Ephesians 3 Summary

One Big Blended Family

# Big Picture Context

*Why is Ephesians 3 in the Bible?*

God created mankind in His image. This setup a body, soul and spirit-based creation that was different from all of the other critters that God created before the 6th day. The other creations showed creativity, but mankind showed complexity that was beyond the others. It also showed personhood, something that the other creatures did not have, and the earth does not have. The fall setup a long series of events recorded in the scriptures (and in extra-biblical places) that shows that mankind cannot do what is right, but that God loves mankind anyway. Ephesians re-affirms these truths.

Written by Paul – from Rome – to the church that he spent three months at reaching out to the Jews and those who had been discipled by John according to Acts 19. This city’s heritage as a Greek colony, and then a powerful Roman colony gave them a strong mixture of gentile, Roman guard, and Jewish Pharisaical influence. Paul’s writing has cultural references that indicate he knew them and the struggles they dealt with as a colony trying to straddle different cultural backgrounds, different religious backgrounds, and different political allegiances.

## Chapter 1: Blessed Be the God Who…

*What foundations that Chapter 3 builds upon are in chapter 1?*

Chapter one is focused on the blessings of God to His saints. The excitement Paul has is evident in his run-on sentence (in the Greek: vs. 3-14). The relationship God desires with the New Testament church is unique compared to the Jewish, earthly, understanding, and substantially richer than the gentiles would have conceived of based on mythologies of the time.

As a foundation for the rest of the book this chapter establishes

* A worldview that is rooted in God’s eternal plan
* A salvation that is guaranteed
* A family relationship through adoption
* A prayer for intimacy with God and knowledge from Him
* The establishment of Christ as a preeminent ruler [who will come to claim His own]

## Chapter 2: While We were in Our Trespasses God Sent His Son

*What foundations that chapter 3 builds upon are in chapter 2?*

Chapter two builds on the nature or our relationship with God by emphasizing that He sent his Son while we we’re still children of wrath (vs. 1-5). We are now seated in the heavenlies with Christ (2:6). We’re loved by God, who shows us mercy, and who pours out grace (vs. 4-7). These lead to use being saved by faith (vs. 8-10).

Paul establishes all of this building of God’s plan and blessing to focus on the next critical doctrine that is true within the church: We’re no longer divided by race or ethnic heritage because we’re now one in Christ. Starting in verse 11 Paul begins 3 arguments for this:

1. Christ broke down the dividing wall of the Law (vs. 11-16)
2. The prophecies of the Old Testament predicted a unified entity (vs 17-22)
3. The Church was a mystery that Paul was given a stewardship of (3:1-12)

# Chapter 3: United Under One Father

## Vs. 1-13: Unity in Revelation

*Why would the Romans look down on the Jews in Ephesus? Why would the Jews look down on the Romans?*

The Romans had special privileges for their citizens (c.f. ). They looked at conquered nations and people with some disdain because a lot of work went in, militarily, to keep everyone obedient. Setting aside your racial or political differences would definitely demand a shift in mindset, possibly one you’d grown up with for a long time. On top of that the impact of the Law’s demands would have caused the Jews to behave differently culturally and this would have caused more segregation and social awkwardness.

Paul's ministry to the gentiles brought a tremendous amount of turmoil to Jews who had been raised in a segregated religious context. They knew the prophecies of the Messiah. They knew that a time would come when the blessings to all nations promised to Abraham would come, but they did not anticipate that it would be through a Messiah who died and was not reigning on the earth at the time they heard the gospel.

*What modern-day secular philosophy is prominent today that drives division and keeps us from coming together?*

Today we face postmodernism, which says at the same time: you cannot understand each other because you have different life experiences, and you must find your tribe so you can have common life experiences. This sort of segregation that is pervading our culture creates an impossibility for unity, demands we ignore things that unite us, like love, and increases tensions.

### The Meaning of Mysteries (vs. 3,4, & 9)

Paul writes that there are mysteries revealed to Him for the church and this is significant because of the Roman mystery cults that would have been common across the empire. These cults had mysteries that they kept secret from everyone outside of the cult, but Paul proclaims the mystery of the church publicly. Today the mystery of the church seems insignificant because it is no longer a mystery, but its substance was heavily impactful for those who were Jewish because they did not anticipate it, and for those who were gentiles because they were not used to such secrets being divulged.

### The Manifold Wisdom (v. 10)

The nature of the mystery was that it kept back some of God’s wisdom. Obviously, God’s wisdom is infinite. He is able to perceive nuance and explain truth beyond what our human minds can imagine. The word translated ‘manifold’ here in the Greek (πολυποίκιλος) was used normally to describe a painting or canvas as having a diverse amount of color. If wisdom is knowledge applied and God has all knowledge, only He can truly have pure and infinite wisdom.

### Confident Access (v. 12)

In the Jewish perspective of God, they have access to God through the temple system, and the gentile believer was prevented from having any access (see Timothy needing to be circumcised for access in Acts 16:3). This annual access was special and intensely specific in the Law (c.f. Leviticus 16), but now Paul is saying that anyone that believes in Jesus as their savior can have confident access. This would either be blasphemy to the Jew or clearly a sign of a new work by God. For a gentile to have access to God and know that to be a safe and good thing to do would be quite shocking.

## Vs. 14-19: The Prayer for Unity Under the Father

Paul’s first prayer in Ephesians (1:15-23) covers the depth of their knowledge of God and the fullness of their blessing in Him. This prayer relies on the truth that has been revealed, but also on the believers’ understanding it and the Lord using it to change them. If God’s love is infinite, it should cause His children to love to a fuller spectrum of love that reflects His life.

### The Father of All Creation (v. 15)

It’s significant and part of Paul’s argument of unity towards the Jews that He points to God’s fatherhood for all of creation. In modern times we think of creators as not necessarily being owners of things. We take ownership lightly through legal agreements that allow us to sign over intellectual property (IP). Historically speaking creators were owners; they were creators, owners and namers. It is worth considering that God created creation and gave mankind dominion – a liberty beyond being owned. This was for establishing personhood and reflected that having a will was inherently part of God’s plan for Adam and his kind.

Prayer to a lesser god may have been normative in gentile thinking, but Paul wanted to accent God’s fulness of deity and that he was the one able to take all of the nations and all of His named creation and name them.

### Strengthening the Inner person (vs. 16-17)

#### Structure[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Request (16) – Grant you to be strengthened by the power of His Spirit in the inner man
   1. Result (17) So that Christ may dwell in your hearts; rooted & grounded in love
      1. Purpose (18) May be able to comprehend with all the saints
   2. result(19a) Know the love of Christ
      1. Purpose (19b) Filled with the fullness of God

The request here has results that are consequential, relating to the purpose or outcome. Paul’s prayer is for individual growth to lead to corporate growth. There are key principles in both the Old Testament and New Testament that share this idea: individuals have an individual relationship with God (by faith) so that their interactions with one another are richer and deeper.

For Jewish believers they might have expected this sort of interaction, but their gentile counterparts may not have expected this. Greco-Roman culture was not oriented towards these principles, and certainly not rooted in Christ and His love.

#### Multi-dimensional Love (vs. 18-19)

Paul’s writing about love here is powerful. It reaches to every dimension perfectly, but it does so with a ‘network’ effect where “with all the saints” demands that we consider the conditional impact of agape love applied across the body in a *giving* and *perceiving* way. Agape love is not concerned up front with the recipients’ perception of love, but it’s critical that inside the body we observe these things because Paul is concerned with comprehension with all the saints. This is critical to the comprehension of not just love in the body but the root source: Christ! He’s the cornerstone, the blueprints, materials, and perfecter of this multi-directional love. The outcome for the individual and the body is that we would be filled with the fullness of God.

Christ had the fullness of God dwelling in Him (Colossians 2:9), but God’s desire is that we would be abiding and have that fullness indwelling us. That’s quite a result for love in the body!

Paul writes similarly of the way that multi-dimensional love behaves in Colossians 3:12-14:

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things [put on] love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

## Vs. 20-21: Blessing the Father of Unity

Paul’s blessing for the Father is His glorification *according to* the power that works in us. *What is that power?* The very life of Christ! *What does the life of Christ do?* It manifests His love and His life to His glory.

*If God can do more than we ask and Paul is asking for these things for the body – what does that mean about the plausibility for these things to happen?*

# Setting up Chapter 4: One & Growing to Completeness

Paul’s focus has continued from God’s purpose and our growth to our unity as a body who has been made on in Christ. Chapter 4 is going to talk about love, mercy, unity and growth even further. This will include doctrinally covering God’s unity, God’s provision for growth, and God’s singular purpose in blessing His children.

*What’s one thing that you’re grateful for in God’s plan for unity?*

1. Insight taken from Harold W. Hoehner’s Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary [↑](#footnote-ref-1)