

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes October 24, 2007

Ephesians 3: 1-21 (Part 4)

Ephesians, chapter 3

1: For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles --

2: assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

3: how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

4: When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,

5: which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

6: that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

7: Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power.

8: To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

9: and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things;

10: that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

11: This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,

12: in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him.

13: So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

14: For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

15: from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

16: that according to the riches of his glory

he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man,

17: and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18: may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

19: and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,

that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.

20: Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,

21: to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction:

- You are a different person. I don't differ in the sense of strange, but rather if you have heard, believed, and were sealed through baptism in the Holy Spirit, then you are a different person. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, if you are "in Christ" then you are "a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come." But this was not to be understood only as a one time event—a rite of passage that happened many years ago in our lives—but the beginning of a life-long journey of faith, growing in holiness and in intimacy with Christ our Savior. In fact, St. Paul proclaims that we are to "be filled with all the fullness of God." This is what we will discuss today on **Deep In Scripture**.

Discussion:

- Welcome....website ... Phone numbers ... special:
- In our study of Ephesians, we have been approaching this epistle from the assumption that it was written by St. Paul while in prison as a homily to be read, by the leaders he converted and appointed in Ephesus, in the weekly liturgy

- to the newly baptized Gentile believers, whose faith and love St. Paul had heard about from messengers.
- Chapter 1 consists of a greeting and then two long sentences of praise to God for what He has done by grace in the lives of these newly baptized Gentile believers.
 - In Chapters 2 and 3, St. Paul “preaches” on the three changes that happen in our lives by grace once we have heard, believed, and then been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism. St. Paul began referring to this in chapter one, but then in chapters 2 & 3 he expounds on this in rapturous detail.
 - Through baptism we are changed in three ways: “up, beside, and within”
 - 2:1-10 ⇨ “up” or the healing of our vertical separation from God due to sin;
 - By grace, we can now love God...
 - 2:11-22 ⇨ “beside” or the healing of our horizontal relationships “in the flesh”;
 - By grace, we can now love neighbor.
 - 3:14-19 ⇨ “within” or the healing of our soul / heart & mind = “in the inner man”
 - These have already happened in those who have heard, believed, & been baptized,
 - BUT this is only the beginning! Though these changes are all given freely by grace, yet we must continue in them, also by grace, for in the spiritual battle we can become distracted away.
 - St. Paul admits, in Philippians 3, that even he is still on the journey, and we are to imitate him:
 - 8: Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ*
 - 9: and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith;*
 - 10: that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*
 - 11: that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*
 - 12: Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*
 - 13: Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,*
 - 14: I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
 - 15: Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you.*
 - 16: Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*
 - 17: Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us.*
 - The author of Hebrews gives an even greater warning! (6:1-6)
 - Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.*
 - One can see these changes happening in stages: reconciliation to God, then to others, then to self...
 - Yet, never separate, nor as consecutive disconnected stages (i.e., spiritual maturity does not mean focus on “self”)
 - Important to recognize behind St. Paul the teachings of Jesus:
 - The Great Commandments;
 - The Beatitudes
 - For 2000 years, the great Mystical writers have reflected on these stages of spiritual growth (St. Augustine, Bonaventure, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila) and though they approach this from different perspectives with different descriptions, yet they generally agree on this:
 - All three dimensions of reconciliation in continuous growth & maturity by grace;
 - progressing from outward to inward: from attachment, to world & self, to detachment, to union.

NOTE: Verses 16-19 have been understood in various ways:

- **Progressive stages of inner spiritual maturity:**
 - The Source: **“the riches of His glory”**
 - Four progressive stages:
 - **“strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man”**
 - **“Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”;**
 - **“power to comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth”;**
 - **“know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge”**
 - All this leading to the goal: **“may be filled with all the fulness of God.”**
- **Following Hebrew poetry, two parallel stages, focused first on the power of faith & second the power of love:**

I.e, Psalm 27:1

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

- **16-17: the power of faith**
 - that according to the riches of his glory
he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man,
and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;*
- **18-19: the power of love**
 - that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,
that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.*
- **That in all these things, St. Paul is trying to express one thing: deep internal conversion!**

STAGES OF CONVERSION

Contemplation
Love
Detachment
Fruit of the Spirit
Understanding [“Know”]
Abiding in Christ
Gifts of the Holy Spirit
Baptism [and/or Confirmation]
Repentance
Fear of God
Believing
Hearing and Seeing

14: For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

15: from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

- **A glimpse of St. Paul's prayer style:** *At least implies worship if not the accepted posture for prayer.*
- **Does this therefore mean we will be together with our families in heaven?** *Here's an example where we have to be careful we don't read too much in a passage. Jesus clearly taught that there will be no marriage in heaven. "But Jesus answered them, 'You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven'" (Mt 22:29-30) However, this doesn't mean that in the resurrection we may not be reunited as families. This is a mystery. However, what is affirmed (1) our Father, who unites us in faith is no longer seen as Abraham, but God Himself; and (2) the communion of saints.*

16: that according to the riches of his glory

he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man,

1: Inner strength of the Spirit;

- **"He may grant you":** *all are the passive work of God; we cannot make this happen; He must grant it!*
- **"strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man":** *Here St. Paul prays that they will grow to experience what he and the other Apostles have been blessed to experience:*
Galatians 2:20: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Philippians 4:11-13, 19: *"Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me...And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*

17: and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

2: Indwelling of Christ in our hearts;

- **"may dwell":** *the passive presence of the Spirit of Christ dwelling within our hearts;*
- *Reminded of all the places where Jesus and John refer to the abiding relationship between Jesus and each one of us:*

John 15:4-7, *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."*

1 John 2:24-29, *"Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life. I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him."*

that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18: may have power to comprehend with all the saints

what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

3: Spiritual gift of understanding;

- **"being rooted and grounded in love":** *the love of God is the beginning / foundation.*
- **"may have power to comprehend":** *the passive gift of understanding (Isa 11:1-3)*
- **"with all the saints":** *with all those in Christ (the holy ones) who are growing in holiness.*
 - **Col 1:9,** *"that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,"*
- **What is "the breadth and length and height and depth"?** *The fullness of the love of God.*

19: and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,

4: intimate supernatural knowing of the love of Christ;

- “may have the power ... to know”: *the passive gift of intimate union with God.*
- **Expressed often in St. John First letter:**

1 John 4: 7-16

7: *Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.*

8: *He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.*

9: *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.*

10: *In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.*

11: *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

12: *No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

13: *By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit.*

14: *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.*

15: *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*

16: *So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*

that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.

• **The ultimate purpose? FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD!**

• **What does this means?!**

- Early in Ephesians, St. Paul states that this is already true of the Church: (1:22-23)
“...the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.”
- In Colossians, St. Paul uses this term to describe Christ: (1:19)
“For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell.”
- In other words, as a part of the Church, the Body of Christ, this is already true by grace, yet the more we grow in union with Christ, the more He dwells fully within us, with the goal being full union, not unlike the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, who by grace was “full of grace”!