

Living UP TO OUR Heavenly Calling

A study in the book of Ephesians

February 18, 2025
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Ephesians 3

Introduction:

Summary from previous lessons:

- We were dead in our sins.
- Dead people can't do anything to save themselves.
- *But God* has made us alive again through Jesus.
- Our purpose: To do the good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- Jesus broke down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles.
- Gentiles as well as Jews are free from the law; the old covenant law is no longer binding on believers in Christ.
- Jews and Gentiles do not exist in two different covenants but share equally in the one and same new covenant promise in Christ.
- We are now members of the same family.
- The church is like a building or temple, and Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone.

Question: Since we are now free from the law because we are saved by grace through faith, does that mean there are no "laws" –no rules, no standards for us as Christ-followers?

What are some of the New Testament standards and principles that we are to live by as Christians?

It is through Paul's letters that we learn of the amazing grace of Christ's law-free gospel to the Gentiles.

Have you ever thought about what God had to do in the heart of Paul to make him the one who would tell the Jews that this gospel of Jesus Christ was not just for them, but it was for the Gentiles as well?

Ephesians 3:1 – 13 (ESV)

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—²assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which 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. ⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of 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. ⁸To 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, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Paul begins this intercessory prayer in verse 3:1, but then he breaks off in order to give an account of his distinctive ministry to Gentiles. Verses 2 through 13 are a parenthetical phrase and the prayer begins again in verse 14.

Since these believers are so new to this wonderful gospel, he wants to repeat it again to make sure they understand the richness of this position “in Christ.”

What does it mean to be a steward? Paul said he was a steward of God’s grace.

How many people in your world really understand this amazing grace of God?

What mystery is Paul referring to? When was this mystery revealed to Paul?

Paul explains that this mystery *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 (3:5)*. This is the mystery that was prophesied in the Old Testament—to the sons of men in other generations.

In Hebrews 11 we find a long list of these “sons of men in other generations” who looked forward to knowing this mystery. But in their lifetime, it was never revealed. Name some of those “sons in other generations” referred to in Hebrews 11.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth (Hebrews 11:13 ESV).

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised (Hebrews 11:39 ESV).

Paul is amazed at the extraordinary privilege granted to him. He indicates how deeply conscious he is that he is unworthy for this great assignment. No doubt he is thinking of the years he spent persecuting Christians.

But Paul did not wallow in his unworthiness; he simply states it as a fact. He knows God has called him to this, and though he knows he is unworthy, he does not hesitate to fulfill his calling. What if Paul had wallowed in his unworthiness? Would we have all these letters he wrote? Would he have founded all the churches he did, and led all the people he did to know Jesus?

The enemy of your soul would love to keep you buried in your unworthiness.

The riches of Christ are too vast to explore completely and too deep to fathom. On the one hand, God has revealed a great mystery to Paul, and on the other hand he focuses on the unsearchable—or unfathomable—riches of Christ. It is beyond his knowing. It is beyond our knowing.

Philippians 3:8 (ESV): *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 rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.*

Paul had come to know Christ in a deeply personal way, but the great ambition of his life was to know Christ more and more.

Now, God’s plan was that his unfathomable riches in Christ, his plan from eternity, might now be made known through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. *The church is the theater where angels watch what God is doing* through the transformation of its people. They see God’s wisdom in this.

Here is a beautiful understanding of this from the *Desiring God* website:

The church of Jesus Christ is the most important institution in the world. The assembly of the redeemed, the company of the saints, the children of God are more significant in world history than any other group, organization, or nation. The United States of America compares to the church of Jesus Christ like a speck of dust compares to the sun. The drama of international relations compares to the mission of the church like a kindergarten riddle compares to Hamlet or King Lear. . . The gates of Hades, the powers of death, will prevail against every institution but one, the church. Lift up your eyes, O Christians! You belong to a society that will never cease, to the apple of God's eye, to the eternal and cosmic church of our Lord, Jesus Christ.¹

The church is the means God is using to show his purposes are moving triumphantly to their climax.

Paul is assuring the new believers that they presently—now—have boldness and access with confidence to God through Jesus, and this cannot be hindered by the hostile powers and authorities that are working in their midst.

How confident are you in knowing that you have access to God because of Jesus Christ? How often do you thank God for this access?

Paul concludes his prayer:

Ephesians 3:14 – 19(ESV)

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 power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Let's look at how we can use this prayer for ourselves and other believers.

- **First, pray that you will be strengthened with power in your inner being.**
No matter what you are facing, if you are strengthened with power on the inside, if you are no longer obsessed with the fears and doubts that have plagued you, it will make all the difference in how you face whatever you have to face.
- **Pray that you will be rooted and grounded in love which comes from Christ who dwells within you.**
What if you faced whatever you're facing from a place of love rather than a place of anger or retribution or self-pity. What if you see those difficult people in your life through God's eyes because you are rooted and grounded—really down deep—in love.
- **Pray that you can comprehend—grasp and understand—the knowledge of how much you are loved “in Christ.”**
Ask God to expand your ability to comprehend his love like never before. The more you understand the breadth and length and height and depth of that love, the less vulnerable you are to Satan's attacks; the less you need the approval of others; the more confident you are to stand tall and strong, because you know the love of Christ.
- **Pray that you will be filled with all the fullness of God.**
We need to be filled with ALL the fulness of God. We are to become what we already are! Pray that you will be all God put you here to be—that you won't miss any of the good works he planned for you to do.

¹ Piper, John. The Cosmic Church, March 22, 1981. www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-cosmic-church

The Doxology to God

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

It is impossible to ask for too much since the Father's giving exceeds our capacity for asking or even imagining.

I wonder how often our prayers are just too small because we just don't really know or believe that our "God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think." We will spend eternity coming to grips with the enormity of our God and the love of Jesus Christ.

Takeaway

Pray this prayer for yourself and others every day this week. Put it in your own words but use this prayer as your foundation for praying this week, and see if it changes your perspective, your mindset, your attitude each day.

Memorize this incredible doxology:

