

Be All You Can Be – Through Christ Ephesians 3:14-21

Going off to college is a big thing. Growing up at camp we didn't venture very far from outside the town of little Fairview because of ministry responsibilities. People can get a little cranky when they don't get a meal. So we didn't travel much or take many vacations. A couple times a year we would go down to Pontiac to visit relatives and our home church. A couple times we ventured to New York to visit my mom's family. But other than that it was a trip once in a while to Alpena, which had the closest Kmart or to other towns for sport.

So going off to college on my own was a big thing. It was four hours away and I only knew three or four people. This was a whole new world and experience for me, being on my own and away from family for the first time with no car and back then no cell phone or computer with which to have instant access to home. It was snail mail or calling collect.

Mom and Dad dropped me off on a Saturday and the following Monday or Tuesday I got a letter from them. Mom had to have written and mailed it days before we left. It was the usual stuff. Things like we're proud of you. We're praying for you. You know, the usual things Mom's like to write. But it also had some other things she wanted me to remember. They were words of instruction and advice. Three things stick out from her letter that she wanted me to keep in mind as I was on my own making decisions that would impact my direction in life.

Remember first that you are part of the family of God, and you represent Him.

Remember second that you are part of the family of Barakel, and you represent it.

Remember third that you are part of the Wideman family, and you represent us.

Essentially, she was saying that people will form an opinion about God, Barakel and our family by your conduct and character. And she's right, which was usually the case with Mom.

And that's good advice for us all. As people witness your actions, attitudes and words they form an

opinion about your family name, our church, and God Himself.

I still have that letter from Mom tucked away in a box in the attic.

We have been given some other letters similar to the one my Mom wrote me. We find them in the Bible. They are letters with words of affirmation, affection, and advice. They remind us to watch our steps so that others will see conduct and character that reflects and resembles our spiritual family. Paul wrote several of them as guides to believers both then and now of how we ought to live in a way that will be a right reflection of the family that we are a part of with God as our Father. His advice is twofold. It is instruction for godly living on how we should act because of the new nature we now have in Christ. It is instruction on how to live in such a way that it demonstrates to others how they too can become part of God's family through their own faith in Christ.

In three months, we, you as a church and Robyn and me as a family will be embarking on a new chapter. We will be looking to what is yet unknown in regard to volunteer ministry opportunities in the Flint area. You will be welcoming at some point a new Sr. pastor to lead you into the next chapter of what ministry will unfold for you in this community. In the meantime, the Deacon Board has been diligently pursuing an interim pastor to fill the gap.

Steve and Carl interviewed a gentlemen and then Pastor Jim and I also met with him to talk about pastoral things and discuss his doctrine. It was a pastor's heart to heart. Please, please be in prayer for the Deacons and the Pastoral Search Team.

It is hard to believe that's it's been almost 20 years since the first time we walked through these doors. This chapter of our lives and ministry is coming to a close at the end of the year. It has been an enjoyable and enriching journey for us as we hope it has been for you. Aside from Thanksgiving and Christmas, I have some things that I would like to close my ministry with through the words of Paul, words that I hope will be affirming and affectionate, but also words of advice. They are words for each of us to

take to heart no matter where we are at in our walk of faith. They are words I hope you will put into practice. They are words I hope will give you pause to remember that you represent the family of God, the family of Fellowship Bible church, and your own respective families.

If you haven't already, please find your way in your Bibles to **Ephesians 3** where we will be looking at **verses 14-21**.

Paul begins this section of his letter with the same three words he began with back in **verse 1** – **“For this reason...”** We could also shorten it up by inserting the word **“therefore”**. And whenever you see a therefore, you have to ask what it is there for. **“For this reason”** points back to something Paul had said earlier and that takes us back to **chapter 2. vv. 1-5** – we are alive in Christ

vv. 6-10 – we are His workmanship

vv. 11-19 – we are fellow citizens with the Jews in God's family

v. 20 – we are built on the foundation of the prophets

vv. 21-22 – together with the Jews, Gentiles join into one temple, one body through God's indwelling Spirit.

With all that in mind regarding our new relationship, **“for this reason”**, he has some additional thoughts to pass on to help them in their spiritual walk of faith. What he has to say will be advice on living the Christian life. Notice in **verses 14-21** that his advice comes in the form of a prayer. This isn't something he is talking to them about, he's taking it to God on their behalf that He might be the source of their growth. As we come to the close of this chapter for us, this is also my prayer for you. In **verses 14-15**, Paul talks about the secret of our enablement.

I. THE SECRET OF OUR ENABLEMENT – vv. 14-15

Paul begins by letting the Ephesian believers know that he is praying for them. In this case, he is praying on his knees. Now this isn't to suggest that kneeling is the only posture for prayer.

I read about a new pastor who stepped into the pulpit to preach and asked everyone to bow their heads with him. As he closed his eyes, he heard a great rustling out in the congregation. He wondered what it was thinking that everyone had gotten up and left, so he took a peek while he was praying and to his astonishment, he couldn't see a soul. But he kept on praying just the same. When he said Amen, there was another great rustling. The whole congregation had knelt to pray.

Physically kneeling is just one of the postures by which we can pray.

Hezekiah laid prostrate in prayer.

Others stood to pray.

Paul and Silas sat while praying. Of course, they were bound in stocks with chains.

There's no one right way that makes God hear our prayers better than another.

Paul was on his knees praying. Kneeling is a sign of submission and humility. It symbolizes a heart that is humble before God recognizing that He alone has the power to answer our requests as we'll see in a moment from **verse 20**.

Kneeling also expresses intense passion, emotion and reverence in our prayers.

Ezra 9:5-6

You can be in any posture while praying and express heartfelt reverence, but what is important is the posture of the heart. What also is important is the person to whom you pray. In **verse 14** Paul indirectly points out that we have access in prayer to the Father.

A. Our Access To The Father – v. 14

I have heard that when Abraham Lincoln was president his children could walk into the oval office anytime. It didn't matter what meeting was going on or who was in the room or what person was waiting outside to speak with the president. They could just walk by the rank and file seemingly oblivious to who was seated there and go in without knocking. They had access to their father. We have access to our Father God.

In the Old Testament, a veil or curtain separated the Holy Place with the Holy of Holies. Behind that curtain was the symbol of God's presence. Only the High Priest could enter behind the curtain and then only one time a year. At the crucifixion the moment Christ died the veil tore from top to bottom.

It allowed us to have direct access to God through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

His death, which atoned for sins, removed our separation from God.

The torn veil conveyed that sins were forgiven and there was no longer any barrier between us and God. The torn veil made a way for us through Jesus to God.

It was the end of the earthly temple and its empty religious rituals allowing God to make each believer the temple of God.

I Corinthians 3:16 “Don’t you know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?”

Again, because what Christ has done for us, we have direct access to the Father at any time.

Paul then speaks in **verse 15** about our acceptance by the Father.

B. Our Acceptance By The Father – v. 15

As is the case in our society, it is through the father we derive our name. It's the same in the spiritual realm as well. Every believer gets his or her name through God as our Father. In the Greek the word family is similar to the word Father. That essentially means that we get both our name and being from Him. As our Father, we come to Him with our requests knowing that we have access to Him through prayer.

Now when Paul refers to the whole family in heaven and earth, he is referring to past and present, Jews as well as Gentiles. In **chapter 2** along with **verses 1-13** of **chapter 3**, we read that Paul talks about a mystery that has been revealed. That mystery is how Jews and Gentiles have been brought together into one family through Christ. Both Jew and Gentile alike are joined by grace through faith. In **chapter 2, verse 14** we

read that the blood of Christ destroyed the barrier that stood between the two bringing them into one body.

Verse 18 then says that we both have access to the Father by the indwelling Spirit.

The Jews do not have a different way of salvation from the Gentiles. There is only one Father and there is only one body, because there is only one faith, faith which is in Christ. Faith is the only way that makes us accepted by the Father.

John 6:35-37, 40

Because we have been accepted by the Father through Christ, we have access to the Father also through Christ. This is the secret of our enablement to live the Christian life, which brings us to the sources of our enablement.

II. THE SOURCES OF OUR ENABLEMENT – vv. 16-19

Every Sunday I make breakfast. We have scrambled eggs with some grated cheese melted into the eggs, some sausage patties along with some English muffins. In order to cook them I need a power source. The eggs won't cook by themselves if I just put them in the frying pan on the stove. Neither will the sausage patties get that nice crispy brown outside with that tender juicy inside if I just let them sit in the pan. Now I can stir the eggs and flip the patties all I want, but if I don't turn on the gas to the burner, they will just be raw and in the case of the eggs they will remain runny. That's not very appetizing. To cook they need a power source.

Our English muffins would remain uncooked if I don't depress the lever on the side of the toaster. Now I can push the lever on the side of the toaster so that the English muffins descend into the slots, but if the chord isn't attached to the wall socket, they too will remain uncooked. To make them nice and golden brown, I need a power source.

As believers, we need a power source to live the Christian life. We cannot become like Christ if we're not hooked up to His power source. Paul gives us three sources for spiritual enablement. Now, they aren't independent of one another, but

instead must work in coordination with each other. Our gas range needs to be hooked up to a gas line that connects to another gas line, which needs to be hooked up to the main source of gas. Sever any one of those links and the thing won't work.

Each of these three sources must be hooked up together to get the spiritual growth desired.

In **verse 16** Paul speaks about our enablement through the Spirit of God.

A. Our Enablement Through The Spirit Of God – v. 16

Now, let's be clear about something you already know. This body is wasting away. We get older and things start falling apart. We have more aches and pains. I now have to make sure that when I get down on the floor, I have a way to get back up. I'm wearing more braces and taking more pills. All you have to do is look at the top of my head and you see that I'm wearing out. I've lost my hair and the next thing you know I'll be losing my mind. But there is good news.

II Corinthians 4:16-18

That passage has some bad news and good news. The bad news is this body is losing ground. No amount of anti-aging cream or replacement parts whether bones or organs can stop or reverse the affects of getting older. There is no fountain of youth for the physical body.

But the good news Paul says is that the inner self, what is spiritual is being renewed day by day. And for that there is a spiritual fountain of youth. Paul says in **Titus 3:5** that the Spirit regenerates us at the time of our new birth referring to salvation. He told the Corinthians that we have become a new creation (**II Corinthians 5:17**). But Paul isn't referring to salvation here, but to sanctification, the daily progress of becoming like Christ in character.

I John 3:2-3

As I like to say *"I'm not what I was but neither am I yet what I'm going to be."*

Paul says that through God's glorious riches, He

strengthens our inner self through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Now the power is there for us to change. If I don't depress the lever on my toaster so that the electricity coursing through the coils will heat up and toast my English muffins, it will remain uncooked. In the same way, the indwelling Holy Spirit is there to empower and enable us to grow in our spiritual walk of faith, but if we don't let Him do His work in us, He cannot develop His fruit so that we exhibit the Christlike characteristics of things like love, joy, peace, patience and so on. If we don't let the Holy Spirit do His work, we will appear no different on the outside.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told the disciples that when the Holy Spirit came on them, they would receive power (**Acts 1:8**). That same Holy Spirit of **Acts 1:8** is the same Spirit in you enabling you to mature in your walk with Christ, if you will let Him, if you will tap into Him. He is your source for spiritual growth, and it comes from His unlimited resources. **Are you tapped into the power of the Holy Spirit allowing Him to work in you?**

Paul gives us a second source of our enablement and that is through the Son of God.

B. Our Enablement Through The Son Of God – vv. 17-19a

We may invite you over and tell you to make yourselves at home. That said, like me, you would probably find it a bit awkward and uncomfortable going through drawers and cupboards, opening doors to see what's behind them. On the other hand, as you would expect, we feel no twinge of guilt whatsoever going through our own house because that's where we live. We are very much at home there because it is, after all, our home. Paul says that he is praying that Christ might dwell in their hearts. That's my prayer for you as well, that Christ would dwell in your hearts. It's the same idea that Jesus uses in **John 15** when He talks about abiding. It means to be completely at home, to be comfortable. One author described it as Christ being at the center of or deeply rooted in the life of the believer.

In other words, as Walvoord and Zuck write that the “believer is to let Christ become the dominating factor in their attitudes and conduct.”

Robert Munger wrote a wonderful little booklet titled “My Heart, Christ’s Home.” In the booklet he likens the life of the believer to a home in which they go room by room cleaning it out so that Christ would be welcome throughout the rooms of his heart. Here’s an excerpt:

“After Christ entered my heart and in the joy of that new-found relationship, I said to him, “Lord, I want this heart of mine to be yours. I want to have you settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to you. Let me show you around and introduce you to the various features of the home that you may be more comfortable and that we may have fuller fellowship together.” He was very glad to come, of course, and happier still to be given a place in the heart.”

They started in the library which is the study of the mind, the things you read and watch.

Then there was the dining room – the appetites and desires of the heart, the things we feed on.

Next was the den. It was comfortable room with oversized chairs and a fireplace. It was a place Jesus wanted to meet regularly. But over time, other things took away that desire of the believer so that their visits became more infrequent. Christ explained how He longed to have that sweet fellowship as they had at first.

Jesus was then taken to the workshop, well equipped with tools to make things. He asked the Christian what he was making for the kingdom of God? When he yielded his hands to the Holy Spirit, he began to make things of eternal value.

They strolled to the recreation room, the place of leisure activity. **Would Christ feel at home in that room with us?**

The last room was the hall closet, that place where we tend to tuck things away and out of sight. **What is in there that we don’t want Christ to see?**

Finally, they came to one last but important part of making Christ at home. The man took the title deed to his life and signed it over to Christ, so that his life was now completely surrendered to the Lord.

Is Christ at home in your life or do we keep some of the rooms closed and locked? If so, we haven’t fully surrendered the title deed of our heart to Him.

Paul not only wants the believer to let Christ dwell in our hearts, he also wants us to know and experience the depth of Christ’s love.

Christ loved us so much He was willing to go to the cross and die in our place for the debt we owed due to sin. He took our place and paid the cost for our forgiveness so that through faith we could have eternal life.

Paul uses two vivid illustrations to enhance his desire to see the believer grounded in faith. They come from the world of agriculture and architecture. He wanted believers to be rooted and grounded in love. They are both in the present tense referring to something done in the past with continuous results, the purpose of which is to have inherent strength to live the Christian life. But that strength again isn’t from our own power, but the power of Christ through the Spirit dwelling in us.

Roger and Linda just finished cleaning up some 25 trees blown over from the recent storm. They were blown over because of shallow roots. Paul wants the roots of your Christian life to go deep. He wants it to be built on a firm foundation that will stand storms. It is a foundation that is anchored in love.

When we yield to the power of the Holy Spirit in us and submit to the Lordship of Christ by obeying His Word, then the result is love demonstrated through us. The very nature of love is selflessness, where we give to the needs of others. Think for a moment about our greatest need and that is the sin nature we can do nothing about. Christ, in love, gave Himself to meet our need. And Paul wants us to see the vastness of that love from Christ so that no matter which way we look, we see His great love which strengthens us.

The third source of enablement Paul mentions is through the sufficiency of God.

C. Our Enablement Through The Sufficiency Of God – v. 19b

Wilbur Chapman tells the story about a man who got off at the Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year begged on the streets for a living. One day he touched a man on the shoulder and asked him for a dime. As soon as he saw the face of the man, he was shocked to see that it was his own father. He said ‘Father, do you know me?’ The man threw his arms around the son and with tears in his eyes said ‘at last I’ve found you! You want a dime? Everything I have is yours.’ Here was a tramp begging from his father for a dime, when for 18 years the father had been looking for his son to give him all he had. God’s unlimited resources are available for our spiritual growth.

Paul wants us to know the depth and length and height and width of Christ’s love and then he wants us to go out and show that same love to others. Christ wants us to be filled completely with Himself. Don’t be content with a thimble full of God, when He wants us to be filled full with God, which means we need to be emptied of self.

To be filled with all the fullness of God means our obedience. It means to be like Christ in our conduct, our character, and our conversation.

We have touched on the secret of our enablement and the sources of our enablement. Let me close with the scope of our enablement.

III. THE SCOPE OF OUR ENABLEMENT – vv. 20-21

In **verse 20**, it’s an inexhaustible power.

A. It’s An Inexhaustible Power – v. 20

It is inexhaustible in its ability and availability. Peter says we have all we need for godliness (**II Pet. 1:3-4**). John MacArthur writes “When the Spirit has empowered us, Christ has indwelt us, love has mastered us and God filled us with His fullness – then He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we ask or think.” He adds that “there is no question in the minds of believers that God is able to do more than we can conceive, but too few Christians enjoy the privilege of seeing Him do that

in their lives, because they fail to follow the pattern of enablement presented in these verses.”

Do you want this amazing power to be visible in you and in this church? Be enabled by God’s Spirit, and His Son. Surrender and submit to the sufficiency of God, that He has all you need. He is able when we ask to do according to His power.

The Bible is a record of God doing amazing things through the lives of people who were fully surrendered to Him. People like David and Daniel and Elijah and Elisha and Peter and Paul. He can do the same in you and through you and for you if you are surrendered to Him and it’s not just in what we ask, but more, abundantly more than we ask or imagine. Think of what God can do through you and through this church when you are surrendered to Him.

We are the speedbump in what God wants to do in us and through us. And **verse 21** gives us the reason of why God wants to work in us and through us. Notice that it’s an inescapable purpose.

B. It’s An Inescapable Purpose – v. 21

It is for His glory both publicly and permanently. We are to live a Christ honoring life so that God can receive the glory both now and forever. God shares His power with us so that through the church He can receive glory.

Are their areas of our life that we need to surrender to God?

Are there things in our life that are keeping us from seeing God do exceedingly abundantly beyond our asking and imagining?

Are we living in such a way that He is being praised?

My prayer is that you become all you can be for Christ and through Christ.