

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

EVANGELICAL IMPLICATIONS IN EPHESIANS 3

SUBMITTED TO THE  
THOMAS CHALMERS EXEGETICAL SCHOLARSHIP

BY  
YEEUN ANNA KIM  
MAY 17, 2022

## EVANGELICAL IMPLICATIONS IN EPHESIANS 3

As an “apostle to the Gentiles,” Paul was a faithful evangelist (Rom 11:13, English Standard Version).<sup>1</sup> However, when we read his letters, Paul seldom gives instructions on whether we should evangelize. Nonetheless, we certainly know that we are not exempt from sharing the gospel to the lost. Our Lord Jesus himself commanded his followers to go and make disciples of all nations. The question then beholds, why is Paul silent in regards to evangelism? This essay will explore Ephesians 3 to prove the contrary. Though Paul does not explicitly instruct others to evangelize, his conviction in Christ’s accomplishments, awareness of how the church can bring glory to God, and prayer for Christians to experience the love of Christ display clear implications that we are called to be faithful in evangelism. Ephesians 3:2-13 illustrates Paul’s pastoral heart; he is able to say that he himself faithfully evangelized and knows the worth of committing one’s life to Christ. Ephesians 3:14-21 is then a powerful prayer that conveys his earnest desire that all Christians would wholeheartedly know the incredible love of God, and possibly also see the worth of committing their own lives to bring glory to God. John Stott provides an explanation on the connection between vv. 2-13 and vv. 14-21 in the following way:

[Paul] has been explaining both Christ’s peace-making work, which resulted in the creation of the new society, and his personal involvement in this because of the special revelation and commission he had received. Now he turns from exposition to intercession. He prays

---

<sup>1</sup> All verses are in English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

that God's wonderful plan which he has been elaborating may be even more completely fulfilled in his readers' experience.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, this essay will look at the entire chapter - including both Paul's call to ministry and prayer for all believers - to explore biblical implications on evangelism. Through Ephesians 3, Paul provides the urgency and motivation for evangelism; just as Paul received revelation and reached the Gentiles, we are prayed over to experience Christ's love so that we may also bring glory to God through our love for the lost.

### **Definition and Mode of Paul's Evangelism**

Before unpacking the evangelistic implications found in Ephesians 3, it is helpful to establish the definition and mode of evangelism that is applicable to Paul's ministry as found in the New Testament. Throughout this essay, evangelism will be defined in accordance to J. I. Packer's definition as such forth:

According to the New Testament, evangelism is just preaching the gospel, the evangel. It is a work of communication in which Christians make themselves mouthpieces for God's message of mercy to sinners. Anyone who faithfully delivers that message, under whatever circumstances, in a large meeting, in a small meeting, from a pulpit, or in a private conversation, is evangelizing.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the message of God's mercy to sinners must entail the work of Christ - that Jesus died on the cross as the payment of man's sins and resurrected, defeating the power of death and making peace with God accessible through faith in Christ. As such, the message of the gospel can be truncated when looking for a summary. However, it also true that "[the gospel] is a

---

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*, The Bible Speaks Today (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 131-132.

<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961), 49.

message of some complexity, needing to be learned before it can be lived by, and understood before it can be applied.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is important to recognize that Paul’s responsibility and involvement in evangelism was not merely delivering the message of the gospel. Paul’s method of evangelism also included teaching, as it was important for him to know that his listeners clearly understood who Christ is and what He accomplished.

In the book of Acts, Paul’s evangelistic ministry is described as that “he *disputed* (Acts 9:29), or *reasoned* (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4; 19:8-9 [*dialegomai* rendered ‘argued’ in the RSV]; 24:25), or *taught* (Acts 18:11; 28:31), or *persuaded* (i.e. sought to carry his hearers’ judgements; Acts 18:4; 19:8, 26; 28:23; cf. 26:28).”<sup>5</sup> Again, Paul was not concerned with simply passing on the message of the gospel, but he was committed to faithfully explaining the contents of the gospel and how it transforms the listener. Listed above as one of the examples, Paul’s time in Ephesus was one of informing (Acts 19:4), reasoning (Acts 19:8-9), and persuading (Acts 19:8). Though the Ephesians were aware of John the Baptist, Paul had to re-baptize them in the name of the Lord Jesus and teach them about the kingdom of God. As David G. Peterson clarifies, “[t]his is the only instance of re-baptism recorded in the NT,” and it was necessary because the gospel consists of Christ’s redeeming work - not of John the Baptist’s teaching.<sup>6</sup> His letter to the Ephesians expands on what he has taught them. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul reminds the Gentiles of how they were saved from darkness through Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul expounds on the application of Christ’s work; Christ has torn down the barriers between the

---

<sup>4</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 56.

<sup>5</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 56-57.

<sup>6</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 531.

Gentiles and the Jews, and more importantly, the barrier between humans and God, and has now made unity between all believing humans and God possible in Christ. Upon teaching the contents of the gospel, Paul also reinstates his calling “to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery” (Eph 3:8-9). Here, Paul’s view is that “his first and fundamental job as a preacher of the gospel was to communicate knowledge” and hence it is clear that “teaching the truth was the basic evangelistic activity” to Paul.<sup>7</sup> Although Paul does not explicitly use the word evangelism in his teaching, in light of the definition and modes in which he evangelizes, it is clear that Paul has done the work of an evangelist in developing his relationship with the Ephesians.

### **Conviction in Christ’s Accomplishments (vv 1-9)**

The first evangelical implication we see in Ephesians 3 is that we are called to evangelize as a result and response to Christ’s redeeming work in our own lives. A. Skevington Wood says, “[t]he fact that [Christians] have been redeemed from sin and given everlasting life will be the basis of their desire that others may come to Christ.”<sup>8</sup> For Paul, the result of Christ encountering his life was that he became “a chosen instrument of [the Lord] to carry [His] name before the Gentiles” and he immediately began to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:15, 20). This result is also confirmed by Paul’s self-identification, as he begins chapter 3 by calling himself a “prisoner for Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:1). Circumstantially, Paul was in prison because he infuriated the Jews, and he was technically a prisoner to the Roman Empire. Symbolically,

---

<sup>7</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> A. Skevington Wood, *Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 57.

though, Paul was a prisoner because he was captivated by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Moreover, Paul saw himself as Christ's ambassador, someone who "always sp[oke] on His behalf" and was personally "involved in the message [he] proclaim[ed]."<sup>9</sup> Paul's understanding of the Gentile inclusion was secondary to his conviction in Christ's work; it is because he was "absolutely certain of the message that Christ has died for the Gentile as well as for the Jew" that he was willing to preach the truth on behalf of the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup> Hence, Paul's primary commitment was to Christ. In effect, "[t]he Ephesian believers are being reminded that Christ has died for them and that his servant Paul is now, in his turn, suffering for them and is ready even to die for them, and that he regards it as a privilege."<sup>11</sup> By proclaiming that his imprisonment is for Christ's sake and on the Gentiles' behalf, Paul's reason for evangelism is made clear: he fully comprehends the work of Christ and embraces the cause and consequences of evangelism because he deems the gospel worthy to be shared with others.

The book of Ephesians and Philippians are both prison epistles and share a "remarkable resemblance of style and matter."<sup>12</sup> Similarly to Ephesians 3:1, Paul more explicitly writes about how he embraces his status as a prisoner and believes it actually benefits his evangelism in Philippians 1. Paul writes from prison that "what has happened to [him] has really served to advance the gospel" (Phil 1:12). G. Walter Hansen compares Paul's disclosure formula to modern day journalism and writes that to share personal news, "a journalist would want to have a

---

<sup>9</sup> Wood, *Evangelism*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> David Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: an Exposition of Ephesians 3:1 to 21* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953), 31.

narrative of his arrest, imprisonment, and courtroom appearances.”<sup>13</sup> However, “such personal matters were not Paul’s priorities. From Paul’s perspective the most important thing that had happened was the advance of the gospel.”<sup>14</sup> Paul believed his identity as a prisoner was fitting to his commitment to Christ, but was also advantageous for evangelism. Not only was Paul able to evangelize from prison himself to the palace guards, he believed his suffering for the gospel was inspiring to his brothers and sisters. Hansen writes, “[t]he chained inspired the unchained. When believers heard that Paul used his chains as an opportunity to express his faith in Christ... they were emboldened to proclaim Christ fearlessly even when they might have been intimidated to keep their mouth shut.”<sup>15</sup> Paul believed that his sufferings were advantageous towards spreading the gospel, and convicts readers to take advantage of their own freedom to share the gospel even more boldly. If in Ephesians 3:1 Paul establishes that he evangelizes as a result in believing in Christ, in v. 2 Paul begins to describe how he responds to the gospel through evangelism. In Ephesians 3:2, Paul writes of the “stewardship of God’s grace” that was given to him for the Gentiles. By stewardship, Paul means the “commission to make known the good news of the gospel of Christ.”<sup>16</sup> By grace, Paul refers to two things: “the gift of salvation” and “his call to apostleship and God’s empowerment to carry it out.”<sup>17</sup> Both his salvation and apostleship are “two gifts of divine grace,” and are related in that “once he had received his special revelation from God, he knew that he was under obligation to make known to others what had been made

---

<sup>13</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 66.

<sup>14</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 66.

<sup>15</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 186. Arnold, *Ephesians*,

<sup>17</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 186-187.

known to him.”<sup>18</sup> Through vv. 3-6 and vv. 7-9, Paul’s response can be characterized as one of gratitude and one of dependence on the Lord.

In Ephesians 3:3-6, Paul speaks of the mystery that has been revealed through Jesus Christ. First, this mystery was made known to him. He then made “insight into the mystery of Christ” and explains that the mystery revealed is that “Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:4, 6). Where as in English the word mystery speaks of something “dark, obscure, secret, puzzling,” it is important to note that the Greek word *mysterion* referred to “a truth into which someone had been initiated.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the gospel is a mystery because it contains a message that humans can hear but require God’s revelation to be understood. With this definition in mind, Paul is saying that “the mystery of Christ is the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ.”<sup>20</sup> The union of Jews and Gentiles was surely culturally shocking. Among the Jews, the law was exclusive and served as a “wall erected around the people, in order that [they] might not mingle at all with any of the other nations.”<sup>21</sup> As a response, “[t]his [Jewish] attitude provoked a Gentile reaction, expressed most sharply in the charge against the Jews that they were ‘haters of humanity.’”<sup>22</sup> However, Paul knows that the union between humans and God is far more unthinkable and glorious of a message. In Ephesians 2:5, Paul describes the stark contrast between the human condition that is found “dead in our

---

<sup>18</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 116.

<sup>19</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *Gentiles, Jews, Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman Era*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 20.

<sup>22</sup> Conzelmann, *Gentiles, Jews, Christians*, 20.



trespasses” and made “alive together with Christ.” As someone who used to “breath[e] out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples,” Paul grasps the Lord’s immense kindness and gravity of the mystery - that Christ would reconcile believers to Himself without any discrimination (Acts 9:1). John Piper defines the mystery as, “the truth that people from all the nations of the world would be full and complete partners with the chosen people of God.”<sup>23</sup> Though many of the Gentiles “were but slaves and very ordinary and common people,” Paul “as their Apostle consider[ed] it a great privilege to be in prison for them” and preach the gospel.<sup>24</sup> As he highlights in v. 5, Paul also understands that the revelation of the mystery was a gift unique to his day and age. If the Lord was willing to reveal the mystery by the Spirit, Paul was ready to acquire it with a thankful heart and faithfully share about his savior.

In Ephesians 3:7-9, Paul’s gratitude carries over to dependence on the Lord to fulfill his ministry to preach the gospel. When Paul says that he was made a minister of the gospel, the Greek word used for minister is “used of a king’s servant.”<sup>25</sup> It can be found “twenty-nine times in the NT,” and it is used of “a ‘waiter’ at a wedding feast (John 2:5, 9), a servant of a king (Matt 22:13), a disciple who is a servant of Christ (Matt 20:26 = Mark 10:43-44 = Luke 22:26), a minister (2 Cor 3:6; Col 1:23), and a ‘deacon’ of a church (1 Tim 3:8, 12).”<sup>26</sup> Following his identification as a minister, Paul says that his servanthood is in accordance to God’s grace (Eph 3:7). Previously, Paul spoke of God’s grace to refer to his salvation and apostleship. Here, Paul

---

<sup>23</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: the Supremacy of God in Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 133.

<sup>24</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: an Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 449.

<sup>26</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 449.

adds another layer to God's grace - that is, Paul "was able to carry out this awesome responsibility [of being a minister of the gospel] by the gracious gift of unmerited favor of enablement that was given to him."<sup>27</sup> Paul was sure that God called him to evangelize and confident in "the provision of His power to carry it out."<sup>28</sup> This brings context to why Paul, though he believes he is "the very least of all the saints," boldly pursues to preach to the Gentiles and "bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery" (Eph 3:8-9). Just as he was saved on the road to Damascus purely by the Lord's intervention, Paul was able to evangelize with great dependence on God's power to save others. Paul's humility and confidence work together to serve as an "inspirational model and an instructive pattern to his readers. The grace of God they have experienced in their call to be his children and engage in a life of service will also be sufficient for them as it was for Paul."<sup>29</sup> Evangelism has little to do with human abilities. To Paul, the revelation and commission given to him "belong[ed] indissolubly together, for what had been made known to him he must without fail make known to others."<sup>30</sup> Through Paul, it is evident that evangelism is a result of being convicted in Christ's work and a response of being thankful for and dependent on Christ's work.

### **The Church and God's Glory (vv 10-13)**

The second evangelical implication we see in Ephesians 3 is that we are called to evangelize because God has sovereignly incorporated the church as the means of preaching the

---

<sup>27</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 451.

<sup>28</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 451.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 193.

<sup>30</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 120.

gospel. In v. 10, Paul continues his thoughts that God's grace was given to him to preach to the Gentiles so that "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." This verse is directly talking about how unity between the Gentiles and the Jews brought glory to God and His wisdom. Again, their union was truly "a revolutionary new concept"; one that had to be "acknowledged by the 'powers' to be a display of the multifaceted wisdom of God."<sup>31</sup> It is important to remember, though, that evangelism had to precede this God-glorifying union. It is because Paul faithfully evangelized to the Gentiles that the church was composed of both Gentiles and Jews. When reading vv. 8-10 together, there is a beautiful picture of the body working in different capacities to display God's manifold wisdom. Paul shared the gospel to outsiders, and the rest of the body was instructed to remember the gospel within the new family in Christ. Evangelism was not and is not a vague responsibility; it is clear that Paul had evangelists in mind when he was considering who was responsible for building up the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul lists evangelists as one of the roles found in the body, and in Ephesians 6:15, "the gospel of peace is connected with the feet of believers."<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in Romans 10:14-15, Paul makes it clear that the gospel is a message that must be delivered by man. As Thomas R. Schreiner writes, "[t]hose who call on the Lord in a saving way must believe in him, but this belief is not possible apart from the *hearing* of a message that someone preaches. And the message is not preached unless one is sent by God."<sup>33</sup> John Calvin also describes, "the gospel does not fall like rain from the clouds, but is brought by

---

<sup>31</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 462.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 274.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 568.

the hands of men wherever it is sent from above.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, it is by God’s power that both evangelism and the aftermath of evangelism (incorporating new believers into the family) are accomplished through the church. By carefully using the prepositional phrase “through,” Paul points to God’s plan to use the church as the “intermediate agent through which the angelic leaders are informed.”<sup>35</sup> According to Stott, “[t]his is the circle of divine communication, for the good news was passed from God to Paul, from Paul and others to all mankind, and from the church on earth back to heaven again, to the cosmic powers.”<sup>36</sup> Paul’s explanation should encourage readers to know that God invites His people to share the gospel and has in mind to glorify Himself before the heavens through the church.

Paul continues to exhort the church and their role in revealing God’s manifold wisdom in vv. 11-12. By saying “[t]his was according to the eternal purpose,” Paul is reinstating that God’s plan to use the church as the means of making His wisdom known was “not the result of a last minute idea” (Eph 3:11).<sup>37</sup> Rather, it was an intentional plan that “can be traced back to his everlasting purpose.”<sup>38</sup> God’s plan to incorporate the church is also affirmed by the fact that this eternal purpose was “realized in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:11). Christ’s death was ordained to save and establish the church; the church was not “the conception of the plan in Christ but the achievement of the plan in Christ’s death.”<sup>39</sup> So far, it is then clear that God has purposefully

---

<sup>34</sup> John Calvin, *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 399.

<sup>35</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 460.

<sup>36</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 126.

<sup>37</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 463.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 248.

<sup>39</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 464.

included the church in His plans to be a manifestation of his glory and to be the recipients of Christ's redeeming work. How the church is then also included in God's plan for evangelism can be seen in v. 12 as Paul then explains the privileges of being included in His eternal purposes. In saying that believers have boldness and access, Paul is explaining that Christ made it possible for believers to speak freely to God. In Paul's specific message to the Ephesians, he extends this freedom to also speak boldly to believers and unbelievers, "attempting to show that both believing Jews and Gentiles as one entity have access to God."<sup>40</sup> In Ephesus, Paul preached boldly to the believers who denied this message (Acts 18:26; 20:21), and also spoke boldly to the unbelievers who were not aware of this message (Acts 19:8; 20:20-21, 27). Knowing that God has given the church an eternal purpose to glorify Him, boldness to speak, and access to God in confidence, Paul exhorts the church to live out these privileges. The church is called and fully equipped to boldly evangelize.

Paul concludes this section by encouraging the church at Ephesus that he is suffering on their behalf and is earnest about the Gentiles' salvation and inclusion (Eph 3:13). Paul's evangelism to the Gentiles was directly correlated to his suffering; for if he "never carried out his ministry of the mystery to the Ephesians, he would not have been in prison and the Ephesians would never have been introduced to Christ."<sup>41</sup> By evangelizing and suffering, Paul conveys God's heart for the church. Like Christ, Paul is willing to suffer for the salvation of others. The church is truly privileged to be able to display God's wisdom, but is more importantly and primarily deeply loved and cared for to be included in the mystery of the gospel. Here, the

---

<sup>40</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 466.

<sup>41</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 470.

evangelical implication is not that we must be as exceptional as Paul, but that we should be convinced that if how the church is formed deeply matters to God, it should matter to us as well. Through this section from vv. 10-13, Paul provides abundant reasons for the church to be encouraged; the church has an effect in showcasing God's glory to angelic beings, has the freedom to speak boldly to and of God, and has the ability to reciprocate Christ's love to others. Given these gracious truths, it is also abundantly clear that the church has many reasons to be motivated to evangelize; the church will bring glory to God, is equipped to share the gospel, and is all the more affirmed of Christ's love if or when evangelism leads to suffering.

### **Prayer for Spiritual Strength (vv 14-21)**

It would seem fitting for this prayer for spiritual strength (Eph 3:14-21) to follow right after Paul's teaching about the Gentiles and Jews becoming one new person in Christ (Eph 2:11-22). Paul knew that his message of unity was important, but also humanly impossible to obtain without the Lord's help. Hence, he prays that the Gentile and Jewish believers "might know Christ's strengthened love which surpasses all knowledge" and "be united experientially in Christ's love."<sup>42</sup> Ephesians 3:2-13 is often considered a digression from the previous section in Ephesians 2:11-22. However, it is important to realize that "with more information gained from the digression in Ephesians 3:2-13, the content of the prayer is all the more forceful."<sup>43</sup> The fact that Paul then deliberately "elaborates further on the mystery and his responsibility to dispense it" may add another reason as to why he is praying.<sup>44</sup> Paul is not regretful that the Gentiles and

---

<sup>42</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 471.

<sup>43</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 472.

<sup>44</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 472.

Jews are struggling to be united as the church; he is absolutely convicted that their unity is necessarily to be lived out in response to the truth that Christ has died for all, and that all believers are truly united to Christ. Perhaps then, Paul is including vv. 1-13 to further support his confidence in evangelism; even if unity is difficult, Paul is certain that his call to preach the gospel to the Gentiles was desired by and honoring to God. His evangelism was only a natural response to his conviction in Christ's work, and is something he knows will directly bring glory to God through the church. Hence, his prayer is purposed to strengthen the Gentiles and Jews to be united in their present congregation, but also contains his desire that the believers would be inspired by his convictions to further advance the gospel. As they experience unity, the Gentiles and Jews should remember at what cost they are able to enjoy more of Christ through unity in diversity. Just as Paul faithfully stewarded the revelation of the gospel, the church should also be motivated to continuously break down barriers with all people groups and proclaim Christ's work and extend His invitation to the lost. But more importantly, Paul knows that believers can only experience unity and desire others to know Christ when they, as individual believers, experience and know the love of Christ. Just as Christ loved the church and laid down His life, the church can grow in love and lay its life down for others. As Paul prays for believers to be strengthened in Christ's love, we find our third evangelical implication in Ephesians 3: we are called to evangelize because Christ's love compels and strengthens us to love the lost.

Understanding and being strengthened by Christ's love should indeed transform and enable believers to love others. Looking back at chapter 2, Paul is praying for Christ's love to make unity possible between the Gentiles and Jews. Moving forward in chapters 4-6, Paul writes this prayer as an "important prelude to the ethical admonitions of Ephesians 4-6" with faith that

Christ's love in believers will also entail that "the lordship of Christ may be exhibited in their lives in ever-increasing ways."<sup>45</sup> Paul understands that if people genuinely love Jesus, they will be motivated to love others. For, "[i]f Jesus is all in all to us, we shall want Him to be all in all to everyone" as well.<sup>46</sup> This explains why he opens the prayer in v. 14 with "an exceptional degree of earnestness," bowing down on his knees before the Lord.<sup>47</sup> In v. 15, Paul says that God is "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." By using the present tense verb, he acknowledges that "God is still naming every family because he is still creating them" and reminds readers that God is "alive and acting in the present time."<sup>48</sup> Paul includes these words to stress God's "greatness and thus his sovereign power and authority in both heaven and earth" and reassure readers "that God is indeed able to fulfill the petitions addressed by the apostle on their behalf."<sup>49</sup> When reading vv. 14-15 together then, we see that Paul is praying with great desire and confidence in God's power to work in the believers' heart to know the love of Christ.

Through vv. 16-18, Paul is also careful in specifically petitioning how believers will come to experience Christ's love. First, he asks God to strengthen believers "with power through his Spirit in [their] inner being" (Eph 3:16). Through this statement, the prayer found in chapter 3 becomes distinct from the prayer found in chapter 1: "[w]here as in the prayer of Ephesians 1:15-23 Paul prays that the readers will gain an expanded awareness of God's power, here he prays that God will actually strengthen them... and that it will touch the core of their being."<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 212.

<sup>46</sup> Wood, *Evangelism*, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 132.

<sup>48</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 476.

<sup>49</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 256.

<sup>50</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 209.



Again, Paul is praying for strength with the purpose that his readers will live out the love of Christ; this prayer's emphasis on strength - beyond awareness - shows that there's anticipation for further action to be taken by believers since they are actually being strengthened. It is important to note, though, that Paul is saying "it is through God's Spirit that the believer is to be strengthened with God's ability to act."<sup>51</sup> His prayer request for strength in believers is further expanded in v. 17 when he asks God to have Christ dwell in the believer's heart. Here, "[t]he 'heart' is the core of a person and is synonymous with the 'inner person' in v. 16," and Paul is writing that "Christ must become the controlling factor in attitudes and conduct."<sup>52</sup> Although Paul is ministering to the Gentiles and Jews, who are struggling to love one another within the walls of the church, we must realize this prayer for Christ to dwell in the hearts of believers calls for love towards people beyond the walls of the church as well. The Gospels repeatedly and explicitly indicate that Jesus came to save sinners (Matt 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32; 19:10). Paul is able to pray for this kind of love - Christ's love for the world and for the lost - to have an effect within the church; but Christ's love should not be minimized to only be sought after for unity among believers. In fact, to minimize Christ's love to be found only among believers and only among people with similarities would be stunting the believer's growth; "true growth cannot occur by association with only certain believers, ones preferred because they are of the same socioeconomic, intellectual, or professional status."<sup>53</sup> And if Paul's prayer for the Spirit to empower the lives of believers is meant for "their transformation into the likeness of Christ," there is all the more joy and hope in what Paul means when he prays that believers "may have

---

<sup>51</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 478.

<sup>52</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 481.

<sup>53</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 486.

strength to comprehend with all the saints” (Eph 3:18).<sup>54</sup> If Christians are not applying Christ’s love to just their own community, but are reaching out in love to all people, we can imagine the great diversity that will be found among *all* the saints.

Up to this point, Paul has made it clear that being strengthened in Christ’s love is what will allow the Gentile and Jewish believers to actually love one another through unity. Given that Christ displayed his love to the lost, we can then also know that Christ’s immense love for the world can work in believers to lead the church to love one another and beyond; Christ’s love can strengthen us to also love the lost. Indeed, Paul’s prayer for the believer to be strengthened in Christ’s love is grand. But, he goes on further in v. 19 to show that we will also continue to have room for growth in our love for Christ. Though we may experience the “breadth and length and height and depth” of Christ’s love, his love is beyond our ability to fully fathom as it “surpasses knowledge” (Eph 3:18-19). Though we know that Christ died for our sins, we should never stop wondering why He showed and continues to show that kind of love to us. As we meditate further on these truths, there is evermore room for compassion to grow for the lost; as our understanding of Christ’s love deepens, our evangelism should increase. When Paul ends the verse by writing “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God,” he was saying “in the present context to be filled up to God’s fullness is to know the love of Christ.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Paul “has in mind the presence and work of the Spirit as mediating the divine presence to God’s people” when he speaks of “fullness.”<sup>56</sup> When Christians experience Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge and are filled with the fullness of God, there is no reason why a believer should not share about God

---

<sup>54</sup> O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 259.

<sup>55</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 490.

<sup>56</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 219.

to people who do not know Him. As Stott writes, “If men cannot keep their scientific discoveries to themselves, how much less should we keep to ourselves the divine disclosures?”<sup>57</sup> Christ’s love furthermore naturally sets an example for us to love others “for quantity, without measure; for quality, freely, fruitfully, constantly.”<sup>58</sup> Lastly, Christ’s love is outwardly visible. When Paul was praying that the Gentiles and Jews would be able to love one another, he was also mindful of how their love for one another could testify God’s love to nonbelievers. More precisely:

Experiencing God’s moral excellence, perfection, and power would result in love between Jewish and Gentile believers. Positionally they are one in Christ (Eph 2:11-3:13), experientially they are to love one another as one in him. Then Jesus’ statement that “all people will know that we are his disciples if we love one another” (John 13:35) will ring true among the unconverted in the community.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, if witnessing Christ’s love in the church is supposed to be distinct and attractive enough to nonbelievers, how much more should we be encouraged to know that we can directly speak of this love to others? Evangelism does not necessarily require maturity. However, when Christians are growing as a result of being strengthened by Christ’s love and being filled up with the Spirit, evangelism should be approached with greater confidence and applied to our daily lives.

Finally, Paul seals this powerful prayer with a doxology, accrediting God all the glory that belongs to Him for being able to accomplish far more abundantly than we could ever ask or think of. In the context of the Gentiles and the Jews, “no human or angel (cf. 3:10) could ever imagine that [they] could function together in one body.”<sup>60</sup> It was only with “God’s infinite and

---

<sup>57</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 120.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Baynes, *An Exposition of Ephesians, Chapter 2:11 to 6:18* (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1959), 202.

<sup>59</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 491.

<sup>60</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 493.

matchless power of love in the life of each believer” that their unity was possible.<sup>61</sup> Today, we must continue to remember that this same power of God is working in the church and is available to make unthinkable testimonies of faith possible. As Paul writes that God’s glory is “in the church and in Christ Jesus,” we should look around our congregation and wonder if we are truly seeking more and more of God’s power to be evident within our midsts. Commonly read as the closing benediction at services, Ephesians 3:20-21 is convicting of how we can live our lives for Christ beyond the church walls. Paul was certain that his call to preach the gospel to the Gentiles was according to God’s will and desire, and he prays that we will also experience Christ’s love to be able to live in accordance to God’s will. Though God is the one who accomplishes everything by His own strength, it is also His design to include the church in bringing Him glory. In vv. 10-11, Paul explained that the church has been eternally purposed to manifest God’s wisdom to the heavens. In v. 21, Paul extends this truth and writes that God will receive glory through Christ and the church throughout all generations, forever and ever. Paul’s closing remarks then leave us with a “strong rhetorical emphasis on the fact that the response of the church to God’s power, love, and saving grace will be to bring him glory for millions of years to come.”<sup>62</sup> Evangelism is a great opportunity to make much of God’s redeeming work through Christ and is hence also a wonderful response to God’s work in our lives. In pursuing evangelism, we can enjoy Christ’s love that compels us to share of our experiences with others, and rest in God’s power to graciously use our efforts to bring Him glory forever and ever.

---

<sup>61</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 494.

<sup>62</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 220.

## Conclusion

In discussing Ephesians 3, there are clear evangelical implications and believers are called to evangelize as: (1) a result and response to being convicted of Christ's accomplishments, (2) the church plays a role in bringing glory to God, and (3) Christ's love gives us the strength to love the lost. Paul's original audience included the Gentiles and Jews, and his letter showcased Christ's great strength and God's glory through the unity of two cultures. Today, the church has the privilege to see even more of Christ's strength and bring glory to God; the church is fully spiritually equipped for evangelism and has the potential to see great diversity in the body of Christ in our globalizing and more advanced world. In conclusion, I wish to provide practical applications for using what has been said in this essay to help myself and others correct misconceptions of God and his desired relationship with us and how practicing evangelism can help us better appreciate the power of being continuously filled with his Spirit and the astoundingly immeasurable love of God for each of us.

In Ephesians 3:1-9, Paul closely associates the revelation of the gospel and his ministry to the Gentiles; his personal salvation led him to share the good news that Christ has also invited the Gentiles to believe and receive salvation. One important truth we must remind ourselves is that "the commission to publish the gospel and make disciples was never confined to the apostle," "[n]or is it now confined to the church ministers."<sup>63</sup> The revelation Paul had in Christ's redeeming work is the same revelation that is the basis of all believers' salvation today. Paul was able to recognize his stewardship over the gospel, and believers today must also recognize that this good news was given to us so that our lives could be transformed for the sake of others.

---

<sup>63</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 54.

There is no hierarchy that determines eligibility in evangelism; anyone who believes in the gospel already has access to content that needs to be shared with nonbelievers. It is encouraging that “[e]very Christian, therefore, has a God-given obligation to make known the gospel.”<sup>64</sup> We are to then evangelize, in obedience to God, but also with the joy and freedom in knowing that God has entrusted all of his children with the ability to share the good news. Whether we are young in faith, struggle with speech, or greatly fear man, all believers can be encouraged by the fact that God invites us all to evangelize; we can be assured that the content of the gospel - not the ability to communicate the gospel - is what matters and made available to all believers.

In Ephesians 3:10-13, Paul emphasized God’s sovereign design to incorporate the church as a means of manifesting his wisdom. Some may argue that evangelism is not necessary in light of God’s sovereignty; He will save who He chooses to save anyways, so we do not need to worry about evangelism. This is a faulty statement, though, since “the command to evangelize is a part of God’s law” and “belongs to God’s revealed will for his people.”<sup>65</sup> People still can only believe, when they have heard, and when someone has preached the gospel (Rom 10:14). And people continue to perish when they do not repent (Luke 13:5). Thus, the necessity and urgency to evangelize do not contradict God’s sovereignty, but are rather part of his sovereign will that people obey his commands to evangelize. We should then continue to “evangelize universally and indiscriminately” because “every soul participates both in a fate and in a promise inherent in human life” and the gospel is the only hope for all humans.<sup>66</sup> Jesus said to his disciples that they will be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”

---

<sup>64</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 106.

<sup>66</sup> Julian Norris Hartt, *Toward a Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), 42.

(Acts 1:8). Thus, the “outward purpose of the church is not limited to evangelizing a congregation’s own city,” but “Christians today have a responsibility to take the gospel around the world.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the church should evangelize knowing that “[e]vangelism is not a task of the church, [but] it is the only task, for all we do is supposed to make Christ known.”<sup>68</sup> Harold Lindsell has also said that “the aim of the Church or its function is to evangelize the world.”<sup>69</sup> God’s sovereignty includes an eternal purpose for the church, and evangelism is the key role that believers must continue to partake in obeying and bringing glory to God.

Finally, in Ephesians 3:14-21, Paul’s prayer empowers us to evangelize being strengthened in Christ’s love. Loving the lost is not our own innate response towards humanity. Evangelism is necessarily sourced from our deeper understanding of Christ’s love for us. We can only share the good news, once we have personally experienced it, and are also strengthened by God to live with the fullness of His Spirit. Thus, “[w]e do not need guilt about evangelism, nor do we need a sense that we always have to say something ‘Christian’ to people we meet.”<sup>70</sup> When we are not motivated to evangelize, we should not try to increase our love towards others on our own strength. Rather, we should look to our inner being and ask the Lord for help to know His love more deeply. Evangelism stems from “a right understanding of God and his gospel” and “should be the natural expression of a life joined to a loving God, the sharing of a faith worth

---

<sup>67</sup> Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 76.

<sup>68</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 360.

<sup>69</sup> Harold Lindsell, *An Evangelical Theology of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949), 133.

<sup>70</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 360.

having.”<sup>71</sup> With that, evangelism is no longer a burden to love others, but is the fruit of knowing and experiencing God’s love for us.

Therefore, biblical implications on evangelism are found all throughout Ephesians 3. Paul does not explicitly instruct believers to evangelize, but his testimony of salvation and ministry and his prayer for all believers to be strengthened by Christ’s love speak loudly of how he deeply valued evangelism. May we then also value evangelism, as we are convicted that Christ truly died for all, embrace our calling as the church, and experience Christ’s love that strengthens and leads us to love the lost.

---

<sup>71</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 122.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnold, Clinton E. *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Baynes, Paul. *An Exposition of Ephesians, Chapter 2:11 to 6:18*. Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1959.
- Calvin, John. *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. Translated and Edited by John Owen. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849.
- Conzelmann, Hans. *Gentiles, Jews, Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman Era*. Translated by M. Eugene Boring. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Dever, Mark. *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012.
- Hansen, G. Walter. *The Letter to the Philippians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009.
- Hartt, Julian Norris. *Toward a Theology of Evangelism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955.
- Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: an Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Lightfoot, J. B. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953.
- Lindsell, Harold. *An Evangelical Theology of Missions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949.
- Lloyd-Jones, David Martin. *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: an Exposition of Ephesians 3:1 to 21*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.
- O'Brien, Peter Thomas O'Brien. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999.
- Packer, J. I., *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961.

Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009.

Piper, John. *Let the Nations Be Glad: the Supremacy of God in Mission*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.

Snodgrass, Klyne. *Ephesians*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Stott, John. *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*. The Bible Speaks Today. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979.

Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Wood, A. Skevington. *Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966.