

**God's People Part 1: Who We Are  
Potential  
Ephesians 3:14-21**

**EASTER Schedule and INVITE FRIENDS!**

**Good Friday Services at 7:00 PM at both campuses.**

**EASTER SERVICES**

**Saturday Night in Dallas at 5:00 PM.**

**OR**

**Sunday at regular times in Dallas (8:30, 10:00, and 11:30) and Lincolnton (9:15 and 11:00).**

**Introduction:** The late founder of Liberty University, Dr. Jerry Falwell, Sr., once told the students, **"You have no right to be ordinary. God has called you to be extraordinary."**

He wasn't suggesting that if the students didn't become the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, invent a rocket ship that goes back and forth to Mars, or personally lead millions of people to faith in Christ, then they would be failures. Rather, as children of God, they have potential unlike anything they had prior to Christ, potential that is not found or derived from the world, nor measured by the world's standards. He was telling the students that, as God's children, they have potential so extraordinarily different from anything this world can fathom or achieve that it would be unthinkable not to live in it.

Furthermore, and more importantly, Dr. Falwell was pointing the students to the Biblical fact that this potential was only available to them because the eternally perfect Son of God willingly suffered the eternal damnation of their sin to give it to them! Who we are as God's children is so glorious and so magnificent that not living in who he has made us to be shouldn't even be something worthy of consideration. When you add to it the understanding of the price that was paid for us to have it, it becomes criminal to even think about not living in it!

Dr. Falwell didn't invent this perspective, nor was the passion to see others understand and grasp it unique to him. Falwell's hunger for God's people to be who God created them to be and live the life Christ died for them to have is exactly what we see Paul praying for the church in Ephesus. Paul longed for the church at Ephesus to live in the potential they had been made to live in, to be the Champions for Christ they were made to be, and therefore he prayed,

**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 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. 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.

Specifically,

**Proposition: Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 reveals three aspects of our potential as God's people.**

**The first aspect of our potential revealed in Ephesians 3:14-21 is the source.**

**(1) The source of our potential is Christ within us. (3:14-19a)**

- A. A creek is nothing but a long indentation in the ground if there isn't a source to supply it with water. Likewise, a branch of a grape vine is a dead, totally unproductive piece of wood that's only good for burning if it's not rightly attached to a healthy vine, the only source that unlocks its potential and provides it with everything it needs to live and produce fruit. Jesus makes this exact point in John 15,
- B. **4 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. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. (John 15:4-6)**
- C. A branch has the potential to produce fruit, but only if it's rightly attached to the vine that is the source of that potential, so much so that apart from the vine, the branch can't do a thing! Nothing about its genetic potential can be realized until it's plugged into the source that both created that potential (the vine makes the branch) and supplies it. In the same way, the creator of our potential is Christ, as well as what supplies it, so much so that, apart from an abiding relationship with Christ, we have no opportunity at all to realize or experience it!
- D. Knowing this aspect of our potential, and longing for the believers in Ephesus to realize and experience it, Paul therefore prayed this way:
- E. **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 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, (3:14-19a)**

- F. Let's break this down.
- G. First and foremost, notice that Paul's prayers are to the one who is the exclusive source for the existence of anyone who has ever existed. **"14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,"**
1. Some take this to mean that Paul is only speaking of the redeemed. For instance:
    - a. "As children derive their name from their father and their relation to him is thereby determined, so the apostle says, the whole family of God derive their name from him and are known and recognized as his children."<sup>1</sup>
    - b. "Yet there is something inherently inappropriate about this reference to a multiplicity of families, since the dominant theme of these chapters is that through Christ the 'one God and Father of us all' (4:6) has only one family or household to which Jewish and Gentile believers equally belong. It seems better, therefore, to translate *pasa patria* 'the whole family' (AV), 'his whole family' (NEB margin) or 'the whole family of believers' (NIV). Then the addition of the words *in heaven and on earth* will indicate that the church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heaven, though separated by death, are nevertheless only two parts of the one great family of God."<sup>2</sup>
  2. Others take this to be a reference to God as the creator of all. For example, "Expositors says: 'The sense, therefore is 'the Father, from whom all related orders of intelligent beings, human and angelic, each by itself, get the significant name of *family, community*.' The various classes of men on earth, Jew, Gentile, and others, and the various orders of angels in heaven, are related to God, the common Father, and only in virtue of that relation has any of them the name of *family*.' But we must be careful here to note that the fatherhood of God over all created intelligences is in the sense of Creator, as in Paul's word to the Athenians, 'We are the offspring of God,' not at all in the sense of salvation where only saved individuals are children of God. The words 'of our Lord Jesus Christ,' are rejected by Nestle and by Westcott and Hort."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hodge, C. (1858). [A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians](#) (pp. 179–181). Robert Carter and Brothers.

<sup>2</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [God's new society: the message of Ephesians](#) (p. 133). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>3</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 4, p. 87). Eerdmans.

3. There is validity in both positions, but determining which one is correct is not essential to Paul's point. The point Paul is making is that his prayers are to the eternally sovereign, all-powerful God, who alone is the creator, King, and the source of all life and existence. The point is who God is as God, and that there is no other God but God! In other words, He's going as high up as can be achieved with His prayer.
- H. **"that according to the riches of his glory"** – *"The riches of his glory, πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης, means the plenitude of divine perfection. It is not his power to the exclusion of his mercy, nor his mercy to the exclusion of his power, but it is everything in God that renders him glorious, the proper object of adoration."*<sup>4</sup>
- I. What He's asking God to do is to give the believers strength that is only sourced by God. Specifically, that they would be **"strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being"**.
1. He's praying that what makes us strong is the power that comes exclusively from the work of the Holy Spirit in our **"inner being"**. So, what's our inner being?
  2. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul points out that if we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord, meaning that we exist even when we are physically dead. Therefore, there are two distinct parts to our humanity. As children of God, we are a human body that will die and one day be replaced, as well as a soul that will instantaneously be with God when our body dies because God promised we will never be separated from Him. Not even death, which separates body from soul, can separate us from God!
  3. We are as much our body as we are our soul, and it's why God is saving both. But, at this point in our salvation, He has only brought who we are as a soul to life, and He did so by placing His Spirit within our soul. As a soul, we were once void of God's presence, but now God dwells in us, and it's the Holy Spirit in us who gives us the power to live in a way we previously did not have. Therefore, Paul is praying for the Holy Spirit to do in us, as a soul, that which only He alone can do: to give us power that He alone is the source of. Paul then tells us the purpose of that power,
- J. **"so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--"**.
1. First of all, when he speaks of our heart, he is speaking of our soul, specifically that aspect of our soul that exemplifies who we are and what we are about. A person's heart is who they are from a moral and ethical perspective; it's what they are about and striving for; it's where their

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<sup>4</sup> Hodge, C. (1858). [\*A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians\*](#) (pp. 181–183). Robert Carter and Brothers.

allegiances lie, and it's the source of what they do and say (Matthew 15:18-19).

2. Furthermore, "to dwell" is not simply to sit in or occupy, but to be active and involved in living together. It takes us back to what Christ was speaking about in John 15 when He used the word "abide." Jesus is not meant to be something stored in our hearts like something stored in a closet, but rather to be lived with as one we are dependent on.
  3. Therefore, this power, which only comes from the Holy Spirit, is what enables the believer to abide in Christ, because the only way to abide in Christ is through faith! Faith in a person is not the belief that someone is real, but the surrender to someone because we believe not only that they are real, but worth being surrendered to! It is the only way we can abide in Christ. It is the only way we can be connected to the source, who is both the creator and the supplier of our potential. We must live in submission to Him, but all too often we are too weak to do so. So Paul prays that the believers have the strength to live submitted to Christ, so that they can experience what happens when He is truly living within them, that is, dwelling within them!
- K. When we have an "em dash" in the text, it means the text is going to pause to elaborate on what it just stated. If Christ is truly dwelling in our hearts, that is, we are truly living in glad submission to Him (faith), then in that reality, that potential we are created for, we are also "**rooted and grounded in love**", specifically God's love!
1. The words rooted and grounded are combined to form an emphatic picture of what keeps a tree from being moved or falling over. The attachment to the ground and the ground itself are both factors in the relationship's success. If a tree is rooted into soil that can't hold it up, it doesn't matter how strong the roots are. Likewise, rotted or weak roots that can't hold the tree upright will fail to keep it attached to the soil.
  2. In this case, living in glad submission to Christ (faith) is the root, and love is the soil. Therefore, we need the Holy Spirit to give our faith the strength to drive deep into the soil that is Christ, which is to be rooted in the literal manifestation of God's love!
- L. Of, "**18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,**" John Stott wrote, "**Yet it seems to me legitimate to say that the love of Christ is 'broad' enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jews and Gentiles, the theme of these chapters),**

**'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven.**<sup>5</sup>

- M. Furthermore, when our souls are oriented in this love, when our lives are being rooted in and grounded in Christ, it gives us the “strength” that is, the faith to understand the love of Christ, not just on an intellectual level but a truly experiential level. The experiential level isn’t void of knowing what is right about Christ and His love, but it also isn’t limited to knowledge that merely informs; rather, it is only rightly understood in the context of a relationship. It’s why Paul says, **“19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,”**
- N. Now, some may say, “Wait a minute, Austin, I thought you said this part of the text is about the source of our potential, but it appears to be the purpose of our potential—to know the love of Christ.” But it’s not! The second half of verse 19 states, **“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (3:19b)**. The words “that” tell us what follows is the purpose, and in this case, that purpose gives us very important insight into the context of our potential. While it is certainly part of the potential we are made to have, here it is clearly stated as the source of living in our potential.
- O. By abiding in Christ, and thus being rooted and grounded in His love, Hendriksen and Kistemaker note, **“... the most powerful and blessed chain-reaction in the whole universe is established.”**<sup>6</sup>

**This takes us directly to the second aspect of our potential revealed in Ephesians 3:14-21.**

**(2) The context of our potential is the holiness of God. (3:19b)**

- A. **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (3:19b)**
- B. Knowing the context of our potential ensures we expect, and thus are looking for, the right results of our potential. For instance, it would be considered ignorant at best if you believed that spending your life working a minimum-wage, entry-level job that requires no education or professional certification to achieve or perform was the way to have and enjoy living in an oceanfront beach house with your own offshore fishing boat docked near it. The context of the potential in a minimum-wage job is not to purchase an oceanfront house and an offshore fishing boat, but to provide the opportunity to get started in the workforce while helping to supplement the most basic needs of living at the most basic level. It’s meant to be an entry-level money-making opportunity that anyone willing and able to work can access, but it’s not meant to be an abundant source of everything a person needs to live. Therefore, if you don’t understand the context

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<sup>5</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (p. 138). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>6</sup> Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Ephesians* (Vol. 7, p. 172). Baker Book House.

of the potential of a minimum wage job, you will end up frustrated when you continue to expect something from it that it can't provide.

- C. Now the context of our potential as a child of God is very different from the context of our potential before we were rescued and saved to be His kids! The context of our potential as His fully favored sons and daughters is to **“be filled with all the fullness of God.”**
- D. John Calvin wrote, **“He who has Christ has everything necessary for being made perfect in God; for this is the meaning of the phrase, *the fulness of God.*”**<sup>7</sup>
- E. Sam Storms wrote, **“God’s “fullness” = his moral perfections or excellencies, as well as his empowering presence; i.e., all that God is as God. “That fullness or perfection is the standard or level to which they are to be filled.” (O’Brien, 265).”**<sup>8</sup>
- F. Putting this together, what we read in this prayer of Paul already means that as the Holy Spirit gives our souls the strength to truly live in submission to God, we are filled with the holiness of God! The moral and ethical character of God doesn’t become a play we put on to try and convince people of something that isn’t true about us, but more and more thoroughly, the moral and ethical character of our soul is transformed into the holiness that God is, and then shines forth naturally in our actions and words. Holiness doesn’t become a play we get better at as actors, but more and more of who we are in actual life.
- G. This process will not be completed until Christ’s return (Philippians 1:6), but that does not mean we are incapable of growing in it right now. Praise God, we can grow in His holiness right now! Your life doesn’t have to be a life defined by sin! It doesn’t have to be a life that has to constantly deal with the nasty fruit of ethical and moral weakness. Your life doesn’t have to be an instrument of chaos, but rather it can be an instrument of God’s love because that’s who God made you to be!
- H. And let’s be clear. God’s love is HOLY, and God’s holiness is love. They are not two separate things that balance each other, but one thing that any less of either creates someone other than who God is. This is why the holy law of God is summed up in the word “love.” Everything about the moral and ethical characteristic of God as love is equally a characteristic of His holiness, or it isn’t love.

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<sup>7</sup> Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [\*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians\*](#) (p. 265). Logos Bible Software.

<sup>8</sup> Storms, S. (2016). [\*Biblical Studies: Ephesians\*](#) (Eph 3:19b). Sam Storms.

- I. Think about it this way. When you bite into a biscuit, you can't say, "With this bite, I'm going to eat the lard that was used to make the biscuit," or "I want to take a bite of the baking powder this time." The only thing you can take a bite of is the biscuit. Everything that made the biscuit is now the biscuit. The flour, the lard, the buttermilk, etc., are no longer independent things but one thing—a biscuit! God's love and God's holiness are who God is! You can't separate them. To have God is have love that is perfectly holy, just as having God is to have holiness that is perfectly love. Without love, holiness is not perfect, and without holiness, love is not perfect. More importantly, they cannot be separated out because they are who God is. He is holy, and He is love. They are not competing forces or options on the dinner table to take a bite of one and not the other, but they are inseparably what makes God, God!
- J. This is why sexual immorality is never an act of love. According to the Bible, God made sex to be the covenantal act of marriage. Therefore, sex outside of the covenant of marriage is physically treating somebody as your spouse even though you are not committed to be their spouse. It's a lie! It's as selfishly deceptive and unethical an act that in no way can be considered "making love" because it's not coming from "love" or being done in "love." Likewise, lying, bitterness, envy, stealing, hatred, unforgiveness, and the list goes on and on of all the biblically immoral and unethical activities and desires, if you stop and think about it for at least a ¼ of a millisecond, stand in total contradiction to God's holiness and love, because God's holiness and love are inseparably defined by one another.
- K. So, the point is that as we abide in Christ and thus in His love, what is equally one with God's love, His holiness, will become who we are as well. It's why Paul wrote,
- L. **7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8)**

**The third aspect of our potential revealed in Ephesians 3:14-21 is the opportunity.**

**(3) The opportunity of our potential is bigger than we can imagine. (3:20-21)**

- A. **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. (3:20-21)**
- B. Notice again that this potential is unlocked by what God is doing "within us," that is, in our "inner being", meaning religious ordinances and practices do not unlock it. This power isn't a product of you participating in any religious function, but rather entirely a product of who God has made us to be and is making us to be, as

we abide in Christ through faithful submission to Him! It is the Holy Spirit who is at work in us, and the power of the Holy Spirit is limitless, so limitless that what He can do in us, through us, around us, or in whatever context we could ever imagine is bigger and more incredible than we could ever imagine!

- C. Therefore, when it comes to who you are, you are the embodiment of the possibilities of God! **Our potential as His children is His possibilities, and His possibilities are limitless!!!**
- D. Does this mean every person can be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company? God can do whatever He wants with you. So, yes, it does, but again, that's not the context of the potential Paul is talking about and thus shouldn't be the expectation. Paul is talking about the potential of the life we were incapable of living in, that we still fall short of all too often, that we, in our actions and faith, are never worthy of, and we often wonder if it will ever fully be our life. To this potential, Paul says, YES God can and will deliver you fully into it! He will not stop accomplishing that potential in you now, and He will fully finish it!
- E. In our recent hangout with the other pastors and pastors' wives, we spent time worshipping the Lord and sharing the scriptures that God was placing on our hearts as we sang. My mother-in-law closed it out with this passage, and it captures exactly what Paul is talking about in the benediction of this prayer.
- F. **24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)**
- G. You don't have to stay trapped in sin! You don't have to have a life controlled by the wickedness of your heart. Your life doesn't have to be a constant effort to fix the mess you keep making of it. Whether it is an addiction to drugs, alcohol, or sex, or a constant pattern of selfish decision making and thinking, or the misery caused by bitterness, envy, or materialism, God didn't save you to endure a life of sin; He saved you from sin, and He can save you from it to the uttermost! So run to KNOW HIM and watch the knowing of HIM unlock HIS POWER in you!!!!

This brings me to a very practical question to wrap this up. John Stott wrote,

**"One of the best ways to discover a Christian's chief anxieties and ambitions is to study the content of his prayers and the intensity with which he prays them. We all pray about what concerns us, and are evidently not concerned about matters we do not include in our prayers."<sup>9</sup>**

With that in mind,

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<sup>9</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 131-132). InterVarsity Press.

**Challenge: If the context of your potential is God's holiness, then how much of your prayer life is focused on unlocking that potential in you and others?**

Although we can talk to God about anything, most people never spend much time talking with God about the things that have to do with unlocking their potential as a child of God!

So many people read the Bible for information or argument rather than as an opportunity to explore the love of God and, as such, to be fueled with the strength to live by faith in Him! They miss the opportunity to meditate on God's Word and have it stir their hearts to pray the will of God over their life because they spend the entire time trying to figure out some puzzle that the Bible isn't even about in the first place.