

1. The language of the ESV is communicating that “*every family*” in the universe is a reflection of the One who gave us life. *Every family* in the universe receives its *essence* from the same source: **God**. Paul has used the imagery of a family over & over in this letter, & the only reason we have any concept of fatherhood or family units is because we were made in the image of the Father. Our identity as fathers and families comes from the Father. This is true, not just for Christian families, but for “*every family*.”
2. The language of the NKJV, however, is pointing to a more particular reality in saying that the redeemed family of God has received its *adopted* identity from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God does not have many families; He has *one family*. Several months ago, we sang an old hymn here at NC which goes, “*I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God.*” In this letter, Paul has been using the language of “family” to describe our relationship to God through Jesus Christ: no longer strangers, foreigners, and outsiders, but “*members of the [singular] household of God*” (2:19). Everyone in this redeemed family has been adopted by the same Father: *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The Father of Jesus Christ is also our Father! He is the Father of this “whole family”. Not just of the Jews. Not just of the believers who have died and entered into the presence of God. He is the Father of this “whole family in heaven and earth.”

LESSON(S):

- **Apologetics** || Don’t be caught off guard when you hear people claiming that the Bible translations are full of errors and contradictions. It’s not true. If I look at the sunset and then write a sentence in my journal about the purple sunset, and you write a sentence in your journal about the orange sunset – somebody comparing our journals 2,000 years from now might conclude that our journals contradict each other; but they don’t. The sunset was both purple *and* orange. Bible translations can function this way sometimes, and that can feel like a scary thing – but it’s actually a really helpful thing (*in that it often gives us a bigger picture of what God is revealing in His Word*).
- **Theology** || You can enter into prayer with the same confidence that Paul had (*and the same confidence that Jesus had*) because you are praying to the same Father. In 4:4–6, Paul goes on to say that God has one family, united by one Spirit, affirming one faith in one Lord, and in this family, there is only one Father. When we pray for one another, we are praying to the same Father that our Lord Jesus prayed to, and therefore we can enter into prayer with the same confidence and boldness and acceptance as Jesus.

Q. WHY does Paul bow his knees to the Father? “*For this reason...*” (3:14). For what reason?

A. For the reason that he has just spent the **58 verses** explaining! Paul has spent the last two and a half chapters explaining his motivation for praying for them.

Illustration: Have you ever sent a text to somebody just to let them know that you were praying for them? “*Hey, I just want you to know that I’m praying for you.*” This is what Paul is doing. The only difference between you and Paul is that it always takes Paul a lot longer to get to the point! 😊 In 1:15–21 he tells them that he’s praying for them. And who does Paul say that he’s praying to? “*The Father of glory*” (1:17). And then he trails off into the glories of grace and reconciliation and peace and the mystery of God opening the door of salvation to all nations! He eventually gets back to one of the main reasons for this letter, and that is to let his brothers and sisters know that he is praying for them.²

“For this reason...”

I’m praying for you **because** God has poured out His sovereign grace in your life – **because** God predestined you to be part of His family through adoption as sons and daughters – **because** His cosmic glory is on display within the unity of the church – **because** your life is a testimony of the wisdom of God to angels and demons – **because** you are in the midst of a spiritual battle – **because** you have glorious work to do.

² I don’t stop praying for you (1:15–21); here’s why I’m praying for you (3:14–21); don’t stop praying for one another (6:18); and here’s why I want you to be praying for me (6:19–20).

Q. **WHO** is he praying for?

A. He is praying for those who have been brought into the church from among the nations. When Paul started to explain his reason for praying in **3:1** (*before he got sidetracked for 13 verses*), he clarified that he was specifically talking to Gentiles (ἔθνη). This means that his prayer (**3:16–19**) is a wonderful model for how we can be praying for one another in the local church today.

Q. **WHAT** does Paul pray for?

1. **THAT the Spirit of God would strengthen their soul (3:16).**

“**that He [the Father] would grant you,
according to the riches of His glory,
to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...**”
~ *Ephesians 3:16*

One of the first lessons we can learn from Paul’s prayer is to let people know how we are praying for them. Paul doesn’t just say, “*I’m praying for you*” – which is a really good place to start. But also takes a minute to tell them specifically how He is praying for them.

Example: Our sister Masah is planning to move to Liberia next month to help the new president with all the transitions and changes taking place within the Liberian government. I am so glad (for their sake) that she is going to be there, but I am selfishly very sad to see her leave, and so I told her that I am praying for her: “*Specifically,*” I said, “*I am praying that all of your travel plans fall through so that you can’t go; I’m praying that airline tickets to Liberia are too expensive for you to afford; I’m praying that you get too sick to travel so that you have to stay here...*” And so, this past week at Bible Study, I reminded her that I am praying for her, and she asked me if I would kindly stop praying for her!

Paul says, I’m praying for you, and here is what I am praying... **that** our Father would strengthen your inner being with might (with power) through His Spirit.

- I know the temptations that surround them; Father, would you give them strength.
- I know the enemy that seeks to divide them; Father, would you give them strength.
- I know the pressures and sufferings that they face; Father, would you give them strength.
- I know the spiritual battles that rage in their soul (*loneliness, shame, regret, depression, fear, bitterness*); Father, would you give them strength.

Far too often, we think that we can give people strength by our own means: getting them plugged into the right groups, signing them up for the right programs, giving them the right tools, connecting them with the right people, developing the right kinds of habits...

- If we could just get them into counseling...
- If he would just stay away from those people who are such a bad influence...
- If she would get off of social media... if only she would listen to better music...
- If only he would stop playing those video games... if only he would get more accountability...
- If only they would get plugged into a small group...

ALL of these things are not only good, I think they are vital for your spiritual growth and development, but NONE of them are the source of spiritual strength within your soul, and Paul knows it. You can be involved in all the right programs and support groups and have all the right tools and friendships – and still die a thousand deaths every day to the enemy’s attack – because groups and programs and tools are no match against the

enemy of your soul. In the midst of all of these good and necessary things, **your greatest need is the Spirit of God at work in your soul**. Nothing else is strong enough to destroy the strongholds of the enemy in our life.³

In my experience, I rarely hear Christians pray like this. We pray that God would heal Aunt Bettie's foot; we pray that He would help Uncle Paul to quit smoking – or that Jimmy would quick looking at porn – or that Sally would have a smooth trip – or that the weather would cooperate for the church picnic. And these are all good things to pray for (*they are...*⁴), but the driving focus of Paul's life was SO MUCH HIGHER, and his dreams were SO MUCH BIGGER because he knew that the stakes are SO MUCH GREATER than the forecast for the church picnic or whether Bettie's foot gets healed. Paul is praying with eternal realities on his mind.

2. **THAT Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith (3:17).**

He prays that Christ would not just be the Savior of their heart and the King of their heart, but that He would be the RESIDENT in their heart.

One of the best devotional books I read as a teenager was a little booklet called, "**My Heart, Christ's Home**." It pictured your heart as a home with all the rooms of a traditional American home. And it talked about how so many people talk about "*inviting Jesus into their heart*", but then there are lots of rooms that are off limits. What I do in the privacy of my **bedroom** is none of your business, Jesus, so you don't ever need to come in here. What I watch on television is really none of your business either, so why don't you just stay out of the **TV room**. I would rather not have you convicting me about my eating habits, so I'll kindly ask you not to go into the **kitchen**. I definitely don't want you looking over my shoulder when I'm in the **bathroom**, so that's obviously off limits. The **closets** are where I store things that I don't want people to see, so that's a no-brainer. I would invite you to hang out in the **backyard**, but I'm not sure you would appreciate the kind of music that I like to listen to. And I'm quite positive that the games I like to play on my computer wouldn't really interest you, so let's say that the **game room** is also off limits. Stay off of my social media accounts. Please don't check my browser history. Actually, it's just safer if you don't go on my **computer** at all. But yeah... welcome home!

Paul says, "*I'm praying that your heart would be Christ's home.*" All of it. Every room. Every closet. Every shadowy corner. Listen, if God answers that prayer, then He has also answered your prayer against **pornography**. A lifestyle of pornography can only exist in a room where Christ has been denied access. If Christ has access to all of your heart, pornography has lost all of its power because darkness cannot exist where there is light. **Bitterness** cannot exist in the same room in which Christ dwells. **Lust** cannot cohabit the same dwelling place as Christ. If you open your heart to the Light of the World, there is no vacancy left for "the unfruitful works of darkness" (**Eph 5:11**).

3. **THAT we would know the love of Christ which passes knowledge (3:17–19).**

What a prayer! I pray that they would know something that cannot be known! I pray they would experience just how wide and how long and how deep and how high is the love of Christ. "**How deep the Father's love for us. How vast beyond all measure.**"

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus || vast, unmeasured, boundless, free
Rolling as a mighty ocean || in its fullness over me
Underneath me, all around me || is the current of His love
Leading onward, leading homeward || to Thy glorious rest above
~ *Oh the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*

³ The sword *of the Spirit* is our only offensive weapon (**Eph 6:17**).

⁴ Phil 4:6; James 4:2–3; 5:14–16; 1 Pet 5:7.

No conditions. No exceptions. No stipulations. No prerequisites. No entrance exam. No quarterly review. No minimum requirements. No expiration date. No fine print. You could never reach the top. You could never hit the bottom. You could never run so far that you finally reach the edges of its limits – because there are none!

If God would give you the grace of knowing that this is how you are loved by God... it changes everything. And Paul knows it. And so this is what he prays for.

RESULT

If God were to answer Paul's prayer, what would the result be? Paul answers this question with the final phrase in verse 19: **the result is our heart that is filled with all the fullness of God (3:19)**.

If you spent the rest of your life meditating on this phrase, it would be a life well-lived. When the Spirit of God is strengthening your soul and Christ has taken up residence in your heart and the love of God has captivated your mind, Paul describes this as being "*filled with all the fullness of God.*"

Q. HOW can Paul pray with this kind of confidence.

A. Because Paul is praying to the God with the riches of glory at His disposal (3:16). Therefore, he believes that *not only* is God able to accomplish all that he asks for, *but also* that He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we could even think to ask (3:20).⁵ He also knows that when God answers prayers like this, God receives unending glory in the church through the work that is accomplished by Christ (3:21).

How long will this glory last? To the 3rd and 4th generation? To the tenth generation? To the thousandth generation? *This glory will echo across the universe to all generations, and it will never stop.*

The earthly glory of humanity is so short-lived. If you are blessed to have an extremely healthy and close relationship with your family, you might be remembered for a couple generations. Maybe! If you happen to be famous for something, you might be vaguely remembered for a little bit longer than that. But God will have His glory for all generations.

When we pray like this, we are taking part in something that will bring glory to God for all eternity.

PRAYERS for 2024

- That God would grant the gift of salvation to more than He has in the past 3 years.
- That God would fill this sanctuary to capacity with people who are hungry to hear the Word of God.
- That God would give us strong, vibrant, and committed leadership teams.
- That God would raise up more six more people eager for the work of global mission.
- That God would provide above and beyond our financial budget...
 - To meet the financial responsibilities of the church.
 - To give more to the TCMBA than we ever have before.
 - To increase our overall missions giving.

⁵ We look out across this little gathering with our limited resources, and in our eyes it all seems so small and insignificant. We don't pray big prayers or dream big dreams because we forget that the power of the church is not in its members or in its pastor or in the offering plate.