

I. Introduction

- A. We're looking at an amazing place in the Bible today. It has a special meaning for me because one of the verses in Ephesians 3 really impacted me as a young adult, when I was trying to figure out my place in the world.
- B. In case you're new, or have missed a few weeks, when we come to church, we open our Bibles together. We believe God guides our everyday lives through the Bible and not just our choices, but our psychology too.
- C. The only way to be connected with reality is to be grounded in the Bible. It's the only way to be wise, and healthy, and just crazy enough to be interesting.
- D. The place in the Bible we're focusing on is called Ephesians. The Ephesians were people. They lived almost 2,000 years ago in a place called Ephesus. This was a city in the Roman Empire.
- E. A man named Paul wrote this book. It was his letter to the Ephesians. He was their pastor for three years. Now, Paul is in prison for his faith. He remembers his friends. He reminds them of all he taught them about salvation and Jesus and God.
- F. And about their place in the great big universe.
- G. That's all you need for now, so let's get right into Ephesians 3:1.

II. *1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, (Ephesians 3:1, 2, NKJV).*

- A. The first thing to notice is that this is a broken sentence. The writer starts an idea and breaks it off. He doesn't come back to his idea until verse 14.
- B. So verse 1 says: For this reason, I Paul, and then he digresses and comes back in verse 14:
- C. For this reason, I bow my knees. And then he offers this beautiful prayer.
- D. So let's just say right here that we are looking at a prayer, and an introduction to a prayer and both are super important.
- E. How many of you have a really good sense of direction? You can usually figure out which way is north, south, east, and west. Anyone?
- F. How about a terrible sense of direction? Anyone get lost easily? When my mother-in-law and her sister drove from Chicago to California, they clipped along the Interstate pretty fast. Then somehow, they got turned around. They stopped a gas station to ask for help, and found out they were in Missouri. We figured about a 400 mile detour.
- G. What this prayer and introduction do is orient you for the journey of your life. Who are you? Why are you here? Where did you come from? And where are you going?
- H. Now, the sentences in this chapter of the Bible are pretty complicated, so I'm switching to a translation that does a really nice job of making it simple: the New Living Translation.

III. *1 I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus because of my preaching to you Gentiles. 2 As you already know, God has given me this special ministry of announcing His favor to you Gentiles. 3 As I briefly mentioned earlier in this letter, God Himself revealed His secret plan to me. 4 As you read what I have written, you will understand what I know about this plan regarding Christ. 5 God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now He has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:1-5, NLT).*

- A. What is he saying? He's saying that God has always been at work in the world to accomplish His plan.
- B. God was announcing His plan from the very beginning, and even in the days long before Jesus, God's plan was clear.
- C. There were, however, a few parts that were not clearly revealed. These parts are called a mystery—God's secret plan.
- D. It's like the secret menu at In-n-Out Burger. If you know it, you know it, and if you don't, you don't. You want that burger protein style or animal style?
- E. The secret part of God's plan really wasn't new. He had been dropping hints since the book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible.
- F. But now, since Jesus, God kicked His plan into high gear, and He was making the coolest parts of it an open secret.
- G. Here it is:

IV. *6 And this is the secret plan: The Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God's children. Both groups have believed the Good News, and both are part of the same body and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6, NLT).*

- A. Your race doesn't matter. Your income doesn't matter. Your religious background doesn't matter. Your gender doesn't matter. Your educational level doesn't matter. Your employment status doesn't matter.
- B. If you have Jesus Christ, you have an equal share with every other Christ-follower, in all the riches inherited by Christ's children.
- C. There is a cosmic vault in heaven.
- D. Jesus threw the doors wide open, and said, whoever will, come on in.
- E. He did this by shedding His blood and dying on the Cross for us. That's why a holy God can do nice things for unholy people. Christ's death on the Cross reconciled us to God—we've already seen that in chapter 2.
- F. If you could pile up all the wealth of heaven—which I don't recommend trying—on the title and deed to all that wealth, you would find your name.
- G. If you've believed the Good News—in other words, if you have been saved, you enjoy the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus.
- H. All that stuff is yours.
- I. And this leads to a really important teaching every child of God should understand.
- J. You need to understand about your standing and state—something also called positional truth.

V. Standing and State

- A. Here are simple definitions.
 - 1. Standing: this refers to your official status before God. This is how God identifies you, how God knows you. This is your position in Christ. So God says **YOU ARE HOLY**, and He calls you a **SAINT**. This is your truth and your standing in the courts of heaven.
 - 2. State: this is how you see yourself, and how others see you act. In your everyday practice, are your choices holy? Is your attitude holy? Are your words holy? Are your actions holy? Sometimes yes, sometimes no, it's a mixed bag.
 - a) **STANDING** is how God sees you and defines you.
 - b) **STATE** is how you and others see you and define you.

(1) Let's do some comparisons.

- B. Beginnings
 - 1. Your standing begins at the moment you are saved. You have a new standing, a new position in Christ.
 - 2. Your state began at the moment you started making decisions, the first time you whined to get attention.
- C. Nature
 - 1. Your standing is permanent. Nothing can change it. You are a child of God, and you always will be a priest of God— an heir of Jesus.
 - 2. Your state fluctuates. You have good days and bad days. Sometimes you live up to your high calling, other days you crash and burn.
- D. Time
 - 1. Your standing is instantaneous. You are given this new status in one moment of time, the instant you embrace Jesus as your Savior.
 - 2. Your state is progressive and gradual. It is a matter of growth in grace, and gradually making your state match your standing.
 - a) *I I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, (Ephesians 4:1, NKJV).*
- E. Effort
 - 1. Your standing is received as a gift by grace working upon you through simple faith.
 - 2. Your state is received as a gift by grace working within you, through arduous, difficult faith, especially when times are tough. God works through you to produce in you the character of Christ—you break a sweat—empowered by Him, but still, you're the one who puts for the effort.
- F. Result
 - 1. There is coming a day when your state will exactly match your standing forever more. That is when you die, or see Jesus face to face at His coming, which ever happens first.
 - 2. Until then, you have these golden moments when you really do rise up to your high calling. You've loved a jerk. You've given generously. You've served someone unworthy. Your motives were pure, and you did something wonderful, and you know it was God in you. Have you ever had that feeling?
 - 3. When your state matches your standing, you're a happy camper. When it doesn't you're kind of miserable.
- G. Psychology
 - 1. Your standing is announced in Scripture and believed by faith.
 - 2. Your state is announced every time you look in a mirror.
 - a) **AND THIS IS THE PART I WANT TO FOCUS ON.**
 - 3. And his attack is made by throwing your STATE in your face. In this world, there will never be a day, no matter how saintly you become, where your state can't be used to attack you.
 - 4. You are ruined by the lies you believe.
 - a) I'll never amount to anything.
 - b) I should just die; the world would be a better place if I just died.
 - c) I'll never break this addiction; I'll never stop smoking, stop drinking, or stop doing drugs.
 - d) I'll never get a job.
 - e) I always pick losers.
 - 5. You are ruined by the lies you believe.
 - 6. God has announced the truth about you. He says:
 - a) You are forgiven (Eph 1:7, Col 1:14, Ps 103)
 - b) You are accepted (Eph 1:6)
 - c) You are Christ's friend (John 15:15)
 - d) You are united with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17)
 - e) You are bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19, 20)
 - f) You are adopted (Eph 1:5)
 - g) You are redeemed (Col 1:14)
 - h) You are complete in Christ (Col 2:10)
 - i) You are free from condemnation (Rom 8:1)
 - j) You are sealed by God (2 Cor 1:21)
 - k) You are protected from the Evil One (1 Jn 5:18)
 - l) You are a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20)
 - m) You are able (Phil 4:13)
 - 7. You are ruined by the lies you believe.
 - 8. But you are healed by the truths you embrace.
- H. The only way you can live up to your high calling, the only way you can make your heavenly reality into your earthly reality, is if you first believe that what God has said about you is true.
- I. And this is enormously difficult. Faith is hard. Faith can be tough.
- J. You see, the devil has snuck all kinds of lies into your psychology. They lie dormant, and they ruin your psychology. And then something happens, and up comes a lie to control you and to make you crazy, and make you depressed, and make you violent, and make you self-righteous and hyper critical and anything but Christ-like.
- K. You are ruined by the lies you believe.
- L. You are healed by the truths you embrace.

- M. And your wounds run deeper than your convictions, almost all the time.
- N. So what to do?
- O. Today, we have a golden opportunity called Grow U, Steps to Freedom in Christ. We are going to help you probe your own heart and look for the lies you believe. We'll do that in seven categories:
1. Lies about false gods.
 2. Lies about false beliefs.
 3. Lies about false revenge and bitterness and an unforgiving spirit.
 4. Lies about false authority and rebellion against God's authority structures in your life.
 5. Lies about false pride and self-centeredness in your life.
 6. Lies about false behaviors and habits and addictions in every area of life, including sexuality.
 7. Lies about a false identity, living out of cursing instead of blessing.
- P. What I'm saying is that there is a whole belief system woven into your psychology by this fallen world-system. It tells you lies, and these lies ruin your life. They keep you stuck in a low-grade state of poop when God designed you to soar to the heights of your calling in Christ.
- Q. When I first started preaching, people told me I had to include a practical application at the end of my sermon. Tell the church how to put what you just preached into practice.
- R. That's pretty true, and pretty good, and pretty important, but it doesn't go far enough.
- S. Because here's the real practical application: that you would obtain a **TOTAL PSYCHOLOGICAL OVERHAUL** in accordance with the simple stated truth of God.
- T. Now, that's a lot more practical than me telling you how to balance your checkbook.
- U. In other words, your **STANDING** is true truth, and everything else is ultimately a big fat lie, and it makes you crazy and psychotic and sociopathic and legalistic—it makes you **ICK**.
- V. So, if you want to deal with these things, come back to Grow U at 3 pm on Sunday. I promise you we will all spend the evening renouncing the devil's lies and embracing God's truth.
- W. And you will feel a deep change in your heart.
- X. It will be a turning point for you—a breakthrough. The date you begin to make your state actually match your standing.
1. Now, there is a reason why this is important—that is way bigger than you. Way bigger than your health and your maturity and your personal sense of God having your back.
 2. Here it is:
- VI. *7 By God's special favor and mighty power, I have been given the wonderful privilege of serving Him by spreading this Good News. 8 Just think! Though I did nothing to deserve it, and though I am the least deserving Christian there is, I was chosen for this special joy of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. 9 I was chosen to explain to everyone this plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. 10 God's purpose was to show His wisdom in all its rich variety to all the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. They will see this when Jews and Gentiles are joined together in His church. 11 This was His plan from all eternity, and it has now been carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Because of Christ and our faith in Him, we can now come fearlessly into God's presence, assured of His glad welcome. 13 So please don't despair because of what they are doing to me here. It is for you that I am suffering, so you should feel honored and encouraged (Ephesians 3:7-13, NLT).*
- A. Can we just zero in on verse 10? Especially this line:
1. *God's purpose was to show His wisdom in all its rich variety to all the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.*
- B. Let's break it down.
1. God wants to show something.
 2. God wants to show His wisdom in all its rich variety.
 3. God wants to show this to specific beings.
 4. God wants to show this to all the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm.
 5. God wants to show this to them through you.
- C. **TRANSLATION:** This entire world is an arena. The stadium is filled with angels and demons. You are on the field of play. And they are watching YOU. Because when you have your act together, you display to the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms the manifold wisdom of God.
- D. Your life with God isn't just for your edification.
- E. It's for angelic illumination too.
- F. We live in a spiritual realm. There is another dimension that we can't see. But it surrounds us and permeates us and affects us. And I don't want us to get all freaky about angels and demons, but they're real. They are the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, says verse 10.
- G. And when you received Jesus you became a citizen of the heavenly realms.
- H. There are great powers playing tug of war with culture, with old people, young people, and in-between people. There are great powers playing tug of war with families and marriages and youth and children. You see it on TV and hear it in music and read about it in books and the Internet.
- I. There is a great power struggle going on; the devil is fighting a losing battle for supremacy, but he hasn't given up.
- J. The good news is that we have a secret weapon: and our secret weapon means we don't have to out-muscle the devil. We don't have to play tug of war with evil.
- K. Do you want to know what our secret weapon is?
- L. It is **THE TRUTH OF GOD**.
- M. God's truth, from the Bible, is invincible. The demons hop away like scared little bunnies when you learn truth, declare truth, embrace truth, and live truth.
- N. This truth is the **SWORD OF THE SPIRIT**, God's sword, the word of God.
- O. And that is exactly why our chapter ends with this prayer:
- VII. *14 When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, 15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. 16 I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will give you mighty inner strength through His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:14-16, NLT).*

- A. Isn't that an amazing prayer? Let's pray it for each other. Pray it for yourself. And pray it for me. God's glorious unlimited resources will give you mighty inner strength through His Holy Spirit.
1. There is no need you face, that He hasn't supplied.
 2. There is no wound you carry, that He can't heal.
 3. There is no pain you feel, that He won't comfort.
 4. There is no loss you've suffered, that He can't get you past.
 5. There is no sin you've committed that He can't forgive.
 6. And there is no problem you face that He can't solve.
- B. He is the Lord of glorious unlimited resources, and these are at your beck and call if you will only:
1. Discover the truth about yourself.
 2. Embrace the truth about yourself, and...
 3. By faith live the truths about yourself.
- C. Because when you do that, the next part of the prayer becomes true for you:
- VIII. *17 And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love really is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God (Ephesians 3:17-19, NLT).*
- A. Does the love of God for you feel more like THEOLOGY or PSYCHOLOGY?
 - B. The way to tell is when you're in crisis. That's when you either feel or don't feel the love of God. And as much as you might spout this doctrine or articulate that Bible verse—and that's important—the deeper question is not what you know in your head, but what you also feel in your gut about the love of Christ so great you will never fully understand it.
 - C. This is my ministry: to persuade you that you are who God says you are, and that God loves you as much as He says He loves you.
 - D. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Do you want that? You can have that, and if you don't believe it, that's your first problem.
- IX. *20 Now glory be to God! By His mighty power at work within us, He is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. 21 May He be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen (Ephesians 3:20, 21, NLT).*
- A. I cannot imagine better words than these. He is superabundantly more powerful than you can ever ask or hope.
 - B. You have never strained the limits of God's power, and you never will.
 - C. And His mighty power is at work in us.
 - D. You are a powerhouse, a generator, an alternator, a nuclear power plant for the goodness and grace and glory of God.
 - E. Don't hold that in—you'll crack up.
 - F. When you walk out of here today, understand your potential.
 1. You have the potential to love this week.
 2. The potential to forgive an enemy.
 3. The potential to give more than you thought you could.
 4. The potential to lay down the cigarette, the joint, the bottle, the pornography.
 5. The potential to close your mouth before the judgmental word comes out.
 6. The potential to be healed.
 7. The potential to speak a healing word and pray a healing prayer.
 8. The potential to encourage somebody who's down.
 9. The potential to get out of your own little cocoon and through kindness and grace, alter the shape of somebody's eternity.
 10. You have the potential to rise up to your high calling in Christ, to make your state match your standing.
 - G. And you have this potential thanks to His mighty power at work inside you—even when you don't feel it—and even when you don't feel like it. FAITH IS THE VICTORY.
 - H. God is glorified by what He does for us, and by what He does through us.
 - I. That's the glory of His grace.
 - J. This is our prayer: may He be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen.