May God deny you peace and give you glory.
Unamuno, a Spanish mystic

According to Russell Maltby in his book "The Significance of Jesus," Jesus promised his disciples three things: "They would be entirely fearless, absurdly happy, and that they would get into trouble."
William Barclay

Prayer Study # 465
EPHESIANS CHAPTER THREE
First Love Ministries, Inc., of Perry, GA USA

Ephesians 3 New King James Version (NKJV)

The Mystery Revealed

3 *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, ***3*** *how that by revelation He made known*
to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,
4 *by which, when you read, you may understand my*
knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ***5*** *which in other*
ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it
has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy
apostles and prophets: ***6*** *that the Gentiles should be*
fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His
promise in Christ through the gospel, ***7*** *of which I*
became a minister according to the gift of the grace
of God given to me by the effective working of His
power.

Paul is writing this letter to the Ephesians while he is imprisoned at Rome. He is eventually to go on trial before Nero. Nero is waiting for the Jewish accusers to come from Jerusalem with their false and malicious charges against Paul.

Although a prisoner, Paul had certain privileges for a time. He was able to stay in a house, which he had rented. He could see visitors day and night. Still, however, he was a prisoner and was chained to the wrist of a Roman soldier whose duty was to see that Paul would never escape.

Paul never thought of himself as a prisoner of Rome but as a prisoner of Christ. To him it was a privilege to suffer for the Name of Christ. He remembered the great love that Jesus had shown him and was very aware that he was to share that love with the Gentiles.

The great secret or mystery of God was that the love and mercy and grace of God was not meant just for the Jews but to all people everywhere. This was the revelation that the Lord had given to Paul. We think that this is so elementary, but it was a foreign and hated concept by the Jews. The Jews hated the Gentiles and saw them as worthless. At best they were created to be slaves to the Jews. At worst they were created to be destroyed.

Yet it was to these very Gentiles that this Pharisee of Pharisees had been sent by Jesus Himself. Paul answered the call and gave his life **"to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me"** (Acts 26:18).

This mystery, i.e. that God loves Gentiles and considers them equal members of His Church and receives them on the same basis He receives the Jews, was taught to Paul by the Holy Spirit. Not only did the Holy Spirit teach this to Paul, but He also

revealed this to the New Testament apostles and prophets. Paul assumes no superiority over others, because of this revelation, and even refers to himself in the next passage as “the least of all saints.

J Vernon McGee tells us that there is a threefold division in the human race. *All* people from Adam to Abraham were Gentiles. All people from Abraham to Christ were either Jews or Gentiles. Finally, from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture, people will be divided into three groups: Jews, Gentiles, and the Church.

Purpose of the Mystery

8 *To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* ***9*** *and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;* ***10*** *to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,* ***11*** *according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,* ***12*** *in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.* ***13*** *Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

Verse 8 shows the evolution of Paul from a proud Pharisee to one who is the least of the saints, an evolution that will continue until he considers himself the chief of sinners:

24 years after his conversion-“I am the least of all

apostles”
(1st Corinthians 15:9).

30 years after his conversion-“Who am less than the least of
the saints” (Ephesians 3:8)

39 years after his conversion-“Christ Jesus came into the
world to save sinners of whom I am chief” (1st Tim. 1:15).

Thus, Paul acknowledges that in himself he is no one special and even insignificant, but in Christ he is a new creature. He goes on to tell his spiritual son Timothy, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” Paul recognized the privilege he had been given to tell the whole world that whosoever will may come to salvation in Jesus and may experience God’s love.

William Barclay speaks of those who approach life in the opposite way of the Apostle Paul: “…there are many who are more concerned with their own importance and influence than with the significance of Jesus Christ, and who are more concerned that they should be noticed than that Christ should be seen.”

In this passage Paul tells us that the eternal purpose of God was to allow all people, Jew or Gentile, to accept redemption through accepting the blood sacrifice of Jesus. The mystery that any and all

may come to the cross, whether Jew or Gentile, was not be argued or debated, but to be preached. And even God's created intelligences, such as principalities and powers in heavenly places, or higher angelic beings, would learn something of the wisdom of God through the love and mercy and grace they see Him lavishing on the Church.

All of us have access directly to God and can boldly come to Him because of faith in Christ. We do not have to have a go-between or an intermediary. He is no respecter of persons and because of the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, the veil has been rent, and we can go into the Holy of Holies.

Paul does not want his followers to be discouraged by his imprisonment or sufferings. He believes that his imprisonment is working for his own good and for the glory of those he has been called to reach. Perhaps we would not have such beautiful passages of scripture as are found in the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians, and in his personal letter to his friend Philemon, all of which were written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

Appreciation of the Mystery

14 *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— **19** to know the love of Christ which passes*

knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
20 *Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,* ***21*** *to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Verse 14 normally would have followed verse 1. Paul often starts out to address a particular issue but then goes off on a tangent or "rabbit trail," before coming back to the original issue, which started out as a prayer in verse one and continued in verse fourteen to the Ephesians. What is this cause that he bows his knees unto God the Father? The cause is that the Ephesian believers would accept everyone and anyone who would come as part of the body of Christ. Paul writes in Galatians 3:26-28: *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

He expounds on this again in Colossians 3:10-11: *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all.*

Ephesians 3:15 speaks of God's wonderful family. The songwriter says, "I love the thrill that I feel when I get together with God's wonderful people. " J. Vernon McGee comments: "A great many folk think that it is only me and mine-we four and no more. But

it's a little wider than that. Some folk feel that their little clique in the church is the only group the Lord is listening to. Some people think their local church constitutes the saints. Then there are others who think that their denomination is the whole family of God."

In Ephesians 16-19 Paul prays for four definite things. First, Paul prays that the inner man might be strengthened with might or power by His Spirit. The spiritual part of a person needs prayer as much as the physical nature of a person. Power is needed to live the Christian life in the wicked world that we are a part of-that takes strength in the inner man. This has to do with human reason.

Secondly, Paul prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. Often in scripture the word *heart* means both spirit and soul. We need to be in Christ, i.e. to have Him in our hearts, and to have the mind of Christ. Colossians 1:27 tells us, "*…Christ in you, the hope of glory."* This deals with conscience. We should pray that He make our conscience more and more sensitive to His presence.

Thirdly, Paul asks that the believers may know the dimensions of the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge and can only be realized by our spirit man. It is a paradox that Paul prays that we know something that is beyond knowledge. That knowledge includes the ***breadth***, His arms reaching to everyone all over the world, (…*him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*-John 6:37); the ***length***, from eternity passed to eternity future, (…*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*-Revelation 13:8); the ***depth,*** even death on the cross (*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled*

Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross-Philippians 2:8); and the ***height***, to the throne of God (*Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*-Philippians 2:6).

Finally, Paul prays that the believers will be filled up to all the fullness of God, at least to our comprehension of the love of Christ.

Paul ends this section with what I consider one of the most important scriptures in the whole Bible. Ephesians 3:20-21 is an outburst of spiritual praise. But it is also an affirmation of the power of God to work in our lives. He wants to bless us beyond what we can even ask or comprehend. But He limits this blessing in our behalf to be according to the power or *dunamis* that works in us.

Dunamis in scripture is understood as *force, miraculous power, ability, abundance, might, power, strength, violence, a mighty and wonderful work, the resurrection power of God.* This *dunamis* comes only through the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Paul prophesies in 2nd Timothy 3 of a time in the last days that will be perilous. A modern paraphrase of the Bible reads: *Remember this! In the last days there will be many troubles because people will love themselves, love money, brag, and be proud. They will say evil things against others and will not obey their parents or be thankful or be the kind of people God wants. They will not love others, will refuse to forgive, will gossip, and will not control themselves. They will be cruel, will hate what is good, will turn against their friends, and will do foolish things without thinking. They will be conceited, will love pleasure instead of God, and will act as if they serve*

God, but will not have His power [dunamis]… (2nd Timothy 3:1-5). In the King James, verse 3:5 says, *…having a form of godliness but denying its power* [dunamis].

A few of the more prominent scriptures dealing with *dunamis* are the following:

1st Timothy 1:7: *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power* [***dunamis***] and of love and of a sound mind.

Acts 1:8: *But you shall receive power* [***dunamis***] *when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.*

Luke 24:49: *Behold, I send the Promise of the Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power* [***dunamis***] from on high.

1st Corinthians 1:18: *For the message [preaching] of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are saved, it is the power* [***dunamis***] of God.