

Ephesians 3 - Walking in Faith

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Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0 : 00] Father God, it is not always true that we feel affections and faith.

! It's not always true that we adequately feel how blessed we are.! But we would just, right now, God, stand before you and say, we know because your word tells us so.

That we are so greatly blessed. As we've worked our way through Ephesians, we've seen that we've been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And that before the foundation of the world, you chose us to be in Christ so that in the coming ages you might show the excellencies of your glories to every being in the created universe.

Praise your holy name for how good you are to us. Thank you for Christ in Jesus' name. Amen. You can be seated. We'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry. And we have the privilege this morning of recognizing a number of folks who are joining Providence officially as members.

[1 : 15] Most of these people are no strangers to you. But they've completed the membership process, which involves either attending the membership class or watching the membership class videos and then going through an interview with one of the elders on the leadership team.

And so we want to recognize a number of people this morning. First of all, I didn't do this on purpose, but MJ, you're right there. Come up here. Stand right here, please, sir. This is MJ Bell coming for membership today.

Jason and Sarah, come on up. I feel like Bob Barker. Ben and Alessandra, are you? There you are. I thought I saw you.

Dustin and Kat are not here. They had a death in their family, so they had to go down to the Lake of the Ozarks to be with family today. But we are recognizing Dustin and Kat Pugh as well.

William and Maddie Weatherford. There you are. All sport-coated up, huh? Quinn and Laura.

[2 : 16] Kevin and Lisa. Sarah Montak.

And Delaney, my fellow Philippines buddy. So these folks are coming today to become members at Providence Community Church.

And let's just celebrate their decision with a round of applause. They passed the probation period. Now they get the secret decoder ring. But in all seriousness, why don't we kill two birds with one stone? And we'll pray for these folks and also read our text for today, which is the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3.

So let's bow our heads and I'll read. Y'all pray. Pray this as I read it for these folks. For this reason, I bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[3 : 48] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Thank you so much. Thank you so much.

And if I forgot anybody, please hit me in the head. It would be completely unacceptable. I don't think I did. But we'll open your Bibles this morning to the book of Ephesians.

We're in chapter 3, as I mentioned, examining this prayer one last time before we move on into chapter 4. Now, last week, because we had a snow day, I did a sermon via the Internet.

How many of you, I'm not going to judge you if you didn't watch it, but I'm just trying to get a feel for how much review I ought to do. How many of you watched the video from last week? Okay, a

reasonable amount.

[4 : 58] And I lied about not judging those who didn't, by the way. No. You know, we look at this prayer, and it's just loaded with potential insights into who the Lord is, into who we are, into God's purposes for our lives.

Last week, I suggested that this prayer is at least partially in response to what Paul says in the preceding verse, where he says, you know, Ephesians, I don't want you to lose heart over what I am suffering, for this is your glory.

Paul is writing the letter to the Ephesians from prison, and he references his chains a few times. He references his suffering a few times. But he says this is the first thing he asked them to do so far in the letter.

Don't lose heart over that which I'm suffering for you. And so last week, you know, on the Internet sermon, I suggested that what Paul might be doing is he's saying, I'm praying that this is a reality in your heart, because if this is a reality in your heart, you can endure suffering with joy.

And I back that up by showing that when Paul discusses his own suffering, for instance, in 2 Corinthians 4, he says, though my outer self is wasting away, I do not lose heart because my inner self is being renewed day by day, and it all has to do with this fact that Jesus is dwelling richly in his heart, which is the very thing Paul is asking God to do for the Ephesians.

[6 : 38] And then, of course, I also thought of Romans 5, at the very beginning of Romans 5, where Paul says, we don't lose heart when we suffer because Christ is in our hearts.

And so one explanation for what this prayer is doing here is that Paul is saying that if this is true, you have a heart without falling into despair. And so that would be one explanation for what this prayer is doing in this particular moment.

He's praying for them that they would have the spiritual power they need, namely the love of Christ dwelling in their hearts, that they would have the spiritual power that they need in order to endure the suffering, not only that they see Paul going through, which, you know, is kind of secondhand suffering, but also, you know, they're going to suffer too.

And they can see the writing on the wall. Things are going to get hot. And so Paul is almost like he's saying, I'm asking that God give you this furnace of Christ's love in your heart that will keep you warm during the cold days of suffering, the cold days of persecution, and so forth.

And I can just say, as a pastor who's walked with many people through many periods of suffering, this spiritual reality shows up in those moments and can indeed become a kind of heater in a very, very cold time.

[8 : 07] Some of you have heard this, and I think I want to respect some privacy because I don't like divulging people's names necessarily when it's streaming.

But we have a close family, a key kind of original family in our church that lost a mother this week. She was a wonderful woman and somebody that I had the privilege of knowing and the privilege of talking with and joking with over the years.

And, you know, her time had just come, and she had really just endured well. And so a couple days ago, it seemed like it was getting close, and so I was able to go visit her in the hospital.

And, you know, she's just this little thing, you know, even littler now than she was before. But I walk in, and her family's there and so forth. And, you know, I would say probably, this is probably disputable, but, you know, I say when I'm with someone who's dying, very often people, this is a good thing to remember, you very rarely have your mental faculties.

You might want to think about that as to how you live right now because it all kind of bleeds through later on. And so this dear woman, you know, she did not have, probably didn't even have half of her full mental capacity.

[9 : 37] She was kind of a sharp gal. And so it was evident that she wasn't all there, if you know what I mean. But I sit down, and I hold her hand, and she, the part that is there is all scripture and Bible songs that she learned in vacation Bible school and Sunday school as a child.

And so she's going through the coldest of the colds, the grimmest of all possible scenarios. She is going to die. And she knows this.

And the love of Christ is absolutely evident in her heart as she passes, warming her so that she did not lose heart as she passed.

Indeed, she was, there was a moment when I was sitting with her when she said, Jesus loves me. And again, this is something that I've seen many times with true saints as they pass.

You want to know why you send your kids to Sunday school or we take them to church and why you read them Bible stories and stuff? Because that's the stuff that's there 60, 70 years later when nothing else is, or not much else is there.

[10:52] And I'm holding her hand, and I just said, you know, I know you, and I know Christ. And I know that he is about to take your hand and take you to where none of us can go.

And he has known about this day since the date before you were ever made. And he's prepared a place for you. And she said, Jesus loves me.

And I said, do you want to sing? Jesus loves me. And she said, yes. And so me and her daughter, one of her daughters, were holding her hands, and we sang, Jesus loves me.

Now, I cannot stress to you, especially to you young people, how important it is for you to absorb the following. That is a rare, a rare passing.

And it all has to do with the realities that Paul is praying for right here. And I say that because each one of us should be praying that this stuff is true, if for no other reason, that when literally everything else is gone.

[12:06] And there is no hope of recovery. And it's just a cold, dark passing that the love of Christ is dwelling richly in our hearts.

And that that is our comfort in life and death. So that's a bit of a review from last week. What is our only hope and comfort in life and death?

In the Heidelberg, there's a formal answer, but in this prayer is the sort of spiritual, experiential answer. Our only hope in life and death is that Jesus Christ has taken up residence in our hearts. That's our only hope in life and death. Okay, so that's the explanation. I'm kind of eating a lot of my time there. That's okay. That's the explanation for looking backward.

One of the reasons that Paul is probably talking about this is because he is concerned that they will lose heart and he knows how he has not lost heart and that is because the love of Christ dwells richly in his heart.

[13:14] And now let's move into another possibility and by the way, when I say possibilities, I think these are both true. I don't think they're in any contradiction with one another, but now let's think of this prayer as connected to what he's going to talk about.

Okay? We have not done an adequate job so far as we've been in Ephesians talking about the word walk. walk. The word walk appears seven times in the book of Ephesians and it always has something kind of theological or, yeah, spiritual in mind.

It's not just a regular walk. Now this is a very important phrase because so many of the big passages, big passages in our Bibles use the word walk in like a spiritual or theological way and it's a lot of the more important kind of diagnostic passages.

For instance, we just, you know, finished our series through 1 John and we got to this statement right away, the beginning of 1 John, that if you walk in the darkness, you're not his, but if you walk in the light, you're his.

Well, what does that mean? What does it mean to walk? Another one is Galatians 5. This is huge for someone who's trying to overcome habitual sin. You know, in Galatians 5, Paul says that if you walk in the spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[14:43] God says routinely in the Old Testament, walk before me, you know. So this idea of walking, it's kind of loaded. It's important that we know it.

It's important we know what that means. In Ephesians, it's used seven times and a few times it's referred to those who are walking in darkness, walking in sin, and then several other times it's referred to walking in Christ.

So I thought we would unpack that a little bit today with the remainder of our time and talk about, well, what does it mean to walk? What does it mean to walk in the Bible when the Bible uses that not in its literal way?

What is the Bible getting at? Because in chapter 4, verse 1, which you'll start next week, Paul says, I urge you, therefore, as a prisoner of the Lord, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling that you've received.

This word walk appears a lot. What does it mean? Well, let me just lay some foundational realities. And I'm not going to explain these or support these with Scripture. They will be Scriptures on the screen.

[15:47] But as we've worked through Ephesians, the following propositions have been observable. The first one is, we live in a multi-dimensional reality comprised of both the visible and the invisible, or the visible and the spiritual.

And we're in both of those worlds all the time. Number two, you and I are a network of constituent parts that is made to interact with both the physical and the spiritual.

What I mean by network is, is that we have different parts of us. By the way, don't get caught up in any of the debates about trichotomy or dichotomy, whether there's three parts of us or four parts of us or two parts of us.

Paul uses so many different ways of describing about this, and he's never giving us a strict breakdown on how many parts there are in us. But the Bible's really clear.

There's an inner man and an outer man. There's the heart. There's the soul. There's the mind. These are all referenced. So when I say that we're a network of parts, it's that you're not just a body, but you're also not just a soul.

[16:55] And you're not just a mind. You're a network of parts. And all of those parts have interaction with both the spiritual and the physical world.

We start to see this. I'll just support this really quickly. We start to see this emerge in chapter one, where Paul says, I'm praying for the eyes of your hearts that they may be opened. I didn't know my heart had eyes.

And then by the time we get to the beginning of chapter two, Paul says that those who are dead in their sins and trespasses are following the prince of the power of the air. They're using their bodies. They're using their minds.

He starts talking about the parts, the parts that we are. Okay? And then the third proposition I think would be the goal of the Christian, no, the third one would be this.

We as this network of parts, these people comprised of multiple parts of us, are using those to serve one of two masters.

[17:58] We are either using this thing to serve Satan. That's what beginning of chapter two is about. They're using their minds. They're using their flesh.

They're using all of that to follow the prince of the power of the air. Or you use this stack, you know, this is a tech kind of, you use the full stack to serve God.

And so in Ephesians 2, you've got the first three or four verses where it says that naturally before Jesus saves us, we use the full stack, the body, the mind, the soul, to serve the devil.

And then we get this glorious statement in verse 4, but God, and he makes it possible for us to use the full stack, the full network to serve him.

And so the next point would be that that's the goal of the Christian life. That's the goal of the Christian life. And that's why Jesus says that all of the law is summarized in the great commandment to love God with what?

[19:01] The full stack, right? The constituent parts. So the great goal of the Christian life is to love God with my whole self, with all my parts.

and there's a lag between the parts, you know, and not every, each one is as important as the other ones, and we'll get to that here in a moment. But that's what God wants for us.

The book of Ephesians is really just a book about unity. The beginning of Ephesians, we see the Trinity, which is a unity. Then we see individuals reconciled to God, more unity. We see the Jews and Gentiles reconciled to each other, more unity.

We see the church unity, which you'll see next week. And today, we're talking a little bit about like, what does it mean to be a unified person? We're all of the stuff. We got all the sled dogs pulling in the same direction for the same master.

This is certainly the best possible life, to be a person who is fully integrated, who is using all of the network to serve God. This is really, this is the best possible life, is to use your whole being and to notice it.

[20:08] That's a beautiful feeling. And it's not something you're always aware of, but it's a beautiful thing to realize, right now I'm in the Shema zone. I'm loving God with my mind and with my body and with my soul.

And by the way, I think singing is one of those times where you can catch yourself doing that. Okay, so that's the goal, and I just tell you, that's not just the Christian goal.

Plato, the Stoics, you know, everybody's identified this problem, that we are many things, and that unless something happens to us, these many things fight against each other, and that's a terrible experience.

So, the Bible has a whole plan for this, a whole plan for becoming an integrated person. And you can see some of this in the text, and I'll skip over some of this just for time's sake, but you can see Paul addressing the body and the heart and the mind.

For instance, at the beginning of the prayer, Paul says, for this reason I bow my knees. He's using his body, his knees in particular, in a way that aligns with his heart and his mind.

[21 : 22] He says, I really want this to come true, and because of that, there's a thing I can do with my body to bold or underline. So, what you've got in Ephesians is the whole theology of self.

You've got, essentially, an anthropology, and it explains what a man is, what a woman is, in its most basic sense, what our main problem is, what we're made of, heart, mind, and soul, and what we're supposed to do with this.

Serve God. Now, all that to say that I think that's what the word walk means. In its theological sense, when the Bible says we should be walking in this way or not walking in that way, I think that the Bible is really just saying your whole being should be oriented, or your whole being is either oriented toward the devil, or your whole being is oriented to God.

So, I'm not just saying I think that. I can show you. If you'll look at Ephesians 4.17, if you'll look at this passage, you will see that a whole, he says, don't walk like the Gentiles do, right?

And then when you actually look at what the Gentiles are doing, it's that they are using their bodies and their minds and their souls, verse 17 and 18, to sin.

[22 : 49] What are the Gentiles doing? They're walking. What does he mean by walking? Their mind is on darkness. Their body is used for sensuality. Their hearts are darkened.

Do you see that in the passage? So, he says, don't walk like the Gentiles do, and then he lists, they're a full stack of disobedience. Their network is fully going against God.

So, that answers our question, I think. And I think this shows up in other places, but what does it mean to walk? Why do, this verse is, this word is all over the place, and it has this enormous theological meaning.

What does it mean? And I think it means you're headed toward one of two places. You're either walking toward the Lord, or you're walking toward sin, Satan, and your whole being is integrated, moving in one of these two directions.

So, that's why I think John can say, if you're walking in the darkness, come on, man, you're not saved. And I think that's what he means, what Paul means when he says, if you're walking in the Spirit, what does it mean to walk in the Spirit based on this definition?

[23 : 57] It means to have your mind on the Spirit. It means to have your body oriented toward obeying the Spirit, and so on and so forth. So, that I think is a big deal in Ephesians, and we'll talk more about walking as we get to more of the verses down the road.

So, then in that case, then what is Paul's prayer trying to do with this forward-looking approach? And that is just simply this. He wants Jesus to dwell in them as in the place where everything else gets commanded.

And that's the heart. Yes, we are constituent parts, we're made up of different things, but the Bible says that the heart is the wellspring. It's the center piece.

It's the cockpit. So, now, let's assume, just in theory, that the goal here is Paul wants these Christians to walk in this way that we've talked about, this full self-integration thing.

Now, look, go back at the text, verse 17. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[25 : 29] Where is Paul? They've got bodies, they've got minds, but where is Paul mostly concerned? Which part of them? Their heart.

Why? Because the Bible is really clear that that's the cockpit of your life. And if your heart is full of Christ's love, it will work its way out into your body, into your mouth, into everything else.

And so he is asking that Christ dwell richly in their hearts. Now, the Greek here literally means to settle down and take up permanent residence.

What does Paul mean when he says, I am praying that Christ dwells in your heart? He is saying, I am praying that Jesus Christ not be a mere guest in your home, but that he move in and take up permanent residence.

one literal Greek translation would be, I am praying that Christ might settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts. This is a prayer that Jesus would become a full-time resident of your soul.

[26 : 45] Now, Martin Lloyd-Jones, he has walked in to preach this passage. I listened to this sermon this week. with as little confidence as I've ever heard Martin Lloyd-Jones have, which is still a lot of confidence.

But he says, I'm so concerned that I fail to deliver the importance of this text to you today. And his whole perspective on this passage is that it is, of course, I'll circle back to this in a moment, it is essential, essentially a Christian reality, that you can be in relationship to Christ but not controlled by him.

He says, they are certainly in a position in which they are having dealings with him, but he is not in the center of their lives. He is not really in their hearts. He's not dwelling there. He has not settled down there.

He's not taken up his abode there. He says, when scripture speaks of believers being indwelt by Christ Jesus, it is referring to a real experience, not simply an emotional reaction.

Lloyd-Jones often differentiates between Christ for us, which is something you have in salvation. He is your advocate. You get that because through grace alone, Christ is your advocate.

[28 : 07] He is for you. But Jones would differentiate at times between Christ for you and Christ in you, and he would just say that there is indeed some sort of additional experience that God routinely provides his people as a means of energizing their heart, filling their heart full of faith, and so forth.

Now, if you know me, I think you know that I'm more of an objective-minded person than a subjective. You might not know, maybe some of you do, that I myself have had bad experiences with the subjective and the mystical, and I think there are many people here who have, by the way. And I really prefer to keep things as orderly as possible, and I definitely am very concerned about putting a burden on someone's back that is not something that you can have any, like, control over. I don't want to command you to do something which you cannot do. So this gets me in my nervous, purvis kind of zone. I don't like talking about things that are like, you need to have an experience, and so on and so forth.

We just get into this potential tyranny of the subjective, and I think there's just so much broken in that world. But the Bible was not written for my sensibilities, and it's not always thinking the way I'm thinking.

[29 : 36] In fact, very rarely. And the reality is, is this passage is pretty straightforward. Paul is speaking to Christians. He says that earlier in the text.

And he is asking that God do something for them that God has not yet done for them. That he give them strength to comprehend and enjoy the dwelling of Christ in their hearts.

Now, I wrote down some thoughts on this, just like, to keep myself self-oriented. Is this experience automatic for the Christian? That was my first question. No.

Otherwise, Paul would not be on his knees praying that it come to pass. Reality is, is that this passage and others make it clear that you could be genuinely converted and still lack a sense of fullness and therefore fruitfulness.

The indwelling is positional, and experiencing that indwelling is a progressive thing. So, number one, is this automatic? Obviously not. That's why Paul's praying for it.

[30 : 42] Is this experience necessary? Necessary for salvation? Doesn't seem to be so, of course. Necessary for anything, like, necessary in a sense that Paul loves them and wants the best for them?

Absolutely. It is necessary in that sense. Paul is asking on his knees in prison that God do this for them. everything before this prayer is indicative.

It's just truths. And then after this prayer, we start getting into imperatives, commands, how to walk. And what Paul seems to be saying is, is that this prayer and what I'm asking God to do is to some

degree necessary for you to do what I'm going to ask you to do next.

Third thing I wrote, is this something we can earn or produce for ourselves? No. Again, that's why Paul is praying. He's asking God to do what only God can do. This is grace, not an achievement. I can't invoke this simply because I want to. Next thing I wrote, am I excused from trying to obey God until this experience hits me? That's, that's, that's, you'll see a lot of that in the hyper charismatic world.

[31 : 56] Am I excused from like just doing godly things and being a holy person until after this experience hits me? It's like, absolutely not. Again, because Paul didn't say, I'm praying this, let me know when it happens and then I'll tell you what to do.

He says, I'm praying for this, but in the meantime, you have to act like Christians. You have to obey the Lord. So what do we do with what Paul is praying for?

We understand that in reality, we are very often double-minded. We're very often not fully integrated people serving God with all of our being.

That the Shema, the call to love, just wonderful to know it and to feel it and to do it. Jesus deserves all of us. All the time. J.I. Packer describes holiness this way.

He says, it's a single-minded, wholehearted, free and glad concentration on the business of pleasing God. And I believe that that's exactly what Paul is eager for the Ephesians to experience and to pursue.

[33 : 03] And he's not saying, I'm praying for you to give you an excuse not to pursue true holiness. But I also know that in order for you to walk fully, completely, heart, mind, body and soul toward the Lord, Lord, it would be best for you to be filled with the fullness of God and that Christ would dwell richly in your hearts.

What do we do with that? We do the very same thing Paul does. We simply ask the Lord, Lord, I don't want to go on, I don't want to go on being superficial in my expectations of your presence. Here's where I would be personally as someone who's walked through, you know, bad things in the subjective and the mystical and all that kind of stuff. Here's where I'd be. I'm going to get up tomorrow and I'm going to love my wife.

I'm going to eat good food. I'm going to take care of my finances. I'm going to care for people when they need things. I'm going to read my Bible. I'm going to pray. I'm going to do all that I know Christ has called me to do, but I'm not going to confuse that with the sheer joy of feeling the love of Christ. And I'm going to not, I'm not going to, I'm not going to say that this Christian life is sufficient insofar as that's enough. I'm going to say, Lord, I, I want to join David in saying that as the deer pants for the water, so I pant for you.

[34 : 41] I want to long for a relational experience with my God. I do want to be strengthened in the inner man so that I can know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

And I think that in, in, we've been very careful at Providence to build a church where such moments are encouraged and possible without being held out as some kind of a spiritual litmus test or some kind of meritocracy where you really show how good of a Christian you are if you're walking in this. The reality is, is that wouldn't it just be nice to feel fully loved by Jesus Christ? You know it's true.

But wouldn't it be wonderful to feel what our sweet dear saint felt as she was passing today?

To know that Jesus loves you. To really know that Jesus loves you. And to have that be the dominant note in your heart.

Do you have that right now? I don't know. I don't know that I do. But I know what I should be asking the Lord for. And I know what you should be asking the Lord for.

[35 : 57] Let's pray. Father God, we pray that you would answer this prayer. On our behalf. Paul says that he is praying all of this that according to the riches of your glory.

And then he says now to him who is able to do far beyond all we can ask or imagine. He's saying that you are not a begrudging God. And the Lord Jesus told us prior that if a father who is evil knows how to give his kids good gifts, how much more so will our heavenly father give us what we ask for?

So we would just ask, Lord, that you would give us a sense of your love for us. And that, Lord, we don't, whatever this passage is proclaiming to us, this this understanding, this knowing beyond mere knowledge of the love of Christ.

Would you please simply because you're good? Would you please give us a clear sense of your love in our hearts? In Jesus name we pray.

Amen. Well, this table has been provided by our Lord Jesus so that you can come and taste and see that he is good and he does give good gifts to those who ask.

[37 : 16] And so as you come today, I think it'd be really appropriate to just come and take the elements, go sit down for a moment and just repeat this prayer, the substance of this prayer to the Lord and say, you have paid for me to walk with you, Lord Jesus.

Would you please give me what this prayer is pleading for? So why don't you come and grab the elements and return to your seat and then I'll lead us. Thank you.