

Ephesians Chapter 3 - John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "freedom in slavery". I use that term as Paul calls himself a slave to Jesus Christ in this chapter. My goal in this lesson is to explain what that terms means, why it should be our desire to be a slave to Jesus and why that slavery makes us totally free people.
 - a) When we think of the word "slave", we think of someone who must do what another person tells them to do. We think of slavery as the opposite of freedom. The freedom within slavery is knowing that the results of one's effort is no longer our problem, but the problem of the slave owner. That sense of no worries about the ultimate results of our lives is where the freedom comes in being a slave to God.
 - b) I would argue that when Paul says he is a slave to Christ, he became freer than at any other time in his life. Paul worked hard as a follower of Jesus to lead as many people as possible to Him, but he understood the results were God's problem and not his. That is the type of freedom God desires for all of us as His "volunteer slaves".
 - c) So John, are you saying we all have to dedicate the rest our lives to be like Paul and try to win as many people as possible to Jesus? That question misses the point. If we call ourselves followers of Jesus, then we need to have the attitude of a being slave to Jesus. All I mean by that is it should be our desire to please God with every aspect of our lives and the results of whatever God calls us to do is His business and not ours.
2. That leads us to the second main point of this lesson. It is about the birth of the Christian church. It is important to understand that the church was considered a mystery in the Old Testament.
 - a) I need to define the word "mystery" as Paul used it to describe the Christian church. When we think of a mystery, we think of something that is still unknown. When Paul used the word mystery, he was referring to something that was unrevealed up to that time. The mystery was that the Christian church was hidden from the Old Testament.
 - b) Let me explain why that is so significant. In the last lesson I emphasized how there was a great divide in Israel at the time of Paul between those who had a Jewish background and those who had a non-Jewish (i.e., a gentile) background.
 - i) In the book of Acts, there were a good number of Jewish converts to Christianity. Some of them argued that in order for gentiles to be saved, in effect those gentiles first had to be "Jewish" and only then they could accept Jesus' payment for sin.
 - ii) The reason some Jews couldn't handle non-Jewish people becoming followers of Jesus is that God made unfilled promises to the Jewish nation. If all a gentile had to do was to accept Jesus, what about all of those promises to the Jewish nation?
 - iii) One must understand that God will one day still fulfill His promises to the Jewish nation, but in effect, that is a separate issue (and a separate future time era) from the fact that gentiles could be saved by trusting in Jesus' payment for their sins.
 - c) What I am getting at is the idea that it was not necessary for a person to be Jewish in order to be saved by the God of the bible. In effect, Paul is talking about the death of the entire Old Testament system of how to be saved. Since Jesus completely fulfilled all of the Old Testament laws for the penalty for sin, trust in Jesus' sin payment is in effect all it takes in order to be saved. That was a radical concept then as it was now.
 - i) The reason most people then and now can't accept this concept of being a total "slave" to Jesus is because they want to prove they are worthy to God. They want to believe that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. Most people refuse to accept the idea in effect that they have to give up in order to be acceptable to God.
 - ii) My whole point in this lesson so far is to understand that to be a slave to Jesus is in effect to "give up" and let God do what He desires with our lives as opposed to us doing what we desire that is not God's will for our lives.

3. OK, with that speech out of my system ☺ remember that I write these lessons specifically for people who already believe that Jesus has died for their sins. In other words, "OK John, everything you have said so far is old news to me. So what am I to get out of this lesson?"
 - a) The issue for you and I is not so much that we are saved by accepting Jesus or that anyone can be saved by accepting Jesus. That is true, but hopefully for us, that is all just step one.
 - b) What I want all of us to see is that if God has called us into salvation, then He wants all of us to grow in Him. That includes the idea of having a love for the fellow Christian, even the ones we can't stand or even the people that get on our nerves. It means having a love for the Christian who belongs to a different group that we don't particularly care for.
 - i) My point is God is not impressed with people who only love those that love us in return. God is impressed with those who show love to others who don't return that love to us for the kindness we show them. (See Matthew 5:46 on this issue.)
 - c) This lesson explains why God calls on all people of all backgrounds into His plan of salvation. We are to share that love that God has for all believers, with anyone and everyone who is around us. That is what being a slave for Jesus is all about.
 - i) I am not saying we have to drop what we are doing and go hug that person we can't stand right now. I am saying that if we hold resentment to someone, we at that moment, don't have God's desire for our lives "flowing" within us.
 - ii) What about people who have really hurt us? How can I be around that person? First of all, we give that pain to God and say in effect, "That person and this pain is now your issue to deal with." Then we move on and make the best decisions possible, but the results of that issue is now God's problem and not ours.
 - d) A big part of being slaves to Jesus includes the desire of letting Him remove all aspects of our lives that are not pleasing to Him. The secret to turning from things God does not approve of is not to try harder, but give that issue to God and say to Him in effect, "This is now your problem to deal with on your timing."
 - e) OK, I would say that is enough to contemplate to start this lesson. Let me now jump into Verse 1 and from there I can expand upon what I mean by being a slave to Jesus.
4. Verse 1: For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--
 - a) First remember that Paul was Jewish. This letter was written to a Christian church that was probably made up of all gentile believers. The point is Paul is writing to a group of people that were not the focus of God's salvation plan in the Old Testament.
 - i) To fully grasp this concept, remember many Jewish people believed one could not be saved unless one became a Jew first. Even the Jews who did believe a gentile could be saved, believed they could never have the blessing as a Jewish believer.
 - ii) Now take that "our religion is better than your religion" view and apply it to one's own church or denomination. We might think, "Other Christians may be saved, but they don't get as blessed as I get by belonging to my particular church or my particular denomination."
 - iii) That is the type of bigotry Paul is dealing with and the type that you and I may be dealing with when we consider ourselves superior to any other person.
 - b) Gee John, what does all of this have to do with Verse 1? Glad you asked.
 - i) Paul is writing this because he considers himself a slave to Jesus, and he is asking us to join in that voluntarily commitment of our lives.
 - ii) At this time Paul was under "house arrest" in Rome. He was not in a jail cell but he was probably chained to a guard and was not allowed to leave Rome until his trial. It was during this time that Paul wrote four of his letters, including this one. Yet Paul did not say he was a prisoner of Rome, but a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
 - iii) To be a prisoner of Jesus Christ is to focus our life on doing what God desires us to do. That starts by seeking Him daily in prayer and through His word. I find that God then just "guides us" to what is His desire for our life at this moment in time.

- c) The next part of verse one says "for the sake of you Gentiles".
 - i) Paul understood that God called him to bring the Gospel message to non-Jewish people. I think Paul figured that out by the fact that whenever he spoke in Jewish synagogues, the main thing that happened next is he would be run out of town or have his life threatened for the message he preached. Yet when Paul spoke to gentile audiences, the message of the Gospel spread in amazing ways.
 - ii) Despite the fact that Paul was called to preach to gentile audiences, that never stopped Paul by trying to reach his fellow Jews as well. Paul had such a heart for his fellow Jews, he never stopped trying to preach to them, despite the lack of success or the threats and pain he received on his own life.
 - iii) The point for you and me is often the way God explains to us what He wants us to do is by observation of the results of our lives. Paul could learn from watching the results of his activities that he was called to preach to gentiles. We too can learn from watching our efforts for God exactly what He has called us to do for Him.
 - iv) Ok, with that said, I'm finally ready to take on the second verse of this chapter. I do promise to pick up the pace fairly soon. ☺
- 5. Verse 2: Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.
 - a) It may help to remember that at this point in Paul's life, he was a known veteran to most of the Christians living in Ephesus. Earlier in his life he spent three years there teaching. However, Paul did not know how much the church had grown since he left. He is stating to those who have never met him that hopefully they have heard about how God had used him to bring the gospel message to that city.
 - b) These verses are stating more than the fact that Paul was called to preach the gospel message to Ephesus. Paul mentions that the "mystery" is being revealed.
 - i) Notice the end of Verse 3 mentions, "already written briefly". Some people think that this refers to a lost letter of Paul to the Ephesians. Others think that it refers to a specific point already made in what we call the first two chapters of this letter.
 - ii) The point for us to learn is not about when Paul first mentioned this "mystery", but to understand what exactly this mystery is. That mystery is that anyone can be saved, by just accepting the fact that Jesus had died for all of our sins, past, present and future. By just believing in that concept, one can be saved.
 - c) OK John, we Christians already know that fact. What do we do with this information? That is when we are to remember that as followers of Jesus, it is God's the desire that in effect we become slaves to His will for our lives. That means we let God work through our lives to be more like the type of person that He desires us to be.
 - i) Being a follower of Jesus is not only to accept the idea that God has forgiven our sins, but also that we want God to rule over every aspect of our lives. It means we desire for God to show us the areas of our lives that He does not approve of.
 - ii) The hard part is to accept that we can't get rid of bad aspects of our lives by just trying harder. Most of us are well aware of our own faults. We can't get rid of those faults by trying harder. If we do that, we get the credit and not God.
 - a) Sometimes we can change in the short term through self-discipline. However, the only way to overcome bad habits is not by having strong discipline, but by letting God work in our lives to change us.
 - b) What God wants is for us to be aware of what those bad things are, and give them to Him to deal with. It is then up to God and only God to deal with those things, His way and on His timing.
 - iii) That in effect, is how we grow in our relationship with Jesus. It starts with the idea of trusting Him to deal with our sins. It continues for the rest of our lives by allowing God to change us to be more like the way He wants us to be.

6. Verse 4: In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.
- a) Paul's main point is that up until his time era, it was not known how God could possibly save gentiles other than someone becoming a Jew. Since most of the world had almost no dealings with the Jewish people, it was unknown how a gentile could be saved. At best, many of that world understood that the Jewish people believed in a single God that ruled over the whole world, but those gentiles had almost no knowledge of this god.
 - b) Prior to Jesus, God in effect divided the world into Jews and Gentiles. That means that God had one standard for salvation for the Jews (following the law to the best of one's ability) and another standard for gentiles where such people were judged based on what they did know about the God of this world and how they acted on that knowledge.
 - i) At the birth of the Christian church, God still divided the world into two groups, but it was two different groups. Now the key point is one must be a follower (a slave) of Jesus in order to be pleasing to God with their lives. A Christian could have either a Jewish or a Gentile background. Like the gentile before the time of Christ, the non-Christian today will be judged based on what they did with whatever knowledge they had of Jesus when they were alive. As for people who die to young to know better, I believe a perfect God can decide that "perfectly".
 - c) In summary, the mystery being revealed is the birth and growth of the church. The whole concept of the Christian church was not revealed anywhere in the Old Testament. In comparison, every aspect of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and second coming is hinted at or predicted somewhere in the Old Testament. One cannot find any hints of the church in the Old Testament, because it was not revealed (i.e., it was a mystery) until Paul's time.
 - d) OK John, I believe in the concept of the Christian church. So what am I to do with that knowledge? That gets us back to the idea of letting God work through us to be the kind of person He wants us to be. That too, is part of the great mystery of the church.
 - i) For example, if we struggle in our relationship with a certain person or a certain group, we ask God to help us with that struggle so we can see all Christians as our fellow believers and not just the ones we like or tolerate.
 - ii) When we encounter someone we don't like, the key is to think, "Our dividing issue is God's problem and not mine to fix". My job is just to love others. One can apply that concept to any issue and not just our relationship with other people or groups.
 - e) Paul's final point is that this information was revealed to God's prophets and apostles.
 - i) Let me explain what Paul meant by a prophet. When most of us see the word "prophet", our first thought is usually an Old Testament character saying what God told them to say. However, that is not who Paul was talking about here. Paul is talking about New Testament believers who have the gift of prophecy.
 - a) When we think of prophecy, we picture somebody who has some sort of special power to know the future. In reality, anybody who is a Christian who can teach others about Jesus is by the "biblical definition" a prophet.
 - b) If you can share the gospel message with someone, at that moment, you are acting as a prophet. If you can lead a bible study group or teach an aspect of God's truth to people, at that moment, you are a prophet.
 - c) What I am trying to do is to get all of us to expand our definition of prophecy as being more than just someone who has a special gift of knowing the future or someone who was an Old Testament prophet. It also includes the idea of anyone being able to tell others about Jesus.
 - (1) Revelation 19:10 verifies this concept. It reads: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." That verses says that to speak of Jesus is what prophecy is all about.

- f) In order for me to finish this verse, I also need to expand our definition of "apostles". When we think of apostles, we think of the original 12 apostles. Some argue that Paul became the "12th" apostle since Judas rejected Jesus and in that sense, Paul replaced Judas.
 - i) Putting that argument aside for the moment, the point is the word apostle simply means "sent one". In this case it means one that is sent by God. Since many of the original apostles were still alive at Paul's time, he may be referring to them.
 - ii) In the broader sense, an apostle could refer to anyone who is sent by one's church to preach the Gospel message to others. I suspect when Paul wrote this, he was simply referring to the eleven remaining original apostles, but I want all of us to know that in the broader context, the word apostle simply means "sent one".
 - g) The key point of this little speech is that it was not just Paul who was called to reveal that anyone can be saved by believing in Jesus. Anyone and everyone who is truly a prophet or an apostle as I just defined them can and has shared that message with others.
7. Verse 6: This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.
- a) I've been talking about this mystery since the start of the lesson. If one has any doubts that I was off track, Verse 6 spells it out very clearly. The mystery is that the Gentiles are heirs together (get to be saved without being Jewish) based on their trust in Jesus.
 - b) The point is since the resurrection of Jesus the road to salvation is no longer through Judaism, but directly through trust and faith in Jesus' payment on the cross.
 - i) When we get to Chapter 5, Paul will use expand upon that mystery some more. In that chapter, Paul will say that the mystery speaks of Jesus and His church. When we get to Chapter 5 I will also expand upon that mystery in terms of what it means in terms of our own relationship with Jesus.
 - c) As I like to remind you every so often, ☺ I write these lessons for believers. Since we as Christians already know that our salvation is not based on the Old Testament system of laws and rituals, what does this verse mean for us? Yes it is to understand that we are saved solely by our trust in Jesus. Is that it?
 - i) Yes that is it, but that "it" is more complicated than we may realize.
 - ii) The idea of salvation is both easy and complicated at the same time. It is easy in the sense that in order to be saved, all we have to do is "let go and trust that Jesus is in charge of our lives and He died for our sins." It is complicated in the sense that one has to let go of every aspect of our lives and learn to trust God with every aspect of our lives.
 - a) Salvation can be thought of, as the single moment we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. Salvation can also be thought of as the moment we pass from this life when we go directly to heaven.
 - b) My point here is that salvation is also a lifelong process of growing in our trust in God. That lifelong change of our attitudes and trust in Him is not only what being a slave of Jesus is all about, but it also is about preparing us for our next eternal life in heaven.
 - iii) That does not mean we have to think about God 24 hours a day. It means we go about our lives thinking in terms of whether or not we are pleasing God.
 - d) OK John, what does dedicating our lives to God have to do with this verse? The point of this verse is that we as Christians get to share in "the promise in Christ Jesus".
 - i) Yes it means that as long as we are trusting in Jesus we get saved, but it is far more than that. Jesus also promises us peace for trusting in Him. That peace comes from trusting that God is in charge of our lives and whatever is the outcome of our situations is "God's problem and not our problem". We still have to go through life making the best decisions possible. Whatever are the results of the decisions we make is in effect God's business and not ours.

- ii) I am convinced the greatest joy of Christianity is not just the fact we are saved, but it is the fact that God is watching over us guiding us every moment of the day. Do I understand how that is possible? No I do not. Do I accept it as true? Of course.
 - a) My proof over and above the biblical predictions that come true over the past millenniums is the sense of peace I receive from trusting in Jesus.
 - iii) Being a slave to Jesus is about knowing our peace with Him is secure and knowing that He is in charge of our lives daily.
 - a) This does not mean I am perfect, just perfectly forgiven. I am painfully aware that there are areas of my life that are not pleasing to God. As a slave of Jesus, I ask God to reveal what aspects of my life He wants me to turn over to Him so He can deal with them "His way and on His timing".
 - b) Once I confess them and turn them over to Him, the results are now His problem to deal with as He is in charge of my life.
 - c) Living with that sense of God's peace is what the Christian life is all about.
8. Verse 7: I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.
- a) The secret of this verse is to personalize it. It is not just about God working through Paul so that he became a servant of the Gospel, it is about you and I being such a servant.
 - i) Being a servant of the gospel does not mean that all of us quit our lives and go on the road like Paul. It does mean that God calls some of us to be in the professional ministry as it is called today. But even if God wants us to stay just where we are and keep doing whatever it is we do, the point is the same. All of us believers are called to be servants (think "slavery") of the Gospel.
 - b) We aren't servants because we have to be. We are servants of God because we want to be. The point is God does not say to us, "OK, you believe in Jesus? Good, I will now leave you alone until the day you die, so go about your life". ☺ When God saves us, it is about calling us into this eternal relationship with Him that begins now.
 - i) So how do I know what God wants me to do? Ask Him. Try different things to make a difference for Him. God does not promise to drag us from where we are now to where He wants us to be. God promises to lead us if we keep moving.
 - c) By the way, notice again, that the power for Paul to do his ministry does not come from Paul himself, but by God working through him.
 - i) Let me review quickly where Paul "was" before he got saved. He was a religiously trained Jew who hated Christianity. He passionately had other Jewish Christians arrested to charge them with the sin of blasphemy. He also was a Roman citizen by birth. He probably spoke Greek (the common language of the Roman Empire), biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, a similar language to Hebrew that was the language of Israel. Further, Paul's ministry took place when the Roman Empire was at its peak. None of these facts are coincidences, but shows why God picked Paul.
 - ii) God took the passion that Paul had for God and used it to spread the gospel. The point is God will often use what talents or passions we already have for His glory. God still gets the credit, as He is the one who gives us those passions to begin with.
 - iii) The point of me explaining all of this is that we should give God the credit for any and all victories in our life. When we wonder what it is that God wants us to do, a good clue is to see what it is we enjoy doing in the first place. One of the great joys in life is to find a way to use that passion or interest for God's glory.
 - iv) What if I don't believe I have any passion or interests? Then ask yourself, if money were not important, what would I want to do all day with my life? It is amazing the answers I get when I pose that specific question to people. Those desires and passions we just have within us is what God wants to use for His glory. That is the point of Paul's life and hopefully your life and my life.

9. Verse 8: Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.
- a) Paul never thought highly of himself. Despite the fact that he single handedly led more people to Christ than probably anyone else in ancient history, he thought he was the least deserving of all of the people that were called apostles. I'm sure a big part of that was low self-esteem based on the guilt he felt for persecuting Christians prior to being saved.
 - b) What Paul is trying to teach us is not about how God used him, but about the fact that God wants to, and can use anyone that He desires to use. If God could take a person like Paul who zealously persecuted Christians, (which is what Paul did prior to being saved), then God is more than capable of taking you or me and using our lives for His glory.
 - i) What if we think, I don't have anything to offer God? The simple answer is just to start somewhere. If you don't know what to do to make a difference for God, talk to someone at your church about where you can get involved or how you can help. You will find the possibilities are endless.
 - ii) Often the answer begins by simply asking God what it is He wants us to do at this moment in time. It never ceases to amaze me how God answers those types of prayers. Often we can look back over time and see how God is calling us into a specific project or ministry. Don't let any person ever tell you what is God's desire for your life. Our job is not to be what others want us to be, but what God wants us to be. Discovering our ministry(s) is part of the joy of being saved.
 - c) So John, what does this little pep talk ☺ have to do with these verses? The answer is everything. Paul is not stating his history so he could brag. Paul is stating his history to show that God can and does use regular people to make a difference for Him.
 - i) God is not looking for ability, as much as He is looking for availability. Before Paul got saved, he made himself available to the Jewish religious leaders in order to persecute Jewish-Christians. God took that availability that Paul had for God and changed Paul so that God could use him for His glory.
 - ii) What if we say we don't have the time to be available for God? What if we still have to say, make a living or take care of our family? I am in no way saying we have to quit our responsibilities in life. I am saying that God wants us to turn to Him and say in effect, "OK God, here I am. I don't know what You want of me, but I want to make myself available to you. Lead me as You desire."
 - iii) Paul's related point is that God created the Christian church not so that we could brag about the good we are doing for Him. He created the church for us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. I have discovered that one does not really live until one is truly willing to dedicate all of one's life to making a difference for God in whatever capacity He has called us to do at this moment in time.
 - d) Let me address one more issue before I move on. Why was the church kept a secret in the Old Testament? Why couldn't there have been some Old Testament prophecy about a large group of gentiles that will arise one day to make a difference for God?
 - i) Part of the answer is that God choose in the Old Testament to work primarily through the Jewish nation to be His witness to the world. Starting at the time of the apostles, God is doing something new where He is using multitudes of people from all races, nationalities, cultures and both sexes to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) The point is that God made the decision to keep hidden from the Old Testament the idea that for roughly the last 2,000 years. He is working through both Jews and Gentiles by what we call the Christian church. That doesn't mean one has to be a pastor or priest or "whatever title" to be used by God. He just wants anyone and everyone who is willing to live to make a difference for Him to be willing to be used by Him and that in effect is the purpose of the Christian church.

10. Verse 10: His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- a) Let me start here by explaining the word translated "manifold". That simply means the many purposes that God has for mankind the way He works in our lives.
 - i) We can see God's multifaceted plans for all of mankind unfold by what He has done through people and one way we can see it by studying biblical history.
 - b) It is also important to understand what Paul meant when he says, "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms". That is an expression for ranks of angels.
 - i) That is a key point and is worth repeating: the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms refers to ranks of angels in heaven who watch our lives.
 - ii) To explain this, I also should define the term "heavenly realms". That refers to all the aspects of God's world that we cannot see. It includes the existence of heaven and hell. It includes the existence and world of demons as well as angels.
 - c) Let me describe this concept of "angels watching people" another way: It appears angels work in ranks kind of like an army has ranks. Armies have top leaders, group leaders and the soldiers themselves. It appears that angels also have different ranks. I suspect demonic angels are also organized in ranks in order to carry out Satan's orders.
 - i) Angels are not all knowing creatures like God. Angels exist in God's world, and go back and forth between heaven and our world as they are commanded to do. My point is angelic creatures watch people like us to see what it is we do for God and see how it is God uses people to make a difference for Him.
 - d) It would probably help if I explained this concept from one more perspective: Consider, why did Satan rebel against God in the first place? We get clues in the bible that Satan desired to be worshipped as God and that Satan took a third of the angels with him when he rebelled against God. (See Isaiah 14:14 and Revelation 12:3-4 on that point.)
 - i) I suspect Satan did not believe people were worth saving. He sees how humans rebel against God and he says to God in effect, "Look what a waste of time it is to try to change these humans." The other angels (the ones that did not rebel with Satan) get to watch God work through people and see how God takes people, puts new hearts in us and then they watch us live to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) My point this whole speech about angels is that the purpose of God's angels is not just to have them interceded on God's behalf in our lives. Another purpose of angels is so that they could observe how God works in the lives of believers.
 - e) This also leads me back to the question of "Why did God hide any reference of the church from the Old Testament?" The answer is that it was part of God's plan from the beginning to eventually lead a large group of people from all nations into salvation. Angels get the privilege of watching this work of God, which is Paul's point in this verse.
 - i) This now leads me back to you and me. If God calls us to serve Him, that at times requires us to look at our own lives and ask in effect, "What aspect of my life "stinks" before God so I can ask Him to take over that aspect for His glory?"
 - a) In other words being a slave to Jesus requires us to examine ourselves every now and then to see what areas of our lives are displeasing to Him.
 - ii) Remember that God is not looking for ability as much as He is looking for our availability before Him. That is the secret of living the Christian life. To look at different aspects of our lives and understand that each of those aspects belongs to God and we want Him to be in charge of those aspects of our lives.
 - iii) If you are confused by what I mean by different aspects of one's life, I would encourage you to study Matthew Chapters 5-7 which talk about different aspects of our lives and how God wants to be in charge of each of those aspects. OK that is enough discussion on these two verses. ☺ We are ready to move on.

11. Verse 12: In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.
- a) The simple point here in Verse 12 is that we should not be afraid to approach God to ask how He can use us. To ask God to reveal to us the parts of our lives that are not pleasing to Him can be scary to put it mildly. It means we want God to reveal what is bad or displeasing about our lives and that revelation can be difficult to face.
 - i) As an example, I can personally look back at ways God has changed my life just over the last year based on how I looked at different groups of people. I realized I had my own bad attitude that had to be cleared by God in order for Him to use me. I'm sure as long as I live on earth there are going to be other areas of my life that God wants to clean up.
 - b) The point is not to have a guilt trip over things we have done wrong. The point is to be willing to ask God to show us and clean us of things that are not pleasing to Him. In that sense, we can approach God with freedom and confidence. God does not want to make us feel guilty over what we have done wrong. He just wants us to be aware of those areas of our life so that He and He alone gets the credit when He changes us from bad thinking.
12. Verse 13: I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.
- a) Remember that most of the people Paul is writing to personally know him or at the least, knew that he taught for years in Ephesus. Also remember that Paul had to suffer a lot for the Gospel message to be spread. That reminds me of the classical expression, "If you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing him for awhile and watch what happens to us."
 - i) If I had to pick the most difficult promise made to Christians in the bible, it is that the bible promises that if we live to make a difference for God, we will suffer for commitment. (See 2nd Timothy 3:12 as support of that promise of our suffering.)
 - b) One has to remember that Satan's time in this world is limited. He is well aware of the fact that one day Jesus will end his reign over this world and at that time Jesus Himself will rule over our world. There is an unknown number of Christians that I call "x". Whenever "x" number of people get saved, then Jesus comes back. Only God the Father knows what the number "x" is. When we come to "x", then Jesus comes back.
 - i) (See Matthew 24:36 or Mark 13:32 as support of this concept.)
 - ii) The reason I mention that here is the reason Paul had to suffer is because Satan did everything in his power to stop or at least slow down Paul's ministry work. If we are going to make a difference for God, we have to expect demonic opposition to our work. It "comes with the job" and that is what I meant by the biblical promise in 2nd Timothy 3:12 that we as Christians will suffer if we are doing God's will.
 - iii) That doesn't mean we have to be scared. It just means we have to stick close to God in that His power is greater than demonic power. God can and does give us the power to overcome whatever demonic forces throw at us. When we get to Chapter 6 of the book of Ephesians, Paul expands upon that concept of how to stick close to God in order overcome whatever Satan "throws" at us.
 - c) Meanwhile, this does lead back to Verse 13. Paul's point here is we don't have to be scared based on his suffering or the fact that we will suffer if we are a good witness for God. Our suffering is for God's glory. The glory comes in that God rescues us from whatever suffering we have in this lifetime. That includes suffering from whatever other people do to us as well as suffering that is demonically inflicted. How can we tell where our suffering came from? We can't. All we know is the pain we feel. The point is not to learn the origin of all of our pain. The point is the solution requires us to stick close to God and let Him lead us through whatever we have to deal with.
 - d) I believe Paul realizes that in order to overcome the suffering of this life, it requires that we stick close to God, which is why the remainder of this chapter is a prayer by Paul, in effect for our safety. Speaking of the next verse, let us move on to it.

13. Verse 14: For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
- a) As I just said, Paul is going to end this section of the letter with a prayer. This prayer runs from Verses 14 to Verse 21. One can think of this prayer as a "doxology". That simply means it is Paul's way of giving us a blessing as we go out and make a difference for God.
 - b) The verse mentions Paul kneeling. Why is that? I suspect it is Paul showing how much he is begging God to bless those of us who are called to make a difference for Him.
 - c) Next question, why include Verse 15? Why is it important to know that the whole world of people and all created things derives its name from God the Father? For starters, it is an acknowledgement that God created all things. It is about the realization that all good things we do come from the God. In other words, it is God who gives us our desire and ability to do things for Him in the first place.
 - i) Since in effect, all of our effort for God begins with Him, ends with Him and it is through Him that we can do things for Him, this line reminds us that all things that are created and all the things that we do is for His glory.
14. Verse 16: I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
- a) Since all we do for God begins with His desire to use us, we should pray for God to make known to us how we are to make a difference for Him today.
 - b) Paul asked that the amount of God's "riches" bless us. I don't know how much riches God has, but I am sure it is beyond measure. The point is that God provides us with all the power we need to do His will for our lives.
 - c) Next Paul asks that God strengthen us. It helps to remember that the power to do anything for God does not come from our own strength but God's. If one thinks they don't have the strength or ability to do what God wants us believers to do, then we need to remember even the strength or ability to do any work for God comes from Him.
 - d) Verse 16 also mentions the Holy Spirit working with us. It is interesting to note that Verse 15 mentions prayer to God the Father, Verse 17 mentions the Holy Spirit working within us, and Verse 17 (Jesus, the) Christ dwelling within us.
 - i) The point is that it is the Spirit of God that gives us the desire and the strength to do what God calls us to do. When we ask God what it is He wants us to do and how are we going to do it, in effect it is the Holy Spirit working in us that provides the answers to those questions.
 - e) This leads to the natural question: Who is within us, the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit or all three? The answer is all three. That is unexplainable concept that "God is one" and God is more than one (three) at the same time. The idea is that each entity is separate, but each is somehow connected and "inseparable" at the same time.
 - i) So do I weigh more with all three inside of me? Of course not. God has no weight that can be measured. The point is God takes up residence in the believer and we have all of His power at our disposal to do whatever He wants to do with us.
 - ii) The idea of who is inside of us is based on the idea of the "Father's will" to work in our life. It is the Son's price paid for our sins that allows God the Father to work inside of us, and it is by the power of the Spirit that God the Father actually works.
 - iii) Here is one more thing to consider: Why do we need God inside of us? Why can't God just work from heaven to do His will in our lives from up there? By God being inside of us, it is a visual picture of true intimacy. The idea of God being within us is that we become so connected with God it feels to us as if He is part of our "inner-being" as believers.
 - f) Let me move on to the set of verse, which talks more about this blessing and prayer that Paul is giving us. Then I'll expand upon this concept of "God within us" some more.

15. Verse 16: And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
- a) One of the important concepts to grasp about our trust in God is that He never forces His will upon us, even when we are saved. The idea is that when God takes up residence inside of us, He "shares space" with our own desires and our own will. God may make His will known to us, but it is up to us at any given moment to choose to do His will or our will for our lives. So how do we tell the difference?
 - i) If the desire to do something is based on a biblical principal, then is a very good probability that it is God's will for a thing to happen. It doesn't mean we have to pray over every little decision we make. It is more about the idea that we pray regularly and often for God to guide us and we do His will for our lives.
 - ii) Let me come back to the idea of why God does not force His will upon us. If we truly love someone, we don't force our will upon them. We may ask someone we love to do something for us, but we don't force them to do that act. That in effect is why God gives us the desire to worship Him (and in effect be a slave to Him), but at the same time out of His love, He never forces His will upon us.
 - b) Getting back to this prayer, the other key concept to grasp is that God gives us all the power we need to do whatever it is we are called to do. Our assignment is to recognize all the power we have in Christ. That power is beyond measure and that is key point of this whole prayer. We can do anything and everything that is God's will for us to do. All we have to do to accomplish those goals is to trust that God provides not only what we need to complete that task, but also the strength to complete that task. That is the idea of this prayer on our behalf that is offered up in these final verses of this chapter.
 - c) I want to discuss something different for a moment. In Verse 18, it mentions how God wants us to grasp how (1) wide, how (2) long, how (3) high and how (4) deep is the love of Christ. If the amount of God's love is beyond measure, then why did Paul use these four "dimensions" to describe God's love for us?
 - i) The idea is that God's love can be measured in the sense that He can accomplish whatever it is He wants to do in our lives or the lives of other believers.
 - ii) The commentaries I read are full of explanations why Paul used four dimensions instead of three to explain His love for us. Those commentary writers that have scientific backgrounds compare these four different dimensions to the three we can perceive (e.g., height, width and length) and they often compare the fourth dimension to time. Other commentators compare these four points to the four end points of the cross and try to get across the idea that God's love is immeasurable.
 - iii) I've learned that when one is in doubt about a subject we should just look for the most straightforward explanation as being the best one. I believe God's love is measurable in the sense that we can see how God does work in our lives and looking back in hindsight we can see what God has accomplished in our life. At the same time, God's love for us is overwhelming in that it is hard for us to grasp all that He does on a universal scale for all of us that trust in Him.
 - iv) Verse 19 says that the love of God "surpasses knowledge" which does summarize my last point that we cannot fully comprehend what God is capable of doing on a worldwide scale. However, we can see what He is doing in our own lives, which is why Paul mentioned the "four dimensions" in Verse 18.
 - d) Looking at this whole prayer by Paul, one gets the idea that he was grasping for words to try to explain just how much love God has for us and how much power He has given us in order for us to do His will. It is as if Paul was using a word processor and constantly backspacing in order to add more adjectives to describe what God is doing for us.

16. Verse 20: Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
- a) The best illustration I ever saw to describe the love God has for us came many years ago, when a pastor was up on a stage with a pitcher of water and an empty glass. He then proceeded to fill up the glass with water until it was overflowing and water was spilling on the ground. The point of that illustration is to show that God can do "more than we can imagine" and the scales to which God desires to work in our lives is greater than we can comprehend with "our little glass".
 - b) So John what does all of this mean to my life? Does it mean I have to think bigger of what God wants me to do with my life? Not necessarily. God always works at whatever level we are at in our life. God still wants us to work in our life to clean up the bad parts that prevent us from overflowing with His love. God is not asking us to work at His level, but He does want to work in our lives at our level.
 - c) Suppose we are at a situation where we don't see any solution. That is when we have to remember that the God that can "overflow" our life with more than enough power to see us through our situations. He desires to bless us even more than we can comprehend. At the same time, God never forces His will upon us, so it is up to us to trust God and let Him work His way and by His timing in our lives. That way He gets all the credit.
 - i) That does not mean we just stand there and wait for God to work. It means we go forward, make the best decisions possible and trust that He is not only guiding us but that He wants to "overflow our cup" with His love.
 - ii) It means when we don't see a solution to our problems, God not only has one, but He will work out our issues His way and on His timing. That does not mean we do foolish things. It means that whatever resources we have, belong to Him and trust that He is guiding us on how to use our resources for His glory.
 - d) The final point of the blessings of this verse is that God get the glory for everything good that comes out of our life. Notice the verse does not mention any good thing that Paul accomplished in his life for God. Remember that Paul probably lead more people to Christ than anyone and everyone in ancient history. Yet Paul is not asking for any credit for Himself, but that every aspect of his success goes to God who is the one who gave Paul (and give us) the power to do those things for Him in the first place.
17. I want to end this lesson by coming back to my opening comment about being a slave to Jesus.
- a) I want you to know that this concept is not just a New Testament concept. In the book of Exodus in the chapter right after the 10 Commandments are first given, there is a passage about a Jewish slave that desires to remain a slave after his slavery term is completed. (See Exodus 21:50.)
 - b) This concept of volunteer slavery in Exodus is essentially the same idea that Paul used here in Ephesians about his relationship with God and hopefully is our desire as well.
 - c) What is unique here in Ephesians is not the concept of us choosing to be a slave of God, but the idea that anyone, Jew or Gentile can have that privilege of that relationship with God by choosing to do His will at any moment in our lives. That is the close relationship that Paul desires that all Christians have with God the Father and God the Son, and in effect is the main point of this lesson.
18. Time for a closing prayer to summarize this argument: Dear God, I don't know what it is You plan on doing for the rest of my life. I do know that You desire to be in charge of my life. Help me to get out of the way of Your desires for me. May my life make a difference for You, as that difference is what matters for all of eternity. Help me to do what it is You called me to do and not worry about others may think of my life. Help me to give You all the credit even down to the ability and the desire to make a difference for You in the first place. May the Holy Spirit be active in my life today to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.