

The Windsor Fellowship Church is small; we're not influential. We don't impact on much of what is going on in Windsor. Few people are aware we even exist. I'm very new so I've not had time to get downhearted, but for those of you who've been here from the start I'm sure it can feel like quite a slog to keep going.

But not only that, if we broaden our horizons the church, in all its denominations, seems weak and pathetic across our nation. The truth is our culture has moved on. The church is seen, at best, as a place for hatching, matching and dispatching, otherwise known as baptism, marriage and funerals.

Well that's a similar feeling that the Ephesians would have been thinking. They were counter-cultural, they were small, their leader Paul was in prison. They were far from impressive. Their culture viewed them as a weird cultural oddity.

So, into that context, Paul wrote this letter. He wrote to encourage them as Christians. We've seen, in chapters 1 and 2, all the amazing benefits that God has given to us. We've been given every spiritual blessing in Christ, we've access to God as our Father, we've been given wisdom, knowledge and insight, we've been given power, we've been made part of the one family of God. And, look at **Ephesians 2:22**, "And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

And for all those reasons Paul is about to launch into a prayer that they would have God's power and know God's love. Look at **Ephesians 3:1** "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—" He then breaks off, for 12 verses, before going back in verse 14 to pick up what he was about to say, **Ephesians 3:14** "For this reason I kneel before the Father."

Do you see? Paul breaks into his flow and, in verse 2-13, hammers home the magnitude of all that God has done in the church. I can picture Paul sitting in his prison cell writing this letter. He's just written the phrase "for the sake of you Gentiles." And then he pauses and thinks, "I know I've already told the about the privileges they've been given. I know I've explained the gospel, the good news about Jesus, to them, I know I've told them about the mystery that's been revealed. But, just once more, before I tell them what I'm going to pray for them, I think I should hammer home the sheer scale and magnitude of all that God has done in the church.

1. God's mystery revealed through the Gospel (2-6)

The gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ. Before Jesus came it was still a mystery about exactly how God was going to save people. It wasn't a mystery that God was going to save people from their sins. What was a mystery was exactly how he was going to do that. And the answer to that mystery is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I've often imagined if the great King David, of Old Testament fame. If he was transported from his time, 1,000BC, to today, his very first questions would be; "Has God done it? I know he's promised to save his people from their sins, I believe that, but I've no idea how he'll do it. Has he done it yet?" And then we tell him all about Jesus and he'll go, "Of course, the answer to the mystery, brilliant, what a great plan, what a great God." And then we'd back up what we said by showing him **Ephesians 3:6**. "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."

In verse 6, did you spot the 3 together? Heirs together, members together, sharers together. We, assuming you're not Jewish as I'm not! We've become heirs together with God's own people the Israelites. Members with them of one body. That's intensely intimate language, it shows an equality, an identity. And we're sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

The promise in Christ Jesus is to be adopted into God's family, it's to be part of his eternal kingdom, it's to have eternal life. There's a new people of God, it's not the Jewish nation, it's now called the church. It's made up of Jew and gentile. All people, regardless of nationality, race, language, can be part of God's own family. This mystery revealed through the Gospel is one of radical inclusion. No one is outside of its scope. Everyone you know, everyone you've ever met, can be part of the church.

Historically to be part of God's family you had to become part of the nation of Israel, you had to become a Jew. But, now, the mystery revealed shows us that anyone, everyone, all people, can be part of God's family.

When you think about the church what do you think? We know it's not about the building, or the ceremony. The church is literally the gathering of God's people. That's what the word means. It's us. When we get together we are a family coming together. We're part of God's eternal, magnificent majestic, and massive family.

But, not only that, when we get together we are revealing God's wisdom. Look around you now. Do you see God's wisdom being displayed? Because that's exactly what Paul says the church does.

2. God's wisdom is made known through the church (7-13)

In verses 7-9 Paul tells us again why he was saved. Look at the end of verse 8. "To preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ" He preached the boundless riches of Christ. Just think about that phrase, "the boundless riches." So, riches without limit, without bounds, unconstrained riches. Or, to use the language of chapter 1, "every spiritual blessing in Christ."

However wealthy or poor you feel, if you've believe the gospel message about Jesus, then you have the boundless riches of knowing Christ. You cannot be more wealthy. If you belong in God's family, you have it all. That gives us security, that gives us an exalted identity. We're part of God's family, we're heirs of God's inheritance. Do you feel that as a Christian, as a member of God's family?

And then Paul tells us what God's doing through the church. Look at 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, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The church reveals God's mystery. The church makes Gods wisdom known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. We're talking about a much deeper, more significant dimension than earthly rulers and authorities. The existence of the church, as God's family, reveals God's wisdom. This family, taken from every tribe, tongue and nation, reveals the end game of God's plan for creation.

The scope of this wisdom goes from the creation of all things, see the end of verse 9. The creation of all things, to the end of time, God's wisdom is to have a family of his own that is made up of all kinds of people. People who were by nature sinners. People who were by nature facing judgement. People who the devil would crow over and say "they're mine." A people rescued from that world, that judgement, and made holy and blameless. A people made into God's eternal, perfect family.

The existence of the church displays all that wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly

realms. Do you see that wisdom displayed when you look around? You might not see it, you may not feel it, but it's true. When we feel insignificant as a church, when we feel marginalised and irrelevant, remind yourself of what the church is. It's God's family and it displays the wisdom of God.

God created the world to save a people who will be his family, fully united in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the mystery revealed through the gospel, that is the God's wisdom made known. That's how significant it is to be part of God's family, the church.

And if you don't think that's spectacular enough, look at the next verse, verse 12. It's one of the most mind-blowing verses in the entire Bible. "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."

I talked about this verse on the weekly email this week. Just think about who you are. Be honest. Perhaps think about how you fall short of perfection, how you're a sinner, to use the Biblical word. Think about that. Now think about the character and nature of God. He is the holy, holy, holy God who is a blazing perfection and must destroy all injustice and wrongdoing and sin. He is the Almighty, sovereign creator God who sustains all things through his mighty word.

And now bring those 2 thoughts together. The thoughts about you and the thoughts about God. And then look at verse 12 again. We can approach God with freedom and confidence. We don't need to sneak up, sheepishly, apologetically. We can approach God with freedom and confidence. We belong with God. We're part of his family.

When Henry and Helena get home from school they don't sneak in and meekly stand in the corner hoping that no one will notice them. No, they march boldly in, chatting away. Why? Because it's their home, they belong there. They have freedom to come in and confidence to treat our house as their home. That's exactly what we can do with God. We belong with him, his home is our home, as part of the church we're part of his family.

This family displays the wisdom of God. And God's wisdom is bringing all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds into his one family. The church is the one sociological grouping that displays this remarkable diversity. No other group, religion, social club gets even close. This diversity was brilliantly illustrated at the church in Balham where I did my curacy.

Alex & Jay illustration

God's wisdom is made known through the church. Paul has hammered his point home. And because of all that he's said so far, because of what has been revealed and made known Paul prays for them. He prays;

3. Pray we'll have God's power and know his love (14-19)

For all the reasons that Paul has told us in the first 3 chapters he prays. And this is an amazing prayer. Can I encourage you, at some point in the week ahead, just to read these verses and think about what Paul's prayer priorities are?

Look at **Ephesians 3:16**. "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." Paul prays that we'll be strengthened with power, God's power, that he gives us out of his glorious and abundant riches. This same power that he talked about in chapter 1 that brought the rotting, decomposing corpse of Jesus back to life. Paul prays that through God the Holy Spirit they would be strengthened by this power.

It's not that we don't already have this power, we have already, past tense, been given every spiritual blessing. But, Paul prays they'll be strengthened by this power. Why would they need that? Well if they feel weak and insignificant as a church; if they feel marginalised and under pressure because of their faith. If their leader, Paul, was in prison because of telling other people the gospel about Jesus, if all those things are going on, a prayer to be strengthened seems like a great prayer to pray.

And, of course, we need this too. We are marginalised in our society. We feel small and insignificant. We need to know and feel the reality of God's power at work in us. And the result of this pray is, look at verse 17. The result is "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." As we are strengthened though God the Holy Spirit powerfully working in us we'll have confidence about our true, eternal, identity. We'll have confidence to keep going, to enthusiastically take our full part in God's family.

But, Paul's prayer doesn't stop there, look at verse 17 again. "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—"

Please note he's not asking that they'd have this love. Paul knows they already have it. They are rooted and established in this love. That's a gardening and a building metaphor. The roots of their identity, the foundation of their faith, are already because of this love. They are the full and complete recipients of this love. What Paul prays is that they'll have the power to grasp something of the magnitude of this love. They'll never completely get to the bottom of this knowledge, it "surpasses knowledge". But, he wants them to know, more and more and more and more, the scale of the love of Christ for them, the church, God's family.

How do we grow in our knowledge of Christ's love? Well think about what he's done for us. Think about who he truly is, God himself born as a man. Contemplate what God the Son did for you in shrinking himself down to humanity's level and then dying. Eternal God being willing to sacrifice himself for our sake because of his love. Think about John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he GAVE his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not die but have eternal life." God's love is literally mind blowing. He loved us so much to give his only son.

I think you're all great. But, there is absolutely no way I would sacrifice my son, Henry, for any of you. I'd like to think I'd be willing to die for you, but there's no way that I'd let Henry do that for you, I simply don't love you enough. But, God loved us so much he GAVE his one and only son.

Think about God's love. Meditate on it, delight in it, praise God for it. And as we grow in our knowledge of this love the result is, as Paul says at the end of verse 19, "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." You'll know God, you'll understand your identity in God, you'll comprehend your place as part of his people. You have all those things now, you'll just be much more confident and secure.

And then Paul finishes the first half of the letter by this shout of praise about God. In verse 20-21 he makes it very clear why he can pray a prayer like that with such confidence. God is so beyond our comprehension, his power is so overwhelming, and that power is at work in us for the glory of the church and of Christ Jesus. God is using his immeasurable power for the glory of his family and his Son throughout all generations.

The eternal church, which we at the Windsor Fellowship are an outpost of, the church exists to display God's wisdom and to be part of his glory.