

The Real Divine Design

Ephesians 3:14-21

Series: Ephesians [#10]

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Theme: **God's Design For You Is To Be Spiritually Mature.**

Introduction

One of the growth points of television programming in the last few years is on *Design*—you name it, there is probably a design program for it. HGTV lists 70 programs they air which are directly or indirectly about design. You can watch programs such as,

- Mission Organization
- Design on a Dime
- Landscape Smart
- Designed to Sell
- Designing for the Sexes
- and, even *Divine Design*.

This morning we are focusing on design ... not for your house, yard, wardrobe or career, but spiritual design. We are looking at the last part of Ephesians 3, which is Paul's second prayer for these in this letter. This prayer not only expresses his desires for them but, based on the truth in chapters 2 and 3, it also is God's design for them. This is *The Real Divine Design*. It was God's design for them, and it *is* His design for us. We can sum up these eight verses this way, *God's design for you is to be spiritually mature*.

God's Purpose For You.

God's purpose for you is to bring glory to Him forever. The old catechism got it right — "The chief end of man *is* to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Here in verse 21,

"to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

This truth is woven through the Old & New Testaments. In the Old Testament, in Isaiah 43:6-7 God speaks,

"I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring My sons from afar And My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and *whom I have created for My glory*, whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

Jesus set the example when He was here on earth. He prayed in John 17, "Father, the hour has come; *glorify* Your Son, that the Son may *glorify* You ... I *glorified* You on the earth,

having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (1, 4). Then 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God.*”

Let’s think about glory. The Old Testament has several words for glory. They emphasize substance, honor, reputation, brightness, splendor. In the New Testament the word has the idea of brightness, brilliance. And so, glory, then, describes God’s majestic splendor, the sum of His character. Our overarching purpose is to display, to radiate and to reflect God’s majestic splendor. As we grow in Christ-likeness, as we mature spiritually, we will grow in bringing glory to God.

We are going to move on to God’s goals for us that enable us to mature and bring glory to Him. First, note a few specific things that glorify God.

- Acceptance and unity with other believers glorifies God. Romans. 15:5-7,
“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice *glorify* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the *glory* of God.”
- Obedience glorifies God. 2 Corinthians 9:13,
“Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will *glorify* God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all”
- Faithful, fruitful service glorifies God.
 - Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and *glorify* your Father who is in heaven.”
 - John 15:8, “My Father is *glorified* by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”

The starting place for maturity is to recognize and live out our purpose: to bring glory to God forever. Now let’s move from purpose to goals, to God’s goals for us.

God’s Goals For You.

There are five goals here. One of God’s goals for you is that you be strengthened in the core of your being. Verse 16,

“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”

First, note the measure and extent of the strengthening. It is “according to the riches of [God’s] glory.” God’s riches of glory are immeasurable and unlimited. We can’t fathom the meaning of “immeasurable and unlimited,” but note just a few descriptions of this in the

Bible. Here in Ephesians, in chapter 1, verse 17 Paul told us that God is the “Father of Glory.” This title of God tells us that He is the Source, the Owner, the One over all glory. God’s riches of glory are limitless. Think about Revelation 21:23 which tells us that the New Jerusalem will have no need of a sun or moon, for the *glory of God will be its light*. His glory is *limitless*.

Also notice that Paul does *not* pray that God would give us strength “from” the riches of His glory, but “according to” His riches in glory. “From” could be compared to taking a drop or two of water out of all the earth’s oceans. And since God’s power and glory are unlimited, that drop or two certainly would be sufficient for us. “According to,” which means proportional, then means that it would be proportional to all the waters of the earth’s oceans; or, proportional to God’s immeasurable and unlimited glory.

Now, he says this goal is “to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.” It is God’s own power, and it is God the Holy Spirit who does the strengthening. Paul speaks of “the inner man.” In 2 Corinthians 4:16 Paul wrote, “...we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” The “inner man” refers to the innermost part of our being, often referred to in the Bible as our heart, as we see in the next verse.

So, the first part of Paul’s prayer and God’s design for you is that you be strengthened in the core of your being by God’s own power from His limitless supply. Why did Paul pray for this? In short, because we *need it!* We have been transformed, transferred and adopted through Christ. But we still carry around the old nature; we still live in a sinful world; and we still are attacked by Satan’s forces. *We need it!*

The second goal is to have Christ at home in your heart. Verse 17, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” This design and request is for Christ to live at the very core, the center of your being. This might raise a question, “But isn’t Christ already in every believer?” The answer, of course, is “yes.” The gospel proclaims and salvation brings “...Christ in you, the hope of glory,” as Paul wrote in Colossians 1:27. In fact, Romans 8:9 tells us “...But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

So, every believer can say with Paul, “Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). We can understand what Paul is talking about here when we look at the word our English versions translate “dwell” or “be at home.” There is one word and two variations of it that are used in the New Testament for dwelling. The basic one (oikeo) means to live, to dwell somewhere. It can refer to being at home or away; short term and long term. The first variation (paroikeo) means to live with, to live alongside others; to stay as a guest. The second variation (katoikeo) means to settle down, to make the place your home; the ideas of possession or ownership are part of it. It is this last word that Paul used here. In essence, the goal is that you not only enjoy Christ as a guest, but that you allow Him to “be at home,” to take possession and control; to direct all of your life. Paul’s prayer and God’s design for you is that by *faith* Jesus would be at home in your heart, be the Lord of all of your life. This is part of spiritual maturity.

Goal number three is to comprehend and experience the love of Christ. Paul writes in the last part of verse 17 “that you, being rooted and grounded in love.” Paul uses the perfect tense which, in the language of the New Testament, speaks of something that took place in the past and continues now. It emphasizes the ongoing, continuing state. So, he is not praying for them *to become* rooted and grounded in love. We remember that Romans 5:5 tells us “...the love of God *has been* poured out within our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” So, this is the groundwork, the basis—being rooted and grounded in God’s love, being firmly planted, established in God’s perfect love.

Now, the prayer request, the design of God,

“[that you] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (18-19a)

He prays that we might comprehend and experience the love of Christ, that we would develop and grow in maturity. Now, a good question you might have here is “How can I comprehend something that ‘surpasses knowledge?’” Paul is talking about understanding, comprehending more and more, as much as we can, of Christ’s love. We will never have enough knowledge to understand everything about Christ’s love. Even in heaven we will not understand the depths of love that led Christ to become one of us, take our sin upon Himself, and die for us. But I am fairly confident that you, like me, have more room to grow here, in comprehending, experiencing His love.

Then think then of the words “know” and “knowledge” in verse 19. They are terms which emphasize knowing through doing, knowing through experience, as contrasted with knowing as a fact or abstractly. This design element of spiritual maturity is to experience and so know all the dimensions of Christ’s love.

Why is this important? First, it deepens our entire relationship with Christ, including our worship and our love for Him. Then, it also impacts our caring and service for others. In short, we look at others and at ministry more and more like Jesus did and does. That is spiritual maturity.

The last goal is to be filled up to all the fullness of God—“ that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (19b). What a grand statement! Let’s deal with the obvious first. It is impossible for us to take in and become the perfection of God. When one of the scribes asked Jesus what the foremost commandment was, He began His answer with “The foremost is, ‘Hear , O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.’ ” *There is only one God.* The Bible is clear. In Isaiah 42:8 God states, “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.”

Yes, leaders of false cults and the cultic “*Faith*,” or “*Word of Faith Movement*” spread the heresy of “positive confession,” and “you can be as much God as Christ.” But these kinds of views are not even close to the true gospel. You and I are not, and cannot become gods.

So then, what is Paul saying here? Let's start with Paul's own "commentary" on this verse that we find in 4:13,

“until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Now, let's go back to earlier in the letter, to 1:23, “which [the church] is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” There is a sense, positionally, where we the church have been given the fullness of Christ—that is how God looks at us, in and through Christ. This is 1:23. But we know our all-too-real need to grow in the character of Christ. This is a process, as we see in 2 Corinthians 3:18,

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

The Colossians 3:10 tells us believers “have put on the new self who *is being renewed* to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”

It may sound like a bit trite, but the idea here is that God design for us is “to be all he wants us to be.” To keep on growing, maturing. To keep on growing, maturing in all the character of God, so that our character will be more and more like Christ's.

We've seen our purpose and the four design elements to achieve that purpose. All of this comes with a guarantee.

God's Guarantee For You.

God is more than able to accomplish His purpose and goals for you. First, let's dispense with an old and devastating myth. The myth that only a few *superspiritual* people can really be spiritually mature. Look ahead into chapter 4 again,

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until *we all* attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” (11-13)

All means all!

Now let's look at verse 20 here in chapter 3,

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.”

Paul tells us God is able to do all of the things in this prayer, to complete the purpose and goals, for all believers. He piles up a few words to make the point.

- God is able.
- God is able above and beyond all we can ask or think.
- God is able exceedingly or infinitely above and beyond what we can ask or think.

God is able!

In Philippians 1:6 we are told that we can be sure ...

“that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.” (NLT)

Make no mistake about it, “God is more than able to accomplish these goals and this purpose” for you.

As well, God is always at work within you— “the power that works [*that is working*] within us.” Let’s go back to verse 16,

“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”

Go farther back to 1:19, [*that you will know*]

“and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might.”

Now let’s go over to Philippians 2:13,

“...it is God who *is at work in you*, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

God *is* always at work within you ...

- leading and warning;
- teaching and correcting;
- assuring and challenging; and,
- transforming you, as Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him and reflect His glory even more.” (1 Corinthians 3:18 NLT)
- God is always working within you to bring about His design for you, that you would be spiritually mature, bringing great glory to Him.

Conclusion.

This is “*The Real Divine Design*,” *God’s design for you is to be spiritually mature*. And, wonderfully, there are no exceptions, even though at times we may think we are an exception.

Myron was a man who, if you didn’t know him, you might think could have been an exception to becoming spiritually mature. He lived in a small town with his mother and did odd jobs. The yards where he worked were easy to spot, standing out with their neatness and beauty. He did a lot of volunteer work, and was well liked for that. But beyond all of this, the community knew and loved him for his cheerful attitude and joyful faith in Jesus Christ. He made a significant impact on many people.

He died when he was about 40. The whole town came to his memorial service. They were joined by many others who once had lived there and had known Myron. Myron had grown, he had matured spiritually. But not as much in other areas. You see, he had Downs Syndrome. He had some very real limits, but he was *not* limited in...

- living to glorify and enjoy God;
- in allowing God to strengthen him;
- in allowing Christ to be at home in his heart;
- in growing in comprehending and experiencing God’s love;
- in being filled up to all the fullness of God—all that God wanted him to be.

How about you and me?

In our time of Personal Reflection and Response with God, thank Him that you are created, designed to bring Him great glory, now and forever. Begin to evaluate your goals in light of what we have seen here this morning. Determine to set and keep this purpose, these goals in place; to grow and mature in them.

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