

Title: THE UNIVERSE WITHIN, EPHESIANS 3:14 – 22.
(Chatham, NJ; 07/26/09, AM) [D – Topical]

Theme: Although Paul teaches that God's power transcends our own, he believes that it works within our hearts to bring about a new life.

Purpose: To remind everyone that God's power transforms us from the inside out.

Introduction:

1. Considering all the problems and tragedies faced by celebrities you would think this might moderate societies' penchant for fame.
2. Facebook, YouTube, and other internet means provide the opportunity for us to be known to a wider circle than our friends, perhaps even wider than we truly want.
3. Yet we want still to be known.
4. But what about being known to ourselves? Do we seek adequate self-knowledge? There is every indication that the knowledge we have of ourselves has failed us.
5. Jenny and Gov. Sanford have different approaches to this. See *World*, 8/1/09, 23.
6. There is an assumption by many that we should act out what we feel and expect that people respect whatever the actions are.
7. God examines us differently. Consider what Ephesians 3:14ff. says and assumes.

I. God Works on the Inner Universe of the Human Heart.

A. God's activity within.

1. The terms tell us the location of God's activity: inner being (16), heart (17), comprehend/mind (18), and power at work within us (20).
2. These demand an understanding of our inner workings.
3. God gets inside us: our minds, our emotions, and our wills.
4. He shapes our impulses and tames the "imp of the perverse." (Edgar Allen Poe's term to describe that we do wrong simply because it is wrong.)

B. We need to reckon with the inequality of impulses.

1. Not all impulses are created equal.
2. We have a part of us that transcends the material, physical impulses which often regulate negative behavior.
3. We think that the accumulation of our desires (whatever they are as long as they are ours) is sufficient to define who we are.
4. Episcopal Church recently declared even more openness to homosexuals in any ordained ministry, "This is who we are."
5. Such boldness betrays an inability to escape the trap of justifying our impulses.

II. Why do we need to be strengthened with power?

A. At work within us (16, 20).

1. God's power is manifest in the way it can change us within.
2. The battle between the Spirit and the flesh (Gal. 5:17) demands power.
3. Spiritual power is needed to fight spiritual forces, Eph. 6:12.
4. The battleground is the human heart.

B. Christ dwells in our hearts.

1. This is the first step in being capable of loving God and neighbor.

2. Without the love of Christ we could not comprehend the love of God.
3. What lives within our hearts is what will proceed from our mouths and define what we are, whether good or evil.

C. We know Christ's love.

1. Part of Paul's prayer is that we might come to know the love of Christ and comprehend it more fully.
2. All of these are intended to fill us with "the fullness of God."
3. The more we are filled with the character of God, the more we displace the spiritual forces of evil that seek to undo us.
4. We are strengthened with power that we might ultimately live a life pleasing to God, see 4:1.
5. This is why the power is made available to us.

III. Three Assumptions Demonstrate the Need for Self-Knowledge and Change.

A. Spiritual conflict.

1. Battle equipment demonstrates the reality of warfare, 6:13ff.
2. We have already mentioned the spirit vs. flesh motif.
3. The Bible speaks of the conflict as a war within.
4. John affirms young Christians in their victory to overcome evil, 1 John 2.

B. A demand for repentance and behavior change.

1. Psalm 14 quoted in Romans 3 to demonstrate that "all have sinned."
2. We must no longer live in a state darkened by our deceitful desires, Eph. 4:17-22.
3. We are called to "put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness," Eph. 4:24.

C. God's power provides us with strength and life.

1. Sin brought about death, Eph. 2:1-3, but that was a former condition.
2. Jesus provides grace to help, Heb. 4:16.
3. Jesus' miracle of the loaves and fish points to his ability to provide not just material but spiritual sustenance.
4. God's presence can be experienced here.
5. The life of righteousness that leads to the narrow gate is what this whole thing is all about.

Conclusion:

1. G. K. Chesterton got it right. Read Peterson, *10,000 Places*, p. 318.
2. The trouble with the world is me, and only by God working in my inner being to change and rectify my impulses will redemption become a reality.
3. Open your heart to the changes you need to make; God's power is available to help you along the way.