

Radiance Bible Studies  
Lesson Five  
“The Fullness of God”  
The Fork in the Road:  
The Derivation of Priority

*Song Lyrics:*

**FULLNESS OF GOD**

Words & Music by Keith Lancaster  
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I am kneeling before the Father  
From whom the earthly family derives its' name  
I am praying for His power  
Through His Spirit in our inner being we live by faith

His love surpasses knowledge  
How wide how long  
How high how deep  
His love surpasses knowledge  
How wide how long  
How high how deep

I am kneeling before the Father  
From whom the heavenly family derives its name  
I am praying out of His riches  
You'll be rooted and established in His love

Chorus

And I pray for you with all the saints  
That Christ live in your hearts through faith  
And be filled to the measure of all  
Fullness of God

Chorus

How wide how long  
How high how deep

## Scripture Source:

Ephesians 3:14 – 21

Everyone has the universe-- or one's personal version of the universe -- itemized in a list of important things. This list of importance becomes a factor of everyday existence. We recognize that some things in the world are more important than other things. The question arises: How should we formulate priorities? What goes at the top of the list? What is of lesser importance? How does one determine a true priority?

Ephesians 3:14-21 provides the answer: Paul tells us that priorities are revealed. These verses make known a class of things that could be called **revealed priorities**. This is a prayer. Paul could have prayed for many things for the recipients of the letter. For instance, he could have prayed for things of a physical nature, but he did not. This prayer is regarding **spiritual things**: intangibles.

1. Evidently the revealed priorities are more important than other priorities. There is another category of priorities that we can call **empirical priorities**. These are physical priorities. They are derived by **sense experience**. And they are developed by our apprehension of needs!
2. On the other hand, **revealed priorities** are determined by God and revealed through the Scriptures by the authority of God.
3. So there is an inherent conflict between revealed priorities and empirical priorities. Each is derived from two entirely different sources and in two entirely different ways.
4. Empirical priorities come from a perspective on **needs**. Apparently revealed priorities have a limiting effect on how real needs are evaluated! However, even needs are not automatically turned into priorities. Needs are contingencies-- but they are not priorities. Here is the reason for this: We all have needs. (When we speak of needs, we refer to such things as food, clothing, shelter and all of the other necessities of life. There is no reference here to video games and other such cultural/technological items as needs.) Real needs cannot be denied-- but we are not to elevate them in terms of their status to the level of priorities.
5. The supremacy of revealed priorities does not mean that we do not have needs. Normally needs are extended the status of priorities. Needs are real and undeniable. Then there is the *status* of those needs. These are two separate things. So due to the **supremacy of revealed priorities** needs certainly exist, but they must be denied priority status.
6. Additionally, the Lord intended that revealed priorities be universal for all people, but most especially for Christians. However, they are not relative to the

individual. Empirical priorities *are* relative to the individual: One might say, “That’s your priority but not mine.”

7. Most societies and their institutions believe that empirical priorities are the true priorities and that revealed priorities are purely elective. As far as the world is concerned, revealed priorities are just private matters of personal religion. Thus we may be welcomed to hold our own revealed priorities, but we are increasingly disallowed from carrying those revealed priorities out into the empirical world of human existence! *True priorities are supplied by the absolute God and are not determined by personal choice. They are not objective, nor subjective, rather they are revealed.*

8. The Apostle Paul made an issue of this in Acts 27. There was a storm at sea. Julius the centurion, the ship’s captain, and the ship’s owner all believed that the true priorities were all empirical. But this was not true on that occasion, because the true priorities were revealed:

Acts 27:25: “So keep up your courage men, for I have in God that it will happen just as He told me” -- the true priorities were all spiritual and quite intangible.

Acts 27:31 “Unless these men stay with the ship you cannot be saved”

9. All this means that faith in the Lord, in the power of God and in the Word of God always brings one to a fork in the road: the decision of how to derive priorities.

10. There are two possibilities: Either priorities are derived....

... By revelation; or

By sense experience.

11. The real priorities are all spiritual. We are confronted with revealed priorities and by empiric needs. This is a different universe governed by the Spirit of God and not sense experience. This is a universe where empiric needs are relative to revealed priorities. But in the universe of sense experience revealed priorities/spiritual priorities are made quite relative to empirical needs.

12. So this reduces to the relation between the spiritual world and sense experience; or another way to put it is that it is the difference between Scripture and empiricism.

13. Revealed/spiritual priorities are not the same things as “values,” for these are of human determination. Today we hear a great deal about values. But values are not the same as absolutes. “Values” are personal, transient, and elective and they are assigned the status of priorities. However revealed priorities are expressions

of the Eternal/Invisible God and therefore are absolutes. So they must be treated as **discontinuous** from empirically derived priorities.

Here are the spiritual priorities from Ephesians 3:14 – 21:

#### A. SPIRITUAL STRENGTH verses 14 – 16

Such strength comes about because of **applied absolutes**, when power comes to bear on the inner man by the Holy Spirit. This strength is a result of the power of God and has nothing to do with personal/ human ability. We are learning that applied absolutes are a priority for us, and that they are stipulated by the Lord Himself! Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are replete with applied absolutes of all kinds:

Acts 7:8 – 10, 55 = there are men full of Holy Spirit and grace and power

Daniel 2:20 – 23 = speaks of God who “gives wisdom” (verse 21); and Daniel says of the Lord: “You have given me wisdom and power” (verse 23).

1Kings 19:1 – 18 = Elijah ran to Horeb because suddenly empirical priorities surfaced as supreme

2 Timothy 4:16 – 18 = Paul states “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength”

Consequently, when we speak of spiritual strength, we are really talking of applied absolutes! Scripture assigns this the status of priority. Applied absolutes stand in contradiction to priorities based on sense experience. Empirical priorities are a *defacto* picture of a closed system. And closed systems are not open to the power of God nor to His intervention. Empirical priorities may offer propositions about God, but effectively they close the human condition to the Lord’s involvement.

But applied absolutes prove that the human condition is not a closed system. Quite the contrary. We are open to spiritual strength, and this is to be considered a priority. This is a revealed priority and spiritual priorities grant us an advantage that is beyond measurability because applied absolutes are not measurable! We do not know the limits of this kind of strength in a person’s life. The application is strictly the province of the Holy Spirit. But we are told that such inner strength is not eclipsed by situations. Nor is it hedged in by human weakness.

*This spiritual strength is anchored in the eternal spirit -- but it is applied in the inner man!*

#### B. CHRIST DWELLS IN THE HEART BY FAITH Verse 17

If Christ dwells in the heart by faith, then it creates an immediate consequence for perspectives. All perspectives must change! It is in the heart that perspectives are stored. And with Christ dwelling within the heart through faith it is impossible for perspectives to remain the same. Once Christ dwells in the heart, He brings a perspective with Him. The perspective that Christ has is not of this world. It is not shaped by human

experience. It is not dependent upon consensus of opinion. This indwelling (applied perspective) would have to translate into transformation for those who have it. Such a one through faith is no longer a “child of his times.”

Consequently, the heart becomes a shared instrument. The heart, of course, is the core of the man. If the core of the man changes, then the man changes. The man becomes a vessel, for his heart is the dwelling place of Christ. The language indicates a permanent residence. So the man is converted into a temple of God. If the man changes his place in the world, the world changes. Community is touched by this change. Society is affected by this change. Thus the indwelling of Christ through faith is a special condition of heart! This special condition of heart is manifested in an applied perspective on the universe, the world, life, history and many other things.

This means that perspective is withdrawn from sense experience!

Christ through faith must apply an eternal perspective to the human heart. This condition makes such a one an exponent of eternal truth. But it will also polarize him from others whose perspective is purely of this world. This applied perspective that Christ brings, and that is applied to the heart, is now the same perspective that such a person applies to all aspects of his existence and experience. Without it men (all men) are less than they could be; and with it, they can go beyond mere human perception of potential.

If this revealed priority were respected and taken advantage of, the world and the church would be very different places. For instance, we would have a very different view of such things as “progress.”

Remember, the applied perspective is revealed: It is anchored in heaven but it is applied in the human heart. This means that the mind has to be redeemed by God. This is a priority for men set not by the human condition rather by absolute authority.

The Lord has decided to dwell with us in a certain fashion. The way He chose to do this is through faith. So it is faith that raises the heart above its own horizons and instills in it an applied perspective. This is in Christ, but it is offered to men!

This revealed priority signals a move away from perspectives grounded upon sense experience:

- The problem is not sense experience, for we cannot do without sense experience.
- Rather, the problem is that sense experience is used as the basis for priorities.
- Biblically this was never to be the case. It was the case in Genesis 3.
- We are being told that the Lord’s priority for us is not to elevate sense experience to the status of priority! The priority is to raise revelation above sense experience.

This must refer to an **applied motive**.

Biblically, God is presented to us in terms of love. Love is the **revealed motive** of the Lord from which He is supposed to relate to us (Malachi 1:1 – 2). Now the Apostle Paul makes it known as a priority for the church. We are to be “rooted” in love and “established” in love. This is that love that originated in the eternal world and becomes the motive for the temporal world of men.

This infers that actions are not rooted nor established in mere empiricism (sense experience). That would be the flesh trying to force itself on personality – trying to leave its mark on our actions. And through that, it leaves its mark on human history in the fractions and in the aggregate. But history changes if the grand motives of human action are shifted away from sense experience to being rooted and established in love! It is in this way in part that this characteristic of God puts its mark on the world of men.

This is presented to us here as a **revealed priority**. Any collective of men will be instantly and immediately enhanced by this kind of change in motives. Furthermore, perhaps the way to change actions is through the shift of motives. One’s motives are usually among the most highly purposeful aspects of our lives. Therefore according to this passage: We are taken out of the business of generating motives. We are not to simply choose motives at random. The self, parents, society, not even the church can be allowed to generate motives for life for us. Rather it is the Lord Himself who applies His own motives. This priority demands a high level of conscious participation on our part. Thus the motives of God become the motives behind human action and the whole sense of being.

This is a kind of love that = Preexisted the universe = 1 John 4:16  
Prompted the creation of man = 1 John 4:7 – 12  
Led to the giving of Christ to the world = John 3:16

Therefore what the Apostle Paul calls love did not originate among men – No! Consequently this love is not derived from empiricism nor sense experience. It is not available to us from naturalism. Some atheists purport to derive ethics from nature but they cannot derive love – not this kind of love! This is not love defined by the human context nor by human need. It is defined by the reality of the Lord Himself!

The idea of the term “love” as rooted in sense experience is different from love residing in God. Love as per sense experience is used as a pretext to overlook sin. Such conceptions of love are an attempt in some instances to banish other parts of God’s character; for example, His judgment upon men for their sin. The love that is found in God is not inimical to His dominion over the affairs of men. God loves us – this is true; but He does not ignore nor overlook sins.

There is a certain appeal to God’s love in contemporary American society that emphasizes God’s supposed acceptance of everybody regardless of their personal commitment to sin. So such arguments focus on God’s love and dispense with His

statements about obedience to His laws, self-control, and revealed patterns of conduct. Love rooted and established in sense experience attempts to exercise the power to reverse what God calls sin and its consequences. But this applied motive cannot be used this way. For example homosexuality is wrong, has always been wrong, and always will be wrong!

The love that we are to be rooted and established in is not a creation of the vagaries of human wisdom nor human preference. The “love” about which Paul writes is the motive in the mind of the eternal God and cannot be not a pretext for sin! Being rooted and established in this love equates to an acute awareness of the true revealed nature of God as found in the Bible!

#### D. UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF CHRIST Verses 18, 19

Here is revealed an **applied structure**.

The love of Christ is what it is. It is “wide,” “long,” “high,” “deep,” and “it surpasses knowledge.” The terms refer to the dimensions of the love of Christ.

The Apostle makes it a priority to grasp the extensive nature of the love of Christ. So there must be some kind of gulf between-----

The Eternal Immensity of Of Christ’s love	and	Human limits which impose a cap on what normally can be known
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Love to be love, has to be performed and practiced. Therefore we can speak of the love of God as an abstraction, but it is more than that. This implies that the love of Christ (that which is within Him) results in what could be called a **theory of action**. When all the saints have the strength to grasp the dimensions of the love of Christ, then this will produce in us as well a theory of action consistent with the love of Christ.

**The revealed theory of action** is based on a connection of the realities of eternity. It is rooted in the eternal world. The highest example of the Love of Christ: the Crucifixion! The love of Christ fully declared in the Lord’s sacrifice on the cross. It closes the gap between the two worlds!

This love and its accompanying theory of action is a complete system. Perhaps this is the perfect system. So let’s ask—what would such a perfect system look like, from the Biblical point of view? Answer: It would be a strong highly conscious linkage between The Invisible World -----and-----The Visible World. The love of Christ and a theory of action linked together pose a picture of how everything should work.

The perfected system is the highest form of ontology. The gulf between the seen and the unseen is closed. This shows up in the love of Christ – and -- Crucifixion. It can show up in business, education, the professions, marriage and the family.

This is the structure: The love of Christ will be known and grasped by people in the temporal domain. The love of Christ is the eternal part and the people are the temporal part. When the two are linked that becomes an applied structure.

The perfected system is not a development of the temporal domain. For instance this is not mere philanthropy nor mere altruism (like that of Warren Buffet and Bill Gates). These things will not form a perfect system.

Unity among the believers is assured if every brother followed this same structure where the love of Christ is linked to a theory of action. If every one does this, then unity is unbreakable. It is a priority to grasp the dimensions of the love of Christ in order that we can become true participants in bringing into fact this applied structure.

- The psychologization of relationships cannot accomplish this!
- Church/congregational structure cannot prosper while it is formed on temporal logic, temporal designs and temporal schemes.
- Nor, by implication, can group dynamics, business models and purpose driven schemes.

Here is a great challenge and a great blessing. We can (all of us) put our personal responses to things of this life in a perfected system. This is all that we have control over. But it is enough!

The realization of the perfected system puts an advanced meaning on our potential.

-Regardless of our circumstances which we might not be able to change we can determine to respond to the world of people and things by applying this revealed structure.

-The formation of the perfected system is exactly what we should do! And it is perfected because it cannot be improved upon!

However, we are not capable of this on our own. So the Lord applies this structure to us. He will give us the strength to be able to grasp this love beyond the finite capacity of the five senses.

This then is the Lord's priority for us: to have the blessing of this applied structure!

#### E. FILLED TO THE MEASURE OF ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD v.19

This must refer to an **applied condition**. It is again rooted in heaven and applied here in the temporal order.

“You may be filled” is in the passive voice, which means something or someone is filling us. This is a priority that the Lord Himself has for us! But what it is – who can say? We only know how we get it: The filling is bestowed!

Since this concerns the fullness of God, it has vital meaning to all the believers. One of the things that this means is that our personal condition can have a **non-natural apex**. To say the least this apex condition is beyond the natural reach. Consequently, to achieve it, this apex condition has to be applied. Another thing this means is that we can set our sights far too low.

The lack of this kind of spiritual understanding leads to an underestimation of personal potential. One of the things that we learn here is that human potential is separated from human capability. Only in Christ is potential detached from capability. We do not have the capability to achieve this potential. But personal potential is not relative to our personal capability. It is uniquely relative to the character of God. So personal potential is relative to God and therefore it is not relative to our capability.

The above statement is true in all pragmatic examples of faith in the O.T. and N.T. Here are some examples: 1 Samuel 17; Numbers 13,14; Genesis 16.

Consequently vision and hope are not dependent upon the refinement nor the enhancement of personal capability. Education cannot do this for us. Personal improvement methods cannot deliver this to us. Techniques do not have the power to give us this apex condition. No! This fullness as an applied condition is a gift.

Final Thoughts: From Ephesians 3:20,21

All of these priorities rest on the power of God (verse 20).

This power is of the same variety as the priorities themselves. That is to say that it is beyond human limits of course: He is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” And this power is at work within us. This would make the possession of these spiritual priorities guaranteed, because the power of God cannot be finally resisted. The Lord wants to help us.

The great purpose that these priorities achieve is twofold:

- First, it elevates the believer beyond temporal circumstances
- Second, it brings glory to God (verse 21)

Perhaps the question is: Are these going to be real priorities for us? Each day is covered by these spiritual priorities. This fact creates a **revealed psychology of time**. Time is to be used for the pursuit and the acquisition of these priorities. This is how time is conceived of and used. Therefore time is not used to pursue priorities founded upon empiricism/sense experience.

### *Questions for Discussion*

1. Give a definition and an example of empirical priorities.

2. Give a definition and an example of revealed priorities.
3. How can it be said that empirical priorities differ from revealed priorities in source and in means?
4. A word that is used a lot in our society is “values.” How are revealed priorities different from values?
5. In what way is the kind of spiritual strength that Paul prays for, a demonstration of applied absolutes?
6. In what way can the indwelling of Christ in a believer lead to a change of perspective? What would that look like?
7. How does the love of God “take us out of the business of generating motives”?
8. What is the “applied structure” that the love of Christ demonstrates?
9. How does being in Christ help one separate capability from potential?
10. What does the lesson call a “revealed psychology of time,” and how do you think that a change in your thinking and priorities would make your life different?

**For further reflection:  
“The Second Singing”**

Now that you’ve studied in depth some of the implications of the Ephesians passage, what do you understand and think as you hear the song again?