

The Urgency of the Middle Position
From Ephesians 3
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From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION
PART 1: THE MIDDLE POSITION IS THE AGENT OF GOD v.1-4.

#1. Paul was just a man; yet he was put by the Lord in an extraordinary position. Paul was put in *the middle position*.

#2. "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus..." v.1. The apostle had no choice in the matter. He asserted no rights before the Lord. Paul had only the purpose to serve the will of God.

#3. The middle position, in this case, stands between God --> and the Gentiles v.2. This a position of "stewardship" of the Gospel. It was from the middle position that Paul preached "God's grace" to the Gentiles. The function of the middle position inherently depends upon "revelation" v.3. From that position, Paul pressed the revealed truth of "the mystery of Christ" into the Gentile world v.4.

#4. This tells us that "Paul", and all "His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (v.5) related to nature and world sociology from the middle position.

#5. The inescapable generalization is that every individual believer and every church is expected to do the same thing. Obedience to the Word of God, in this world, is to press the Gospel into the lives of others by its articulation through our thought, speech and behavior.

#6. The middle position is the agent of God. And it is the position of a revealed "understanding". "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" v.4.

#7. No believer, no church has the right to abandon the middle position. Yet, one can step outside of it, by a simple lack of faith.

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PART 2: THE RIGOR OF THE MIDDLE POSITION v.4-7.

#1. The apostolic middle position becomes *the reference point for the reading of Scripture*. "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" v.4. The preaching of the Gospel is not of human origin. The middle position represents a revealed source of *meaning outside of time, human experience and the human mind*.

#2. This requires cognitive adjustments on the part of believers. According to this text, the middle position is part of a continuum, anchored in eternity, with its terminus in time and materiality.

#3. The members of this supernatural continuum present, at least, *5 pre-conditions to the understanding of Scripture*.

- The leading member is God. It all starts with Him;
- following is the revelation of the Word of God v.3, the revealed language manifold;
- then personal insight begins to take form;
- preaching comes to bear on the human mind;
- the revealed truth is pushed into the world ("made known") v.5: the work of the Holy Spirit guides it all.

#4. In this manner, the Almighty intends to push the fulsome rigor of His mind into the world of men. What the Lord wants for us is to anchor our reasoning, outside of our circumstances and beyond time and this world. It is His purpose to gather us into the middle position. That is to be our preferred position in the world. It is a position of strength, wisdom. Only in the middle position are our minds separate from the world.

From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION

PART 3: THE DANGER and RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION (a) v.6, 7.

#1. ". . .To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" v6. The Lord desires to bring the whole world (Jews and Gentiles) to the knowledge of "the Gospel". This creates immediate danger for those in the middle position.

#2. The good news is not always welcome. Some people, upon hearing the Gospel, can react rigorously, even violently to it. Centers of temporal power, those with a lot of worldly advantage to lose, can feel immediately threatened by *the message from the middle position*.

#3. Long held histories of animosity are put into question, if all men are to be part of the same "body" of Christ. Personal opinions and objections to revealed truth have to be sacrificed.

#4. The New Testament is replete with examples of many in the churches who refused the *behavior of the middle position*. Some, as well, did not and would not accept the *cognitive changes required by the middle position*. And that is still true today.

#5. The rejection of the Gospel and the consequent pressure on its adherents are ever present. World sociology (people and their interactions) can and may stand in direct opposition to the *great truths of the middle position*.

#6. Today, in the churches, modernistic, rationalistic perceptions, gained from the influence of the world, are actually operating to denounce the *biblical legitimacy of the middle position*.

And that is a discreditation of the Gospel. Many believers do not want their reasoning anchored outside of human experience.

From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION

PART 4: THE DANGER and RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION (b) v.6, 7.

#1. ". . .of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power" v.7. The apostle was compelled by the Lord to fulfill his *ministry*. That ministry was the full exercise of the middle position.

#2. The Gospel is not ideological, not man made. It is revealed truth. So, both the revealed truth and the middle position are *manifestations of "God's grace"*.

#3. Consequently, they both partake of the supernatural. Therefore, the middle position is one of great personal responsibility. It stands between the eternal reality and human rationalization, ideology and all false ideas.

#4. Secular humanism is not a new idea. That pattern of thought is as old as man. It denies the existence of God, denies His authority over man, nature and history.

#5. Idolatry of one focus or another abounds. Worldly standards of thought, speech and behavior are always running to be normative. The redemptive power of "Christ Jesus" is put into question.

#6. Because of the urgency of the middle position, then, the church is expected to engage all false ideas and darkened reasoning. Human salvation depends upon the proclamation and defense of the truth of the middle position. *Conflict with world ideology is the function of the middle position*.

#7. But believers must become capable of this function. No believer, no church has the prerogative to refuse to stand within the borders of the middle position.

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PART 5: THE MIDDLE POSITION AS FORCED CONTRADICTION v.8-10.

#1. The Lord intends to *force a contradiction* into the world cultures. He does this through the preaching "to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ" v.8. The middle position proclaims the Gospel and creates an incursion into the pagan world and its mindset.

#2. The middle position challenges the accepted social norms and the sin that has been normalized. It is the purpose of God to publicly, openly and unambiguously contradict the pagan way of life. This is the portfolio of the middle position.

#3. This contradiction frames temporal, material existence in the light of Christ. ". . .and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things" v.9. Preaching the Gospel puts the true context, which is the Creator, around human life and creates an encounter with the Almighty.

#4. The church of the middle position takes a stand on the foundation of "the manifold wisdom of God" v.10. And proclaims its preeminence over human reason to "the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places".

#5. Necessarily, there can be no compromise between the believer, the church and the world. We are not here to be accepted but to exercise the platform of the middle position. We must bear the social burden of contradiction and be strong against the self.

From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION
PART 6: THE MAP OF KNOWLEDGE and THE MIDDLE POSITION v.11, 12.

#1. Suppose that we employ the term, *THE MAP OF KNOWLEDGE*. In this text, verses 1 through 10, the apostle infers that all men everywhere and everywhen, construct, put together, compose a map of knowledge; or, what is worth knowing. Paul further insists that those maps of knowledge are conceived by the twin powers of human reason and human experience of the material universe.

#2. One of the characteristics of a map of knowledge is that it stipulates just what knowledge is and how it is to be realized. In consequence, what is not on the particular map of knowledge, in question, is not knowledge.

#3. Not a new idea-- there are always keepers of the map. Sometimes the term "curator" is used. The map of knowledge is passed on to subsequent generations through education, formal and or informal.

#4. Then comes the Book of Ephesians, announcing a revealed truth. This is that human maps of knowledge are incomplete, misleading, limiting representing a dangerous ignorance of higher order truth. In other words, the significance of " the manifold wisdom of God" (v.10) is not on the map.

#5. Paul makes the point that *revelation of the word of God is intended to challenge all human maps of knowledge*. They are to be displaced by the ministry of the middle position v.7.

#6. That is preaching "*the unfathomable riches of Christ*" v.8. The purpose of the middle position is to put the revealed truth of the Gospel on the map! When that happens confidence in the human map is contradicted.

#7. "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him". It appears, though, that many in churches are staying with the world map of knowledge.

From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION
PART 7: THE MIDDLE POSITION and TEMPORAL CIRCUMSTANCE v.13.

#1. "Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory" v.13.

#2. The "manifold wisdom of God" (v.10) is pressed into the middle position. That is the sole source of meaning for all and every human experience.

#3. *Preaching the Word of God, as delivered, inherently, generates opposition from the world and sometimes from the churches.* So, an appealing ideology was adopted by some. The Scripture could be taught, not as delivered, but as a *devotional device*.

#4. The Scripture used and read as a devotional device does not generate much oppositional heat; nor does it fulfill the ministry of the middle position.

#5. Paul bore "tribulations" because of his uncompromised preaching of the Gospel. His motive was not to avoid suffering but to proclaim the full meaning of revealed truth v.3.

#6. Apparently, preaching the meaning of Scripture, as delivered, is not socially acceptable. Nor has it ever been.

#7. Because of the integrity of the middle position, believers should never come to think that personal suffering is without purpose and meaning. Of course, if tribulations are perceived to be without meaning, the immediate sentiment and psychology is "to lose heart". In other words, suffering is superfluous and meaningless. So it should be avoided if possible.

#8. Our personal experience can and may be horrific and unjust. But it cannot be allowed to move us to relinquish the privilege of the middle position. *That position is not self-serving.*

#9. Endurance of such conditions as tribulation, for the sake of the Gospel is represented as "Your glory". Like the Lord Christ Jesus, suffering is a personal investment in the will and purpose of God on the earth. Endurance of tribulation, not tribulation itself, is the source of the glory. Unexpectedly, our suffering in the world, lifts us beyond the world.

From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION
PART 8: THE CAPITALIZED MIDDLE POSITION v.14-17.

#1. The believer is to occupy the middle position, because it is chartered by the Word of God. But it is not enough. There must be something else.

#2. There is a power beyond this world, beyond immediate experience and beyond human reason. We need that power. The apostle prayed..."that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" v.16.

#3. Hard to understand, impossible to explain, no one can function in the middle position without the power of God attending.

#4. At least this much is inarguable; *the power of God enables one to overrule the world magnitudes of influence*. It has direct effects: "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love"...v.17. True faith is empowered faith, not just a structural, doctrinal kind of faith.

#5. The kind of belief that occupies the middle position *is capitalized by a non-natural power*. This means and it insures that the will of God can be and will be accomplished through us, if we submit to this advantage and pursue it.

#6. World magnitudes of power constantly assail those who trust in God. From what is stated in this text, the Lord does not want us to face temporal pressures with ambiguities of trust in revealed truth. *Doubt-free* is the only term for the faith of the middle position.

#7. In the midst of our personal ordeals that challenge our full confidence in the Almighty, we are assured that *we are not alone in these circumstances*. You can be reinforced by Someone stronger than material conditions; whatever they may be.

From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION
PART 9: THE POTENTIAL OF THE MIDDLE POSITION: "THE FULLNESS OF GOD" v.18, 19.

#1. The middle position is a dynamic position. This must be by eternal design. It represents a continually expanding state of consciousness.

#2. Throughout Scripture there are examples of believers who had determined not to occupy the middle position and accept its inherent requirements. Israel in the desert experience, for example (Exodus, Numbers).

#3. "...that you" v.17..."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, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" v.18, 19.

#4. Empiricism is a way of knowing founded upon the close study of material things and one's experience of them. Naturalism is the immediate source of empiric methodology.

#5. Empiricism rests on *the assumption that there is no greater reality than the material order*. If one believes that then one will act upon it. There is a kind of faith that can reconcile faith in God-->and empiricism. But that is *a compromised faith*.

#6. And as such, it cannot know "the breadth and length and height and depth". The compromised faith is severely circumscribed, limited. It cannot exercise the middle position.

#7. In too many ways the church and the believer stay as part of the world, in thought, speech and behavior. In consequence the full potential of the middle position is not reached. "The fullness of God" is never realized.

#8. Most certainly, the fullness of God carries one's mind beyond this world of circumstance. Such a *shared condition* with the Lord is the fulfillment of the purpose of God in time and among men. What do you think? Should we settle for less?

From Ephesians 3. THE URGENCY OF THE MIDDLE POSITION
PART 10: THE BEDROCK OF THE MIDDLE POSITION. v.20, 21.

#1. "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" v.20.

#2. Since the Lord is beyond what we can ask of Him and is beyond human experience and beyond human intelligence, then, there remains a significant conclusion.

#3. If we are in any way to correctly comprehend Him, then we are locked into *revealed representations* about who the Almighty is and what His capability may be. So, human reasoning, independent of revelation, creates, only, chronic and misleading *underestimations of God*.

#4. Although not directly stated in the text, by generalization, one realizes this enormous truth: My faith is in no way a measurement of God. *Rather, my faith is the Lord's measurement of me*.

#5. Therefore, the faith exercised in the middle position is expected to exceed the limits of rationalism and human experience.

#6. There is an inveterate human inclination to attempt to make compatible biblical ideas --> and human reasoning based on experience. Fundamental mistake. Doing that, we cannot come to know "the breadth...length...height and depth".

#7. The "glory" of the Lord is synonymous with His powerful reach. This glory becomes *a shared conditionality* with the church. "To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen".

We have no such power nor imminent glory, in ourselves. It is the power of God working in us that changes things. In turmoil we declare: "How mighty is His hand"!