

Ephesians ~ Chapter 3 ~ Scripture [NIV, 1984]

Paul the Preacher to the Gentiles

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—
[continued at verse 14]

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 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.

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 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, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

A Prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians ~ Chapter 3 ~ Discussion Questions

1. In the last four verses in Chapter 2 before the first intact section of Chapter 3 (3:2-13), we find words like household, foundation, cornerstone, building, holy temple, and dwelling. To what is Paul referring? (2:19-3:13)
2. When Paul writes, “For this reason...” to what is he referring? (3:1)
3. Paul refers to “mystery” in verses 3 and 6. What is this mystery? How was it revealed? (3:3-6)
4. What helped Paul become a servant? (3:7)
5. What did Paul feel called to do and what was his attitude toward it? Does any of this apply to you or was this call (and his attitude to it) mainly for Paul? (3:8-9) How can you apply this gift or privilege?
6. How and to who did God say that his wisdom would be made known? (3:10)
7. How did God accomplish his plan? (3:11) What does this mean to us? (3:12) Do you feel the freedom and have the confidence to approach God directly? You, yourself with no intermediary? Boldly, without hesitation?
8. Paul’s first prayer in Ephesians (1:15-23) was that his readers and listeners would have spiritual understanding. What is this second prayer for? (3:14-21)
9. What is the first thing that Paul requested of the Father? (3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 4:16)
10. What is your understanding of Christ’s love for you?
11. What does the love of Christ surpass? To what will your life now conform? (3:19, Galatians 2:20)
12. How did Paul close his prayer? (3:20-21) How does this doxology serve as a fitting conclusion to the doctrine he presented in the first three chapters? How does this doxology encourage you? Do you have a favorite doxology? Why do you especially like it? Do you include a doxology in your personal prayers?

Ephesians ~ Chapter 3 ~ Leader's Guide

1. In the last four verses in Chapter 2 before the first intact section of Chapter 3 (3:2-13), we find words like household, foundation, cornerstone, building, holy temple, and dwelling. To what is Paul referring? (2:19-3:13)

The description of a building under construction conveys the sense of the dynamic growth of the **church**, not an actual building (that would come later), but a community of people in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Having saved people individually by his grace (2:1-10) and having reconciled them to each other as well as to himself through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (2:11-22), God now unites them on an equal basis in one body, the church. This step in God's plan was not fully revealed in previous times. Thus, Paul calls it a "mystery."

2. When Paul writes, "For this reason..." to what is he referring? (3:1)

He is saying, "Because of all God has done..." explained in the preceding verses. Specifically, the amazing salvation that God's grace has brought to undeserving sinners and the incredible revelation that Gentiles can also be included with the Jews in God's new family and will be equal heirs.

In his letters, Paul uses many devices to hold the attention of his readers and listeners. Here he starts a thought which piques their curiosity but then interrupts it with another thought (vv 2-13); he then comes back to the original thought in vs. 14.

3. Paul refers to "mystery" in verses 3 and 6. What is this mystery? How was it revealed? (3:3-6)

As I said above, the mystery was something that had not previously been fully revealed. According to the NIV Study Bible, Paul uses the term to mean a truth known only by divine revelation (Romans 16:25). Here, the word has the special meaning of the private, wise plan of God, which in Ephesians relates primarily to the unification of believing Jews and Gentiles (or heathen) in the new body, the church. It may be thought of as a secret that is temporarily hidden, but more than that, it is a plan God is actively working out and revealing stage by stage.

In Verse 5, Paul says this mystery was not made known to men in previous generations. Paul views himself as the chief recipient of the understanding of this mystery but says that other apostles (more than just the 12) and prophets received this revelation also. (3:5)

In verse 3:6, Paul uses the word "together" three times indicating the unique aspect of this mystery that was not previously known: the equality that Gentiles had with Jews in the new church, the one body. That Gentiles would turn to the God of Israel and be saved was prophesied in the OT (Romans 15:9-12). That they would come into an organic unity with believing Jews on an equal footing and become heirs was quite unexpected.

4. What helped Paul become a servant? (3:7)

God's grace and his mighty power. Grace, in a Christian sense is defined as the free

and unmerited favor of God, as shown (or proven) in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. Grace is a spontaneous gift from God to man — generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved.

Do you feel that you have received grace from God or is it something that God mainly gives to people more deserving than you? How do you think you become aware of receiving God's grace? Be specific.

5. What did Paul feel called to do and what was his attitude toward it? Would you feel that the gift (or privilege) that Paul received was actually a chore? Does any of this apply to you or was this call (and his attitude to it) mainly for Paul? (3:8-9)

Paul said he felt called to explain to everyone, but especially the Gentiles, the mysterious plan that God had kept secret until now.

Paul emphasized his feeling that he is the “least deserving of God's people” (or “less than the least”) to receive this gift of God's grace—“the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.” [NLT] Two things here: 1) In his letters, Paul often notes how amazed he is that he should be chosen by God for some task. His modesty was genuine, even though we may disagree with his self-evaluation. True modesty and humility are things valued by God (90 verses in the Bible speak of humility and it is held up as a key to honor, success, and true greatness). Fake humility is a form of hypocrisy (although not one of the ten commandments, Jesus seems to regard it as one of the worst sins).

2) Most Bible translations say that Paul was given grace (a gift) to *preach* to or among the Gentiles. The NLT says “the privilege of telling the Gentiles,” which has a somewhat different implication. The “gift of preaching” is not the same as the “privilege of telling” The latter is probably a better translation as the original Greek word actually meant “to evangelize, to proclaim good tidings” but Tyndale translated it “preach” and preach it has remained.

More to the point, would you feel that the gift (or privilege) that Paul received was actually a chore? How do you feel about telling others the good news of their salvation by believing in Christ? We're not talking about quietly showing that you're a person of integrity or caring, but actually telling people in words or conversation about being saved. Do you feel called to do this? Did God give you the privilege of doing this? Are you?

Here's a hint: the next time someone tells you about something that is going wrong in his life or a problems he's having, STOP right there and **pray** with him—on the phone, at the table having coffee, or wherever you are. I guarantee you will get a chance to do this today. Don't let it pass you by. Make this a habit!

6. How and to who did God say that his wisdom would be made known? (3:10)

From the Pulpit Commentary: “... through *the church*, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the *rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms;*” that a lesson might be given to the unfallen angels [by whom are meant, not civil magistrates, much less evil angels, but the good angels, the angels in heaven – Gill]. Their interest in the scheme of man's redemption is often referred to (1 Peter 1:12). Even the highest powers of heaven have yet much to learn respecting God. Although many men may scorn the salvation of Christ and all that belongs to it, the highest intelligences regard it with

profound interest.

Through the Church, now constituted, according to the revealed mystery, of Jew and Gentile, all redeemed by Christ's blood and renewed by his Spirit, there is exhibited to the angels the manifold wisdom of God. The precise line of thought is this: God from eternity, had a purpose to put Jew and Gentile on precisely the same footing, but concealed it for many ages, until he revealed it in the apostolic age, when he appointed Paul his minister to announce it. The purpose of this whole arrangement was to enlighten the principalities and powers of heaven in the manifold wisdom of God. How in his manifold wisdom? In this way. During these preparatory ages, when God's gracious dealings were with the Jews only, all kinds of false religions were developing among the heathen, and their diversified influence and effects were becoming apparent in many ways. The divergent tendencies of men, especially in religious matters, were being developed; but in the new turn given to things by the breaking down of the middle wall in Christ, the manifold wisdom of God was shown in transforming many of these most diverse elements, unifying them, building them up into a great spiritual body, into a holy, most beautiful, most symmetrical temple—the church. When all things seem to be flying asunder into the most diverse and antagonistic elements, God gives a new turn, as it were, to providence, and lo! a glorious symmetrical and harmonious structure begins to rise.

7. How did God accomplish his plan? (3:11) What does this mean to us? (3:12) Do you feel the freedom and have the confidence to approach God directly? You, yourself with no intermediary? Boldly, without hesitation?

Quite simply, God accomplished his eternal plan through Christ Jesus. The effective headship of Christ over a united church is in preparation for his ultimate assumption of headship over the universe. The phrase, “in Christ Jesus,” is the constantly returning indication of the element in which the whole scheme of grace had its beginning, its progress, and its end.

“Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.” [NLT] Do you feel the freedom and have the confidence to approach God directly? You, yourself with no intermediary? Boldly, without hesitation?

8. Paul's first prayer in Ephesians (1:15-23) was that his readers and listeners would have spiritual understanding. In general, what is this second prayer for? (3:14-21)

Here Paul is praying for spiritual growth and empowerment. He also wants his readers and listeners “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that *surpasses* knowledge (his first prayer).

This section (prayer) resumes what Paul started to say in the first verse of the chapter.

9. What is the first thing that Paul requested of the Father? (3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 4:16)

He prayed that the Father “may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” The NLT reads, “that he will empower you through inner strength through his Spirit.¹⁷ Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.

2 Corinthians 4:16 – Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are

wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

These two verses (and others) suggest that we are being strengthened and renewed every day because of the flame of resurrection burning within us.

This is another place where we see the actions of the triune God: the Father hearing and answering our prayers with the power of the Holy Spirit in us and, with faith, Christ also dwelling in our hearts (*hearts* meaning the whole inner being).

10. What is your understanding of Christ's love for you?

11. What does the love of Christ surpass? To what will your life now conform? (3:19, Galatians 2:20)

3:19 – May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. [NLT] Christ's love, Paul says, surpasses knowledge and understanding. The Pulpit Commentary adds, "it is infinite, not to be grasped by mortal man, and therefore always presenting new fields to be explored, new depths to be fathomed. Christ's love, in the sense of an inward personal experience of it – its freeness, its tenderness, its depth, its patience – is the great dynamic of the gospel. This love is transmuted into spiritual force."

The second part of this verse, "Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God" [NLT] means that now that you as a believer have the presence of Christ in you and he will conform you to his image.

Galatians 2:20 – My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [NLT]

12. How did Paul close his prayer? (3:20-21) How does this doxology serve as a fitting conclusion to the doctrine he presented in the first three chapters? How does this doxology encourage you? Do you have a favorite doxology? Why do you especially like it? Do you include a doxology in your personal prayers?

Paul closed this prayer with a doxology as he closed most of his prayers. A doxology is a short formula of praises to God at the end of prayers, canticles, psalms, and hymns. The tradition derives from a similar practice in the Jewish synagogue.

Paul is asking a lot of God in these first three chapters of the letter but by saying that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, he refers to the matters he raised but says that God is not limited to these and might do even more.

"To him be glory," is the ultimate goal of our existence. By saying, "in the church and in Christ Jesus," Paul puts forth a remarkable parallel. God has called the church (the community of believers) to an extraordinary position and vocation. To be a member of this community of believers—the church—is an extraordinary honor—and challenge!

Some assorted doxologies:

- As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. (Gloria Patri)
- Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now, and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. (Gloria Patri, Orthodox English version)

- Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise him, all creatures here below; Praise him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen. (The Common Doxology or the Old 100th)
- For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen. (Lord's Prayer doxology from the Book of Common Prayer)
- Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)
- Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. And blessed be His glorious name forever; And may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen. (Psalm 72:18-19)
- But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)
- May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5-6)
- The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)
- (May) the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)