

Ephesians 3:1-13

In v. 1, Paul begins a statement ("*For this reason*") that is interrupted in v. 2 and not resumed until v. 14 ("*For this reason*"). The intervening verses form a parenthesis, the theme of which is the mystery—Christ and the church.

"For this reason," refers to what (v. 1)? It looks back to what Paul had just been saying in the first two chapters about God's blessings that are now the possession of both Gentile and Jewish believers. It is a reminder of the place of privilege into which believing Gentiles are brought as a result of their union with Christ.

Who does Paul consider himself to be a prisoner of (v. 1)? Christ -- rather than a prisoner of Nero or Rome.

According to Paul why was he in Prison? On behalf of the Gentiles; not because he did something wrong, got framed, persecuted or deserved it. This imprisonment had resulted from his service for Christ, specifically his missionary efforts on behalf of the Gentiles for which the Jews had mobbed him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30). Thus, the apostle regarded his imprisonment as God's will for him.²

Application: Have you ever been in prison? Imprisoned by a job, a relationship, by a particular sin?

What was the administration of God's grace that was given to Paul (vv. 2-4)? A revelation of the mystery of Christ. He had not learned the mystery from anyone else, nor had he discovered it through his own intelligence. It was made known to him by direct revelation from God. Paul had previously alluded to the mystery in Chapter 2.

"Administration" refers to a stewardship. A steward is one who is appointed to administer the affairs of someone else. Paul was God's steward, charged with setting forth the great truth regarding the New Testament church.³

Application: Paul was very much aware of God's grace in his life. Where do you see evidence of God's grace at work in your life?

How does Paul explain what this mystery is (v. 5)? First, it is a truth which in other ages was not made known to men. This means it is futile to look for it in the Old Testament. There may be types and pictures of it there, but the truth itself was unknown at that time.

Second, it is a truth which has now been revealed by the Holy Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. God was the Revealer; the apostles and prophets were the ones set apart to receive the revelation; the Holy Spirit was the channel through whom the revelation came to them.⁴

What exactly was the mystery (v. 6)? Through the message of the Gospel, God has joined Jews and Gentiles as equals in one new body, which is the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). As a result, Jews and Gentiles are "*heirs together with Israel*" of God's riches, i.e., as far as the inheritance is concerned, saved Gentiles share equally with saved Jews. They are "*members together of one body*" i.e., they share a position of equality with saved Jews in the church. And they are "*sharers together in the promise*" i.e., whoever trusts in Him has everlasting life (John 3:16; et al.). Gentiles are copartners with Jews in all of this. God showed Paul His plan for a church composed of converted Jews and converted Gentiles.

How did Paul describe his own ministry (v. 7)? He was a servant of the Gospel which he considered to be a gift of God's grace and power. God graciously gave Paul the opportunity to serve Him by proclaiming the gospel ("*the gift of God's grace given me*"), aided by God's supernatural enablement ("*the working of His power*").

What was Paul's self-evaluation (v. 8a)? Paul considered himself the "least" worthy of all God's people to be a recipient of God's grace to preach the Gospel. Actually, this is the true self-estimate of one who is filled by the Holy Spirit. Anyone who sees Christ in His glory realizes his own sinfulness and uselessness. In Paul's case there was the added memory that he had persecuted the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:4) by persecuting the church of God (Galatians 1:13). When we consider Paul's personal history, we see that his calling truly was a calling of grace.

What does this say about Paul's character? It was a sign of humility and spiritual maturity. The clearer your vision is of God, the clearer you see your own sinfulness and the lack of any value you have in and of yourself.

What was Paul's calling.....the purpose of God's grace (v. 8b)? To focus his preaching on the unsearchable riches of Christ and to direct the Gospel message toward his primary audience – the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-8).

It's as if Paul tried to figure out the greatness of God's grace, and started tracing it out as one might trace out the shore of a lake. He soon discovered that it wasn't a lake at all, but an ocean, an immeasurable sea. God's riches are unsearchable; we will never know them completely.

What was Paul's mission as he described it (v. 9)? The second part of Paul's ministry, besides preaching to the Gentiles, was explaining to everyone the mystery of the church being worked out in practice. God's plan for this present age is to call out of the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14), a Bride for His Son.

This mystery had from the beginning of the ages been hidden in God. The plan was itself in the mind of God eternally, but here the thought is that He kept it a secret throughout the ages of human history.

It was not known before to anyone but God. The secret was hidden in God who created all things. He created the material universe, He created the ages, and He created the church—but in His wisdom He decided to withhold any knowledge of this new creation until the First Advent of Christ.⁵

What was Paul's intent (v. 10)? His intent was to reveal God's manifold wisdom to the angelic hosts of heaven. Paul again uses the metaphor of a school. God is the Teacher. The universe is the classroom. Angels – both faithful and fallen - are the students. The lesson is on "The manifold wisdom of God." The church is the object lesson. From heaven the angels are compelled to admire His unsearchable judgments and marvel at His ways that are past finding out. They see how God has triumphed over sin to His own glory. As the angelic hosts witness the church, they must admit that having Jews and Gentiles in one body is evidence of God's wisdom.⁶

This explains *how* God will reveal His wisdom, and to *whom* He reveals it. He will reveal it *by* His work in the church, and He will reveal it *to* angelic beings ("*rulers and authorities*"). This means that angelic beings are *interested* and *instructed* by the lives of Christians. This is why the conduct of the church is so important: because angelic and demonic beings are looking on, and God's intent is to teach them through us.

What was God's "eternal purpose" (v. 11)? To reveal His wisdom through the church, i.e., the headship of Christ over a united church. Before the world was made, God knew Satan would fall and man would follow him in sin. And He had already prepared a counterstrategy, a master plan. The whole program centered in Christ and has been realized through Him. Now God can save ungodly Jews and Gentiles, make them members of the Body of Christ, conform them to the image of His Son, and honor them in a unique way as the Bride of the Lamb throughout eternity.⁷

What is the result of Christ's work (v. 12)? We now have the unspeakable privilege of freely entering into God's presence at any time, in full confidence of being heard, and without any fear of being scolded. And it is all through our faith in Jesus Christ.

What is Paul's message (v 13)? God had entrusted Paul with the mystery of the church, and had given him the ministry of evangelizing the Gentiles. "*Therefore,*" his Ephesian readers should not view his present imprisonment as a tragedy, but simply as part of his ministry. His ministry was for them and for their "*glory,*" so they should view his "*sufferings*" as part of God's good will for him and for them (Philippians 1:7).⁸ If Paul had not dispensed to the Gentiles the truth of the Gospel, then Jews would not have been hostile to him and he would not have been imprisoned. The last thing Paul wanted was people to feel sorry for him because he was imprisoned. He wanted his readers to realize that it was a benefit for them that he was a prisoner.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1925). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Ephesians, 2019 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 64

³ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1925). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ Ibid. p. 1926

⁵ Ibid. p. 1928

⁶ Hoehner, H. W. (1985). *Ephesians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 630). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1928). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Ephesians, 2019 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 75