

## Ephesians 3

Ephesians 3:1-3

1For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

2Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

STRUCTURE of Ephesians 3

Paul starts a prayer in Eph 1:1, interrupts it, and returns to the prayer in verse 14, when he repeats the expression “for this reason.”

The digression from prayer (verses 1-13) discusses Paul's distinctive ministry to the Gentiles. At verse 13, he wraps up the digression by making reference to his sufferings. The reference to being “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (v. 1) and the mention of his sufferings due to his prison conditions, are used as an opening and closing framework. When he mentions his prison conditions again, it marks the end of the digression, and Paul continues the prayer again in verse 14.

vv 2-12 confirm and explain the words “a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.” This “digression” leads on to the prayer vv. 14-19 in which the one who intercedes for them is their apostle who undergoes tribulation on their behalf” (O'Brien, p. 225)

## Ephesians 3—Paul & Ministry

V. 1 — **1For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—**

**For this reason** – because Jews and Gentiles are no longer separate.

**I, Paul, the prisoner** — gives a clue to his location at writing. “The prisoner” emphasizes that it's well-known, or common knowledge that Paul is in prison.

**of Christ Jesus** —Remember that nothing happens apart from the will of the God of Christ Jesus.

**For the sake of you Gentiles** – whole reason for imprisonment was due to the protest of the Jews regarding his actions toward the Gentiles.

Paul spent 4 years in prison: 2 years in Caesarea, and 2 years in Rome. It was all because of his ministry to the Gentiles. See Acts chapters 23-28. (Hoehner, p. 420)

V. 2 — **Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,**

Paul considers himself privileged to be part of a ministry that is wrapped up in the administration of God's grace.

**the administration of God's grace** — This could include: A) the grace shown to Paul in his conversion, B) the grace shown to him when he was called to be an apostle, C) the grace of God's plan to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles, using Paul to carry out that administration.

V. 3 — **3that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.**

**Mystery**—Secret Revealed by God “... a revealed secret to be understood by all believing people and not just a few elite” (Hoehner, p. 426).

Christianity is NOT a Mystery Religion or Secret Order:

“They mysteries of the mystery religions were secrets known only to initiates, whereas the mystery in the present context is made known not only to Paul but also to the apostles and prophets (v. 5), to all people (v. 9), and to all rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (v. 10).” (Hoehner, p. 427)

In Ephesians 1:9-10, the mystery referred to “God's all-inclusive purpose which has as its goal the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Here, a more limited dimension to the mystery focuses on Gentiles, along with Jews, being incorporated into the body of Christ and thus participating in the divine salvation” (O'Brien, p. 228)

## Ephesians 3:4 — Insight into the Mystery of Christ ...

### **Ephesians 3:4-6**

4In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5which 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. 6This 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.

"...the mystery is not that Gentiles would be saved because the OT gives evidence of their salvation, but rather that believing Jews and Gentiles are together in Christ. This concept was revolutionary for Jews and Gentiles alike."

Hoehner, p. 448

### V. 4 — ***In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ***

***In reading this*** — In verse 3, Paul said, "***as I have briefly written.***" This may refer to another letter sent to the Ephesians. It most likely refers to the earlier part of this letter: Ephesians 1:9-10 and 2:11-22, especially vv. 15-16, that refers to the creation of one "new man" in Christ.

***You will be able to understand my insight*** — The importance of Paul's letter for the Ephesians then, and for Christians today, is emphasized by this statement. The Word of God revealed in Scripture so we can understand our relationship with God and with fellow believers in Christ.

***into the mystery of Christ*** — This is the mystery of Christ as O'Brien succinctly summarizes it. "Gentiles, formerly kept apart from Jews by the barrier of the law, were now able to benefit from God's saving act in Christ and to be incorporated in him along with Jews. Ephesians 3 emphasizes this aspect of the 'secret' that has been revealed." (O'Brien, p. 231)

### V. 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***

***in other generations*** — Reference to the Old Testament era.

***as it has now been revealed*** — that God's blessing of the Gentiles would involve the obliteration of the old line of demarcation which separated them from Jews and the incorporation of Gentile believers together with Jewish believers, without any discrimination, in the new, comprehensive community of God's chosen people" (Bruce, p. 314)

"This mystery was not known before the NT era. Only after the death of Christ was it revealed to the holy apostles and prophets by means of the Holy Spirit. Verse 3-5 clearly show that the mystery was not revealed to Paul alone but also to the apostles and prophets. Furthermore, the mystery was revealed to the apostles and prophets, not by Paul, but by the Holy Spirit. .... It was the apostle Paul's responsibility to disseminate this mystery to Gentiles." (Hoehner, p. 444)

**FOCUS of Verses 4 and 5:** Paul encourages people to read (and listen). If you read it, you will understand it. We have a calling from God to be active listeners.



## Ephesians 3:5-6 — Gentiles & Jews Are Members of One Body in Christ

V. 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.***

***through the Gospel*** — The Gospel is the tool God used to make this mystery known. The Gospel is the means of grace.

“Thus, the gospel not only declares what is God’s gracious plan, announcing the content of the mystery of Christ; it is also the instrument by which God achieves his purposes of bringing Gentiles to faith and incorporating them into his Son. It is through the active proclamation of the gospel that God draws men and women to himself (cf. 2 Thess. 2:14).” (O’Brien, p. 236)

***Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel*** - The mystery revealed is that the Gospel was for Jews and Gentiles. The Gospel is the instrument that God used to make this mystery known.

***Sharers together in the promise*** — through the gospel, Gentiles are heirs of the promised salvation together with the children of God; heirs of eternal life.

***in Christ Jesus*** — Christ is the sphere in which Gen-

tiles are made heirs together with Israel. In Christ, and in Christ alone, Gentiles inherit the promises that were made to Abraham. ***In Christ Jesus*** — See Excursus A ***the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus***

“The mystery or open secret of Christ is ‘the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ. It is this double union, with Christ and with each other, which is the substance of the “mystery”’ (Stott, quoted by O’Brien, p. 236)

“the mystery is not that Gentiles would be saved because the OT gives evidence of their salvation, but rather that believing Jews and Gentiles are together in Christ. This concept was revolutionary for Jews and Gentiles alike” (Hoehner, p. 448).

***The Oneness of Believers in Christ***: Verse 6 emphasizes the oneness of believers in Christ. This is not some humanistic oneness. This isn’t something that we manufacture in a human way. It is something that we strive to express and “bring to bear” (NT Wright phrase) on the world around us. It is through the Gospel that this unity, and oneness is revealed and made known to us.

### The Word Preached & Written Connects Us to Christ & One Another

Paul emphasizes his ministry to the Gentiles. Through this ministry he used his preaching and the Word to reveal the mystery of the gospel in Christ. There is a central reason for this emphasis. The Word connects us to Christ. “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” (Eph 1:13)

In Ephesians 2, Paul emphasized that the Ephesians are “fellow citizens” with the people of God, and part of God’s household. That household is built on the Word of God.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Eph 2:19-20)

Now, in Ephesians 3, Paul emphasizes the way that the Word of God is a means of grace that gives understanding

into God’s plan of salvation. “In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4).

Through preaching, Paul revealed the unsearchable riches of Christ. This is how he made plain the administration of God’s grace. “This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8)

Paul preached the gospel because the message was also the means; “through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel ... sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:6)

Considering Paul’s emphasis on the Word of God, hearing the word of truth, preaching the gospel, and being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, we see the importance of the Gospel as a means of grace to create and strengthen faith.

Contrast the above with this statement from Mc Neil in *The Present Future*.

He says that we focus on the Bible because the thing-in-itself (God) is beyond us. Mc Neil thinks that hinders our relationship with God; emphasis on the Word puts us on a head-trip and keeps us from true “intimacy with God.”

“Contrast this to the quest of medieval mystics who sought and attained personal intimacy with God. In a premodern (and postmodern) world there was not the interposition of text between the soul and God, nor did spiritual maturity rely so much on human reason’s ability to grasp, understand and explain. .... North American Church is on a head trip ... We have rational faith.” (p. 55, *The Present Future*)

God reveals the Gospel of Christ through Scripture so we have a relationship with God and one another in Christ. Far from hindering, the Word of God creates and sustains this relationships.

## Ephesians 3:7 — Servant of the Gospel by the Gift of God's Grace Given Me

### Ephesians 3:7-9

7I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8Although 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, 9and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

### Paul is All God's Doing

- God's election
- God's call
- God's conversion of Paul
- God's enabling power
- God called him to be an apostle
- God sustained him by His grace

### Structure—Verse 7

Verse 7 wraps up the thought grouping started in Verse 2, with the emphasis on "grace" as the book-ends, or inclusion, bracketing verses 2-7. This also prepares the way for the statement in verse 8. The only way you can make sense of the revelation of this mystery to him, the incorporation of the Gentiles into the body of Christ, and Paul's commission, is due to the overflowing grace of God.

### By the Gift of God's Grace

1 Corinthians 15:10 10But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

V. 7—*7I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.*

*I became.* I changed into a servant.

*Servant* — (diakonos), minister. No Article, stressing willing service. "It is used 29 times in the NT, twenty-one times by Paul, and twice in Ephesians (3:7; 6:21). It is used of a "waiter" at a wedding feast (John 2:5, 9), a servant of a king (Matt 22:13), a disciple who is a servant of Christ (Matt 20:26 = Mark 10:43-44 = Luke 22:26), a minister (2 Cor 3:6; Col 1:23), and a "deacon" of a church (1 Tim 3:8, 12). It is a synonym of (doulos, slave), which emphasizes the servile relationship of a servant to a master, whereas (diakonos) emphasizes the activity of a servant." (Hoehner, p. 449)

*servant* - servants through whom God works See 1 Cor 1:5 5What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants (diakonoi), through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

*By the gift of God's grace*— in line with the gift of Gods grace.

*gift* – used eleven times in NT, 5 times by Paul, 2 times in Ephesians (3:7; 4:7). "it always refers to a gift that God graciously gives. It is a gift; thus it is un-earned or undeserved, for which there can be no payment. In the present context it is the gift of the grace of God that was given to Paul" (Hoehner, p. 450).

*grace* – see v. 2. God's unmerited, undeserved favor. By grace God gives us the unmerited favor of salvation for the sake of Christ alone, though his sacrificial death (Rom 3:23-34; Eph 1:7, 2:8). It also shows the enabling power that God provides for the believer to perform the tasks which God gives him (1 Cor 15:10; Eph 4:7, 29).

"Just as nothing short of Gods' mighty intervention could transform him from being a persecutor into a Christian, so it took the same almighty and effective working to make him into a 'servant of the gospel'. Secondly, since both 'working' and 'power' in other contexts draw attention to the ongoing mighty work of God, here the apostle is focusing not simply upon God's powerful working in grace to *commission* him. The expression also points to his ever-present consciousness that day by day he experiences 'the operation of his power' in the *fulfillment* of his missionary calling. It was not only in God's initial call but also in the subsequent enabling that he knows of the divine power operating mightily within him. This is the explicit point he makes in the parallel passage (Col. 1:29) and elsewhere in his writings, notably 1 Cor 15:10" (O'Brien, p. 239).

given me through the working of his power. — The Word "given" emphasizes the grace characteristic. "through the working of his power" emphasizes that it took the very creative, saving power of God to make Paul a servant of the gospel. All glory be to God alone! 1) It took God's power, and 2) it was a gift.

It's a gift to be a servant of the gospel. It's a "miracle" of God's effective, saving power. The amazing grace of God at work made Paul a minister of the Gospel.

SUMMARY: "Paul was made a minister of the gospel and was able to carry out this awesome responsibility by the gracious gift of unmerited favor of enablement that was given to him. That enablement corresponded to the activity of God's dynamic ability to convey the mystery. God does not give responsibility without the provision of his power to carry it out. In the end God is to be praised, for humans can neither initiate nor accomplish the work in their own power" (Hoehner, p. 451).

## Ephesians 3:8-9 — Grace Given Me to Preach to the Gentiles

**V. 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,***

***Although I am less than the least of all God's people*** — Paul is leaster, 'less than the least. Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, enemy and persecutor of the church. "he has in view here his violent persecution of the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9). His repeated, specific references to his role as a persecutor reveal his consciousness of sin" (O'Brien, p. 240).

***all God's people*** — literally all of the holy ones, all of the saints. All God's people are saints in Christ Jesus.

**Morbid Self Focus? Incurvatus Se?** — This is not a morbid preoccupation with sin. Paul goes on to emphasize the amazing grace of God.

***this grace was given me*** — Paul is referring to the "grace" given him to "preach to the Gentiles." The *general* grace that made Paul a follower of Christ and gave him salvation in Christ, also resulted in the *special* grace whereby Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

***To preach [the good news] to the Gentiles*** — the word translated as "preach" actually means to "preach the good news." Good news! Your God reigns. Sin, death, and the devil do not reign. Evil powers and principalities don't call the shots. Christ reigns over the power of sin and death, by his life, death and resurrection. He frees us from our sin to live the resurrection life in his presence. Good news!

***the unsearchable riches of Christ*** — unsearchable, in comprehensible. Someone tries to search but gets lost in a maze. ***Unsearchable riches*** — "Revelation creates rather than annihilates wonder, awe and respect" ... "The god who has been comprehended ... is always an idol." (O'Brien, p. 242).

It's a gift to preach the Gospel. The same amazing grace that enabled Paul to do this also enables us. Proclaim the incomprehensible riches and mysteries of Christ. Proclaim it, you don't need to try to explain it.

**V. 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.***

***and to make plain*** — "it is an explanation to enable the recipients to understand the mystery that is being disclosed" (Hoehner, p. 455).

***to everyone*** — to Jew and Gentile, all nations.

***the administration of this mystery*** — the management plan is God's plan. Paul wants to make plain how "God chose to accomplish his purpose" (O'Brien, p. 243). The mystery is revealed in Christ, and proclaimed through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

***"was kept hidden in God"*** — Until Christ came, God's plan was a mystery, hidden from the nations. "Through the blood of Christ" (2:13) and "through the cross" (2:16) God has revealed the plan to reconcile all nations (Jew and Gentile) "to God through the cross. Now Christ makes plain how we are reconciled to God "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (2:18).

***for ages*** — Old Testament time. See [Colossians 1:26](#) 25I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

***in God*** — Since God is creator of all, man can recognize by nature that God exists, yet the full mystery was hidden.

***who created all things*** — The God who created all things also created the plan to redeem his creation from sin. "God has not changed; nor is he abandoning his first creation by forming a new creation in Christ. Salvation and the unity of the Jew and Gentile in Christ have always been his purpose (see on 1:9-10); his creation of heaven and earth was an important step in the fulfillment of that plan. And he who created all things in the beginning with this goal in mind will consummate his work of re-creation on the final day when he brings all things together in unity in his Son, the Lord Jesus (1:10)" (O'Brien, p. 244)

### Reflecting on God's Plan — Ephesians 3

1. What was Paul's mission in life? (Eph 3:1-9)
2. What is your mission in life as an individual Christian?
3. What is your mission in life as a member of the body of Christ? (Eph 3:10-21)
  - In prayer—pray that others be strengthened in their inner being.
  - In helping others know the love of Christ (v. 19)
  - Giving God glory



## Ephesians 3:10 — Through the Church the Manifold Wisdom of God Made Known

### **Ephesians 3:10-13**

10His 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, 11according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”  
Eph 3:12

V. 10 — **10His 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**

**Now**—the chosen time had come. The now time begins with the inception of the church, the time when Jew and Gentile form one body in Christ.

**Through the church** — The church is the agent by which God’s plan of salvation, as worked out makes known to the “rulers and authorities” the wisdom of God. Part of that wisdom seems to be the effect that Christ’s suffering and death has on mankind, upon the church.

**The manifold wisdom of God** — Manifold is many-sided, with many angles. It can mean variegated, many-coloured, like a garland of flowers (as used in Greek poetry). “In our present context ... this variegated wisdom has particular reference to God’s richly diverse ways of working which led to a multiracial, multi-cultural community being united as fellow-members in the body of Christ” (O’Brien, p. 245).



See Excursus B, p. 12, for more about the manifold wisdom of God.

**Should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms** — The heavenly places are the places or “dimension’ where angelic beings (good and evil) reside and operate over the human world. Even though the angels are beyond us in many respects, they did not know the details of the manifold wisdom of God’s plan of salvation.. 1 Peter 1:12 [vv10-11; prophets tried to figure out what God was doing, but didn’t know either] “**It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.**”

Angels are interested in God’s plan of salvation. They rejoice over one who repents (Luke 15). Their whole being is tied up with God’s plan of salvation. Angels are invested with powers that are beyond our human limitations, but they are not omniscient. Through the church, as the intended result of God’s plan of salvation, God’s manifold wisdom is revealed. **Hebrews 1:14**Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

## Rulers and Authorities in Heavenly Realms

“In 6:12 these residents of the heavenlies have been identified as evil rulers who are in conflict with believers, thus indicating that this is not a physical but a spiritual warfare. On the other hand, the reference in 1:21 could refer to either good or evil authorities and this does not help to determine their character in the present passage. It is not acceptable to conclude, however, that since they are evil in 6:12 they must be exclusively so in

the present verse. In Ephesians the term “heavenlies” refers to the source of the believers’ spiritual benefits (1:3), where Christ presently resides at the right hand of the Father (1:20), and where believers are positionally raised and seated with Christ (2:6). Hence, the heavenlies is the place where both good and evil leaders reside and attempt to influence humans. Such a concept may be difficult to understand, but in fact it is parallel to the

idea that there are good and evil humans living together on earth. .... God and Satan are seen conversing with one another in heaven (Job 1:6-12) and a struggle between good and evil angels is portrayed in heaven and on earth (Dan 10:13, 20). Therefore, it seems acceptable to suppose that both good and evil beings are being informed of the manifold wisdom of God.” (Hoehner, p. 460)

## Ephesians 3:10-13 — God Finished His Eternal Plan in Christ Jesus Our Lord

### V. 11 — *according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**according to his eternal purpose** — in line with the purpose. This includes what we recognize as good and that which his bad. All this is a part of God's purpose. Need to remember that when things don't go like we think they should. "not the result of a last minute idea which God had" (Hoehner, p. 463)

**Eternal purpose** — Literally the purpose *of the ages* — . It's the purpose that has lasted, the eternal purpose. "Right in line with the way God laid out the ages of the earth's history" (Hoehner, p. 463).

**Which he accomplished** — This shows that the purpose is not mere chance but God is doing it.

**In Christ Jesus our Lord** — All that God does is in Christ Jesus. The ages all revolve around the Savior, Messiah. The Lord rules all for us (1:22) The full title is used "to enhance the idea that God's purpose was accomplished in the historical Jesus when he died on the cross about thirty years before the Ephesians received this letter or about two thousand years ago for the present day believer. The preposition indicates sphere or locale in which God's purpose was fulfilled" (Hoehner, p. 464).

**Emphasis on Four Things** — "this title shows four things (1) his Lordship ("Jesus is Lord" was an early confession of the church, Acts 2:36; 8:16; 10:36; 11:17; 19:5; Rom 10:9; 14:9; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11); (2) his name ("Jesus"); (3) his title ("Christ") which is more than just a name, because it denotes that he is the promised Messiah who would bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles and make it possible for both to be created into one new person; and (4) his personal relationship to believers ("our Lord")" (Hoehner, p. 464).

**SUMMARY:** Nothing happens by chance all is right in line with God's plan for our salvation. What God has made know by his accomplishment in the church reveals an eternal plan that God has had all along. God planned it and accomplished it in Christ.

### 12 *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

**In him** - In union with Christ that we have this confident access to God. Centrality of Christ emphasized.

**Literal translation:** "In him we have freedom [freedom of speak] and entrance [right to enter] before God with confidence through faith in him. This literal translation emphasizes the present and ongoing privilege given to us through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. **We have**— present and ongoing. **Freedom**—This is freedom of speech; it's openness, speaking freely, concealing nothing

(Mark 8:32; John 7:4, 13, 26, etc, Hoehner, p. 465). **an entrance** — Free access to God (cf, Heb 10:19-22). at all times and places, because in Christ heaven and earth are reunited, time and eternity interlock, and those in Christ may approach God freely. "Moses' and Davids' frankness with God (e.g. Exod 32:11-13; 33:12-23; Pss 6, 13, 69) and Jesus' honesty at Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-44 = Mark 14:32-39 = Luke 22:40-44) are illustrations of boldness and confidence before God" (Hoehner, p. 4645)

We can do this **in confidence**. The above happens in confidence in our reliance upon Christ. "Without Christ they may shout rashly at him and go unheard but with Christ believers may speak boldly knowing that they will be heard" (Best, p. 329, Quoted by Hoehner, p. 465).

**Through faith** — The church has free access to God through faith in Christ's faithfulness. "...in their union with Christ [Jew & Gentile] presently *have* boldness and confident access to God that cannot be hindered by the hostile powers and authorities" (O'Brien, p. 249).

Heaven and earth are united and overlap in Christ. Those seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (2:6), are reconciled with God through faith in Christ. In Christ, heaven and earth overlap and are united.

**Summary:** "Gentiles were uncircumcised, alienated from the blessings of God, and were far off from God (2:11-13). Now they can come into God's presence with no fear and speak openly and frankly to him" (Hoehner, p. 467).

### V. 13 — *13I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

Draws conclusion from the foregoing verses 2-12. If the Ephesians understood what he had just shared with them, it will be possible for them to comply with the following request.

"Paul has written about the eternal purposes of God, the place of his Gentile readers within the divine plan, as well as his own role in relation to it. God had appointed him to enlighten them about the mystery, and as a result he undergoes suffering for them. In view of so momentous a task given to him in his calling, they are entreated not to become disheartened at his sufferings, which he undergoes on their behalf" (O'Brien, p. 250f).

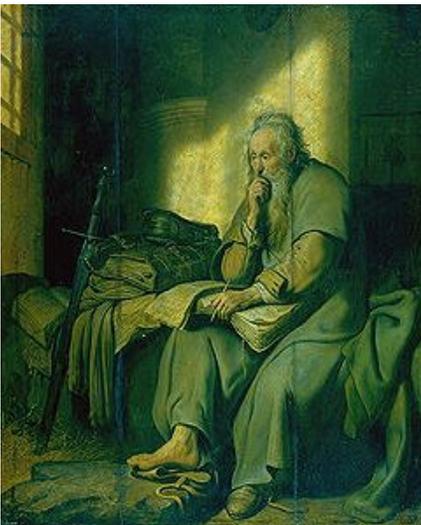
**My sufferings**— Paul's imprisonment. After his arrest and trial in Jerusalem, some Jews attempted to take his life. He was taken to Caesarea (Acts 23:12-35). That's when some Jewish leaders asked him to be taken to Jerusalem to be tried, but Paul requested to have his case taken to Caesar (Acts 24:1-25:11) and that is when he was sent to Rome (Acts 27-28). He incurred this ... "because of his ministry among Gentiles, including the Ephesians" (Hoehner, p. 469)

## Ephesians 3:14-15 — Kneeling Before the Father ...

### Ephesians 3:14-19

14For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

“The Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name” Eph 3:14,15



Rembrandt: Paul, Prisoner of Christ Jesus. 1627, Oil on panel, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart

Vv. 14-15 — **14For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.**

In v. 12 had shown why Paul can approach God, and so Paul kneels. I kneel (I bow my knees). Shows humility over against God’s power. This is an ongoing, continuous action. Paul is bold (see 3:12), but not brash. Paul shows reverent submission, solemnity, adoration.

**I kneel** — This is what a person would do before a dignitary. It also shows worship and submission before a supernatural power. See Ezra 9:5,15; Isaiah 45:23 and Phil 2:10 Ezra 9:5, 15 5 Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God ... 15 O LORD, God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence.” Isaiah 45:23 23 By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. Philippians 2:10 10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

**for this reason** — “This reason, encompasses Paul’s discourse in 2:11-22, namely, the unity of the Jews and Gentiles in Christ as one “new person.” (Hoehner, p. 472). Paul could have started this prayer right after 2:11-22, but the digression in 3:2-13 makes the prayer even more forceful.

**Before the Father** — Term of intimacy, term that has tones of dignity and authority. “A father not only sought the good of his family but also ruled the clan or family unit. ‘When Jews spoke of God as Father, they meant he ruled the world which owed him its obedience’ (Turner, 1235)” (O’Brien, p. 255)

**15from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.**

**from whom**—expresses unity as believers and origin from which the name comes. **whole family OR every family?** — In classical Greek *pasa* (πασα) is every. In koine *passa* (πασα) is “whole.” If taken as **every family**, it emphasizes that God rules over every family, every class of being. The good and rebellious, every family on earth, or in heaven, Christians and unbelievers, good angels and fallen angels. In this sense, good and bad alike “...owe their origin to God, while every family on earth speaks of family groups and so of the basic structures of human relationships which own their existence to him” (O’Brien, p. 256). If taken as “**whole family**” it emphasizes the Family of Believers. The NIV translation “**whole family**” refers to the communion of saints, saints below and saints above.

**whole family seems best** — Stoeckhardt supports the NIV translation for reasons of A) Context, B) Theology. “To call God “AllFather,” “Father of all,” or “the Father of all angels and men” is certainly incongruous in this connection; for the Apostle is not praying for temporal, natural blessings and gifts, but for spiritual advancement. Moreover, according to these modern commentators Paul here calls God Father in a sense which he never employs in this or any other Letter.” (Stoeckhardt, p. 167,168)

**In heavens and on earth** —Not just believers on earth but also those in heaven. Believers in heaven and on earth are part of one family.

**derives its name** — Is named. Given unique expression in baptism. God put His name on the child and that’s where His blessings will rest; cf. Exodus 2:24.

**Wherever I place my name there my blessing rests on them.** We are God’s heirs.

## Ephesians 3:16-19 — Prayer for Strength and to Grasp and Know the Love of Christ

**V. 16 — I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,**

Purpose of Paul's Prayer: Paul prays that the Holy Spirit would strengthen the Jew & Gentile in proportion with the riches of God's glory.

**His glorious riches** — Unlimited resource. Paul prays for the Ephesians to be strengthened to the level of God's glory.

**He may strengthen you**—God is the one who will strengthen them. This is not a self-endowed strength, self-achieved strength, but something God performs **out of his glorious riches**

**through his Spirit** — By his Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. It is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace.

“This is not new or unusual, for already in the first prayer (1:15-23) Paul prayed that believers might know God's power that he directs toward them. Hence, it is through God's Spirit that the believer is to be strengthened with God's ability to act” (Hoehner, p. 478)

**in your inner being** — Shows where this strengthening occurs, in the inner being (Cf. Eph 4:24; 2 Cor 4:13-18). Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. “This ... includes the entire inner life of man, his emotions, thoughts, and will, which in a Christian has been renewed and sanctified through the Spirit.” (Stoekhardt, p. 169).

**Vv. 17- 18 — 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,**

**Paul prays** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Paul asked for them to be strengthened (v.16), and now he prays for how they will be strengthened; he prays for Christ to dwell in their hearts. “To be empowered by the Spirit in the inner person means that Christ himself dwells in their hearts” (O'Brien, p. 258).

**Hearts**—center of being, where a person is enlightened (1:18), and is motivated to obey (6:5). It can be hardened in those who are alienated from life with God (4:18). This focus of the indwelling of Christ is on the individual rather than the corporate indwelling of Eph 2:21-22. The entire Holy Trinity is involved.

**Rooted and established in love**— Rooted is an agricultural image, established (founded) is architectural.

**In love**— whose love? A) Christ's Love, B) God's love for us in Christ, or C) Believer's Love. All we are and do

is **rooted** and **established** in love because God chose, predestined, and redeemed us. God made us a heritage, sealed us with the Spirit, made us alive, raised us with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realm. God reconciled us within the body of Christ. So loved by God, our life proceeds from love. God loved us. This love is basis for the next prayer.

**18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,**

**“wide and long”** works well with architectural image of **established**. **“high and deep”** works well with the agricultural imagery of **rooted**.

Paul wants them to **grasp** (fully understand) the love of Christ for them and displayed among them. **with all the saints** — Not experience in isolation or with certain chosen, preferred saints with similar interests (political, intellectual, emotional, social). Rather, **all the saints**

**v. 19 — and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

**to know**— to know from experiential knowledge.

**love that surpasses knowing**—knowing from experience. How can you know a love that surpasses knowing? Paul prays for them to know a love of which there will always be more love to know. You will know this love **“with all the saints.”**

**Of Christ**—this is left out in the NIV translation. Did it seem “redundant” post verse 18? In verse 18 Paul wanted them to grasp the love of Christ, and now he prays for them to know the love of Christ.

**To be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God** —Knowing the full love of God (which surpasses knowing) would be to know the fullness of God. Paul is talking about knowing Christ's love. Paul's Prayer is that Christ might dwell in them by faith so that they might learn all that Christ's love means, and all the fabulous dimensions of Christ' love. Christians don't stop knowing Christ's love until filled with the fullness of God.

**with all the saints** — “This experiential knowledge of Christ's love is not only for individual believers but it is to be applied to the corporate unity. Unity of Jewish and Gentile believers is evidence of God's power. “A divided church, instead of being a sign of God's conquering power in Christ, reflects the negative message of a victory by the forces of evil.” The body of believers is to experience Christ's love” (Hoehner, p. 491).

## Ephesians 3:20-21 — To Him Who Is Able to Do Immeasurably More ...Be Glory!

### Ephesians 3:20-21

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.

+ + +

V. 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,**

**Now to him who is able** — Paul leads to a climax of doctrinal proportion. The conjunction (now) which he chose emphasizes this. It's God's doing that fills us with knowledge of his love. He is the one who is able to do this and immeasurably more. So it's not me that is the key to learning. Don't worry if you think you are dense, or still can't get it, focus on the One who is ABLE. God is able to get it done. There is no limit to what God can do.

**According to his power** (dynamyn) **that is at work** (energoumenen) - Think of something with dynamic power that God puts to work on our behalf. This is the God of power who is able to accomplish this in line with the things that he has already done.

**Immeasurably more than all** — superabundantly over all

**Than we ask or imagine** — The things that Paul has asked for (vv. 16-19) are great, but God can do far more than we ask; so Paul is expressing his confidence that they will be done. **Or imagine** (understand) — Not just what we ask but even what we think of. God is able to do beyond all that we ask or think of asking.

which is worked in us. We have already experienced it.

Paul tells us to look and see God's power in us. He elected us, he called us, redeemed us, sealed us. He has brought us to faith. He has called us into one body. Look at all he has done in us in Christ. (Eph 3:16-17)

Recall the power expressed in Eph 1:19ff. "Now that same power which raised Christ from the dead, enthroned him in the heavenlies, and then raised and enthroned us with him, is at work within us to achieve infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. In the doxology Paul thus praises God for the bestowal of strength by his Spirit on his people, and affirms that the full realization of God's gracious purposes for them and in them becomes possible" (O' Brien, p. 267).

V. 21 — **to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

**To him be glory** — the glory belongs to God. "In the Old Testament *doxa* was primarily the brightness or radiance of God's presence. To give God glory is not to add something to him; rather it is an active acknowledgement or extolling of who he is or what he has already done (Ps. 29:2; 96:8)" (O' Brien, p. 268)

**In the church and in Christ Jesus** — Praise God for what he has done in the Church (cf. 2:14-22; 3:10) and in the sphere of Christ Jesus (Eph 2:20-22). "God's glory *in the church* cannot be separated from his glory in *Christ Jesus*. This expression of incorporation signifies that believers are able to ascribe glory to God because they are 'in Christ Jesus' (see on 1:3). Just as 'every spiritual blessing' is given to us 'in Christ' (1:3), so our acknowledging the Father's glory is wholly dependent on Christ Jesus; it is rendered by those who have been incorporated into him. He is the mediator of God's activity to us, and the mediator of our response of praise to the Father. Just as our thanksgiving to God can only be given in the name of the Lord Jesus (5:20), so also glory can be ascribed to God only within the realm of Christ Jesus" (O'Brien, p. 269).

SUMMARY: "Praise is rendered for genuine reconciliation, not just cessation of hostility but genuine love for one another. Therefore, God is to be glorified in the church because his power and splendor are displayed there and he is glorified in Christ Jesus because Christ's work, which pleased the Father, made the church possible" (Hoehner, p. 495)

**Throughout all generations, for ever and ever** — all the generations emphasizes the temporal or earthly aspect of this praise. For ever and ever, eons upon eons, emphasizes the eternal, even "heavenly" aspect of this praise. Time and eternity is blended, throughout all generations, for ever and ever.

Amen – let it be. Yes. This is most certainly true. Amen is also a short way of saying, "repeat it again." Paul emphasizes this praise and invites the Ephesians to join. AMEN: 1) ends the prayer and doxology, and 2) concludes the doctrinal section of this letter. Fitting responds to the powerful message Paul has shared in the opening three chapters. As Paul began this letter (1:3), Paul urged the Ephesians to give all glory to God whose power assures us of every spiritual blessing, and so he ends. This is our song of praise now and forever! It's our assurance too.

**First Half of Letter is Over:** "Paul wants his readers to have a theological perspective on God's mighty saving purposes. He prays that they might be empowered by Christ through his Spirit, so that they might walk in love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us (5:2). They prayer and doxology of chapter 3 function in an important preparatory way for the subsequent admonitions to love in the second half of the letter" (O'Brien, p. 269-270)

## Excursus A — “In Christ” and Similar Phrases in Ephesians.

In Christ—*εν Χριστω*

1:3 ...who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. — Location

4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

In Christ Jesus—*εν Χριστω Ιησου*

1:1 To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2:6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

2:7 the might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,

2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ

3:6 and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen

In the Christ—*εν τω Χριστω*

1:10 to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (in the Christ).

1:12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ,

1:20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms

In the Christ Jesus—*εν τω Χριστω Ιησου*

3:11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Jesus—*εν τω Ιησου*

4:21 in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

In the Lord—*εν κυριω*

2:21 to become a holy temple in the Lord.

4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you ...

4:17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, ...

5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord,

6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord

6:21 Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, ...

In the Lord Jesus—*εν τω Κυριω Ιησου*

1:15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

In Him—*εν αυτω*

1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

1:9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ (In Him)

1:10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together [literally in him; probably left out because it seemed redundant. NIV translated it as “even” for sake of emphasis.] under one head, even Christ

2:15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,

2:16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which [most likely refers to cross; may also refer to Christ] he put to death their hostility.

4:21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him

In Whom—*εν ω*

1:7 In him [in whom] we have redemption through his blood,

1:11 In him [in whom] we were also chosen,

1:13 you also were included in Christ [in whom] when you heard the word of truth

1:13 Having believed, you were marked in him [in whom] with a seal,

2:21 In him [in whom] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

2:22 And in him [in whom] you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

3:12 In him [in whom] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom [in whom; who does this refer to? Christ or Holy Spirit?] you were sealed for the day of redemption

Other Expressions

1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

2:5 made us alive with Christ [in Christ]

2:13 you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ

List provided by Hoehner, pp. 173,174

## Excursus B—The Church Reveals the Manifold Wisdom of God

### **Ephesians 3:10-12**

10His 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, 11according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

+ + +

### **Made Known Through the Church**

Through the blood of Christ and the cross of Christ (Eph 2:13, 16) God carried out his plan. This plan is marked with “manifold wisdom” because it was able to bring together the manifold people on earth, of every tribe, nation, language and people and reconcile them in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The reconciliation of all nations on earth to God, through Christ is amazing. This has been put on display through the church. By its very existence, the church announces to the “rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” that God’s plan worked.

“Paul has in mind neither evangelism, social action, nor any other additional activity by God’s people. Instead, *through the church* signifies that the very existence of this new multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body is the manifestation of God’s richly diverse wisdom. Its presence is the means by which God himself discloses to the powers his own richly diverse wisdom. Later, the apostle will point out that this precious unity which has been won through Christ’s death is nothing short of ‘the unity of the Spirit’ which they are to be eager and zealous to maintain (4:3)” (O’Brien, p. 246)

The world of Christ and Paul, the world of Pontius Pilate and Herod, was a world of racial tension and distrust. Cities of the ancient Mediterranean world were a chaotic mixture of races, tribes, nations, and languages. The fear, and distrust that came with it was always there, rumbling under the surface, just waiting for some real or perceived wrong to set off a riot. People co-existed together, but they didn’t live in peace, even though the threat of death (the Roman sword) kept the lid on.

In contrast to the dark times and difficult living conditions, the Christian church was salt and light.

“The uniting of ‘Jews and Gentiles in Christ was ... God’s masterpiece of reconciliation, and gave promise of a time when not Jews and Gentiles only, but all the mutually hostile elements in creation, would be united in that same Christ’. The church is not only the pattern, but also the means God is using



to show his purposes are moving triumphantly to their climax” (O’Brien, p. 248).

### **To the Rulers and Authorities in the Heavenly Realms**

When Christ was crucified on the cross, he dealt the death-blow to the powers and principalities that rebelled against God. When Christ died it looked like Herod and Pilate triumphed. When Christ was crucified, it may have seemed as though the powers of injustice that sentenced an innocent man to death

had overcome God’s goodness, truth, and justice.

But the cross of Christ is the means by which Christ triumphed over the powers and authorities (Colossians 2:15) and disarmed the powers of sin, death and evil. Ever since the fall of Satan, and the fall of Adam and evil, the powers and authorities in the spiritual realm have worked against God’s good creation. The powers and authorities have brought sin and death, and all its companion sufferings.

Christ has won the victory over sin, death and the devil. He has made us heirs of his victory, and even brings the firstfruits of that victory to us through faith, as we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6). We wait for the consummation of this victory, while we are assured of that victory. When we resist the evil “rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” we are living by, in, from and through the reconciliation that Christ won by his death on the cross to give us peace.

“... the authority of the rulers has been broken, that they cannot hinder the progress of the gospel, and that all things are to be subject to Christ. Such assurances would surely encourage them as they engage in a spiritual warfare and await the final day” (O’Brien, p. 248)

The display of peace between Jews and Gentiles, and the expression of the hard-won unity that Christ gives in one body, was revolutionary, and has had a profound impact on the history of earth and heavens. Something that earthly and heavenly rulers and authorities could not comprehend is now displayed in the church, the body of Christ.

“Through the church, the angelic leaders, both good and evil, gain knowledge of the manifold wisdom of God. It is a defeat for evil angels who would like to continue to engender animosity between Jews and Gentiles in order to frustrate the plan of God. ... the evil angelic leaders’ power has been broken, demonstrating that even the most diverse elements of creation are subject to Christ. .... the union of Jews and Gentiles into one body must be acknowledged by the “powers” to be a display of the multifaceted wisdom of God.” (Hoehner, p. 462)