

Ephesians 3

Introduction:

1. The third chapter of Ephesians ends the first of the book, which is the doctrinal half of the book.
2. The second half of the book is very practical, with many duties based on what God did in saving us.
3. The third chapter is divided easily into two parts, based on Paul's repetition, "For this cause" (3:1,14).
4. The first part (3:1-13) reviews his role as apostle to the Gentiles and comforts them about his bonds.
5. The second part (3:14-21) is a glorious prayers for saints to know God's love in Christ to its fullest.

1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

- A. The connection here – the verb based on Paul's cause – is found at the section's end (3:13).
 1. Paul's frequent use of "for this cause" can refer to things before or after the phrase.
 2. Paul's cause is the glorious news that Gentiles were one with the Jews by the gospel.
 3. The consequence of this cause was Paul's desire for them not to worry about him (3:13).
 4. Instead of fearing about him, they could glorify God for his special dispensation for them.
- B. Paul was a prisoner at the time of writing this epistle, and he was a prisoner for the Gentiles.
 1. He will refer again to his imprisonment shortly and when he closes the epistle (4:1; 6:20).
 2. Being a prisoner "of Jesus Christ" does not make our Lord the prison or the prison keeper, but it indicates clearly the reason for his imprisonment, testifying of Jesus Christ.
 3. Paul was in prison for the gospel's sake, and he preached to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13).
 4. Paul was in prison specifically for Jews knowing he preached to Gentiles (Act 22:21-24).

2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

- A. His use of "if ye have heard" does not need to be conditional or doubtful, for it is not in other places; it is rather suppositional (Eph 4:21; Phil 2:1; Col 3:1; I Pet 1:17; 2:3).
 1. Paul had not stated his dispensation in chapter 2, where he wrote the mystery in general.
 2. Paul had spent much time in Ephesus and visited often, so they likely did know of him.
 3. Having introduced himself (3:1), he will now explain his personal role in the mystery.
- B. A dispensation is the administration, dispensing, control, or management of some thing.
- C. The grace of God here is the gospel of the grace of God, which Paul preached to Gentiles; for Paul was a minister and steward of the mysteries of the gospel (I Cor 4:1; I Peter 4:10).
- D. Paul was a chosen vessel of God to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17).

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

- A. Paul did not get the news of Jews and Gentiles in one body from men; He got it from God.
 1. He spent some time in Arabia, which Acts 9:19-28 does not record (Gal 1:11-12,15-18).
 2. Paul saw our risen Lord after the Damascus road experience (I Cor 15:8; Acts 26:16).
- B. The general mystery of Jews and Gentiles in one body was what Paul wrote in chapter 2.
- C. Please remember, the word "mystery" does not generally mean a mystery to us, but truth that had been kept secret until it was revealed to the apostles and then to us (I Cor 2:6-16).

4 *Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)*

- A. The news written in 2:11-22, being very unusual, proves Paul's unique knowledge in Christ.
- B. How can a mystery be known? It had been a mystery before being revealed: now it is known.
- C. Do you appreciate this great mystery heretofore unknown ... "preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world" (I Tim 3:16) ... which is the grounds of your faith this very day?

5 *Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;*

- A. The other ages of the world, from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to Paul, did not have the knowledge about Gentiles and Jews being united in one body, as Paul now wrote it clearly.
- B. Paul was not the only one knowing this mystery, as shown by other apostles and prophets.
 - 1. Peter had a revelation to preach to Cornelius (Acts 10:9-20,27-28,34-35,44-48; 11:1-18).
 - 2. The Spirit showed James to apply Amos 9:11-12 to Gentile conversions (Acts 15:13-19), yet it was Amos who wrote that God had only known the nation of Israel (Amos 3:2).
 - 3. Prior to the completion of the New Testament, prophets helped reveal the will of God.

6 *That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:*

- A. This is exactly what Paul had written about in general in 2:11-22, of which he was an expert.
 - 1. Do you understand that in Christ the promises to Abraham are yours (Galatians 3:16,29)?
 - 2. If you grasped this great blessing, this third of chapter of Ephesians would not bore you!
- B. What is God's promise in Jesus Christ that we partake of by the gospel? The Holy Spirit!
 - 1. We are reading a letter. What was earlier? The Holy Spirit of promise (1:13-14; 2:18,22)!
 - 2. Paul is not finished with this great and glorious gift from God (3:16,20; 4:4,30; 6:18).
 - 3. A great blessing of Abraham on the Gentiles through the gospel is the Spirit (Gal 3:14).
 - 4. Partaking of the Holy Ghost is one of privileges of saints through the gospel (Heb 6:4).

7 *Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

- A. Paul was made a minister to the Gentiles to preach this glorious news of their full inclusion.
- B. It was a gift of God's grace to make Paul, before a blasphemer, a preacher of Jesus Christ.
- C. It took the effectual working of God's power to convert Saul of Tarsus to the apostle Paul.

8 *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;*

- A. Paul in this place denigrates himself to maximize the grace of God in His office of apostle; though in other places he magnifies himself to maximize God's grace (I Cor 15:10).
- B. The apostles, though having great knowledge, had the treasure in earthen vessels (II Cor 4:7).
- C. What an honor! Paul, though an enemy of Jesus Christ, was chosen to preach the gospel among millions of Gentiles, rather than be limited to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
- D. What are unsearchable riches? Those beyond knowing and measuring (Job 5:9; Rom 11:33).
- E. It is the incredible and fantastic value of Jesus Christ the angels desired to see (I Peter 1:12).
- F. Jesus Christ, by ending the Mosaic economy, united Jews and Gentiles in one body to God.

9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

- A. The “all men” here are all the Gentile saints and Jews to whom God sent the apostle Paul.
- B. “Fellowship” here is the comfort and pleasure of the mystery that blesses Gentile and Jewish believers to be united in one Christian fellowship and church for advanced worship of God.
- C. Here again is the definition of “mystery.” Some thing of truth hidden in God from the world.
- D. This specific mystery had been kept hidden from the beginning, but it was known to God.
- E. Did God create all things? Yes. But how? By Jesus Christ (John 1:3; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2).
 - 1. What do all modern Bible versions do? They delete the pure words, “by Jesus Christ.”
 - 2. God will take away the part of these Christ-despisers out of the book of life (Rev 22:19).

10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

- A. This can be a difficult text, if you rush through it without considering the wording carefully.
- B. The intent, or purpose, of God in revealing a new dispensation was to magnify His wisdom.
- C. It was only “now,” the first time since the beginning of the world, that it was fully known.
- D. Principalities and powers in heavenly places are the holy and elect angels of God’s heaven.
 - 1. Principalities and powers can refer to either category of angels (Eph 6:12; Col 2:15).
 - 2. We understand these to be good angels by virtue of their place in heaven (1:3,20; 2:6).
- E. God’s glorious and gracious plan of redemption is to reveal His glory to the whole universe.
 - 1. He chose as part of this revelation to show the angels His glorious wisdom in redemption.
 - 2. The manifold wisdom of God includes all the facets, phases, and aspects of His salvation.
 - 3. Since angels are more intelligent, glorious, and powerful than us, it is a great revelation.
 - 4. Since the fallen members of their ranks are reserved in chains for judgment, the salvation of men is a glorious thing that they desire to look into and comprehend (I Pet 1:12).
 - 5. Since they are creatures, they are not privy to the mysterious will of God (Matt 24:36).
- F. The words, “by the church,” tell us the means by which God teaches the angels His wisdom.
 - 1. It is not the church that learns or knows in this verse; it is the principalities and powers.
 - 2. And they learn God’s wisdom by observing what He did for and to the church. Glory!
 - 3. They learned in progress of time as did the apostles of God’s plan for the pagan Gentiles.
 - 4. What a contrast of grace and judgment – grace to the Gentiles and judgment to angels!
- G. The glory of this verse will be overlooked or missed, unless you stop to consider its weight!
 - 1. God chose you for a cosmic object lesson of great proportions to impress mighty angels!
 - 2. God’s treatment of us in our church is far greater than anything He has done for angels!

11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

- A. All things God does in time are according to His purpose that He ordained in eternity past.
- B. James at Jerusalem’s council declared the Gentile inclusion was planned earlier (Acts 15:18).
- C. Not only was election and predestination according to His purpose, but this grace also (1:11).

12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

- A. Continuing one of his long sentences, the apostle tacks on the church's privileges in Christ.
- B. The church – at Ephesus and ours as well – has open and easy access to God through Christ.
 - 1. The Lord Jesus Christ is our mediator! He is not the mediator of angels! They have none!
 - 2. The saints of the Old Testament, even the best of the Jews, did not have access to God.
 - 3. However, our Lord opened up a new and living way, even for Gentiles (Heb 10:19-22).
 - 4. No wonder our brother Paul told saints to go to the throne of grace boldly (Heb 4:14-16).
- C. The faith here, though modified as “of him,” is our faith in Christ Jesus as our High Priest.
 - 1. The prepositional phrase proves nothing by its grammar; the context must determine it.
 - 2. Such prepositional phrases are either subjective-genitive, where the object of the preposition is the subject of the possession (Rom 5:5; 14:20), or objective-genitive, where the object of the preposition is the object of the possession (Luke 11:42; John 6:29).
 - 3. Our boldness and confidence in approaching God is based on faith in Christ (Rom 5:2).
 - 4. The practical benefits of the gospel have been the theme since 2:11, so we assume the practical exercise of our faith in Jesus Christ as our mediator, Apostle, and High Priest.

13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

- A. Resuming his thought in 3:1, Paul expressed the desired action that was his cause for writing.
 - 1. Read the two verses (3:1,13) together: “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles .. desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”
 - 2. Everything in between is a parenthetical explanation of his personal role to the Gentiles.
- B. Though a prisoner of Jesus Christ (3:1), there was no reason for the Ephesians to faint at it.
- C. Though a prisoner of Jesus Christ (3:1), there was every reason for them to glory in Paul.
 - 1. What a glorious thing! God had raised up such a chosen vessel as Paul for the Gentiles!
 - 2. What a glorious thing! Paul was excited to suffer, if he might preach to more Gentiles!
 - 3. What a glorious thing! Is there any doubt about a man's integrity when facing death!
 - 4. What a glorious thing! Paul, a Pharisee taught at the feet of Gamaliel, defied the Jews!

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

- A. Here is the second section of the third chapter, indicated by the new use of “for this cause.”
- B. He will tell the readers in 3:16 exactly what the cause is here – to know the love of Christ!
- C. When we pray, we bow our knees, either literally or figuratively, to God the Father of Christ.
 - 1. Note the posture of prayer (I Kings 8:54; 18:42; Ezra 9:5; Daniel 6:10; Acts 20:36; 21:5).
 - 2. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Mediator to Another – God, Who is all in all (I Cor 15:28).
 - 3. We do not typically pray to Jesus Christ; we pray to God the Father through Jesus Christ.

15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

- A. While the text could refer to either the Father or Christ, we emphasize the Father of our Lord.
 - 1. As the Father even of the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the Father and Head of all in heaven.
 - 2. As the children of God, chosen by Him and adopted by Him, we form the family of God.
 - 3. The Lord Jesus Christ will be subordinate to the Father throughout eternity (I Cor 15:28).
 - 4. The whole family of God's elect are the brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).
 - 5. Jesus Christ Himself will present us as His children to God the Father (Hebrews 2:13).
 - 6. The Lord Jesus Christ saw His seed, for which He died on the cross (Isaiah 53:10).

- B. Brethren, do you fully appreciate your adoption and the gospel message of it? Rejoice!
 - 1. The whole family in heaven and earth includes those spirits in heaven and us on earth.
 - 2. Jesus Christ is not going to lose a single one of those the Father gave Him to redeem!

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

- A. The grand blessing of God the Holy Spirit powerfully assisting your understanding is a grant!
 - 1. Repentance to be saved from captivity of Satan is a grant (Acts 11:18; II Tim 2:25-26).
 - 2. It is something that Paul has already stated was his constant prayer request (1:15-19).
 - 3. No man, no matter how rich or noble, can give more than he owns. God is infinitely rich!
- B. The blessed God of heaven, our Father, has inexhaustible and infinite riches of glory to tap!
- C. We need to be strengthened with the might of the Holy Spirit to fully realize spiritual growth.
 - 1. This is not strictly the new man, for the new man does not need additional work (4:24); but it is rather the “ye” that must put off the old man and put on the new man!
 - 2. The inner man is inner aspects of heart and spirit (3:17) in contrast to body (II Cor 4:16).
 - 3. The ability to resist temptation, believe the promises, understand the gospel, live with heaven in sight, rejoice in hope, bear spiritual fruit, follow Christ in suffering, reject conforming to the world, and so forth can only be done by the power of the Holy Ghost.

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

- A. The presence of Jesus Christ in your heart and soul by the Holy Spirit depends on your faith.
 - 1. This was the promise of Jesus Christ to His disciples about the Spirit (John 14:15-18,23).
 - 2. Spirit-strengthened faith, casting itself upon God’s grace, will have Christ dwelling there!
 - 3. We want more than Jesus in our heads by doctrine; we want Him in our hearts by faith!
 - 4. We want more than Jesus in our tongues by word; we want Him in our hearts by faith!
- B. Paul prayed that these saints – and us by extension – would know God’s great love for us.
 - 1. Rooted in love is a lesson from trees, where health and strength depend on great roots.
 - 2. Grounded in love is from buildings, where stability and strength depend on a foundation.
 - 3. It is the love of God for us that is the foundation of all spiritual prosperity in saints (3:19).
 - 4. What can possibly move a soul, who is firmly established on God’s eternal love for him?
 - 5. If you were to ever fully grasp your adoption, it would change your life (I John 3:1-3).

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

- A. Paul prayed this prayer not for the Ephesian saints alone, but also for all other adopted saints.
- B. It takes a large measure of the Holy Spirit for mere mortals to comprehend the love of Christ.
- C. The breadth of the love of God took in elect from the world, including Gentiles in America.
- D. The length of the love of God stretches from election in eternity past to glorification to come.
- E. The depth of the love of God reaches even to the most depraved sinners of a wretched race.
- F. The height of the love of God carries these recovered rebels to the very throne of God above!

19 *And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

- A. To know the love of Christ by faith is more than mere knowledge, but rather an intimate and experimental appreciation and connection to His love that is soul filling and life changing.
- B. The love of God in Christ for His people passes knowledge – it is beyond human thinking.
 - 1. How can the apostle describe knowing something that is unknowable? To make his point!
 - 2. He has used this kind of language before and elsewhere, and it is good (3:8; Phil 4:7).
- C. The fullest fellowship with God is by Spirit-induced faith and knowledge of His love for us.
 - 1. Muse on this: consider “filled”! consider “all”! consider “fulness”! consider “God”!
 - 2. Our poor and weak spiritual condition is generally due to being negligent of this blessing.
 - 3. It is more than you can muster through reading and meditation: the Spirit must give it.
 - 4. The apostle Paul’s character is very different from most Christians – based on this verse.
 - 5. Read Paul’s own testimony of what made him different – the love of Christ (II Cor 5:14).
 - 6. The fullest measure of enjoying God’s presence offered to men is by this means of love.
 - 7. Religion that offers such an unspeakable opportunity far exceeds all other things on earth.
 - 8. It was this fellowship for full joy that John described with the Father and Son (I Jn 1:1-4).

20 *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

- A. Paul concluded the three-chapter dissertation on the doctrine of salvation with this doxology.
- B. Many Christians memorize and quote this verse as a bubble gum machine for getting toys.
 - 1. The context limits the intention and purpose of this verse to greater spiritual blessings.
 - 2. God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think in any area of our lives, but the preceding context and included mention of the Spirit limits the sense here.
- C. When reading the fabulous request (3:16-19), you might think such blessings impossible; but God is able to do exceeding abundantly above our feeble and doubtful thoughts and prayers.
- D. The power working in us is the power of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14; 3:6,16; 4:4,30; 6:18).

21 *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

- A. God is to receive all glory for graciously saving us and putting us into His glorious family.
 - 1. The glory God is to receive in the church is based on what He does for us from 3:20.
 - 2. God will not share glory with any other creature, so let us give all to Him (I Cor 1:29-31).
 - 3. Let us make sure that everything we do in the house of God is for the clear glory of God.
 - 4. Let all the children of God rejoice in their family and Father to give glory due His name!
- B. The glory we give Him is by Jesus Christ as the Source, Means, and End of our glorying!
- C. As long as ages of men and the world continue as we know them, let us give glory to God.
- D. Amen! Let it be so in truth!

Conclusion:

- 1. Here is one of the most sublime passages in Scripture for content and language. Read it! Glory in it!
- 2. God raised up the greatest of the apostles for us Gentiles, for which we should glory and rejoice.
- 3. What is the cause that so many barely survive as Christians? Here is the spiritual truth, the source of the power, the appropriate prayer, and the offered blessings (3:14-19)! Take them, reader!

For further study:

1. The sermon outline, "[The Great Mystery of Godliness](#)," details the six glorious secrets of I Timothy 3:16.
2. The sermon outline, "[The Mysteries of Hidden Wisdom](#)," shows how God reveals His secrets only to some.