

An Exhibition of God's Manifold Wisdom

Ephesians 3:1-21

Revelation

3:1-7

3:1 ¹For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—

A. For this reason...

1. These words link us back to Ephesians 2:11-22—God makes Gentiles members of His household
2. These words introduce the cause for his prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21

B. I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus...

1. Paul calls himself a “prisoner of Christ Jesus” instead of a “prisoner of Rome”
2. Although Paul had been in a prisoner for about two years in Caesarea and two years in Rome, he did not consider himself to be a prisoner of any government or person

Rather, he knew that he was under Christ's control, and every aspect of his life was in the Lord's hand

C. I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles

Paul suffered imprisonment for preaching to the Gentiles

3:2-7 ²if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

A. Ephesians 3:2-13 is a parenthetical section

In Ephesians 3:2-13, Paul interrupted the thought he began in verse 1 in order to reemphasize and expand on the truths he had written about earlier in Ephesians 2:11-22

B. ²If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you (3:2)

1. “Dispensation” can also be translated “*stewardship; administration; management*”

2. God entrusted Paul with the responsibility of delivering the Gospel of God’s saving grace to the Gentiles

C. ³How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery

1. “Mystery”

a. First, Paul defined what a “mystery” is in Ephesians 3:5: “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets”

b. Next, Paul made known what the “mystery” is in Ephesians 3:6: “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel”

c. In Ephesians 3:4, Paul called the “mystery”, “the mystery of Christ”—

This emphasizes the fact that this mystery originated with Christ and has its basis in Christ

D. ³By revelation He made known to me the mystery

1. “Revelation” means “unveiling; to make known”

2. Paul did not invent the mystery, instead God the Holy Spirit made it known to him—

John 16:13

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...”

E. ⁷of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

1. Paul understood that God commissioned him to make known the mystery of Christ to the Gentiles

2. In the Greek language, Ephesians 3:7 states that Paul’s service was initiated by “the gift of God’s grace” and continues by “the working of His power”

Proclamation

3:8-10

3:8⁸To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...

A. Paul viewed himself and his ministry as an exhibition of God's grace

B. God entrusted Paul with the privilege of proclaiming the "unsearchable riches of Christ" to the Gentiles—

1. "Unfathomable" means "*incomprehensible*"; "*unfathomable*"
2. "The riches of Christ" refer to all of God's truths, all of God's blessings, and all of God's possessions
3. We can know something about the riches of Christ, but can never fully comprehend them

3:9-10⁹and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*,

A. The Church—consisting of both Jewish and Gentile Christians—is an exhibition of God's manifold wisdom

B. God shows off His manifold wisdom to angels—¹⁰to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*

1. “Principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*” refer to “angels”

 2. Angels are learning about the “*manifold wisdom of God*” from observing the Church
 - a. “*Manifold wisdom*” means “*many-colored wisdom*”

 - b. It refers to the beauty and variety of God’s wisdom in His great plan of salvation

 2. Angels learn about God’s power through creation, but they learn about God’s wisdom by observing the Church
 - a. As angels watch the outworking of God’s salvation, they praise God for His wisdom

 - b. As angels observe the new relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the Church, they praise God for His wisdom
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Motivation

3:11-13

3:11-13 ¹¹according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. ¹³Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

A. God’s motivation for His plan of salvation and His secret plan of the Church was His “*eternal purposes*”

1. God’s plan of salvation and the formation of His Church preceded the creation of the world—it existed with Him in eternity

2. God's "eternal purposes" were "carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" on the cross—

a. Because of the cross, salvation is available for both Jews and Gentiles

b. Because of the cross, fellowship exists between both Jews and Gentiles

B. ¹²in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, all Christians (both Jews and Gentiles) have the right of access to God

C. ¹³Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

1. In view of the ministry and message that Paul had from God, he considered his sufferings to be "worth it"

2. He considered his sufferings a joy and privilege because he understood that it all worked out for the gain and glory of Gentile Christians

3. This is an example of "Jesus Style" ministry

Prayer

3:14-15

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...

A. Paul responds to God's exhibition of His manifold wisdom with prayer

B. This prayer includes petitions and praise

Petitions

3:16-19

¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

A. First Petition: Spiritual Strength—¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man

1. The emphasis of this petition is on the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian
2. The “inner man” is the “inner nature”
3. Paul is praying for spiritual strength for the “inner nature” of the Christian

B. Second Petition: Deeper Experience with Christ—¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love

1. Christ came into the hearts of the Ephesians at conversion, but here, Paul is praying for something deeper—a deeper experience between Christ and His people
2. Paul desires for Christ to settle down and feel at home in the hearts of the Ephesian Christians

3. This is not a surface relationship; this is deep, intimate fellowship—“being rooted and grounded in love”

C. Third Petition: Comprehend God’s Love—¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge...

1. “Comprehend” means “to grasp”

2. Here, Paul prays to God that the Ephesian Christians could grasp onto the love of Christ, and live in it

3. Paul writes about the love of Christ “four-dimensionally”—“width and length and depth and height”

a. This description of the love of Christ points to the vastness and completeness of the love of Christ

b. The love of Christ is real and substantial; it’s not theoretical or without substance

c. Geometrically, this description forms a cross—the greatest emblem of Christ’s love towards you and me

4. Paul prays for all Christians could “comprehend the incomprehensible”—

a. “Able to **comprehend**” (18)... “to know the love of Christ which **passes knowledge**” (19)

b. Paul could pray this because of what he knew in Ephesians 3:20-21

c. Paul was praying a BIG prayer to a BIG God

D. Fourth Petition: Filled with God’s Fullness—¹⁹that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

1. Paul wanted the Ephesian Christians to know and experience God’s fullness in their lives
2. “Fullness of God” refers to God’s completeness and sufficiency
3. “Filled up” means completely full; there’s no space for anything else
4. The “fullness of God” in the life of the Believer is a theme in the Book of Ephesians—
 - a. Filled with the fullness of **God the Father** (Ephesians 3:19)
 - b. Filled with the fullness of **God the Son** (Ephesians 4:13)
 - c. Filled with the fullness of **God the Holy Spirit** (Ephesians 5:18)

Praise

3:20-21

²⁰Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

A. These two verses emphasize the greatness of God

B. Paul did not hold back when writing about what God can do—there are no limits to His ability

1. **Able** to do
2. **Exceedingly** abundantly
3. **Above all** that we ask or think

C. God's power is working in us

1. **"Power"** (*dunamis*) means *"achieving power"*
2. God's power is working in and through our lives enabling us to live a life that pleases Him, and transforming us more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ

D. ²¹to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.

1. God is all glorious and worthy of all glory!
 - a. He must glorified in the Church
 - b. He is glorified in His Son
 - c. He is and will be glorified forever and ever
2. Are you glorifying Him today?