

## Ephesians Lesson 03

Ephesians Chapter 3

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Memory verses for this week: *1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

**Introduction:** Chapter 2 of Ephesians has some of the best teachings in the Word of God to prove that salvation is wholly from God and by His grace are we saved. We work for the Lord out of debt for what Christ did for us, not in order to obtain or maintain salvation.

In this chapter, Paul summarizes the 'mystery' he described in chapter 2. Afterwards, he prays to the Lord on behalf of the Ephesian church in consideration of that mystery.

Paul summarizes the matter of the mystery alluded unto in the preceding two chapters in 2 sentences. The essence of the summary might be tracked from Verse 1: *"For this cause, I Paul . . . (to verse 7) was made a minister . . . (to verse 8) that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."* Though greater detail is noted, this is the essence of these first ten verses.

### I. The Church is a Mystery Hidden from Past Ages

*Ephesians 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, Eph 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:*

In verse 1, Paul begins a prayer which he resumes in verse 13 after he explains why he was so earnestly praying for them. His interest grew out of a special revelation, such as no other man has sustained. His expression was "The dispensation of the grace of God which was given me to you-ward." By the grace of our good Lord, Paul received this special revelation. This dispensation for the Gentiles was given and committed specifically to him.

The Apostle noted, *"For this cause"*. Paul refers to the cause of the unity in the church wherein both Jew and gentile are one. He further identifies himself as the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you gentiles. The reference to him being a prisoner is both literal as well as spiritual.

He was a prisoner in Rome and used that occasion to describe his relationship to Jesus Christ. He implies his imprisonment was for the gentile church. Without such, he may never have written the epistles that he did.

The statement continues with a conditional phrase, similar to a rhetorical question—its answer is obvious. They had heard of the “dispensation of the grace of God” which had been given to Paul for their sakes. Though some might associate this phrase to the dispensation of the church age in general, it carries a more specific in its application. Its most literal sense is that Paul had been given the administration of the grace of God to gentile believers as the apostle to the gentiles.

*Rom 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:*

*Rom 11:14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.*

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

Paul notes how that his understanding of the mystery of the gentiles being in the same body with believers was given to him “by revelation.” This may have taken place while he spent time in Arabia. It may have been at other times when God spoke to him. In any event, his understanding was by direct revelation from God. The time and place wasn’t specified.

*Eph 3:4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Eph 3:5 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; Eph 3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:*

Paul continued to articulate on this mystery concerning the gentiles. Paul mentions again the matter of the “mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men” as it now had been to him and other of the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. Paul’s mention of the prophets acknowledges the ongoing use of that New Testament office. It soon would cease according to I Corinthians 13:8.

*1Co 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail;*

*whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

*1Co 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*

*1Co 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

In any event, all such revelation was by means of the agency of the Holy Spirit. The old testament prophecy made it clear that the gentiles would someday turn to God. The fact that they would be united by the same means not revealed until its time came to pass.

In verse 6, we find summarized here is the very essence of the mystery: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of Gods promise in Christ by the gospel. The gentiles would now be in one accord with all privileges of their Jewish brethren in the church.

In the church, there would be no distinction between Jew and gentile. They would be united together in one body as one spiritual organism. This does in any way allude to a church in the old testament or a universal church.

Paul's special revelation did not come by man but from the Lord Jesus Christ. This wasn't something that was relayed to him second hand by Peter, but God himself spoke to Paul. He mentions how that he had written of this prior to this letter.

*Colossians 1:25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;*

Paul mentions the word mystery in regards to Christ in verse 4. John speaks of the mystery of Babylon in the book of Revelation.

*Revelation 17:5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

Paul speaks of the mystery of godliness over in I Timothy 3:16

*1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

The word "Mystery" used here in verse 4 is used in a different meaning. The things he speaks of are not a mystery to him, nor will they be to those when he explains these verses. The mystery he speaks of is how the Gentiles had

become fellow heirs and fellow members in the church with the Jews. Only those who turn to Christ for salvation have this special honor bestowed upon them, whether they be Jew or Gentile. It was a mystery that the gentiles were to be saved and be in the church as equal members with the Jews.

*Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

*Genesis 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

*Deuteronomy 32:8 When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.*

Not only were the gentiles to be saved like the Jews, but they were to be fellow-heirs with the Jews. This was a great mystery concerning them being together in the new testament church.

*Eph 3:7 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. Eph 3:8 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;*

Paul continues how that he was “made a minister” toward this end. It was according to “the gift of the grace of God” which had been given him by the effective working of God’s power. Of even greater contrast was that this marvelous ministry should be given unto Paul.

In his spiritual humility, he considered himself “less than the least of all saints.” Nevertheless, God had given him this grace. God had given him grace that he ‘should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.’ There is no end to the discovery of the riches of Christ. The evidence of this God given grace is the love one has acquired for a people that seems to just appear out of no where. Of further interest is the word, preach (euaggelizw evangelidzo). Though its more generic sense is to ‘preach,’ more literally it refers to making known the gospel.

The Old Testament saints did not have this mystery concerning the church revealed unto them. But we are blessed to have this made known unto us. Paul talks of how by God’s grace he was called into the ministry, and how that he was granted the opportunity to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. All of God’s ways are unsearchable.

*Romans 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

*1 Chronicles 28:9 And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*

God is the one who searches the heart, but no human heart can search out God. Even when it comes to salvation, it is God who is seeking us. Our ways are all against God.

J. Vernon McGee has some good insights concerning this mystery of the church.

Now he clarifies what he means by the mystery. There is a sharp contrast between the sons of men in past generations and the apostles and prophets of the church. No one in the Old Testament had a glimmer of light relative to the church. It is now revealed to His Holy apostles. They are “holy” because they have been set aside for this office by God. The “prophets” are definitely New Testament prophets.

The “Spirit,” the Holy Spirit, is the teacher of this mystery. This is what the Lord Jesus promised when He told His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit. “All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:15).

What precisely is the mystery? It is *not* the fact that Gentiles would be saved. The Old Testament clearly taught that Gentiles would be saved. Let me cite several passages: “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious” (Isa. 11:10). Another: “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa. 60:3). Isaiah also wrote: “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6). Zechariah also mentions it: “And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee” (Zech. 2:11). And Malachi: “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 1:11).

If the mystery is not that the Gentiles would be saved, what is the mystery? Mark it carefully. The mystery was that the Gentiles and Israel were placed *on the same basis*. By faith in Christ they were both brought into a new body which is the church. Christ is the Head of that new body.

Therefore, now there is a threefold division in the human race:

All people were Gentiles from Adam to Abraham—2000 years (plus)  
All people were either Jews or Gentiles from Abraham to Christ—2000 years  
The threefold division is Jews, Gentiles, and the church from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture—2000 years (plus)

Paul referred to this threefold division when he said, “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Cor. 10:32). Paul included the whole human family when he said that.

The church is not in the Old Testament *de facto*, although there are types of it in the Old Testament. Christ said, “... upon this rock I *will* build my church ...” (Matt. 16:18, italics mine), and when He spoke that, it was still future. It is true that the church was all Jewish when it began, but there was a period of transition when Gentiles were brought into it. The church is one body, made up of both Jew and Gentile, and Christ is the Head of that body.

*Eph 3:9 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: Eph 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, Eph 3:11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: Eph 3:12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

The Apostle’s ministry was to “make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery.” Part of Paul’s purpose to enable all to see the unity, accord, and fellowship there was in the now revealed mystery— “that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body”. This mystery “from the beginning of the world” had been “hid in God.” Paul speaks of how that God “created all things in Jesus Christ.” The Apostle made that very clear in Colossians 1:16.

*Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:  
Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

All of this, the revelation of the mystery as well as God’s creative work in Christ, was to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. The thought is that even the angelic leadership in high places would understand, through the church, God’s diverse wisdom. What an amazing thought. The church, the mystery hid from ages past, is God’s chosen vehicle for the propagation of the truth not only here on the earth, but also in heaven.

The church is the vehicle of such understanding even for those who died in faith and knew not the mystery as it had not as yet been made known. Implicit also is that the church is the primary body for the transmission and preservation of the Scripture—the manifold wisdom of God.

In verse 11, this all was “according to the eternal purpose” God accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Once again, Paul indicates that in Christ, we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Because we are in Christ, we can now boldly come to God (see Hebrews 4:16).

*Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Our access is through Him (see John 14:6). Moreover, we have access with confidence through faith in Christ. As we come to God through faith in His Son, we have complete access to Him and therefore can come with boldness.

God chose Paul as the vessel to preach and make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery. This had been hid from the beginning of the world until this time. God had a reason, and eternal purpose, for the church which was purposed in Christ. The church is clearly God’s authoritative house of witness today. We should be known as a beacon of light in a dark and dismal world tainted with sin. If we don’t shine forth, the lost will not be saved.

## **II. Paul’s Second Prayer for the Ephesians**

*Eph 3:13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. Eph 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

In light of all of this, Paul desired that they be not discouraged at the imprisonment he was facing at Rome. Paul had the spiritual maturity to realize it was for the glory of the Ephesian church. Rather than fret over him, he urged them to be encouraged (i.e., glory in him).

With all of the preceding in view, from the revelation of the mystery to Paul’s incarceration for their sake, he bowed his knees unto “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, Paul rather took the entire matter to God in prayer. Lest there be any doubt in the minds of his readers, he wrote how that God was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. His full title is presented. He is Lord, Savior (Jesus), and King (Christ).

Paul bowed his knees unto the Father in prayer for the Ephesians, the exact same God that Abraham, Isaac, Elijah, and Joshua prayed unto in the Old Testament.

*Eph 3:15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, Eph 3:16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened*

*with might by his Spirit in the inner man; Eph 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,*

Before launching into the essence of his prayer for them, he also made clear that all in heaven and earth have their origins in Christ.

(See Colossians 1:15-18).

*Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:*

*Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:*

*Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

*Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

Though some try to make a special entity out of ‘the family of God,’ the word translated family (*patria patria*) has the sense of ‘lineage’ or ‘ancestry.’ The greater point is that all, whether in heaven or earth, have their origins in Christ as Creator. This is the preface of his prayer.

In Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church in chapter 1, the focus was upon their understanding of the knowledge of what lies ahead for God’s people. In Ephesians 3, the focus of Paul’s prayer for them is upon them being strengthened and realizing the love of Christ.

More specifically, he prayed for them that God would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. Though not directly defined, “the inner man” is our soul. It is the non- physical part of our being. Strengthening of the inner man comes through His Spirit and ultimately from “the riches of his glory.” As also noted in Romans 9:23, Paul speaks of those riches.

*Rom 9:23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,*

His glory through His Spirit is always available as a source of strength for God’s people. In verse 17, we find that dwells in our hearts. And when Christ dwells in your heart by faith; that ye, will be rooted and grounded in love. This next clause, beginning with that, is not parallel with the that in verse 16. There, the word is (*ina*) hina. Here, it is only implied. The thought is that Christ already dwells in our hearts by faith. Moreover, the greater truth is that Christ indeed dwells in our hearts by faith.



This, incidentally, is the only place in the Bible which expressly speaks of Christ being in one's heart. The next major segment of Paul's prayer is again introduced by a ('ina) hina—(b) "that ye, being rooted and ground in love." Paul prays not only that God would strengthen them, but that they might be rooted in love. How that is needed to this day.

We note some of the things Paul prayed for in these verses.

In verse 16, he prayed that they might grow spiritually. If we do not grow, we will be dwarfs in the knowledge of God.

*Heb 5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

*Heb 5:13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.*

*Heb 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

In verse 17, Paul prays that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith, and that they might be rooted and grounded in love. We will not accomplish anything in life until we find Christ as Savior and get our feet on the solid rock. But when we do that, and we seriously seek to serve the Lord, we will be known for our love.

*John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

*1 Cor 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

*1 Cor 13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

*1 Cor 13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;*

*1 Cor 13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

*1 Cor 13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

*1 Cor 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

*Eph 3:18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and*

*length, and depth, and height; Eph 3:19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

But that is only the introduction to his greater thought. As they were rooted and grounded in love, he prayed that they may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height. Paul's second desire in this prayer was that the Ephesians church might comprehend to the same degree what other Christians (i.e., saints) elsewhere had come to know. That is the full dimensions of the love of Christ.

Of interest is that he notes three and actually four dimensions. Not only is the breadth and length thereof mentioned, but he then uses two degrees to describe the third dimension—depth, implying the depths of the sea. This is along with height implying the height of the heavens. The greater thought is that he prayed they would fully understand the measureless love of Christ to us ward. It in fact is infinite love.

He notes the same in that it “passeth knowledge.” The word translated as passeth (‘uperballw huperballo) has the sense to ‘exceed’ or ‘transcend.’ The love of Christ transcends knowledge. It is measureless and infinite. The third parallel thought is again introduced by (‘ina) hina (in order that) that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

Precisely what “all the fulness of God” is has not been defined.

- (1) It may refer to the fulness of the Holy Spirit.
- (2) It may refer to the fulness of His blessings to us both spiritually as well as otherwise.
- (3) It likely refers to the full blessing of spiritual maturity and all that comes therewith.

Three distinct thoughts have been introduced by a (‘ina) hina clause (‘that,’ or ‘in order that’) regarding Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church: in order that they might be strengthened in the inner man; in order that they might be able to comprehend the full dimension of the love of Christ; and in order that they might be filled with the fulness of God.

Though the three thoughts are grammatically parallel, there also is clearly a logical implication to the word (‘ina) hina (in order that). The three thoughts are a progression with each thought building upon the former, culminating in the fulness of God. In any event, such is the marvelous intercessory prayer life of the great Apostle for others. What an example not only in its content, but in its intercessory character.

Paul prays that they might come to understand the great love that God has for His

children... the breadth, the length, the depth, and the height. I don't think we know how wide or how deep God's love is for us, but it is the greatest love of the universe. It is not the love like man has for one another, but it is the perfect

Agape love, love of God. Full of mercy and totally pure.

In verse 18, he asks that they might understand and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. As Brother Hair once preached, the love of God is probably the deepest of all doctrines, and truly is beyond our understanding and comprehension.

*Philippians 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

Paul desired to know not only the power of Christ's resurrection, but wanted to have fellowship with his sufferings. Not many want to know about the suffering, but we must understand this to truly begin to grasp the great love Jesus has towards us.

### **III. The Place Where God Receives His Glory**

*Eph 3:20 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, Eph 3:21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

This final benediction is magnificent. The focus is entirely upon Almighty God. The first phrase in itself is profound, Now unto him that is able. God has all ability. He is all powerful which is implied in the word translated as able (dunamai dunamai). Moreover, He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. His ability is infinite. Nothing is too hard for Him.

The only limitation upon God is our inability to ask as we ought. Truly, we have not because we ask not. He is able to do more than we could ever even think, much less ask. Moreover, this potential is according to the power that worketh in us. Though not defined, that power likely is by the Holy Spirit.

In the last verse, we once again see the focal point of glory is our blessed God. The entity through which that glory has been ordained is "in the church." The primacy of the local church as the vehicle in this age to glorify the Father is clear. It is unique and exclusive.

Above all the other things mentioned, God is able to do abundantly above those things. He knows our needs and meets them with His riches.

*Mat 7:9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?*

*Mat 7:10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?*

*Mat 7:11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

We don't give God the credit he so richly deserves for all that He does for us. Paul in Philippians says that he could do all things through Christ.

*Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

We don't give God the credit he so richly deserves for all that He does for us.

This glory to God in the church is further "by Christ Jesus throughout all ages." God has ordained that glory be focused upon Himself in all generations unto the ages through the church of Jesus Christ. It is the church which has willingly turned to and trusted in God's gracious offer of salvation, thus bringing glory to Him. This chapter ends with an amen—so be it!

The King James Version Commentary had this to say about verse 20.

**Now unto him.** This ascription of praise to God's ability expresses our assurance of answered prayer. Why should we hesitate to offer our deepest petitions? Note the expressive and exhaustive language. **Is able.** The strength of our confidence is the fact that He is vastly able above and beyond all that we might ask. **To do exceeding abundantly.** Superabundantly, overwhelming, over and above, more than enough. David said, "my cup runneth over" (Ps 23:5), and we can say, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (Song 2:4). **That we ask or think.** Our highest aspirations are not beyond God's power to grant. **According to the power that worketh in us.** This is that omnipotence that raised Christ from the dead and quickened us when we were dead in sins.

Verse 21 teaches that it is through the local new testament church that God receives glory and this will glory will continue throughout all ages, world without end. Christ loved the church so much that he died for it. Do you love it the way you should? I doubt if we put the love into it that we should.

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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