

# EPHESIANS

## Chapter 3

### *Paul the Preacher to the Gentiles*

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,<sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.<sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.<sup>8</sup> 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,<sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.<sup>10</sup> His 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,<sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.<sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

**3:1–13** Having saved people individually by his grace (2:1–10), and having reconciled them to each other as well as to himself through the sacrificial death of Christ (2:11–22), God also now unites them on an equal basis in one body, the church. This step in God's eternal plan was not fully revealed in previous times. Paul calls it a "mystery."

**3:1** *For this reason.* Because of all that God has done, explained in the preceding several verses. – Paul became a prisoner because he took the Gospel to the Gentiles. Jewish accusers who were opposed to the Gospel and especially any efforts to incorporate the Gentiles were responsible for Paul's arrest. There are repeated references in the history of the early church of hatred between the Jews and the Gentiles (see Acts 22:21-24; 26:12-23). (LL)

*prisoner.* Apparently Paul was under house arrest at this time (see Ac 28:16, 30). – He was probably waiting for his audience with Caesar Nero. For Paul, it was a privilege to suffer the inconvenience or even life-threatening crisis for the sake of his relationship with Christ. In this he was one with Christ who had suffered for him, and he knew his suffering would produce benefits for the church. Newspapers in 1993 carried the story of a man in Miami who was suing both his church and his pastor to get back the offerings from the previous year. The man's pastor had promised benefits and blessings if members would tithe their income for the Lord's work. The man tithed. The blessings

didn't come. He wanted his money back. How this attitude differs from that of St. Paul. Paul didn't approach his faith from the perspective of gain, but from the perspective of service and sacrifice. (LL)

*of Christ.* Paul's physical imprisonment was because he obeyed Christ in spite of opposition. After this verse Paul breaks his train of thought to explain the "mystery" (v. 4). He resumes his initial thought in v. 14.

**3:2** *Surely you have heard.* Most of the Ephesians would have heard of Paul's ministry because of his long stay there earlier. However, if this was a circular letter (see note on 1:1), the other churches may not have known much about it.

*administration.* Paul unfolds God's administrative plan for the church and for the universe in this letter (see especially 1:3–12). He has been given a significant responsibility in the execution of this plan. – oikonomian – Management of a household; direction; office or stewardship. The plan of salvation (including the eternal plan from eternity through the promises of the OT to the fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the declaration/proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:3** *mystery.* A truth known only by divine revelation (v. 5; see Ro 16:25; see also notes on Ro 11:25; Col 1:26). Here the word "mystery" has the special meaning of the private, wise plan of God, which in Ephesians relates primarily to the unification of believing Jews and Gentiles in the new body, the church (see v. 6). It may be thought of as a secret that is temporarily hidden, but more than that, it is a plan God is actively working out and revealing stage by stage (cf. 1:9–10; Rev 10:7). – What they did not see in ages past (even though it is mentioned in Isaiah 60 and in the prophet Ezekiel 33:11, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live." These words were applied to the Gentiles as well as the Jews) is the togetherness of Jew and Gentile in one body the church. The idea of Jew and Gentile as joint heirs, members of one body, sharing the promise of Christ, was a vision not held until the time of Paul. That was mystery revealed. It was as radical a vision as people in Alabama or Memphis in the 1950's seeing whites and blacks together in the front of the bus. (LL)

*as I have already written briefly.* May refer to 1:9–10.

REVELATION – apokalupsin - A disclosure of what has been hidden or covered. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:4** ABLE TO UNDERSTAND – anagivwskovtes - To gain insight into with the mind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:5** *not made known to men in other generations.* See note on v. 6.

REVEALS – When God "reveals" his "mysterious secret," he does not "pull the covers off" but snuggles under the covers with us; incarnation (John 1:14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

*holy.* Set apart for God's service.

*apostles and prophets.* See note on 2:20. Although Paul was the chief recipient, others received this revelation also. – Thus Peter and James at the apostolic council (Acts 15),

testified that God wanted to gather together for himself a people from the Gentiles. And what God revealed to them the apostles then –for which reasons they are also called – published further and proclaimed to the world. (S)

**3:6** *together ... together ... together.* The repetition of this word indicates the unique aspect of the mystery that was not previously known: the equality and mutuality that Gentiles had with Jews in the church, the one body. That Gentiles would turn to the God of Israel and be saved was prophesied in the OT (see Ro 15:9–12); that they would come into an organic unity with believing Jews on an equal footing was unexpected. – The unity is complete when Jew and Gentile are incorporated into the new people of God, the church. The church does not consist of isolated little groups of Christians. Every Christian is a member of the worldwide community of Christians and a partaker in the promise of God! (A)

*heirs.* See note on 1:18.

SHARERS – sugklaronoma – Inheriting together, fellow heirs, coheirs; joint share holders, equal heirs, equally belonging.(Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1) – The promise of Abraham, “In you and in your seeds shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” They did not get this blessing indirectly through the Jew, or by becoming Jews, but directly, as Gentiles; they became fellow-heirs, fellow- members, and fellow partakers “in Christ Jesus.” Enjoying all privileges in him in a state of union and fellowship with him. To this state they are invited and admitted through the gospel. (PC)

PROMISE – The pledge or promises (all of them) given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendents, stressing full equality of Gentile Christians with Jewish Christians; God has no “step-children.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:7** BY..GOD’S GRACE GIVEN ME – Here Paul sees grace bringing him the power necessary to preach the Gospel. Grace also equips us for ministry. (LL) – *energeian* – The operation, action, activity; energy/energize; divine empowerment energizes to evangelize. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:8** *less than the least.* Cf. 1Ti 1:15. Paul never ceased to be amazed that one so unworthy as he should have been chosen for so high a task. His modesty was genuine, even though we may disagree with his self-evaluation. – Not only of apostles and prophets, but even of all believers – a profound expression of humility, founded not only on his persecuting career, but on his consciousness of sin, of inborn rebellion against God’s Law. (PC)

*grace.* In this case, a special endowment that brings responsibility for service.

*to preach.* Lit. “to gospelize”; parallels “to make plain” (v. 9). – Notice how the ministry of the apostles is identified with the ministry of our Lord himself. (A) – The two infinitives (to preach, to make plain) do not refer to separate or different things, but together they explain and define what Paul’s underserved gift was. (PBC)

*unsearchable.* Far beyond what we can know, but not beyond our appreciation—at least in part (cf. Ro 11:33). – The riches of Christ are so vast that they cannot be mapped out or measured. (A) – *anezichniaston* – Incomprehensible or inscrutable. No one can ever exhaust the depths of the Gospel in the person and work of Jesus Christ, for it is a treasure – house of grace, vastly beyond all human comprehension. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1) – Conveying the idea of the things that are most precious

being infinitely abundant. Usually precious things are rare; their very rarity increases their price; but here that which is most precious is also boundless – riches of compassion and love, of merit, of sanctifying, comforting, and transforming power, all without limit, and capable of satisfying every want, craving and yearning of the heart, now and evermore. (PC)

**3:9 MAKE PLAIN TO EVERYONE** – Paul was presented in verse 8 as a missionary. Now he is presented as the universal theologian who brings out the profoundest implications of the Gospel and enlightens the whole church. (A) – *phwtisai* - Give light, light up, illuminate, shine light on. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**KEPT HIDDEN IN GOD, WHO CREATED ALL THINGS** – It has been in the mind of the creator and inherent in creation since the beginning. Notice how creation and redemption are tied together here. The created order is also God's and part of his plan of salvation. (A) – *ajpokekrummevnou* – Kept secret. The revelation of God is the answer to life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:10 now.** In contrast to the “ages past” (v. 9).

*through the church.* The fact that God had done the seemingly impossible—reconciling and organically uniting Jews and Gentiles in the church—makes the church the perfect means of displaying God's wisdom. – The mission of the church, like that of Christ, is not confined to earth but fills the whole universe. (A)

*manifold.* Variegated or multifaceted (in the way that many facets of a diamond reflect and enhance its beauty). – Man-sided, multi-faceted; displaying God's wisdom before the intelligences of the heavenly order. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**SHOULD BE MADE KNOWN** – *gnoqisthan* - To reveal. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

*rulers and authorities.* Christ had ascended over all these (1:20–21). It is a staggering thought that the church on earth is observed, so to speak, by these spiritual powers and that to the degree the church is spiritually united it portrays to them the wisdom of God. This thought may be essential in understanding the meaning of “calling” in 4:1.

*heavenly realms.* See note on 1:3. – In the Preface of our communion liturgy we say: “Therefore, with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious name...” (LL)

**3:11 eternal purpose.** The effective headship of Christ over a united church is in preparation for his ultimate assumption of headship over the universe (1:10). – All periods of history have made their contribution to this eternal purpose and plan of God. Notice how God works in history to bring about redemption and the unity of humanity. (A) – *prothesin* - A plan or will. Through everything that time and life brings about, God carefully prepared a plan for the complete fulfillment of his eternal will. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1) – The apostle is ever anxious that we should connect these operations of God with the profundity, deliberation, and awfulness of an eternal decree, and that we should thus contrast them in our minds with many even of the

most important works of man which are often determined on his part, by a passing event or other trivial cause. (PC)

**3:12** THROUGH FAITH IN HIM – This epistle again stresses the personal relationship with God I Christ that makes all this happen. Our faith is not just “personal,” however, but is part of the design of the universe itself. For this God created us. (A)

WITH FREEDOM AND CONFIDENCE – We no longer need to feel timid or unsure in the presence of God. God is not ruthless or unpredictable, for Christ has revealed him to us as he really is. Note in the entire section how the church rises triumphantly with Christ into the presence of God. The church is victorious over every force or power that might oppose it. Furthermore, the world is created for spiritual purposes and these purposes are realized in the church glorious. (A) – parrasan – Courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

MAY APPROACH – prosagogan – To have access. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

CONFIDENCE – pepoithasei – Trust. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:13** NOT BE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE OF MY SUFFERINGS – Far from discouraging the saints, the suffering of the apostle are a source of courage and renewed strength for the saints. They are not to give up when difficulty and danger threaten. (A)

### *A Prayer for the Ephesians*

**<sup>14</sup>For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom his whole family <sup>a</sup>in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup>may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>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, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

**3:14–21** Paul now expresses a prayer that grows out of his awareness of all that God is doing in believers. God’s key gifts are “power” (vv. 16, 18, 20) and “love” (vv. 17–19). – The heart of this prayer is the fact that love is better than knowledge. (A)

**3:14** *For this reason.* Resumes the thought of v. 1. – Because you Gentiles have now come nigh and become fellow-citizens with all the saints and members of God’s household, I pray for you; and since I am the apostles to the Gentiles, it is a part of my office to pray for you, so that you may grow and increase in your new, spiritual, divine existence and life. (S)

*I kneel.* Expresses deep emotion and reverence, as people in Paul's day usually stood to pray. – This is an emphatic way of denoting prayers; but not incidental, occasional prayer, inspired by some passing feeling; the attitude denotes deliberate prayer, making a business of it, approaching God reverence. (PC)

**3:15** *family.* The word in Greek is similar to the word for “father” (see NIV text note), so it can be said that the “family” derives its name (and being) from the “father.” God is our Father, and we can commit our prayers to him in confidence. – God is the prototype of all Fatherhood. His relationship to his children is the pattern of all other social relationships. (A) – Best renders by “he who is the true Father of all who are children.” The family on earth – Christians – in heaven it includes the angels and saints. (S)

**3:16** HIS GLORIOUS RICHES – God's standard of giving is liberal, bountiful, overflowing. An image of the riches of his glory is seen in the starry heavens, which proclaim at once the vast riches and surpassing glory of God. Or in the beautiful appearance of an autumn sunset, where the whole sky is fleshed with clouds brightened into a sea of glory. (PC) – Christians continually take from this kindness after kindness and all that is good. (S)

STRENGTHEN YOU WITH POWER – This means that Christians might find themselves equipped with courage and vitality for all the tasks ahead. (A)

INNER BEING – This is our mind and our heart. It is our conscience, our will, and our commitments. The actions we take, as Jesus said, flow from the inside out (Luke 6:43-45). (LL)

**3:17**  *dwell.* Be completely at home. Christ was already present in the Ephesian believers' lives (cf. Ro 8:9). – It means to make a permanent home. (LL) – If we are to comprehend the full scope of God's purposes, we need both the inward strengthening of the Holy Spirit and the uninterrupted communion with Christ as he dwells within us. (A)

*hearts.* The whole inner being.

THROUGH FAITH – This aspect of faith uses Martin Luther's favorite word for faith, *fiducia*. It means a relationship of trust, in which we stake our very lives on Christ. ((LL) – The instrument by which this indwelling is attained. (PC)

ROOTED AND ESTABLISHED – Both of these verbs are perfect passive, indicating something which has already happened and is continuing as a stable and constant condition. (A) – That of a tree and that of a building, denoting what is both a starting point and the support of the Christian's love. (PC)

IN LOVE – This is *agape* love which is purely unconditional, intentionally sacrificial, expressive in both word and action, and enduring, as in the case of Christ, even to death on the cross. (LL) – It is implied that the Christian life can begin and flourish only in such an atmosphere as warm sunshine needed to start and advance the life of plant, so love is needed to start and carry on the life of the soul. (PC)

**3:18** TO GRASP – The highest knowledge of God is not personal achievement. It is given to the community of believers and is available only to the individuals who share in the life of that community. We are not plugged into God on our own private wire. (A)

WIDE..LONG...HIGH AND DEEP – The full scope of the divine purpose can be understood only in a corporate life in the church. (A)

**3:19** *surpasses knowledge*. Not unknowable, but so great that it cannot be completely known. – Love is better than knowledge. However desirable, knowledge is nothing unless it is controlled by love. (A)

*fullness*. God, who is infinite in all his attributes, allows us to draw on his resources—in this case, his love. – This is the paradox of the Christian faith. The Ephesians are already filled as Christ dwells in them, but not yet completely filled in terms of the fact that the gift has yet to be realized through spiritual growth. Most of the distortions of the Christian faith result from trying to resolve this paradox. (A)

**3:20** *immeasurably more*. Has specific reference to the matters presented in this section of Ephesians but is not limited to these. – At work in the church today is a low expectation of God. We expect little from God, it seems, and by our lack of prayer and planning, we end up fulfilling our own low expectations. It's not unlike the man who had a flat tire in the middle of the night. He pulled to the side of the road and saw a farmhouse off in the distance. He decided to walk to the house and ask to borrow the lug wrench he himself did not have. It was late, and he was sure the farmer would not want to help him. So sure was he that all along the way he talked to himself about the farmer. "He'll probably be angry that I have awakened him...No doubt he'll complain about how often people come to him for help...He probably never loans tools to strangers...He'll likely say I should have called for assistance," he thought out loud. By the time he reached the farmhouse he was so worked up that he threw a rock through the window of the farmer and exclaimed, "You can keep your lousy lug wrench. I don't want it anyway!" (LL)

*his power*. See 1:19–21.

AT WORK WITHIN US – If he can do great things with us, imagine what his real power is capable of. (A)

**3:21** *to him be glory*. The ultimate goal of our existence (see 1:6 and note). Paul's attitude is so different from the man with the flat tire. Paul knew the extravagance of grace, the scope of God's love, and the power behind that love. The doxology that ends his prayer glorifies God for the power within the church that can do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine." His doxology no doubt raised the expectations of Christians then as it does now.

*in the church and in Christ Jesus*. A remarkable parallel. God has called the church to an extraordinary position and vocation (cf. v. 10; 4:1).