

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 3

By Charles Dailey © 2014 Revised 11/30/2023 NLT
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Previous:

1. The first chapter reviews the wonderful blessings available to the Jewish believer and shows the blessings apply equally to the Gentile believers.
2. It concludes on the theme that Christ is the head of the church and is present in all of us – both Jews and Gentiles – through His Spirit.
3. In the first half of chapter two, we learned that both Jews and Gentiles are God’s work of art, created for good works. But we are not saved **by** good works. The last half of the chapter discusses the breaking down of the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles by the death of Jesus.

MORE COMMENTS TO GENTILES

(1) When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles . . .

- **When I think of all this.** Probably refers to the previous sentence in chapter 2 where Paul said they were becoming a temple of God. The chapter and verse divisions are not original but are late additions for convenience in handling the text.
- Ephesians was among the group of letters that Paul wrote while under house arrest in Acts 28. He was not in a prison, as such. But he was a prisoner. **Robinson** says, “He hears, as it were, the clink of his chain and remembers where he is and why he is there.”
- While it was Emperor Nero (54-68) who was holding Paul captive, he was there because of **Christ Jesus**. He was there by the will of his Master.
- Further, he was there because he stood for the rights of **Gentiles** to be saved. This is clear when we read Acts

21:27 – 22:22. Paul had been arrested over a Gentile issue (Acts 21:17-34) and threatened with death (Acts 22:21-24) because he said that God sent him to the Gentiles. Acts 26:12-18:

Acts 26:12-18 "One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. (13) About noon, Your Majesty, as I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. (14) We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is useless for you to fight against My will.' (15) "Who are You, lord?' I asked. "And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting. (16) Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as My servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future. (17) And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles (18) to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in Me.'

The readers needed to know this bit of history.

- Paul interrupts his flow of thought at the end of verse 1. It repeats and continues in verse 14. This is an indication that he was dictating the text to a secretary, not writing it out.

(2) assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending His grace to you Gentiles. (3) As I briefly wrote earlier, God Himself revealed His mysterious plan to me.

- There is a clue here that Paul was writing for a wider audience than just the Ephesian Christians. God's grace is seen here in two ways:
 - That God would select Paul as a mouthpiece. "... **gave me ...**" Galatians 2:7-9.
 - That God would include the Gentiles in His plan for the ages. **"you."**
- Paul had a special assignment from God. It was to make known God's **mysterious plan**.
- In English, a mystery is something dark, obscure, secret or puzzling. The Greek idea is different. **John Stott:**

"More simply, a mystērion is a truth hitherto hidden from human knowledge or understanding but now disclosed by the revelation of God."

- Paul is claiming direct revelation from God. He is God's spokesperson - an apostle of Jesus Christ. His writings guided the church of his time and they still guide us. The message traveled from God to Paul to pen to reader.
- **"Wrote earlier."** Probably not referring to a previous epistle to them, but to an earlier part of this one. So **A. T. Robertson** in *Word Pictures* and many other commentators. It may refer to 1:9. Also consider verse 4 that follows.

TRUTH REVEALED TO APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

(4) As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. (5) God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by His

Spirit He has revealed it to His holy apostles and prophets.

- The members of the body could **read**. Those who picture them as illiterate people miss the mark. Paul intended they could read and understand the former mystery. This is yet another claim that Paul is writing an inspired message.
- It is true that the Old Testament foretold that Gentiles would be included in God's plans. This is repeated frequently and does not depend on just a sentence or two. Psalm 67 is a case.

Psalms 67:1 For the choir director: A song. A psalm, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

May God be merciful and bless us. May His face smile with favor on us. *Interlude* (2) May Your ways be known throughout the earth, Your saving power among people everywhere. (3) May the nations praise You, O God. Yes, may all the nations praise You. (4) Let the whole world sing for joy, because You govern the nations with justice and guide the people of the whole world.

***Interlude* (5) May the nations praise You, O God. Yes, may all the nations praise You. (6) Then the earth will yield its harvests, and God, our God, will richly bless us. (7) Yes, God will bless us, and people all over the world will fear Him.**

- But now some very important additions have been made to these predictions. An entirely new society has come into being.
- God has **revealed** some new truth through His apostles and **prophets**. The Spirit of God has done this.

- Paul is not the sole revealer. It was not his private message, but **all** of the apostles and prophets agreed.

(6) And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. (7) By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving Him by spreading this Good News.

- In three ways the Gentiles are on a par with the Jewish believers.
 - They are fellow heirs. They are not servants that are allowed into heaven, but they have the same standing as saints in Israel.
 - Gentiles are fellow members of the body. There is no two-tier system with the Jews sitting at the front and the Gentiles in back as they did in the synagogues.
 - The Gentiles are fellow-partakers of the **promise**. There is no difference.
- It was God that made Paul a minister and empowered his ministry. A guard was almost certainly chained to him at the moment.
- Paul had the privilege of a personal commission (vs. 7).

PAUL PRIVILEGED TO TELL GENTILES

(8) Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, He graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.

- Paul sees God's grace as overwhelming. He sees himself as the least of the saints because of his earlier opposition to Christ, His message and His followers. 1

Corinthians 15:9; 1 Timothy 1:12-15. Yet God chose him to deliver the good news to the **Gentiles**.

- His commission was to preach to the **Gentiles**. He is, to some degree, doing that in the letter he is writing here. Think how personally degrading this could have been to a highly-trained Pharisee such as Paul.
- Hear **John Stott**:

“What these riches are we may judge from Paul’s exposition in Ephesians 1 and 2. They are riches freely available because of the cross. They include resurrection from the death of sin, victorious enthronement with Christ in the heavenlies, reconciliation with God, incorporation with Jewish believers in his new society, the end of hostility and the beginning of peace, access to the Father through Christ and by the Spirit, membership of his kingdom and household, being an integral part of his dwelling place among men, and all this only a foretaste of yet more riches to come, namely the riches of the glory of the inheritance which God will give to all his people on the last day.”

(9) I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. (10) God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display His wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

- **God is the Creator of all things** and now He has again created. This time it is a new class of people from the ruins of their own past. They are in the church and it is through the church that God is showing His **wisdom** (vs. 10).
- Their former religions could not bring anything to light. Idols and their demon backers cannot redeem men and

women, cannot lift them, cannot give them hope, cannot free them and cannot solve their conflicts.

- In our day of “everyone doing his own thing” and hearing that it is only “our personal relationship with Christ that counts,” the inspired apostle says that the church is God’s show piece to all of humanity, both by what it is and what it teaches.

- Organizations that we create to accomplish good in place of the church are suspect.

- **John Stott** puts it graphically:

“The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colorful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique. It is God’s new society. And the manycoloured fellowship of the church is a reflection of the many-coloured (or ‘manysplendoured’, to use Francis Thompson’s word) wisdom of God.

“So then, as the gospel spreads throughout the world, this new and variegated Christian community develops. It is as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the *theater*, the world is the *stage*, and church members in every land are the *actors*. God himself has written the *play*, and he directs and *produces* it. Act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold.”

- The church was not an afterthought, but a central part of God’s plan to demonstrate His wisdom. The alternate view says that Israel rejected God’s kingdom so He temporarily substituted the church until He could try again.

THE PLAN WAS CONCEIVED BEFORE THE UNIVERSE

(11) This was His eternal plan, which He carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. (12) Because of Christ and our faith in Him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.

- God showing His wisdom through the church was not a spontaneous idea. It was a part of His **eternal** purpose.
- **Boldly** (vs. 12) --carries the idea of freedom of speech. Paul uses the word again in 6:19. It is used many places including Acts 4:31.
- Again, the subject of access (vs. 12) has come up. We can each reach God on our own and we cannot benefit from a special class of priests, such as in the Roman Catholic system.
- This access is amazing to other world religions that rely on a priesthood to connect worshipers with their deities.
- **John Stott** paints a new picture of history:

“Secular history concentrates its attention on kings, queens and presidents, on politicians and generals, in fact on ‘VIPs’. The Bible concentrates rather on a group it calls ‘the saints’, often little people, insignificant people, unimportant people, who are however at the same time God’s people and for that reason are both ‘unknown (to the world) and yet well-known (to God)’.

“Secular history concentrates on wars, battles and peace treaties, followed by yet more wars, battles and peace treaties. The Bible concentrates rather on the war between good and evil, on the decisive victory won by Jesus Christ over the powers of darkness, on the peace-treaty ratified by his blood, and on the

sovereign proclamation of an amnesty for all rebels who will repent and believe.

“Again, secular history concentrates on the changing map of the world, as one nation defeats another and annexes its territory, and on the rise and fall of empires. The Bible concentrates rather on a multi-national community called ‘the church’, which has no territorial frontiers, which claims nothing less than the whole world for Christ, and whose empire will never come to an end.”

(13) So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.

- When his friends thought of Paul in chains, they may have been discouraged. But the route to glory passes through the land of tribulation. It did with Jesus and it may with us.
- The devil would be delighted if they had such feelings for Paul's troubles that they just quit and went back to the world.

PAUL IS OVERWHELMED BY THANKFULNESS

(14) When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, (15) the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.

- Paul had started a prayer in verse one. After interrupting his own thoughts, he returns to it in this new sentence.
- **I fall to my knees.** The posture in **prayer** is not critical, but Jews generally stood for **prayer**, Mark 11:25. David sat, 1 Chronicles 17:16. Jesus fell on his face, Matthew 26:39.
- Because Paul has access (verse 12), he can pray effectively.

(16) I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit.

- *Prayer request:* That they would have **inner strength** because they have the **Spirit** of God.
- The power to be successful in the face of fierce opposition from Satan and the other religious forces comes straight from God. Paul prays for their strength in the face of resistance. The means is by God's Spirit in our **inner man**. He grants the power to say NO at critical times.
- Perhaps this is why so many denominational "superstar preachers" fall to financial scandal or immorality. They preach well, but lack the help of the Holy **Spirit**.

(17) Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

- How does **Christ make His home** in us? Always by means of His Spirit that He gives when we are baptized into Him. Acts 2:38. Since we cannot be specific about how our own spirit dwells in us, we are not able to be more specific about how the Holy Spirit dwells there either.
- The inner man of verse 16 is identical to **your hearts** in verse 17. Both are talking about our spirits.
- **Make His home** shows *residence* rather than just *lodging overnight* as we might at a motel. Learning **Christ** makes us stable, reliable people.
- **Your roots** is a word picture drawn from the orchard. Many trees put down deep **roots** to withstand the elements. So must we.

(18) And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. (19) May you experience the love

of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

- The **love** will enable us to comprehend the dimensions of what God has done for us.
- Paul wanted all of the saints to grasp the scope of Christ's **love**.
- Consider what Paul writes to the Romans in 8:

(37) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. (38) And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow -- not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. (39) No power in the sky above or in the earth below -- indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Christ's love is measureless.

- **John Stott** says,

“... the love of God is ‘broad’ enough to encompass all mankind (Especially Jews and Gentiles, the theme of these chapters), ‘long’ enough to last for eternity, ‘deep’ enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and ‘high’ enough to exalt him to heaven.”
- Paul ran out of words. The **love of Christ** is greater than we can express because language is inadequate.
- Each of us needs to have our comprehension of Christ's **love** expanded. It is **love** that enables us to become God-like.

- It seems that our goal for growing is to become like God – and we never will.
- Mystery religions touted knowledge as the ultimate. Paul says “no,” **love** surpasses knowledge.

GOD'S POWER MUST BE GLORIFIED

(20) Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. (21) Glory to Him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

- Not only can **God** answer our prayers, He can go way beyond our wildest imaginations. We can't even dream up the things that he can actually do. He is a **God** of super-abundance.
- **God** can accomplish these wonderful things through saints as individuals and the **church** as a whole.
- The grand climax of history will be the total focus on the **glory** of **God** by the **church**.