



## NG Study Guide: Ephesians 3:1-13 :: “In Christ You Are Partakers” [5.12.24]

### Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

### The Study

**Thesis:** Followers of Christ are part of the most amazing entity ever imagined – The Church, and are to experience Jesus together. When a diverse group of people display God’s love to one another it reveals His love to others.

**Subject:** The mystery of Jesus

**Object:** Partake of Christ together

#### A. The plan for Christ’s Church (1-6)

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup> by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), <sup>5</sup> 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: Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...*

#### 1. Divided people united in Christ (1-4)

The *reason* Paul is referring to (1) is the gospel message of salvation by grace and the unity of Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) in the Church as one person and household (2:8-22). God’s plan to bring Jew and Gentile together in the Church by His *grace* (2) was *revealed* (2,5) to Paul for the benefit of Gentiles (non-Jews). Grace is receiving something that you don’t deserve. Salvation is available because of what Jesus did not our efforts.

A *mystery* (3,4,9) is a truth that is veiled in Old Testament, but clearly revealed in the New Testament. Paul had briefly written already (3) about this mystery in chapter two regarding the unity of Jew and Gentile being fit together to form the house of God (2:11-22).

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, divisions between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), men and women, free and slave were so pronounced that these groups were radically separated. The Church uniquely obliterated these class distinctions, clearly declares these groups equals (Galatians 3:28); and integrates these divergent redeemed people together in Christ!

*What are some matters that can cause people to divide rather than unite?*

#### 2. Jew and Gentile partake together (5-6)

God’s plan regarding His Church was *not made known* until the time it was *revealed* (5). The Greek term means to uncover, and the aorist tense indicates that that it was revealed once and for all. The Church is not improved Judaism, but a new creation. The Church was *revealed* by the *Holy Spirit to the apostles and New Testament writers* (5).

Prior to Jesus, Jews could not imagine Gentiles having the same standing before God as Jews. The prior understanding was in order to be part of the family of God, and share in the inherited blessings of being part of God’s covenant people, a Gentile needed to convert to Judaism. For roughly the first ten years of the early Church it was essentially entirely Jewish (Acts 1-9). Then God’s Spirit was poured out upon Gentiles at the house of Cornelius just like at Pentecost (Acts 10, 2). Church leaders realized through the grace of God, and the gift of God

through the gospel, all people can become part of the Church through faith in Christ (Acts 15). Thus faith in Christ, not ritual (e.g. circumcision) nor performance of a moral code is the basis of acceptance into the community of the Church.

The *promise* (6) or New Covenant speaks of promised blessings of forgiveness of sin, spiritual life, relationship with God, and a community of faith. *Same body* (6) is the Greek *syssoma* and it was a word coined by Paul to meet the unique situation created by the gospel. This is the only place the word is used in the New Testament, and was later used exclusively by Christian writers. No other society is comparable to the Church since Jesus is the head, foundation, the one who holds it together, and the only one who can build it. Jews and Gentiles, former separated people, partake of Christ and the blessings of life with God as part of the same body or community of faith *through the gospel* (6). The gospel is the good news that all people can be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection.

God's plan can be threatened by bad doctrine, and bad practice. Paul confronted Peter when Jewish church leaders from Jerusalem visited the church at Antioch, and Peter separated himself from the Gentiles, because he was concerned about what the Jews would think. Other Jewish Christians at Antioch, even Barnabas, followed Peter's hypocrisy (Galatians 2:14-21). Paul recognized the threat to the gospel and the church. Peter's doctrine would declare that Jews and Gentiles are united, but in practice, he acted as though there were differences to separate over. That separation mars the beauty of Christ and His Church. Paul knew had to confront this error and threat to gospel-culture.

## **B. The proclamation of Christ's Church (7-9)**

*<sup>7</sup>Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. <sup>8</sup>To 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, <sup>9</sup>and 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;*

### **1. The Person we proclaim (7-8)**

Paul became a *minister* of the gospel (7). The term translated minister is *diakonos* which is often translated as servant or deacon. This doesn't refer to clergy, vocational ministry, or an office in the church. Paul, like each of us, was called by *grace* (7, 1Timothy 1:12-17) to minister or proclaim God's grace [8, 2:8-9]. God had empowered him to proclaim Christ to others. The term *effective working* (7) is *energia* which yields our English energy, and the term *power* (7) is *dunamis* which yields our English dynamite. Paul did not see himself as qualified for the task, but realized it was God's grace and power (7-8). Paul humbly calls himself *the least of all the saints* or followers of Christ (8). Paul realized that the same Spirit that reveals Christ empowers us to proclaim Christ. Paul is not the hero, but God's Spirit!

Paul wants the *Gentiles*, those who had been far from God, to get to know the *unsearchable riches* or limitless treasure that is *Christ* (8). Jesus is the Person we are proclaiming. His goodness and greatness are limitless, but the more we know Him, the more we want to proclaim Him.

*If not Jesus, what are some other messages the church will proclaim?*

### **2. The purpose of proclaiming (9)**

Paul wanted all to *see* or understand and experience *the fellowship of the mystery* referring to unity with God and others through Jesus (9). In essence we proclaim Jesus and His gospel so those who are disconnected from community with God and other believers can partake of Christ. And experience the blessings of life with God together with a body or community of faith of divergent people united in Christ.

*What is attractive about followers of Christ, who are different from one another, partaking of Christ together?* Consider that almost every other aspect of our society conditions acceptance based on performance or alignment with values (e.g. work, school, friendships, clubs. Cf. family). This is what makes the gospel and the Church so attractive (assuming there is actual unity and togetherness in practice). The Church is exclusive in the sense that you have to place your faith in Jesus to be accepted, but once you believe then you are to be accepted regardless

of differences. We are to be united in Christ and by Christ, but not uniform. Our common Nexus is Jesus, and our identity as His.

Ps. 133:1 declares, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Brethren are covenant people. The psalmist likens it to the refreshing of mist from melting snow descending upon an arid place, or the like the presence of the Spirit of God like an anointing, and the contentment of God’s blessing of eternal life with Him (Psalm 133:2-3). It is something worth beholding, because it is supernatural, and not found in the natural world.

### **C. The privilege of Christ’s Church (10-13)**

#### **1. Glorify God’s wisdom (10).**

*To 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,*

The term *manifold* refers to multi-faceted or sufficient for any need. *God’s wisdom* is sufficient for all of man’s needs. God’s glory and wisdom are displayed by the Church among the angelic beings of heaven (*the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*). God doesn’t use angels to reveal the gospel to man, but man to reveal God’s grace to angels.

#### **2. Glorify God’s redemption (11-13)**

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

God’s glorious wisdom (10) is revealed to humanity and every spiritual being *according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord* (11). What is this eternal purpose? Through the gospel, mankind is redeemed, restored, reconciled, and reunited with God. Fallen man can be restored through faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9). Fallen angels never get to experience the hope of restoration. God’s plan of redemption was, is, and will be for Jew and Gentile to partake of Christ together! That was, is, and will be His eternal purpose (11).

God has always had a plan to redeem man. He was not surprised by Adam’s fall in the Garden (Gen. 3). But it was not until Christ’s ministry, death and resurrection that the mystery of the Church could be fully revealed. That through faith in Christ all can experience *access to God*, and can *approach Him with confidence and boldness* (12, Hebrews 4:12-16). Paul concludes by exhorting the Ephesians not to lose heart at his tribulation. Paul’s imprisonment was for their glory, because it revealed how important they were to God and to Paul.

*How might believers partake of Christ together with other believers who are (very) different than them?*

#### **Study Guide Qs:**

**Q1. What are some matters that can cause people to divide rather than unite?**

**Q2. If not Jesus, what are some other messages the church will proclaim?**

**Q3. What is attractive about followers of Christ, who are different from one another, partaking of Christ together?**

**Q4. How might believers partake of Christ together with other believers who are very different than them?**

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Search the mystery of Christ and God’s progressive revelation regarding salvation <https://www.gotquestions.org/progressive-revelation.html>. What did you discover and what questions arose?

**2. Why might people who have discovered the limitless treasure of Jesus be very motivated to share Jesus with others who don't know Him? <https://www.gotquestions.org/unsearchable-riches.html>.**

**Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:**

- 1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?**
- 2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?**

**Disciples who make disciples:**

- 1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?**
- 2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:  
[Invite someone different to participate in your NG, a meal, or an area where you serve at church.](#)**

**Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:**

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

**Notes:**

- 1. Preparation and participation:** Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?**  
If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.
- 3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better.** As a leader, discuss this section frequently.
- 5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples.** Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

**Next week's passage:**

Ephesians 3:14-21 :: "In Christ You Are Loved"