

## Metro Women's Bible Study Ephesians 3:1-13

### Lesson 6

God revealed a secret to Paul. It was not a secret to be kept, but a secret to be *dispensed* throughout the world – especially to the Gentiles; the beneficiaries of the good news contained in the secret. What is that secret? The Gentiles and Jews, as believers have now been united as one body, the church.

### **DAY ONE: Read Ephesians 3:1-13**

1. Read through this week's verses using both your Observation Worksheet and another Bible translation or paraphrase.

a. Ephesians 3:1-13 has been divided into 2 sections. List below the subject(s) covered in each section.

**Verses 1-7**

**Verses 8-13**

**OPTIONAL:** From the list below record the key words and their symbols on the chart.

**New to this lesson:** *were/once, you/we*

**Term of conclusion:** *therefore, for this reason*

**OPTIONAL:** Using the symbols you have chosen, mark each of the key words every time they are used in Ephesians 3:1-13. Remember, as you mark the words: *God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit*, to mark any personal pronouns that refer to Them.

2. Using your marked references to Jesus, make a list of what Ephesians 3:1-13 reveals about Him. Record the verses reference next to each one. a. Summarize, in your own words, what these verses teach about Jesus.

### **DAY TWO: Read Ephesians 3:1-5**

**Verse, "For this reason"** - refers back to the building together of the saints - Jew and Gentile being built together, and are fellow citizens with God's people.

1. Before his conversion to Christianity, Paul had an impressive resume. He referred to himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews, concerning the law, a Pharisee. That is like saying, "I was among the most religious of the religious". In contrast, how does Paul identify himself in Ephesians 3:1?

a. Whose *prisoner* did Paul gladly refer himself to be?

b. At the time of this writing, Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Why do you think he described himself as a *prisoner of Jesus Christ*?

2. Most commentators agree that Paul wrote this epistle during his first Roman imprisonment during which he was under house arrest, and yet he describes himself not as a prisoner of Rome but of Christ Jesus. Paul understood his imprisonment as God's will for him. What reason does Paul give in Acts 28:20 for his chains?

3. Verse 1 says that Paul was *the prisoner of Christ*. Who was he a prisoner of Christ for? See verse 1

a. See why in Acts 13:46-47

b. In a sense, we're all a prisoner of something. We're all bound to something. Some people are bound to dangerous things like addictions to drugs or alcohol. Others are bound to pleasure – they live for the next time they'll experience pleasure. Some people are imprisoned to others. They are always wondering how they can please their parents, spouse, boyfriend or friends. Their life's aim is to get that other person to be happy with them. Bob Dillon had a song years ago where he sang, "**You gotta serve somebody ...**" The way Paul might rephrase it is, "you have to be a **prisoner** of somebody" Paul chose to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He lived for one thing, to serve Jesus. You might say he was "captured" by His love. Paul said "the love of Christ controls me" (2Cor. 5:14) Are you a prisoner of any of the things mentioned above? Who are you a prisoner of?

c. What did Paul do during his 2 years of imprisonment? See Acts 28:30-31

d. During this time of "house arrest" Paul a prisoner of men, viewed his circumstances from a divine perspective and used his time of imprisonment not to sulk and blame God, but to preach the Kingdom of God! How does his example inspire you to look at your trials differently, and to use them for God's glory?

4. Let's look at Verse 2. Beginning in **Ephesians 3:2** Paul begins a new sentence which does not end until verse 7. The thought continues to verse 13 and thus this section (verses 2-13) seems to serve as a "parenthesis" or digression. What had these Gentiles heard?

5. Look up the word *dispensation* in your Concordance and write out the English translation.  
**Dispensation-** (Stewardship)

a. Paul was given the responsibility of having oversight or management over the grace of God. He was given the revelation of the grace of God and the responsibility of properly preaching and teaching it. **Grace** (5485) (**charis**) in simple terms is God's unmerited favor and God's supernatural enablement and empowerment for salvation and for daily sanctification. As Disciples of Christ, Paul's mission is our mission as well! How are you being a steward of the grace of God? How are you extending God's unmerited favor to those who live in your home, or those you work with, or come in contact with?

6. Surely you have heard about the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, (Ephesians 3:2 NASV). The sentence continues in verses 3 and 4. What had they heard that would indicate a supernatural calling on Paul's life?

**Note:** a *mystery*, as Paul refers to, is a spiritual truth once hidden, but now revealed.

a. To what *mystery* is Paul referring to in Colossians 1:24-27? Highlight or underline what you discover.

**Colossians 1:24-27** <sup>24</sup>I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, <sup>25</sup>of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, <sup>26</sup>the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. <sup>27</sup>To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

7. What does Ephesians 3:5 tell us about this *mystery*?

a. In his letter to the Galatians Paul wrote about a revelation of Jesus Christ. What do you learn from Galatians 1:11-17 about Paul and this Revelation?

**Galatians 1:11-17** <sup>11</sup>But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup>For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. <sup>14</sup>And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup>But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, <sup>16</sup>to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus."

b. Peter was among those who did not understand this *mystery*; God's plan to save the Gentiles. What does Peter say about this in Acts 10:28 that reveals to us that he now understands this *mystery*?

**Acts 10:28**

c. By Whom was the *mystery revealed*? See Ephesians 3:3 & 5.

8. What do the following verses tell us about the *Holy Spirit*? John 14:26 and John 16:13

**John 14:26**

**John 16:13**

a. How you have experienced the Holy Spirit revealing truth to you at different times in your life? Explain your answer.

**DAY THREE: Read Ephesians 3:6-8a**

1. In Ephesians 3:6, Paul takes the guess work out of the *mystery*. What does he say it is?

a. What do the following verses say that deepen our understanding of this *mystery*?

**Galatians 3:14** “<sup>14</sup>that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

**Galatians 3:26-28** “<sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

2. What two privileges do believing Gentiles now have? See Ephesians 3:6

a. What are the privileges of an *heir* according to Galatians 3:29?

b. What does Romans 4:13 add to this?

**Romans 4:13-14**

3. **Wayne Barber** explains that "fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" speaks of the promise of redemption; that if a man comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he can enter into the family of God. According to Galatians 3:13-14, how have we been allowed to partake of this promise? "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.'"

**\*\* John Phillips** writes, "The new equality of the Gentiles was a bitter pill for most Jews to swallow. For centuries they had prided themselves on being God's "hosen people. They had nurtured a growing contempt for Gentiles and wallowed in religious and racial snobbery. They had considered themselves to be God's favorites. Now all this superiority was shattered. It turned out that all along God had loved the Gentiles just as much as He had loved the Jews (witness the events in the book of Jonah, for instance). Now God was proving this truth in an astonishing way by bringing Jews and Gentiles together in a new body that ignored the special privileges the Jews had enjoyed for some thousand years. Gentiles were not going to be added to the existing corporate body of the Jewish people, the nation of Israel. There would be an entirely new body to which Jews and Gentiles would be added on equal terms.

Jews and Gentiles would share equally in the same **legacy**. They would be "**fellow heirs**." There would be no double portion for the Jews. Jews and Gentiles alike would receive the same blessing.

They would share equally in the same **life** too. There would be one body, its head being Christ and its member's believers. Jews and Gentiles were all one in Him- all washed by His blood, all partakers of the same Spirit of life, and all equally dependent on Him and on one another.

4. After reading this quote, can you think of a time that, as a Christian, your thinking was wrong and someone had to correct it? If so, briefly share that experience.

5. In Ephesians 3:7 Paul declares his calling as a *minister*. How does Paul view this calling?

6. Paul did not make himself a minister but God appointed him as a minister. The calling and empowering of God is His prerogative alone to give. Underline or highlight what you learn about Paul's calling from God in Acts 26:16-18.

**Acts 26:16-18** <sup>16</sup>"But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. <sup>17</sup>I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, <sup>18</sup>to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

a. Using the following passages underline or highlight what you learn about Paul's response to his calling.

**1 Corinthians 15:10** <sup>10</sup>"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which* was with me.

**Acts 20:18-24** "And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, <sup>21</sup>

testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

b. If someone loses the joy or stamina in serving Christ, what do you think they should do?

7. Paul took God's calling on his life very seriously. He labored fervently. Colossians 1:29 tells us that he even *strived*. Yet, Paul had a source of strength beyond his own. What does Colossians 1:29 teach us about this?

8. So far, in chapter 3, Paul has described himself as a *prisoner of Jesus Christ* and a *minister*. What phrase does he use to describe himself in verse 8?

a. Read 1 Corinthians 15:9 and 1 Timothy 1:15. Summarize what Paul is saying about himself.  
**1 Corinthians 15:9** “<sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

**1 Timothy 1:15** “<sup>15</sup>This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

b. How do you think someone who thought of himself in this way could be used by God?

#### **DAY FOUR: Read Ephesians 3:8b-10**

1. Paul was given grace to *preach among the Gentiles*. What specifically does verse 8 say he was to *preach*?

2. Look up the words *unsearchable* & *riches* in your Concordance and write out the English translation

#### **Unsearchable**

a. Write out the only other use of this word in the New Testament from Romans 11:33. This passage sure gives me the “wow” factor!

#### **Riches-**

b. Where do we receive this plentiful supply of spiritual riches? See Colossians 2:3

**When a person trusts the Lord Jesus, he immediately becomes infinitely rich spiritually, for in Christ he possesses inexhaustible treasures. We can never find that wealth apart from Christ.**

3. Verse 9 continues Paul's commission. What do you learn from this verse?

a. The word *fellowship* may be better understood as *administration* or *distribution*. The revealing of this *mystery* was a **primary** part of Paul's ministry. Paul's general ministry was to preach the gospel. Yet, he was also given a specific ministry to share the mystery that the gospel was available to all, whether Gentile or Jew. Why was it so important that Paul fulfill the specific calling on his life?

b. How does this speak to you about fulfilling your specific calling?

4. According to Ephesians 3:10, what was God's intention?

**Not only was the mystery of our redemption, of Jew and Gentile now in one body, preached to a visible audience on earth, but it is also being proclaimed to an invisible audience of angelic hosts in the heavenlies, both good and evil angels.**

**Challenge:** Define the word *manifold* as it is used in this verse to describe God's *wisdom*.

**Manifold**

**Paul's point is that the wisdom of God has shown itself in Christ to be varied beyond measure and in a way which surpasses all previous knowledge thereof. It is "infinitely diversified" and from which ever way you view God's wisdom, new flashes of truth blaze forth. His wisdom is inexhaustible. God's eternal plan is more complex and multifaceted than Old Testament saints had imagined.**

5. How does God plan to make this message *known*?

**In context Paul is saying there is an invisible audience of princes or chiefs among angels, including the fallen angels (see note Ephesians 6:12) who are watching the unfolding of the drama of this mystery of redemption of Jew and Gentile in one body.**

**God is "educating" the angels by means of the church! What they learn is the "manifold wisdom of God". They knew God's wisdom in creation but the truth of salvation of Jew and Gentile in one body was a mystery hidden from them.**

**DAY FIVE: Read Ephesians 3:11-13**

1. What phrase from verse 11 discloses that this *mystery* was not an afterthought?

a. What does God say about His plans in Isaiah 14:24?

b. What affect does knowing the surety of God's plans for your life have on you?

2. In Whom was this plan accomplished? See verse 11

a. Because of Jesus, what does verse 12 say that we have?

b. Using Paul's words (or your own) from verse 12, describe this *access* that we have and what it means to you.

3. According to Hebrews 4:14-16 what can we find *at the throne of grace*?

**Hebrews 4:15-16** <sup>14</sup>Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

4. *Therefore*, (Ephesians 3:13) what does Paul ask the Gentile believers *not* to do?

5. Describe Paul's ministry attitude by using the following verses:

**Acts 14:22** <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

**2 Corinthians 1:6** <sup>6</sup>Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation.”

**Galatians 6:9** <sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

**Hebrews 12:3-4** “<sup>3</sup>For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. <sup>4</sup>You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”

a. What can we apply to our lives from this?

6. Paul's concern that others not be overly concerned about him is not exclusive to the Ephesians. What do you learn about Paul and his sufferings from Philippians 1:12-14?

**Philippians 1:12-14** “<sup>12</sup>But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, <sup>13</sup>so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; <sup>14</sup>and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

a. Paul began this section (verse 1) telling the Gentiles that he was a *prisoner of Christ Jesus* for them. He ended this section (verse 13) telling them that his *tribulations were for them, which is their glory*. In light of what Paul wrote in Philippians 1:12, what was Paul's over-riding concern?

b. Reflect on your own concerns about serving Christ. How does this challenge you?

### **DAY SIX: Review Ephesians 3:1-13**

1. Paul was a *dispenser* of God's grace. What are some of the things about God's grace that are most meaningful to you?

a. To be a dispenser, we must have something to *dispense*. If you were a vending machine, what would you be stocked with?

2. The *mystery* revealed to the Gentiles is now old news to us. Describe how you might have felt if you were alive 2,000 years ago and, hearing the gospel for the first time, and were told that it wasn't available for you.

3. Record on your Worksheets “**Truths about God, Truths about Jesus, Truths about the Holy Spirit, Truths about the Believer, and Instructions.**”

*“for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle— I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying— a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth”. - 1 Timothy 2:7*