

Eph 3:1–13 (ESV) For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—⁽²⁾ assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ⁽³⁾ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁽⁴⁾ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁽⁵⁾ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁽⁶⁾ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁽⁷⁾ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁽⁸⁾ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁽⁹⁾ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ⁽¹⁰⁾ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ⁽¹¹⁾ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ⁽¹²⁾ in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ⁽¹³⁾ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

1. Most of us love a good mystery that keeps us on the edge of my seat

- A. If it is written well – the ending when it finally gets solved is so satisfying!

Wow! I never saw that coming

- 1). For some reason this reminded me of a story – two men and a mystery

Two families who had lived in the dark jungles of Africa. They were befriended by missionaries and brought to the United States. Everything was new and mysterious. One day the two men left their wives at home and took a walk. They ended up in front of a posh department store. As they stood there taking it all in, they saw an elderly lady approach the front doors. The doors automatically opened and she went in. Immediately another door opened and a beautiful young lady walked out. They looked at each other wide-eyed and speechless. Then it happened again. An elderly woman who wasn’t much to look at walked up, the doors opened up and she disappeared into the store. Then the other door opened up and a woman who was a knock out appeared. The men looked at each other and said “Let’s go get our wives!”

- a). Like I said – we all enjoy a good mystery – especially with a great ending

- B. In this passage Paul explains a mystery that ends in a way nobody saw coming!

- 1). An ending that took everyone by surprise
2). This was a story that was well written

There were hints in the OT that the Gentiles would be a part of the plan of salvation

- a). We had to wait until the NT to see the full unfolding of his plan
b). But nobody saw how God would work that out

2. What “Mystery” means in the Greek

- A. It simply means something that wasn’t known before but now is

- 1). We didn’t know how God was going to unite the Jew and Gentile now we do

- B. So Paul is going to tell us what the mystery is – and how it was revealed to him

Transition: With that as an introduction – let’s dig into this section

I. PAUL THE PRISONER

Eph 3:1 (ESV) For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

1. Paul writes this epistle while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28)

- A. The reason for his imprisonment – he preached Christ

- 1). The religious leaders in Jerusalem felt threatened by Christ’s teachings
2). And so did Paul before he was converted – Christianity was a threat to Judaism
a). It taught that the Law – circumcision – the traditions were not necessary to be saved
b). These leaders to protect Judaism and their position lashed out
They pressured Rome to arrest and try Paul for treason and causing a rebellion
c). Paul being a Roman citizen could appeal to Caesar to hear his case and did so
As he writes this he is was awaiting his trial in Rome

Transition: It's interesting how Paul saw his situation – important to see this

2. Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ

A. Even though the circumstances of his arrest and trial were by the hands of man

1). Paul believed it was because of the plan of God
He trusted that God was in control of everything that happened to him

2). I believe that too – don't you – we believe in the Sovereignty of God

The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith: We believe that God upholds and governs all things—from galaxies to subatomic particles, from the forces of nature to the movements of nations, and from the public plans of politicians to the secret acts of solitary persons—all in accord with His eternal, all-wise purposes to glorify Himself, yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly; but that His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with the moral accountability of all persons created in His image.

a). I've read that before – but that requires repetition to keep it fresh in our mind

B. This outlook is the only way to have consistent joy

1). To see everything coming through the love of God – even when it hurts
He is in control and he knows what he's doing – even when it doesn't seem like it

2). My life isn't being tossed to and fro through a series of unfortunate events

a). This is the result of a divine conductor orchestrating everything required
To fashion into me Christlikeness and bring me into a place of blessing

b). To use Psalm 23 language – this is the valley of the shadow of death
That must be traversed to get to those green fields of blessing

Point: So Paul knew that Jesus was the Lord of his life NOT the Roman government

A. The Roman government was mighty – but just a puppet in the hand of God

B. Paul also wasn't surprised by this happening to him

3. Paul knew in advance he would suffer

Ac 9:15–16 (ESV) But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ⁽¹⁶⁾ *For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*”

A. This shows us something else – Paul was willing to accept the will of his Lord no matter what it was

1). If it meant prison – then so be it – great suffering – then fine

2). He didn't demand ease and comfort from the one who set the example by going to a cross

B. Paul understood the Christian life was a call to warfare not comfort

See that in his writings

2 Tim 2:3 (NIV) Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Eph 6:11-13 (NIV) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (13) Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

1). We don't remember that – therefore we're surprised when trials come into our life

a). We're surprised when the spiritual warfare heats up

b). Check your contract – the Bible – you'll see it clearly defined there

C. Paul's life on the pages of Scripture is a living example for us

1). He trusts God in all things – even prison

2). That trust is seen by his willingness to accept all things as coming from God's hand

Phil 4:11-13 (NIV) ...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. (12) I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content

in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (13) I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

- a). I know what it is to have plenty – and I was content then – of course EASY
I know what it is to have nothing – and I am content then – Wow!
- 1a). I find my joy in Christ – trusting his will to be best for me
Even when I can't figure out how it could be best for me

Transition: Now he tells us why he was in prison

4. Paul was in prison on behalf of the Gentiles

- A. He was awaiting trial because of his missionary efforts to reach the Gentiles
 - 1). He was suffering for proclaiming the very truths he is writing in this epistle
- B. I believe Paul – like he did in Philippians is comforting his readers
 - 1). I am here because of Christ – it is his plan – don't be too concerned
I am here because I have been faithful to the ministry I was called to – it's worth it
- C. The Apostles faced their trials a little differently than we do – see this in Acts
 - 1). Again they become our example
 - 2). We pick up the story of the Apostles being brought before the Jewish leadership
Who are trying to force them to stop proclaiming the truth about Jesus
Ac 5:27–30 (ESV) And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ⁽²⁸⁾ saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” ⁽²⁹⁾ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. ⁽³⁰⁾ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.
 - a). They say “We command you to stop teaching about Jesus and quit blaming us
 - b). Peter says “We must obey God rather than God”
Then adds “The God of our fathers who raised Jesus, whom YOU killed on that tree”
 - 3). Like Paul - The consequences didn't determine if they were going to be obedient or not
 - 4). After getting some advice from Gamaliel we pick up the story again
Ac 5:40–41 (ESV) and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁽⁴¹⁾ *Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.*
 - a). But I'm sure they stopped preaching right
Ac 5:42 (ESV) And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.
 - b). They were more concerned with the eternal than the temporal
 - 1a). They understood that every hardship that came from serving their king
Would be rewarded greatly when they entered glory
 - 2a). They fixed their eyes on the other side of the grave
 - 5). If you're only concerned about the temporal – that will keep you from really serving Christ
 - a). Because we know total commitment can bring us into conflict with the world
2 Ti 3:12 (ESV) Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,
 - 1a). We all must decide if Christ is worth that – the Apostles believed he was

Transition: Now Paul goes on to explain his ministry of proclaiming the mystery

II. PAUL EXPLAINING THE MYSTERY

Eph 3:2–5 (ESV) assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ⁽³⁾ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁽⁴⁾ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁽⁵⁾ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

1. Paul assumes his readers have heard his testimony

- A. It seems his conversion was well known – far told
 - 1). The Christian persecution became THE church planter – how? Let me tell you...
 - “He was on his way to Damascus to imprison the Christian believers when Christ himself confronted him on that road. He was knocked down and blinded for three days. During that time something happened and he came out planting churches!” “Really!”
 - a). His ferocity against the church was only matched by his zeal to plant new churches
- B. Paul says when Christ converted him – he called him into a specific ministry
 - He made him a steward of God’s grace for the Gentiles
 - 1). Christ revealed the truth of grace for the Gentiles to Paul
 - Then commissioned him to take that truth out to those Gentiles

2. How Paul learned the mystery

Eph 3:3 (ESV) how the mystery was made known to me *by revelation*, as I have written briefly.

- A. The mystery was this – Jews and Gentiles could be united as one by faith in Christ apart from the law
 - 1). God showed him that – not man
- B. This was not known by men in other generations like it is known now

Thought: Let’s look at this - The fact that Jew and Gentile could be united was nothing new

- A. The Gospel blessing to all nations goes all the way back to Abraham
 - Ga 3:6–8 (ESV)** just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? ⁽⁷⁾ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁽⁸⁾ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”
 - 1). All nations on earth would be blessed through Abraham
 - a). But how – with 20/20 hindsight we know through his seed Jesus Christ
 - 2). We also see Abraham believed God and was considered to be righteous
 - a). That was apart from the law – because there was no law yet
 - But until Paul explained that in Romans it was still fuzzy
 - B. Isaiah 52 gives us two scriptures that show the Gentiles will be a part of God’s plan
 - Is 52:7 (ESV)** How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”
 - Is 52:10 (ESV)** ... *all the ends of the earth* shall see the salvation of our God.
 - 1). Here we have salvation proclaimed to Zion (Israel) and to the ends of the earth (Gentiles)

Question: So why are we calling this a mystery if we know the Gentile would be a part of God’s plan? Why does Paul say in v. 5 this “Mystery of Christ” was previously unknown?

- A. God’s plan to save the nations wasn’t the mystery – that was known
 - 1). But the way God would go about it was unknown – all through faith in Christ
 - a). That God himself would come to earth to live out righteousness
 - And that God would give that righteousness – 100% compliance to his law as a free gift to all who believe – Jew and Gentile
 - 2). That message is radical – God will come and live the life we were required to live
 - And die on a cross paying the penalty we deserved because we couldn’t live that life!!!!
 - a). That’s that mystery being solved with a turn that catches you off guard

They never saw THAT coming!

- B. This is the message revealed to the Apostles – How God was going to save individuals
 - 1). This is the message the Apostles were entrusted with – explain how that happened
 - a). How both Jew and Gentile would become one through faith in Christ

Transition: Let's look at that idea of stewardship of God's grace

3. Being a steward of God's grace

Eph 3:2 (ESV) assuming that you have heard of *the stewardship of God's grace* that was given to me for you,

- A. This was something that Paul took very seriously – seemed to constantly drive him on

2 Co 5:9–10 (ESV) So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (**Why Paul? Why do you live your life constantly wanting to please Christ?**) ⁽¹⁰⁾ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Includes us in Rom 14:12 (NIV) So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

- 1). Paul says every one of us are going to have this meeting with Christ
 - a). We are going to talk over how faithful we were as stewards of what he gave us
 - 1a). Our time – money – gifts – talents etc.
 - 2a). NT tells us we are not owners – it is God's – we are stewards
And will talk over how well we did

- 2). This caused Paul to live his life in a way that he would be prepared for that meeting

2 Co 5:11 (ESV) Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

- a). Because we know this meeting is coming up – we persuade others
 - 1a). Why persuade others? Because that was his calling
- b). He was called to proclaim the Gospel

Ga 1:15–16 (ESV) But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ⁽¹⁶⁾ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...

Point: Paul lived in light of that meeting

- A. He was called to proclaim the Gospel – therefore – he did in season and out – feel like it or not
 - 1). He did so no matter what the cost – prison or death

Thought: I think we take our Christianity so lightly – we live like we won't ever give account

- A. This meeting doesn't move us at all – Paul teaches through his words and example it should

Reformation Study Bible: Degrees of reward in heaven are taught in this verse. Though Christians have their sins forgiven and will never suffer the punishments of hell ([Rom. 6:23](#); [8:1](#)), they will nonetheless stand before Christ at the day of judgment, to receive various degrees of reward for what they have done in this life.

- B. Objection: I don't care about rewards! I just want to love Christ – sounds so spiritual – but isn't Biblical
 - 1). Paul warns us to be concerned about that day – He tells us he is
 - 2). He tells us to run the race with excellence to get the prize
 - 3). He was able to suffer so much because he knew it turned into a greater weight of glory
 - a). Maybe it's time we stopped sounding so spiritual – and conform our mind to the Bible instead

Thought: So the Spirit spoke to the Apostles and Prophets of those early days

- A. He explained how the Gospel that was written about in the OT would be accomplished
 - 1). The Jew and the Gentile would become united in Christ – by faith in Christ alone
 - a). They didn't have to adopt the Jewish traditions or the Mosaic law
 - b). The righteousness they needed would be given as a free gift to those who believe

Transition: Now Paul sums up the mystery

III. THE GENTILES ARE FELLOW HEIRS

Eph 3:6 (ESV) This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

1. There it is in a nutshell – but it is a bombshell

A. The Gentiles are fellow heirs of the same body – united with Jews

And they both become inheritors through the promise in Christ that comes through the Gospel

Question: Why would Paul go on so much about this – we get it Paul – Jew and Gentile one – YES!

A. This is not shocking to us because it is so familiar – we’ve had 2000 years to get used to it

B. So radical to the zealous Jew who had lived his whole life trying to keep the law

1). Who thought the only way into heaven was by keeping it

2). Then Paul comes along and says things like

Ro 3:20 (ESV) For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

3). Can you imagine how hard it would be to grasp the truth

It is still the standard you must keep perfectly BUT Christ kept the law for you!

You have to see that you never could keep the law – it was never meant to show you how right you were with God – it was meant to show you how wrong you were – it was given to show you that spiritually you were a failure – it was given to dangle you over hell – with only one way out – it was given to drive you to Christ as your only hope

You’re as lost as the Gentile who never had the law – you have to come the same way – through faith – when you do you both become heirs of all that God has

4). The Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews – and they both become heirs through the Gospel promise of Christ

a). Say that in the 1st century and you’d better duck – rocks are coming!

b). Paul is sitting in prison because he did say that

The Classical Study Bible: "It seems never to have entered into any human mind until the day of Pentecost, that the [Jewish] theocracy itself was to be abolished, and a new form of religion was to be introduced, designed and adapted equally for all mankind, under which the distinction between Jew and Gentile was to be done away. It was this catholicity of the Gospel which was the expanding and elevating revelation made to the apostles, and which raised them from sectarians to Christians."

Transition: In this verse we see three benefits of salvation through faith we’ll go through quickly

A. We’ve already seen these in other studies

2. Three benefits of salvation through faith

Eph 3:6 (ESV) This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

First: The Gentiles Are Fellow Heirs

A. Fellow heirs of all that God has for us for all of eternity

1). Enjoying his presence

Just let this verse sink in: Re 21:2–3 (ESV) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ⁽³⁾ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*

a). All I can say to that is “Wow” – that is the ultimate blessing

2). Enjoying our new residence

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- a). This new beautiful city – an environment untainted by sin
Re 22:1–5 (ESV) Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ⁽²⁾ through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ⁽³⁾ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁽⁴⁾ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁽⁵⁾ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.
 - 3). Enjoying our new bodies
1 Jn 3:2 (ESV) Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.
 - a). Bill 2.0 – the new improved version – constant energy – no pain
 And no more fight with sin
 - 4). Enjoying each other
 - a). None of this petty fighting – petty competitiveness – pride and egos
 - b). We will love and care for each other perfectly – no flaws
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Second: We will be members of the same family

- A. We will all have the same Father = God
 We will all have the same brother = Christ
 - 1). There will be none of the family dysfunction that we know here
 There we will see what family is meant to be – the beauty of family without friction
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Third: We will be worshipping the same Lord

Eph 3:6 (ESV) This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, *and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

- A. We will all gaze upon him in amazement – worshipping together fully
 - 1). Seeing those nail marks on him – reminding all of us what it took to get us there
 - 2). We will see the beauty of heaven – the beauty of absolute purity
 We will know what it took to save us – the life we lived!
 - a). We will worship with all of our heart – what a chorus – can’t wait to hear it
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CONCLUSION

1. The mystery of how the Jew and Gentile become one is explained

- A. It is through faith in Christ – based on his finished work not on our performance
- B. The Apostles saw proclaiming this as a stewardship they would give account for
 - 1). The same way we should view our lives – we will all give an account to him
 Therefore Christianity is to spill into and influence all of our lives
 - a). How we use our time – talents and resources
 - 2). The Apostle chose to live for God – no matter what the cost
 - a). They knew that guaranteed that day would go well
 - b). They knew every bit of inconvenience would result in greater reward.

