

Verses 1-13 are closely connected to the last paragraph in chapter 2 which explained that the *Gentiles* were incorporated into a new group that has been created by *God*.

3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--

3:2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;

3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

"For this reason" introduces Paul's prayer for his *Gentile* readers, however, before he begins his prayer, he immediately digresses with an explanation of his ministry. It is not until 3:14 that the actual prayer is resumed with the repetition of the words "for this reason."

Paul calls himself "the prisoner of Christ Jesus." His imprisonment was literal and was a result of his proclamation of the *Gospel* to the *Gentiles* and his subsequent arrest (Acts 21:17-36).

God made Paul a steward of His grace (3:2 - the passive verb "was made" indirectly points to *God* as the source). The grace he is referring to is "the mystery" which he had received by revelation (3:3). The content of this mystery is in verse 6; namely "that the *Gentiles* are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." In other words, Paul had been given the responsibility as a steward to discharge the grace of *God* found in the *Gospel* (O'Brien, 227). He received this stewardship when *God* revealed His Son to him on the road to Damascus (Gal. 1:12, 15-16) and had already written about "the mystery" before in brief (cf. Eph. 1:9-10; 2:14-16).

If *Ephesians* was a circular letter passed among a number of churches in *Asia Minor*, it's fair to conclude that some had only "heard" of the stewardship of *God's* grace given to Paul since they had not met him personally.

"If indeed" in verse 2 does not express doubt, but rather confidence that those in *Ephesus* had indeed heard and believed in the grace of *God*

that Paul proclaims (ἐὶ γὰρ in Greek is used only five times in the NT - II Cor. 5:3; Gal.3:4; Eph. 3:2; 4:21; Col. 1:23- and is used to make a preceding underlying assertion explicit - O'Brien, 226, n.5).

3:4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

3:5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

That is, by referring back to what he has already said in chapters 1 and 2, Paul's readers can more easily discern what the mystery of Christ is. But before Paul reveals the content of the mystery in 3:6, he *explains how it fits into the scheme of history* (3:5).

When Paul says that the mystery was not made known to men of other generations, he is not saying that it is something totally new, for the mystery of God *had been revealed in the OT* (Ro. 1:2; 3:21; 15:8-12; Gal. 3:8). What he is saying is that it was *not comprehended* until it became a reality in God's appointed time (cf. I Pet. 1:10-12). In other words, though the mystery of the gospel existed in God's divine counsel, and can be found in the OT, it was not understood until the Holy Spirit revealed it to the apostles and prophets (cf. 2:20).

The content of the mystery is now explained (3:6).

Through the gospel, the Gentiles are:

- 1) Fellow heirs
- 2) Members of the body
- 3) Joint partakers of the promise

3:6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

Paul first calls gentiles "fellow heirs."

In Genesis 12:2-3 it says that in Abraham "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." In the mystery of the Gospel the Gentiles will be counted as Abraham's children, for Abraham is the father of all who possess the faith (Ro. 4:16) and all who place their faith in Christ are fellow heirs with Him (Ro. 8:17).

Though the content of the inheritance is not specified, in 5:5 it is "the kingdom of Christ and God." Other NT references speak of the inheritance of believers as salvation, glory, the redemption of our bodies, eternal life, and blessing.

Secondly, they form one body with the Jews.

Gentiles and Jews share the common blessings of being united under Christ as their head. God has broken down the wall that divided both groups and has destroyed the hostility that the wall had created (cf. 2:19-22), making peace and the creation of a "new man" possible.

Thirdly, they are sharers of the promise (cf. 2:12).

Although it doesn't say what the promise consists of, in other places Paul mentions the Holy Spirit, inheritance, life, righteousness, and sonship. Most likely it is gift of Holy Spirit who brings the other elements of salvation to reality.

All three of these blessings are "in Christ Jesus through the Gospel."

Jesus is the sphere in which this incorporation of Gentiles takes place. His death is the basis by which all of this can take place. Thus the mystery is a double union - one uniting both Jews and Gentiles, and one uniting the Gentile with Christ Himself.

It should be noted that Paul is not saying that the Gentiles become Jews, rather he is saying that there is a coequal participation of the Gentiles with Israel in the full messianic salvation that is realized in the crucified and risen Christ. This is the mystery which Paul now proclaims.

3:7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

Paul returns to the thought of his stewardship in the mystery and prepares the way for his statement in verse 8 that he was commissioned to preach this to the *Gentiles*. Both the incorporation of the *Gentiles* into Christ and the ministry given to Paul can only be explained in light of God's grace.

Paul not only received information but was tasked with proclaiming it. It was due to grace that the call to ministry, the revelation of the message to be proclaimed, and the empowerment of God could be effective.

3:8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the *Gentiles* the unfathomable riches of Christ,

Paul is painfully aware of his own unworthiness to fulfill the ministry given to him. In Greek, the expression translated "very least" is more literally "less than the least." As if "least" was insufficient to express his unworthiness, he creates a new form of this Greek adjective, that is, a comparative of a superlative ("leaster," "less than the least") (O'Brien, 240). His reason for feeling this way is no doubt related to the severe persecution he inflicted upon the Church before becoming a believer himself (I Cor. 15:9).

But the emphasis of the verse (and the paragraph for that matter) is on the overflow of abundant grace that he has experienced. In spite of Paul's unworthiness, God lavishes an overabundance of riches upon him.

"The unfathomable riches of Christ" shows that from Paul's perspective, the Gospel message was about wealth - the riches of divine grace and glory which Christ possesses in Himself and which He lavishly gives to others (cf. II Cor. 4:6-7). Such riches are impossible to comprehend - too expansive to explore and too deep to plumb.

Though God revealed much to Paul, the apostle realized that it was only the tip of the iceberg. His goal and ambition in life were to know Christ

more (Phil. 3:9-10). He knew that in Christ there were vast treasure houses of spiritual riches yet to be explored and untrodden paths that passed through places of incomprehensible beauty. They were unfathomable; just when he thought that he would reach the end of the road he discovered that it continued on to a new vanishing point ahead. The revelation that he had been given and the experiences that he had had only created a deeper longing and a wonder to know more.

3:9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;

In verse 8 the grace given to Paul was a reference to Paul preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. In verse 9 God's grace is applied to revealing the administration of God's mystery that Paul was commissioned to reveal.

"To bring to light" means that God shed light on this truth so that it could be seen clearly. Through the proclamation of the gospel Paul shed light on God's mystery - something that had previously been hidden - and he saw God working in history, bringing men and women of all races to Himself. This was God's age-old plan coming to light as He directed the era in which Paul lived (i.e. in "the administration of the ages" in which Paul lived - cf. 1:10 for more detail). God was working out this mystery before Paul's very eyes - it was coming to light.

3:10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

Paul's purpose, his job assignment from God (starting in verse 8), included making the wisdom of God known to the spiritual authorities and powers in heavenly places. This has also become the mission of the church, for he says it is "through the church" that the manifold wisdom of God is made known.

"Manifold" means variegated, many sided, or many colored. It was used of many colored cloaks or garlands of variously colored flowers. It is used here to speak of the richly diversified nature of God's wisdom (O'Brien, 245). This wisdom is evidenced in God's plan of salvation spoken of in chapter

1. In these verses though, it is related to the mystery of how God includes Jew and Gentile in a new body through the proclamation of the Gospel. As Paul fulfills his mission, principalities and powers are enlightened through the church (also see I Pet. 1:10-12 for a similar idea).

The work of the Gospel provides hostile angelic powers with tangible evidence that their power has been broken by Christ. Their schemes cannot hinder the advancement of the Gospel nor the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles into this new group. As the church spreads the Gospel and its people live lives worthy of the redeemed, they prove that the death of Christ was not in vain. They demonstrate that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation (Ro. 1:16). On the other hand when they fail to do these things, they send a message throughout the galaxies that God's plan is not wise but foolish, for it has no power to change lives.

These verses bear a similarity to the consummation of all things in Christ spoken of in 1:9 and 10. There the mystery of God's will was described as uniting a sin-stained universe under Christ including the subjugation of hostile spiritual powers. The existence of the Church is a reminder to such powers that their ultimate defeat is imminent. The Church is the means by which God is displaying His triumph.

Finally, these words would be a comfort to the community of believers whose warfare was not of this world but with "the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

3:11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

3:12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

"God's making known His many-splendored wisdom through the church to the authorities in heavenly realms was His intention from all eternity, and He has now accomplished this in Christ Jesus" (O'Brien, 248).

God isn't surprised as events in the world unfold, nor is He forced to deal with the unexpected; before He created anything, He knew what would

occur and how He would bring His will to pass. What God has planned, He has accomplished in Christ at the cross and the world is now waiting for its final outworking.

Paul has already said that Jews and Gentiles have equal access to the Spirit (2:18). In verse 12 he repeats this idea with a slightly different nuance of meaning. They not only have access but can also enter boldly with confidence. "With boldness" shows that our entrance into God's presence is fearless and without any restrictions. "With Confidence" focuses on the assurance and certainty with which believers may enter God's presence (O'Brien, 250).

Once again, the centrality of Christ comes to the forefront. Our access to God is only made possible through Him.

3:13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

Paul has been given a tremendous ministry by God and a great responsibility to discharge it, but with his apostolic role also comes suffering (Acts 9:16). Yet his readers need not feel sorry for him nor lose heart for Paul is more than willing to suffer for Christ and for them.

3:14 For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father,

"For this reason" picks up the thought of verse 1 that Paul did not complete and reveals the content of his prayer for them (O'Brien, 253). His digression in verses 2-13 enriches the content of the prayer by telling of the reader's place in God's church and in His cosmic plan. "For this reason," therefore is a reference primarily to the concluding words of chapter 2 rather than to what has been said in 3:2-13. Because the believer is part of a new temple (a new people of God) in which the Spirit of God dwells, Paul prays as he does.

Paul's prayer has two central requests (Linclon p. 197 sees three requests all beginning with *hina* - ἵνα):

1. the first is in 3:16-17a and is a request for inner strengthening through God's Spirit and

2. the second is in 3:17b-19a is a prayer for knowledge. The prayer ends in a climatic request that the readers might be filled with the all the fullness of God (3:19b).

In light of far-reaching prayer, the apostle then closes with a doxology praising God for His ability to do more than we can ever ask or even think. (For an explanation of the typical structure of a doxology see O'Brien, 253).

The prayer in verse 14 begins with two unusual comments: (1) the reference to "bowing the knee" and (2) the added detail of calling God the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name" (v.15).

The typical posture for Jewish and Christian prayer was standing (Mk. 11:25; Lk. 18:11) although kneeling was also performed (I Ki. 8:24; Ezra 9:5; Lk. 22:41; Acts 21:5). Kneeling signified great reverence and submission. Paul's words echo God's in Isaiah 45:23. Here it is a mental rather than a physical kneeling (Best, 337).

Paul bows to the Father. "Father" in the ancient world not only indicated intimacy but also dignity and authority (O'Brien, 255). A father was one who ruled the clan. Earlier, Paul had referred to the personal aspect by speaking of our ability to approach God (2:18, cf. 3:12), here he emphasizes the authoritative and respected position of our Father. Because we have access we know that He hears our prayers.

3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,

The authoritative aspect of the Fatherhood of God is enhanced by the description given to Him in verse 15; He is the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. Of course, the ideas of father and family are naturally related to each other - a family is a group of people that come from the same ancestor. In the OT the term "family" could

refer to something as large as a tribe or even a nation. "Every" family (not whole family as in the NIV - cf, O'Brien, 256) identifies groups - angels in heavens and human groupings on earth - as having a common source of existence in God. Ordinarily, the Bible would use the word "Creator" to speak of God as the source of all life, but the word "Father" removes any idea of an impersonal God to whom it would be impossible to pray (Best, 337).

"Name" in ancient thought was not just a means of distinguishing one person from another, it was the way that the inner nature of the person was revealed (cf. Gen. 25:26; I Sam. 25:25; O'Brien, 256). "So for God to give creatures a name was not simply to provide them with a label, but signifies His bringing them into existence, exercising dominion over them (Isa. 40:26) and giving each their appropriate role. The verse thus affirms that the Father is the Creator of all living beings (Eph. 3:9; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-18), so that their existence and significance depend on Him" (O'Brien, 256).

3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;

The heart of Paul's request is that his readers receive power. He has already prayed that they would know God's might in 1:18-19a. He now specifically prays to God that that power would come to them in the form of inward strengthening through the Spirit. The believer is not required to conjure up resources from within himself. God supplies the power necessary to live the Christian life (Best, 340).

God has unlimited resources available to the believer to fulfill this prayer. They are "according to the riches of His glory." "Glory" can refer to God's radiance or splendor but is often found in passages related to His power (Ro. 6:4; Col. 1:11). By referring to the "riches" of His glory, the emphasis moves from simply "glory" to the inexhaustible, limitlessness of the glory from which the believer can draw. Paul lacks words to describe the goodness that He expresses to us. In 1:18 he spoke of "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints", in 2:7 of "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus," and in 3:8 of "the unfathomable riches of Christ." He also spoke of the lavish goodness of God in 1:8. In Philippians 4:19 he says, "and my God shall supply all your needs according to

His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Also see Ro. 15:13; I Cor. 1:4-5; II Thess. 1:11; Ja. 1:5). The readers have no need to fear that God might not be able to meet their needs or requests.

This prayer is overflowing with words of power. Paul not only uses a relatively rare word in Greek for "strengthen" but adds to it "with power." This empowerment is to come through the Spirit - the same Spirit that imparts wisdom and revelation (1:17, cf. Acts 1:8; Ro. 1:4; 15:19; I Cor. 2:4; I Thess. 1:5). It is to take place in the inner person (cf. Ro. 7:22; II Cor. 4:16). The inner person could be a reference to that new creative work of God in us when we believe, but it most likely refers to the seat of our personal consciousness, the center of our total being that directs who we are as people in Christ. While the outer person is wasting away, the inner self is being renewed each day (II Cor. 4:16).

3:17(a) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

3:17a expands upon and explains what Paul means by praying that the believer might be strengthened in the inner person through the Spirit. Some (including the translators of the NIV) see this as the result of the Spirit's strengthening and insert the words "so that" to express this idea (i.e. "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" - NIV). This is possible but it is more likely that the "strengthening by the Spirit in the inner man" and "Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith" are synonymous, parallel expressions with the latter defining more precisely the strengthening role of the Spirit (O'Brien, 258; Best, 311). In other words, the strengthening of the Spirit comes by Christ dwelling in us, and the inner person and the heart are virtually the same thing (the words "so that" do not appear in Greek).

Some think that it is strange that Paul would ask that Christ dwell in believers' hearts since He already lives in them and they in Him. But the word used is "to settle down" as opposed to "to sojourn" and is a prayer for the continual experience of the presence of Christ in them.

The place of His dwelling is in the heart, which if taken in an OT sense, is the center of our being and is the same as our inner person in verse 16. If Christ is the center of our lives, He must rule our emotions, personality, thoughts and will. This indwelling comes through faith.

Some Christian circles commonly refer to Christ being in their heart. This is the only passage in the NT that uses this expression (Lincoln, 207). The implication is not simply that of salvation, it is that the more settled that Christ is in the believer's life, a greater transformation into the likeness of Christ is to be expected. This becomes Paul's theme of the second half of the letter.

**3:17(b) and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
3:18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the
breadth and length and height and depth,**

It is not entirely clear how verse 17b functions in the sentence. (1) It is seen by some as a second request that comes from the prayer that Christ dwell in the believer, (2) some see it as the aim of the indwelling of Christ and the strengthening of the Spirit (that is, that the goal of Christ dwelling in the believer is to make the believer become rooted and grounded in love), and (3) still others see it as the result of Christ dwelling in the believer and the condition of the next request. That is, through the strengthening of the Spirit/ the indwelling of Christ, the believer is established in love so that he can comprehend the greatness of Christ's love for him. I prefer this last interpretation.

Verse 17b uses a botanical and an architectural metaphor to stress the foundational nature of love. Both "rooted" and "grounded" are perfect tense participles in Greek emphasizing a condition that has begun in the past and continues in a state of love. "Love is the soil in which believers are rooted and will grow, the foundation upon which they are built" (O'Brien, 260). The love being spoken of is the love of God revealed to them through Christ (cf. Ro. 5:5, 8; 8:35-39). Some see this as the believers' love, which is also very possible. In 2:4, 5:2 and 5:25 this love is seen to be the source of our salvation. However, it is probably better to see this as a reference to Christ's love. First, there is no mention of human love in the context. Secondly, Christ's love is in view in verse 19. And thirdly, it is difficult to imagine how human love would be an adequate foundation to know the love of Christ. It is Christ's love in us that becomes the motivating power that enables us to love others. This also anticipates the exhortations in the chapters that follow (4:2; 5:2). "Those who are strengthened by the Spirit

and in whom Christ dwells will have their lives rooted and grounded in love" (O'Brien, 260). Therefore, love is both the source and goal of the believer's life.

The second petition of Paul's prayer is that believers (1) "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth" and (2) "to know the love of Christ." As believers are strengthened by the Spirit and are indwelt by Christ so that they are rooted and grounded in love, Paul wants these two results to take place in their lives. The power they need must come from God.

The first request - that they "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth" - doesn't have an object attached defining what he is referring to. As a result, various views have arisen. The best is the most common view - that the unexpressed object of these dimensions is the love of Christ mentioned in the following clause. The way it is written provides a climatic effect. Love that surpasses knowledge becomes a parallel thought to these vast dimensions that draw attention to the magnitude of Christ's love for us (see O'Brien, 263 for the reasons for holding this position). So Paul's thought moves from the need of the believer being rooted in love to the believer's ability to grasp the love of Christ. The latter is predicated on experiencing the former.

3:19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

The fact that Paul prays that the believers know the love of Christ assumes that all he has said in chapters 1 to 3 has not yet been fully appreciated. They need God's power to begin to understand its dimensions. This is not a request asking God to cause them to love Christ more, rather, that they may know Christ's love for them. Their need for empowerment makes it clear that they cannot grasp it by mental reflection. They need to experience it personally, as God reveals it to them.

"Paradoxically, the request is that they may *know* the love of Christ that *surpasses knowledge*" (O'Brien, 264). That which is absolutely necessary to know, in fact, surpasses knowledge (Lincoln, 213).

To speak of knowing something that surpasses knowledge means that no one, no matter how much they know can ever grasp the infinite love of Christ for them. No matter how much we know there will always be more waiting. The implication is that we will always be growing spiritually.

Paul's prayer ends with one final summarizing request - "that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." As Christ dwells in their hearts believers become rooted in love enabling them to experience Christ's love for them and allowing them to be filled up to all the fullness of God.

The verb "be filled" is passive indicating that God is the one who fills them. The fullness of God includes His presence, life, and power (O'Brien, 265).

According to Ephesians 1:23, the church already shares God's fullness. Here Paul prays that the believer be filled. Once again we find the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" experiences of our salvation. The divine fullness resides in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9) and the Church is united with Him. Therefore, God's people possess the divine fullness as well and possess the fullness of life (cf. 2:10). This is the "already" aspect of our salvation experience. At the same time, the believer is exhorted to walk in newness of life and Paul expresses the need to attain the fullness (4:13, cf. 5:18). The believer is to become what he already is. "Christians experience the fullness of God, His presence, and power. In experiencing that fullness they themselves are made full by Christ" (Snodgrass, 182).

Paul's prayer plays an important role in relating what has preceded to what follows. In Ephesians 1-3, Paul has outlined all that the believer has in Christ. However, he only scratches the surface in assisting us to understand and appreciate Christ's love for us. Even the information he has provided is of no value unless the believer is enlightened to understand it. Therefore, Paul prays to this end; that the believer would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, for it is through this that believers reach spiritual maturity. This is also the motivation that gives us the desire to walk in a way that is pleasing to God, which is the subject Paul begins in 4:1 and encapsulates in 5:2 with the words "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us."

**3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,
3:21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.**

Paul had just asked the Father for extravagant blessings including requests that they might know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Has Paul asked for too much? No, because God gives beyond that which any human has the capacity to imagine. This thought leads Paul into writing a doxology, "that is, a short, spontaneous ascription of praise to God." (O'Brien, 267)

The doxology is addressed to the power of God. The translation "to Him who is able" blurs the link of power in the doxology to verses 16 and 20, although it is quite obvious in Greek. God is the powerful one who can accomplish incredibly great deeds on behalf of His people. Nothing can hinder the all-powerful one from acting, no matter how wild the imagination runs. Paul stated in an earlier prayer (1:19) that the power of God that works in believers was the same power that was exerted at the resurrection of Christ. In other words, the same power that raised Jesus and exalted Him in the heavenlies *is at work within us* to do more than we can ask or imagine. This power does more than just barely exceed the human mind; it is infinitely more than any man could dream of.

Glory is rightly ascribed to God. To give God glory is to acknowledge or extol Him for what He has done. This form in a doxology is an affirmation of who God is rather than a wish.

To say "to Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus" is unusual. This is the only place in the NT where Jesus and the Church appear together in this way. It does, however, fit the context of chapters 1-3 where all things are summed up in Christ and the Church is the masterpiece of God's grace (2:7). God's glory in the Church cannot be separated from His glory in Christ for the Church is "in Christ."

This ascription of glory will last for all generations to the end of the ages.

Paul ends with the word "amen" which was uttered in the OT and by NT believers to confirm what was said.