

EPHESIANS 3

Paul's Insight into the Mystery

1 For this reason¹ I, Paul, a prisoner² of Messiah Jesus on behalf of you nations (τῶν ἐθνῶν) — 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship (οἰκονομία)³ of God's grace that was given to me for you,⁴ 3 how the mystery (τὸ μυστήριον)⁵ was made known to me by revelation (ἀποκάλυψις), as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight (σύνεσις)⁶ into the mystery of Messiah, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω, aor. pass.) to his holy apostles and [New Testament] prophets⁷ by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the nations (τὰ ἔθνη) are co-heirs (συγκληρονόμος), co-members of the body (σύσσωμος), and co-partners (συμμέτοχος)⁸ of the [New Covenant] promise⁹ in Messiah Jesus through the gospel.

To Bring to Light the Plan

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister (διάκονος) according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working (ἐνέργεια) of his power (δύναμις). 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints,¹⁰ this grace was given, to preach (εὐαγγελίζω, aor.) to the nations (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) the unsearchable (ἀνεξιχνίαστος)¹¹ riches (πλοῦτος)¹² of Messiah, 9 and to

¹ This refers back to the “one new man” discussed in the previous chapter, especially Eph 2:21-22. **Eph 2:21-22** 21 ...In [Jesus] the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you [Gentiles] also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

² **2 Ti 1:11-12** 11 ...I was appointed a preacher, apostle, and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

³ **1 Co 9:17** 17 For if I do this of my own desire, I have a reward, but if not of my own desire, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. **Col 1:25** 25 ...Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known....

⁴ Vv. 2-13 is one sentence in the Greek.

⁵ **Eph 1:9-10** 9 ...Making known to us the mystery of his desire, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Messiah 10 as an administration for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

⁶ “[T]he content of understanding or comprehension, *insight, understanding*” (BDAG, 970).

⁷ Paul was not the only person to whom God revealed the mystery.

⁸ These three co-'s match the three co-'s of Eph 2:[] and 2:[].

⁹ See *New Covenant*.

¹⁰ **1 Co 15:9** 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

¹¹ “[Inscrutable, incomprehensible...lit. ‘not to be tracked out’” (BDAG, 77). **Ro 11:33** 33 Oh, the depth of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

¹² **Eph 1:18** 18 ...Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints....

bring to light (φωτίζω)¹³ for everyone what is the arrangement (οικονομία)¹⁴ of the mystery hidden for ages in God,¹⁵ who created all things, 10 so that through the Church (ἐκκλησία)¹⁶ the manifold (πολυποίκιλος)¹⁷ wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹⁸ 11 This was according to the eternal purpose (πρόθεσις)¹⁹ that he has realized in Messiah Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness (παρρησία)²⁰ and access (προσαγωγή)²¹ with confidence (πεποίθησις)²² through our faith (πίστις) in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Filled with All the Fullness of God

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches²³ of his glory he may grant you to be powerfully strengthened (δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι) through his Spirit²⁴ in your inner being (τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον), 17 so that Messiah may dwell²⁵ [more and more] in your hearts through [phase two] faith—that you, having been rooted (perf. pass.) and grounded (perf. pass.) in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend ([]) with all the saints what is the breadth, length, height, and depth, 19 and to know the love of Messiah that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power ([]) at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the Church and in Messiah Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

¹³ “[T]o make known in reference to the inner life or transcendent matters and thus enlighten, *enlighten, give light to, shed light upon*” (BDAG, 1074).

¹⁴ “[S]tate of being arranged, *arrangement, order, plan*...of God’s unique plan *private plan, plan of salvation, i.e. arrangements for redemption of humans* (in the pap of arrangements and directions of authorities...of the measures by which one wishes to attain some goal...)” (BDAG, 697).

¹⁵ **1 Co 2:7** 7 ... We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

¹⁶ “[T]he global community of Christians, (*universal*) *church*” (BDAG, 304).

¹⁷ “[P]ert. to being diversified, (*very*) *many-sided*” (BDAG, 847).

¹⁸ **Eph 1:21** 21 ... Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **Eph 6:12** 12 ... We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹⁹ “[T]hat which is planned in advance, *plan, purpose, resolve, will*” (BDAG, 869).

²⁰ “[A] state of boldness and confidence, *courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness*, esp. in the presence of persons of high rank” (BDAG, 781).

²¹ **Eph 2:18** 18 For through [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

²² “[A] state of certainty about someth. to the extent of placing reliance on, *trust, confidence*” (BDAG, 796).

²³ See *Riches*.

²⁴ See *Holy Spirit*.

²⁵ This is an ongoing sanctification process, like a renovated house.

Discussion Questions

1. Hook.

- a. What common things do people do or go through when they are feeling weak?
- b. What was a time in your life as a Christian when you felt really weak—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, or physically?

2. Review.

- a. What were the circumstances of Paul when he wrote *Ephesians*?
- b. What did he most want the Ephesians believers to know from his letter? What's the big idea he wants them to understand?
- c. What are some of the riches believers have, according to Ephesians 1-3?

3. Ephesians 3:1-13.

- a. What is your chapter theme for Ephesians 3?
- b. What are your paragraph themes for Eph 3:1-6 and 3:7-13?
- c. What shined out to you the most from Eph 3:1-13?
- d. What is the heart of the passage, the central idea?
- e. What is the mystery?
- f. What is Paul's connection to the mystery?
- g. Why is Paul so passionate about the mystery?

4. Ephesians 3:14-21.

- a. Observation.
 - (1) Bring out a light bulb. What does this prop have to do with the passage?
 - (2) What is your paragraph theme?
 - (3) Is there anything that shines from the passage, that draws your attention?
 - (4) What key or repeated words did you mark?
 - (a) What do we learn about power?
 - 1) What did you learn about power from the cross-references?
 - (b) What do we learn about love?
 - (c) What do we learn about knowledge?
 - (5) What are the key verbs?
 - (6) What connecting words did you notice? Why are they there?
- b. Interpretation.
 - (1) What is the heart of the passage, the central idea?
 - (2) Why did Paul include this prayer?
 - (3) What does this passage tell us about human nature and the world we live in?
 - (4) What does this passage tell us about the Father? Jesus? The Spirit?
 - (5) Is there anything difficult to understand or that you'd like to ask Paul?
 - (a) What does v. 15 mean?
 - (b) Does Christ dwell equally in all believers?
 - (c) Why do we need strength to comprehend? What do we need to comprehend?
 - (d) To what does "the breadth and length and height and depth" refer?
 - (e) If the love of Christ surpasses knowledge, how can we know it?
 - (f) What does it mean to be "filled with all the fullness of God"?

- (g) How do we know God's abundant power is at work within us?
- (h) How long will the Church last?
- (6) How does this passage connect to the whole of Scripture? The biblical story?
- (7) What other Scripture passages come to mind?
- c. Application.
 - (1) What do you learn about how Jesus wants you to follow him as a disciple?
 - (2) What commands are explicitly or implicitly given?
 - (3) What sin is highlighted or condemned?
 - (4) How are we to change the way we think, speak, or act?
 - (5) What are the implications for our lives? Our beliefs, behaviour, attitudes?
 - (6) How does God expect us to respond?
 - (7) Is there a promise for us to believe?
 - (8) Is there an example for us to follow?
 - (9) Is there a command for us to obey?
 - (10) Is there an error for us to avoid?

Ephesians 3:1-13 — Paul’s Insight and Passion for the Mystery

1. Introduction.

- a. Image.
 - (1) This past week, during the Operation 513 evangelism campaign in Dunedin, I asked several U. of Otago, “What’s the purpose of life?”
 - (2) Modern and postmodern people, especially in the West, have given up on this question.
- b. Need.
 - (1) We all want to know: (a) Is there an objective, grand purpose? (b) Does my life really matter? (c) Does the human race really matter? (d) Is there a plot to this story?
- c. Subject.
 - (1) This morning we are going to talk about a secret God has revealed to us. The secret is that in Christ, we do have an objective, grand purpose. Our lives really do matter. The human race really matters. We are important.
- d. Text: Ephesians 3:1-13.
- e. Outline: (1) The Mystery; (2) Insight into the Mystery; and (3) Passion to Make the Mystery the Known to All.

2. Review.

- a. Ephesians is about the riches we have as Christians.

Keynote	Chapter	Theme
Wealth of the Church	1	Blessings in Christ
	2	Unity, Unity in Christ
	3	Revealing the Mystery of Christ
Walk of the Church	4	Walk in a Manner Worthy of Your Calling
	5	Beliefs of God
	6	The Whole Armour of God
Book Theme	Riches of God's Grace	
Author	Paul (chained up, called to minister to the Gentiles, entrusted with the mystery)	
Date	AD 66-72	
Purpose	Reveal the mystery, remind believers of their identity and walk	
Key Words	In Christ, grace, heavenly places, faith, riches, love, inheritance, walk, peace	
Historical Context	Roman empire, Emperor Nero, Armenia, hostility to Christians, Jew-Gentile relations	

- b. The last two Sundays, we have discussed what God has created by grace: (1) new individuals (Eph 2:1-10); and (2) a new community (Eph 2:11-22).

3. Read Ephesians 3:1-13.

4. Pray.

5. Overview.

- a. Paul has just finished explaining the “one new man,” the living temple made up of individual Jewish and Gentile believers, built upon Jesus, and founded upon the teaching of the apostles. The gospel proceeds toward the completion of this great

temple in which God dwells. Through Jesus, the Father created new individuals to become and live as a new, single, worldwide, multiethnic community.

- b. These verses (vv. 1-13) are a sudden, but very important, digression. In v. 14, Paul gets back to the main purpose with “For this reason.”

6. The Mystery (Eph 3:6).

- a. **Eph 3:6** 6 This mystery is that the nations are co-heirs, co-members of the same body, and co-partners of the promise in Messiah Jesus through the gospel.
- b. Mystery.
- (1) A mystery in the NT sense is information previously unknown to human beings but now revealed by God. It’s a secret now fully disclosed and known by the special revelation of God.
- (a) This differs from the English term mystery, which describes something unexplainable or incomprehensible.
- (2) The concept of mystery is very common in the New Testament.
- c. Content of the Mystery.
- (1) Here, the content of the mystery is that Gentile and Jewish believers are co-equal in Christ and that they are part of one worldwide community growing together. They are:
- (a) Co-heirs.
- 1) **Eph 1:5** 5 [The Father] predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Messiah....
- 2) **Eph 1:13-14** 13 In [Jesus] you [Gentiles also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
- 3) **Ga 4:7** 7 So you [Gentile believer] are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.
- (b) Co-members of the same body.
- 1) **1 Co 12:12-13** 12 ...Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Messiah. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
- 2) **Col 1:18** 18 ...[Jesus] is the head of the body, the Church.
- (c) Co-partners/co-sharers in the New Covenant promise of the Holy Spirit.
- 1) **Eph 1:13** 13 In [Jesus] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit....
- 2) **Ac 2:33** 33 [Jesus b]eing therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.
- (2) These riches are described by Paul (v. 8) as indescribable or “untrackable” (ἀνεξιχνίαστος).
- d. Dispensations.
- (1) A dispensation is:

- (1) “A period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.”²⁶
- (2) “A stewardship by which God administers His purpose on the earth through man under varying responsibilities.”²⁷
- (3) “A means by which God administers His governance of humanity throughout history. These various means of administration generally progress toward the final and ultimate expression of God’s administration under Jesus Christ.”²⁸
- (2) Ephesians 3 and dispensations:
 - (1) **Eph 3:2** 2 ...If indeed you have heard of the stewardship (οἰκονομία) of God’s grace which was given to me for you....
 - (2) **Eph 3:8-10** 8 To me [Paul], the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the nations the unfathomable riches of Messiah, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration (οἰκονομία) of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things, 10 so that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.
 - (3) God manages his relationship to humanity differently at different times.
 - (4) Covenants and dispensations work together to forward the biblical story to its end.
 - (5) There are seven covenants and seven dispensations.
 - (6) Each dispensation ends in failure.
 - (1) “Each of these Dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment—marking his utter failure.”²⁹
 - (7) Understanding dispensations is key to understanding the Bible.
- e. The Church Age.
 - (1) The Church age was a mystery unknown in the Old Testament.
 - (a) The Church age may be called an “intercalation” or “parentheses.”
 - (b) Though man did not know the Church age was coming, God did.
 - (2) Jesus prepared his disciples for the Church age once clear Israel would reject him.
 - (a) **Mt 16:18** 18 And I [Jesus] tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock [Peter’s confession] I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
 - (3) The Church age began on Pentecost and will end at the Rapture.
 - (4) As Church age believers, we are a distinct group of people.
 - (5) The Church age is a unique age, unlike any other dispensation.
 - (6) Worldwide evangelisation is the priority of the Church age.
 - (7) The visible Church will spiritually decline at the end of the Church age.
 - (8) The Church age is the final age before the day of Yahweh.

7. Insight into the Mystery (Eph 3:1-5).

a. Paul’s Insight.

²⁶ Scofield Reference Bible.

²⁷ DTS Doctrinal Statement.

²⁸ Michael J. Svigel.

²⁹ C. I. Scofield.

- (1) **Eph 3:2-5** 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 Messiah, 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.
- (2) God gave Paul special insight into the mystery.
 - (a) As the apostle to the Gentiles, God gave him a unique personal role in his revelation to humanity.
- (3) Paul was an unlikely choice.
 - (a) At one point, Paul was the chief enemy of Jesus and his followers. Suddenly, on the road to Damascus, he became Jesus' chief advocate.
- (4) How and when did God give Paul this insight?
 - (a) **Ac 22:17** 17 When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance
 - (b) **Ac 22:21** 21 And he said to me, Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.
 - (c) **Ac 26:16** 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you....
 - (d) **Ga 1:11-12** 11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Messiah.
 - (e) **Ga 1:15-18** 15 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, I did not immediately consult with anyone. 17 Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem....
 - (f) **2 Co 12:1** 1 I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.
- (5) God gave others insight into the mystery (Ac 10-11), but Paul was the chief.
- b. Our Insight.
 - (1) God wants us to have the same insight as Paul.
 - (2) How do we gain this insight today?
 - (a) By studying the Bible inductively, using a plain, literal, common sense hermeneutic.
 - (b) Listening to good Bible teachers in person and online.
 - (c) Reading the best theological textbooks and commentaries.
 - (3) It is our responsibility as Christians to develop a biblical view of history.

8. Passion for the Mystery (Eph 3:7-13).

- a. Paul's Passion.
 - (1) Paul was God's designated agent to reveal the mystery. He was commissioned by the Father. It was his life's work. This was recognised by the other apostles. He had a certain commission, the responsibility to make the mystery known to all

people and nations. His motto was “to know Christ and to make him known.” He was convinced the good news had been revealed to him only for him to communicate it further. He was extremely driven. He was determined to deliver the gospel message to the nations through every obstacle. Why? What was it that drove Paul?

- (2) Paul was so passionate about proclaiming the mystery because:
 - (a) He was personally called to that mission (vv. 2, 7).
 - (b) God’s grace and power were working through him (vv. 7-8).
 - (c) It dealt with ultimate issues of purpose, meaning, and value (v. 9, 11).
 - (d) It dealt in the space between heaven and earth. The Church is an exhibit to the angels (v. 10)!
 - 1) Through the Church, God brings the angelic world and human world touch each other. God has chosen to educate heaven through earth. Perhaps human history is, after all, a resolution of the angelic conflict.
 - 2) Specifically, we are public demonstration of God’s:
 - a) Power (Eph 1:19-2:6).
 - b) Grace (Eph 2:7).
 - c) Wisdom (v. 10).
 - 3) No doubt the elect angels sing for joy over us, the Church, as they did over the original creation. Like the earth, the Church has a foundation, measurements, and a cornerstone.
 - a) **Job 38:4-7** 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, 7 when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
- (3) Paul deserves our utmost respect.
 - (a) As Gentile believers today, we owe a great deal to the apostle Paul. He understood and carried out his part in the gospel enterprise for the world. He was bold and uncompromising in his defense of the Gentile cause. At any point he could have given up his Gentile mission for a relaxation of the persecution he faced, but he never did.
 - (b) Paul was happy to suffer for the proclamation of the mystery to the nations (vv. 1, 13).
 - (c) **2 Co 11:23-28** 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea. 26 On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers. 27 In toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

b. Our Passion.

- (1) We, like Paul, are to be passionate about proclaiming the mystery. What has been made known to us we must without fail make known to others. Revealed truth is held in stewardship and is given to be shared, not monopolised. How could we keep the mystery to ourselves?³⁰
- (2) Like Paul, we are to be passionate about proclaiming the mystery because:
 - (a) We are personally called to the same mission (vv. 2, 7).
 - (b) God's grace and power are working through us (vv. 7-8).
 - (c) The mystery deals with ultimate issues of purpose, meaning, and value (v. 9, 11).
 - (d) It dealt in the space between heaven and earth. The Church is still an exhibit to the angels (v. 10)! The Church is God's grace demonstration to the angels.
 - 1) The Church as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community, a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique.³¹
 - 2) God's multifaceted wisdom is reflected in the church's construction. The angels marvel at God's wisdom as they observe Jews and Gentiles united in one body.³²
 - 3) The Church is to be an audio-visual display of God's reconciling work, proving God's grace and wisdom to the angels.³³
- (3) We, too, have our own motivations. We have our own goals in life. I want to ask you: Should you be more like Paul? What is it that drives you? The truth is Paul was so driven because of what was revealed to him. He understood something at the core of his being the we, too, need to understand. It is the revelation of the mystery of Christ and the Church. I reckon that if we truly understand what Paul understood, and believe it, many of us will become like him in his zeal to make the mystery of Christ known to everyone. We will become fearless, bold, determined, disciplined ambassadors for Christ right where we are, here in Dunedin, and beyond.

9. Application.

- a. Unbeliever.
 - (1) Be a new individual and join the new community by grace through faith in Jesus.
- b. Believer.
 - (1) Gain insight into the mystery. Let the Bible shape your view of the world. Get excited about it.
 - (2) Develop a passion to proclaim the mystery.
 - (a) "Once we are sure the gospel is both truth from God and riches for mankind, nobody will be able to silence us."³⁴

³⁰ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 120.

³¹ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 123.

³² Thomas Constable, *Notes on Ephesians*, 74.

³³ Darryl Bock, *A Theology...*, 315.

³⁴ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 121.

Ephesians 3:14-21

1. Prayer for Strength to Comprehend (Eph 3:14-19).

- a. Paul always prays for the believers in writes to. He is a true intercessor.
- b. This prayer is a continuation of the prayer in Eph 1:15-19.
- c. Our prayers are reasonable. They are based on reason (v. 14).
- d. The attitudes of prayer is both humility (v. 15) and confidence (v. 13).
- e. We need inner strength from the Spirit to understand how much God loves us (vv. 16-19).
- f. Jesus's love for us doesn't ignore or discount knowledge, but it does go beyond it (v. 19).
- g. The fulness of God is seen corporately in the fact we love one another. Love is our number one family trait (v. 19). We can't experience the fulness of God apart from one another, and apart from the corporate comprehension of God's love for us as a community.

2. Glory to the Father (Eph 3:20-21).

- a. This segment began with God's glory (Eph 1:3) and it ends with God's glory (v. 21).
- b. God is able to do far more than all we ask or think (v. 20).
- c. God's abundant power is at work within us (v. 20).
- d. Jesus and the Church, as husband and wife, will glorify the Father forever (v. 21).