

Ephesians 3

Ephesians 3 tells Paul's story of God's call on his life to reveal His purposes in Christ. Paul shares the mystery that had been revealed to him and others, and the amazing blessings associated with it. Paul ends with a second beautiful prayer for the church in Ephesus.

Imagine that Paul is writing this letter to you personally and experience the depth of Paul's desire to minister to all believers. Claim the truths that are yours today because of God's amazing grace!

Day 1

Ephesians 3:1-6 NAS

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

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

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

4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

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;

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,

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Paul's imprisonment

1. What reason did Paul give for being a prisoner? 3:1

- List the phrases Paul used to describe himself in 3:1, 4:1, and 6:20.

Digging Deeper

What was Paul's attitude about imprisonment?

Philippians 2:17

2 Timothy 2:8-10

FYI: "During his Roman imprisonment Paul was under house arrest. In the day he was free to move around the house with the supervision of soldiers, but every night he was chained to a soldier to make sure he did not escape before his trial before Caesar. Yet he saw himself as **the prisoner of Jesus Christ**. He knew that Jesus was the Lord of his life, not the Roman government, so if he was a prisoner, he was Jesus' prisoner...Paul suffered for the very truth he would explain to the Ephesians, and this did not make him back down one bit." - David Guzik

Paul's ministry

2. What phrases did Paul use to describe the ministry that God had given him?

- 3:2
- 3:3

IT'S GREEK TO ME: "**Administration/stewardship/dispensation**" NT:3622 *oikonomia*; administration (of a household or estate); specifically, a (religious) "economy"

The mystery

3. Concerning the “mystery” in 3:3-6:

- How was it given? 3:3
- When was it revealed? 3:5 (*Contrast Acts 26:22-23*)
- To whom was it revealed? 3:5

FYI: "In English a 'mystery' is something dark, obscure, secret, puzzling. What is 'mysterious' is inexplicable, even incomprehensible. The Greek word *mysterion* is different, however. Although still a 'secret', it is no longer closely guarded but open . . . More simply, *mysterion* is a truth hitherto hidden from human knowledge or understanding but now disclosed by the revelation of God." (Stott) - David Guzik

4. From 3:6, list the 3 phrases that describe the new position of a Gentile.

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FYI: fellow heirs/heirs together "Paul is inspired to use three words compounded with the prefix sun, 'together with', 'on an equality with'...Jew and Gentile believers are on a perfect equality from every angle. As we have seen, they lose their natural status as Jew and Gentile and become members of a newly-created company who are closely linked as head to body with the enthroned Christ in glory...No one has ever seen an earthly body in which each member is on absolutely equal terms in importance and in all other respects with every other." - Stuart Allen (60,61)

"In the Old Testament it was clear that the Gentiles would one day be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Psalms 2:8; Isaiah 2:2-3, 42:6,7, 49:6). In the New Testament, Jesus told his disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). But what had not yet been made clear was...the complete union of both Jew and Gentile in Christ given concrete expression in a new body, the Church." - Ephesians, Mastering the Basics (34)

In the Old Testament, the salvation of Gentiles in the Messiah is prophesied, the coming together of Jew and Gentile into the Church is never spoken of." - David Guzik

5. Mark the word mystery in Ephesians. What do you learn about it in:

- 1:9-11
- 3:2,3
- 3:4,6
- 3:9,10

6. How is the mystery described in Colossians 1:26,27?

Applying the Word: How would you explain the difference between the unity and the diversity of believers?

Day 2

Ephesians 3:7-8 NAS

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.

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

Paul's ministry

7. To what did Paul give credit for his ability as a minister? 3:7

IT'S GREEK TO ME: "**minister/servant**" (3:7) – Strong's #1249 *diakonos*; probably from an obsolete *diako* (to run on errands; an attendant, i.e. (genitive case) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties); specially, a Christian teacher and pastor (technically, a deacon or deaconess)

"**preach**" (3:8) – Strong's NT: #2097 *euaggelizo*; to announce good news ("evangelize") especially the gospel: KJV - declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel).

8. From the following verses, underline how adequate the "*gift of God's grace*"/enabling (3:7) was for Paul.

- Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. NASU
- Colossians 1:29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. NIV
- 1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. NASU
- 1 Timothy 1:12,14 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service...14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. NASU

9. How did Paul regard his human qualifications for ministry? 3:8a (See also 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10)

- What did he admit to the Corinthian believers? 1 Corinthians 2:3-5

10. What do all believers need to understand?

- 2 Corinthians 3:4-5
- 2 Corinthians 4:7

11. From the verses below, record in the chart what you learn about Paul’s life before becoming a believer? (i.e. What authority did he have? What religious beliefs? What activities was he involved in against Christians?)

- Acts 8:1-3; 9:1,2,10-14; 22:3-5
- Galatians 1:13,14

Authority/status	Belief	Actions against Christians

Applying the Word: Consider the contrast between being “the very least of all saints” to preaching “the unfathomable riches of Christ” (3:8). Is there anything from your background that makes you feel defeated or inadequate to serve the Lord? What does Paul’s example say to you?

Day 3

Ephesians 3:8-13 NAS

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

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;

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

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

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

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

The mystery

12. How did Paul describe the mystery in 3:8b?

- What else was Paul supposed to “bring to light?” 3:9a

IT'S GREEK TO ME: Bring to light/make plain Strong's NT:5461 photizo; to shed rays, i.e. to shine or (transitively) to brighten up (literally or figuratively): KJV - enlighten, illuminate, (bring to, give) light, make to see.

“**unfathomable**” (NIV “*unsearchable*”) – Strong's NT:421 *anexichniastos*; not tracked out, i.e. (by implication) untraceable: KJV - past finding out; unsearchable.

“**anexichniastos**” from *a* = without + *exichniázo* = explore) means past finding out, impossible to comprehend, immeasurable, unsearchable, impossible to be traced out...The word means...that they are so vast you cannot discover their end.”
- preceptaustin.org

13. Write the phrases that describe the hiddenness of this mystery.

- Ephesians 3:5a
- Ephesians 3:9b
- Colossians 1:26

14. What amazing ministry does the church have? 3:10 Mark the connecting words “for this reason” (3:1,14), “therefore” (3:13), “so that” (3:17) in chapter 3.

FYI: Might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers “This reminds us that we are called for something far greater than our own individual salvation and sanctification. We are called to be the means by which God teaches the universe a lesson, and a beautiful lesson... ‘They see in us indeed all our weakness, and all our sin. But they see a nature which, wrecked by itself, was yet made in the image of their God and ours. And they see this God at work upon that wreck to produce results not only wonderful in themselves but doubly wonderful because of the conditions.’ (Moule)”
- David Guzik

the eternal purpose “God is working our His vast redemptive plan which embraces the highest heaven as well as the earth, and the Word of God is the written record of this plan...God’s plan has a goal of perfection and glory that nothing can finally frustrate. What an unspeakable privilege it is to have any part in it!”
- Stuart Allen (64)

15. In the following verses, what things are used to illustrate God's "manifold" ("*greatly diversified, abounding in variety*") wisdom?

- Psalm 104:24 O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions.
- Psalm 139:1-4 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. NASU
- Jeremiah 10:12 But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.
- Daniel 2:19-22 Then Daniel praised the God of heaven 20 and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. 21 He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. 22 He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. NIV

16. Underline what the following men said about God when they considered His manifold wisdom/works.

- Job 26:14 "Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; And how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?" NAS
- (David) Psalm 139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it. NASU
- Psalm 40:5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which You have done, And Your thoughts toward us; There is none to compare with You. If I would declare and speak of them, They would be too numerous to count. NASU
- (Solomon) Ecclesiastes 8:17 then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it. NIV
- Ecclesiastes 11:5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things. NASU
- (Paul) Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! NAS

Digging Deeper

Where is wisdom found?
Colossians 2:2b-3

17. What do the following phrases in 3:11 reveal about God's plan?

- "*eternal purpose*" (Cf. 1:10)
- "*carried out/accomplished in Christ*"

18. What kind of attitude can we have when we approach God? 3:12

- What does this say about any believer having a higher, or more privileged position in approaching God?

IT'S GREEK TO ME: "**boldness/freedom**" Strong's NT:3954 *parrhesia*; all out-spokenness, i.e. frankness, bluntness, publicity; by implication, assurance

"The word for **boldness** has the idea of 'freedom of speech.' We have the freedom to express ourselves before God, without fear or shame. "The Greek word 'parresia' translated by 'boldness' means really 'free speech' - that is, the speaking of all. It is the blessed privilege of prayer." (Gaebelein) - David Guzik

19. What is the only way to this close relationship with the Father? 3:12 (Cf. John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5)

FYI: 3:12 KJV reads: "*In whom we have boldness and access with confidence **by the faith of him.***"

"What would happen to access if our faith failed? Behind the word 'faith' is the thought of 'faithfulness' and it is the Lord Jesus and His utter faithfulness which alone can give us confidence and boldness when we approach God. He is pre-eminently the faithful One. (Rev. 19:11)" - Stuart Allen (65)

20. How did Paul want the Ephesians to respond to his tribulations/sufferings? 3:13a (What ideas does the word 'therefore' connect?)

- What divine purpose did Paul give to his earthly trials? 3:13b

FYI: On your behalf "Paul's friends and converts might be tempted to think that, if Paul were really in the path of God's will, he would not have so many trials to endure. Paul therefore tries to convey to them his own assurance that his tribulations are the direct consequence and a certain token of his obedience to God's eternal purpose. Since that purpose includes the blessing of the Gentiles, the hardships which befall Paul in the course of his ministry are hardships which he suffers for them. If they can be brought to appreciate that, far from finding cause for discouragement...they will glory in them as he himself had learned to do, seeing in them the proof that God's purpose was advancing." - F.F. Bruce

Which is your glory: "Paul was being used, and probably in a greater way than he ever imagined. This Roman imprisonment produced the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. They all certainly have a place in God's eternal plan. In the same manner, each of us has a place in the service of God's eternal plan. Knowing this and working towards it is a great guard against losing heart in the midst of tribulation." - David Guzik

Applying the Word: *How does the knowledge God's eternal plan and your having a part in it affect you? What would you say to someone who says that the Bible is just a collection of religious books or good moral teachings?*

Day 4

Ephesians 3:14-18 NAS

14 *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,*
 15 *from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,*
 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,
 17 *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,*
 18 *may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,*
 19 *and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the*
fullness of God.
 20 *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the*
power that works within us,
 21 *to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

Paul's second prayer

21. (The phrase "for this reason" in Eph 3:1 is picked up again in 3:14. The verses in between seem to be a parenthesis explaining Paul's ministry and God's eternal plan.)

- What "reason" would you say Paul is referring to in 3:14?
- What attitude did Paul have as he began his prayer? 3:14
- What did he acknowledge about God as he began his prayer? 3:15

22. For what did Paul pray? 3:16

- What does the phrase "according to the riches of His glory" indicate about this strengthening? (Compare Colossians 1:11)

23. What did Paul hope would be the result of the Spirit's strengthening? 3:17a (See Jesus' words in John 14:23)

- What would that do for them? 3:17b

IT'S GREEK TO ME: *Dwell* NT:2730 katoikeo; to house permanently, i.e. reside (literally or figuratively)

"signifies 'to settle down in a dwelling, to dwell fixedly in a place.'" Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

24. What would Christ's indwelling enable them to comprehend? 3:18-19a

- What does describing Christ's love in *four* dimensions (3:18) indicate about its magnitude?

Food for Thought: "*comprehend/grasp*" Strong's NT:2638 *katalambano*; to take eagerly, i.e. seize, possess.

"to lay hold of so as to possess as one's own, to appropriate." - Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

"It is possible to understand something but not really make it your own. Paul's concern is that we lay hold of the vast expanses of the love of God. ..

When God gave the land to Abraham, He told him to "walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it" (Genesis 13:17). Abraham had to step out by faith and claim his inheritance.

A similar principle is seen in Joshua, in which Jehovah states that.. "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses." (Joshua 1:3)... God had already bequeathed it to Joshua, but Joshua would not fully realize the reality of what was his promised possession without obedience to God's call to step out."

- preceptaustin.org

25. How does Paul's describe Christ's love in 3:19?

- How can we "*know*" something that is beyond our knowledge (3:19)? (Compare 1 Corinthians 2:9-12)

IT'S GREEK TO ME: *Know* "*ginosko* NT:1097 signifies 'to be taking in knowledge, recognize, understand,' or 'to understand completely,'...*ginosko* frequently indicates a relation between the person 'knowing' and the object known"

- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

"He is not referring to their *knowing* as simply a mental exercise or simple intellectual reflection. Paul wants them to be empowered so as to grasp the dimensions of that love in their own experience."

- preceptaustin.org

"How can human beings, finite creatures still, for all their endowment with spiritual blessings in the heavenly realm in Christ, ever hope to apprehend that which is infinite and eternal? Only in so far as that which is infinite and eternal has condescended to their estate and capacity."

- F. F. Bruce

26. What does knowing Christ's love lead to? 3:19b (Compare Colossians 3:19b)

FYI: Filled up to all the fulness of God "Only in Christ can the apostle's prayer be answered; in Christ the divine fullness is ideally theirs already, but his earnest desire is that it may increasingly be realized in their experience." (Compare Ephesians 4:13)

- F. F. Bruce

27. Interestingly, Paul asked the believer to be filled with or empowered by:

- 3:16b
- 3:17a (See John 14:23)
- 3:19b

28. How extensively does God work in our lives? 3:20

- What is this “*according to?*” 3:20b (Cf. 1:19)

IT'S GREEK TO ME: ***Immeasurably more/abundantly beyond*** - **huperekperissou** from **huper** (NT:5228)= above + **ek** (NT:1537) = intensifies meaning, adding idea of exhaustlessness + **perissos** (NT:4053) = exceeding some number or measure, over and above, more than necessary) means surpassing, superabundantly, beyond measure, exceedingly, quite beyond all measure, overwhelming, over and above, more than enough. It describes an extraordinary degree, involving a considerable excess over what would be expected. As F. F. Bruce has said here we encounter another one of Paul's coined 'super-superlatives'."

Huperekperissou is the highest form of comparison imaginable and so means immeasurably more than, quite beyond all measure, infinitely more than."
- preceptaustin.org

29. Once again, how did Paul respond to all these blessings in Christ and God's eternal plan?
3:21 (Note how Paul expresses the eternal aspect of it all.)

FYI: ***forever and ever/(KJ) throughout all ages*** "One age supervening upon another into the remotest infinity"
- F. F. Bruce
"In the Bible, prayer is usually directed to **the Father**, through the Son, by the empowering and direction of the Holy Spirit."
- David Guzik

30. Take verses 3:16-21 and put someone's name in Paul's prayer who is dear to you and pray this prayer for him/her.

Applying the Word: (Questions for group discussion) What kind of a perspective on life does this prayer give? What does it say about a person's worth? About battling our cares and problems? About hope? About love? What does the example of this prayer move you to ask God for in your life?