

EPHESIANS

3:1-21

Ephesians 3:1-21

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 19th October 2025 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Introduction

As you may know, we are studying our way through the 49th book of the Bible, called Ephesians, the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians living in the ancient Greek city of Ephesus — which as I've mentioned before, was a large city full of commerce, idolatry, and immorality. And in the midst of that place there was this thriving group of believers that Paul had previously nurtured, taught, and equipped with the Bible over a three year period.

And what we've seen already in this letter is that he was writing to them to remind them how God had blessed them (and us) so much, having planned our salvation even before the world began, *that* one day He might gather together a people who love Him, who live for Him, who are to His praise and glory. And the key to all that was who we are, and what we have *in Christ*.

Furthermore Paul had gone on to say, that when he heard of the Ephesian's *faith* in Christ, he couldn't stop giving thanks to God for them, praying that God would do yet more in their lives, and that they would understand more as they sat at Jesus feet, who is the Head of the church. No doubt, reading those things would have been an encouragement to them. And indeed, this whole letter is very much one of encouragement.

Last time, as we looked at chapter two, we read Paul underline how they and we have been saved by grace, not by works. That is, they didn't need to earn their salvation, but rather, God had already done all that was necessary to pay for all of their sin, accomplished through Jesus on the cross, stating that they had been brought near by His blood, with God reconciling both Jews and Gentiles to Himself by the same method — that is the Jews (who had the law) and the Gentiles (who did not have the law) were both reconciled by Jesus sacrifice in their place. And as such, they were now fellow citizens of heaven. Both saved by grace.

And that is where we had got to. But last week, while I was ill, Bob kindly taught in my place, and looked at Galatians chapter one, which really was perfect, because after all Paul had spoken to the Ephesians about God's grace, we were reminded of his warning to the Galatians to not lose sight of that grace, for they risked returning to the idea that they needed to earn their salvation, or somehow maintain it through works.

However, while grace was opposed to earning, it wasn't opposed to effort. And so this morning, as we get into chapter three of Ephesians, we're going to see Paul pray for the full effect of grace to become evident in the lives of these Christians in Ephesus — that they would comprehend what God has done for them in His marvellous love toward them, the purpose of which was that this would be the foundation for their lives — not a system of works through which to attain salvation, but a foundation of grace and love that the fullness of God may be seen in their lives.

Overview of chapter three

- **v1** — For this reason...
- **v2-13** — The mystery that the Gentiles would also be saved
- **v14-21** — Paul's prayer for the Ephesian's spiritual maturity

And so, building on what he has said, Paul will begin in verse 1 saying "*For this reason...*", but then detour to talk about the mystery of the gospel, that the Gentiles would also be saved, before returning to what he was saying in verse 14, telling the Ephesians how he was praying for the full effect of grace to become evident in the lives, as I've previously mentioned.

Chapter three

So let's get in to this chapter. We read in verse 1:

Ephesians 3:1

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

And so, Paul begins, or rather continues by saying **for this reason...** building on what he has just said in chapter 2, that we are *no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*. That the Gentiles have now had the door of salvation opened unto them, just as the Jews had that same door opened to *them*. And they are *being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*.

And Paul, never the prisoner of Rome or mere men, calls himself **the prisoner of Jesus Christ**. That is, he didn't see his current situation as a catastrophe, but rather that he was there because God had allowed it. That whether free or in prison, the situation he was in was one for him in which to honour God. Just as it is with ours, whatever we might be going through.

I like how CS Lewis viewed the trials of this life. He wrote:

The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's 'own,' or 'real' life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life — the life God is sending one day by day.

CS Lewis

The sooner we accept that God has things for us to do in whatever circumstance we find ourselves, the sooner we will find greater contentment with our present situation, and the sooner we will become useful to our Creator. Indeed, remember that while in prison Paul wrote to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, as well as to Philemon.

But also, note that Paul says specifically that he was the prisoner of Christ Jesus **for you Gentiles**. And he wasn't joking. For back in Acts 21 we find that while he was in Jerusalem, Paul had visited the temple, but the Jews from Asia had dragged him out, seeking to kill him, beating him until the Roman authorities stepped in, precisely because they thought he had brought Gentiles into the temple (and specifically Trophimus, who was an Ephesian), which was forbidden.

And then in Acts 22, as he gave his defence, the people listened to his testimony of *all* God had done in him *until* he spoke of how God sent him to the Gentiles. Following which we read "*And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!'*" And so, he was literally captive because of his willingness to obey God in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. Indeed, from that moment on, Paul would never again be free in the human sense, as he was first set before Felix, then Agrippa, and then ultimately sent to Rome for trial. But all within the will of God.

But here, before Paul returns to his response to all that he said in the opening two chapters (that for this reason he was praying for the full effect of grace to become evident in their lives), he first detours until verse 14, to talk of mystery of the gospel that was now revealed in Christ, writing:

Ephesians 3:2-4

if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),

That is, since you have indeed heard what I'm saying to you about God's grace, as a steward of God's grace, having received this good news from God Himself, how what was once concealed is now revealed, *which* (we read in verse 5)...

Ephesians 3:5

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

That as we already *read* in chapter one, God has *made known to us the mystery of His will* and in Romans 16 that *according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest* and in Colossians 1 that *the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints* — so we now know and can clearly see that God had a plan to save both Jews *and* Gentiles, not separately, but by the same method.

Ephesians 3:6-7

that the Gentiles should be **fellow** heirs, of the **same** body, and **partakers** of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

So then, what is the mystery? Is it that the Gentiles (the non-Jews) would be saved? No. You see, we read in the Old Testament that the Gentiles *would* be saved. Reading in Isaiah chapter 11:

Isaiah 11:10

"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious."

And later in chapter 42:

Isaiah 42:6

"I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,

Then in Zechariah chapter 2:

Zechariah 2:10-11

"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the LORD. "Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

And in Malachi chapter 1:

Malachi 1:11

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down,
My name shall be great among the Gentiles;
In every place incense shall be offered to My name,
And a pure offering;
For My name shall be great among the nations,"
Says the LORD of hosts.

And so the mystery wasn't that the Gentiles would be *saved*, but that the Gentiles and Israel would be saved on the *same basis* — which is by faith alone, in Christ alone. Which is what the council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem concluded in Acts 15, when dealing with those who stated that *"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*

We read there:

Acts 15:6-11

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

And so, Peter flips this question on it's head, saying it's not a question of whether the Gentiles will be saved the same way as the Jews, but rather that the Jews can only be saved the same way as the Gentiles — which is on the basis of faith, not works.

But let *us* note, the Gentiles have been grafted in. We have become fellow heirs *with* the Jews, as Paul writes here, not *instead* of the Jews. The church has not replaced Israel. Rather, we are part of the same body — not that all Israel are saved, but rather speaking of those Jews who have come to Christ... like Peter did, like James did, like Paul did, like all the apostles did — on the basis of faith.

And Paul is saying in this passage, that since you have heard these things, and how...

Ephesians 3:8-12

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

He's saying, since you have heard these things, and seen how God has worked in me...

Ephesians 3:13

Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

And so we'll get to that. But let's not miss all that is found in these verses, for first we read back in verse 8:

Ephesians 3:8

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

And in this verse we see Paul's **attitude** — which was one of humility, *here* describing himself as the *least of all the saints*, in 1 Corinthians 15 describing himself as *the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle*. And in 1 Timothy 1 as the *chief of sinners*. I'm sure in part because of the memories he had of all that he had done in persecuting the church, but also because he still had to deny himself like you and I do, dying daily. And he was amazed God would use him, as we should be — not proud of ourselves, thinking somehow that God needs us.

And in this verse we also see Paul's **mission** — which was to faithfully deliver the gospel of grace (that he had been given) to the Gentiles. And as such we also see his **message**, that he preached Jesus, and the unsearchable riches that are to be found in Him. Not unsearchable in that they cannot be found (he didn't say unfindable after all), but so abundant that it's like looking for sand on the beach (or pebbles in our case here in Deal) — that there is just such an abundance of riches in Christ that it's hard to know where to start.

And he continues (regarding what he should preach), saying:

Ephesians 3:9

and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

And so, he says that in the past this was not clear. It was not clear how man could be reconciled to God, whether Jew or Gentile, since there had been such an insurmountable wedge driven between us and Him. But, as he wrote in chapter 1, God *chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*.

Made possible by Jesus, as Peter writes in his first letter, saying; *He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God*.

Meaning that, as Paul wrote in chapter 2, *we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...*

Ephesians 3:10

to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

That is, when we gather together, we are not only declaring God's goodness, glory, and plan of salvation to each other, but we're also doing so to the whole spiritual realm who are looking on going "Ah, now I get it! Now I get why God protected the line through to Christ, by establishing the nation of Israel. Now I get why God gave them a law they could not keep (for it was to show up their sin). Now I get why it was necessary for Jesus to be born in human form. Now I get why He had to suffer and die. Now I get what His death accomplished. Now I see the wonder of the resurrection!"

So imagine that, that even as we meet together this morning there are angels in the spiritual realm that are learning more of Christ because of you. For that's what Paul says happens as the church gathers together. And it's what Peter says the angels desire, writing in his first letter:

1 Peter 1:10-12

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

When we think of that, didn't we ought to take a greater interest? It certainly convicts me that I don't give as much thought to the wonder of God's salvation or His Word as I ought to. Especially when we consider that this is not something temporary that God has done. For Paul continues, saying:

Ephesians 3:11-12

according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

That is, God's purpose in saving us wasn't momentary, but with eternity in mind. But not in the sense that it is something a long way and long *time* away from now, but rather even *now* we have can have boldness to come into His presence because of what Christ has done (because our confidence comes not from our own ability, but from what He has *already* accomplished for us).

And Paul is saying, since you have heard these wonderful things of God's grace, how He has an eternal purpose beyond our lives here and now, and seen how God has worked his grace in me...

Ephesians 3:13

Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

You see, the Ephesians knew Paul well. He had pastored the church for three years. He had taught them night and day. When talking to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 he spoke of how he had done so with tears; how he had not failed to teach them the whole counsel of God, and how now these elders should watch out for these believers, to protect them from those who cared more about themselves than they did about God, who would come in to deceive them. And likewise we saw this love reciprocated, for following that we read:

Acts 20:36-38

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

And so there's this sense that he had poured his heart out to them. How he had given his all. But also how much they loved Him in the Lord. So, given that he was now in prison, with the potential of a death sentence hanging over him, he says here, don't be despondent — for God is still in control, and the fact that I'm in trouble for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, is good evidence that I've done so, and that you have received it with open arms.

Now, you may recall that Paul began verse 1 by saying *"For this reason..."*. Well, all that we've read since then was a detour that he might talk about the mystery of the gospel that was now revealed in Christ; that the Jew and Gentiles would *both* be saved by grace. But now, as we get to verse 14, we find Paul picks up the thought he was starting, that he might explain to them how in light of the gospel of grace that had saved them, he was now praying for the full effect of grace to become evident in their lives. We read:

Ephesians 3:14

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

And so, Paul was saying to them that he was coming before the Father to pray for them. **Yielded to God's will, and for their good.** And note it is the Father that he prays to. Often, we can find ourselves praying to Jesus, especially with children, saying "Dear Jesus". But that's not the pattern of scripture, for we see that Paul prayed to the Father *in Jesus name*. I'm not saying it wrong to speak to Jesus in prayer — indeed we should in that we should be thanking Him for His sacrifice for us — but our access is to the Father, because of what Jesus has done, that we might pray in Jesus name, His Spirit working in us as we pray.

And here we see **prayer is the natural response of Paul** when he considers all God has done in the lives of these believers. He is moved by his deep love and care for them. And there is much example in that for us to follow, that we might have the same heart to pray for each other, and all believers, that God would continue to work in their lives. That as we considered in chapter one, we wouldn't only pray when there was a specific practical difficulty, but that we would pray when things are going well too. That we would have a heart for prayer. That we would never find ourselves thinking there is nothing we can pray for when it comes to other people.

But also note, Paul's prayer here, is brief. Let me read to you from J Vernon McGee's Thru the Bible commentary, for I think he makes the point so well. He says:

Have you noticed that Paul's prayers are brief? Both prayers here in Ephesians and his prayer in Philippians are brief. In fact, all the prayers of Scripture are quite brief. The Lord Jesus said that we are not to use vain repetition as the heathen do—they think they will be heard for their much speaking. Moses' great prayer for Israel is recorded in only three verses. Elijah, on top of Mount Carmel as he stood alone for God against the prophets of Baal, prayed a great prayer which is only one verse long. Nehemiah's great prayer is recorded in only seven verses. The prayer of our Lord in John 17 takes only three minutes to read. But the briefest prayer is that of Simon Peter, "... Lord, save me" (Matt. 14:30). He cried out this prayer when he was beginning to sink beneath the waves of the Sea of Galilee. Some people think that was not a prayer because it was so short. My friend, that was a prayer, and it was answered immediately. If Simon Peter had prayed like some of us preachers pray on Sunday morning, "Lord, Thou who art the omnipotent, the omniscient, the omnipresent One ...," he would have been twenty feet under water before he got to his request. I tell you, he got down to business. Prayer should be brief and to the point.

J Vernon McGee

So don't ever think you can't show up to prayer meetings because you don't know what to pray. Don't think at prayer meetings that you ought not to pray because you don't have much to say. Those who offer simple, short prayers, are often the ones that are getting right to the heart of what is necessary. So be encouraged if you feel you could only pray 10 words!

Here, sharing with the Ephesians what he was praying for them *to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, he notes that it is Christ...

Ephesians 3:15

from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

That is, all the citizens of heaven — Jews, Gentiles, Baptists, Pentecostals, Free church members, and Calvary Chapel congregations too — all those who have come to Christ in repentance and faith, have taken on His name. For it is those who have truly put their trust in Christ that are Christians. Not because they ticked that box on a census, or were sprinkled with water as a baby, but because they are now found in Him, and He is living in them.

And speaking of those who truly are Christians, Paul says he is praying...

Ephesians 3:16

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

And isn't this a wake up call for us, that Paul doesn't jump to praying about their physical needs. I mean, at that time life expectancy was far worse than today. The chance of a child even reaching 10 years of age was staggeringly low compared to what we're used to (one estimate saying half of all children didn't make it as far as their tenth birthday). There were brutal wars where many men were killed. Many women didn't survive childbirth. There were no antibiotics, no heart surgeries, no hope for diabetics, no relief for arthritis. Yet Paul didn't pray for the outer man, but the inner man. For he recognised that is where the biggest problem laid.

For though Christ had saved them, they still needed His hand on their lives. They still needed to yield to Him. They still needed to keep His commandments — not out of compulsion, but out of love. And they needed prayer that they might not stumble into sin. They needed prayer that they might walk worthy of all God had done. And so Paul said that he prayed for them...

Ephesians 3:17-19

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

That is, that Christ might live in their hearts, noting that *Love is the soil in which they must grow and the foundation on which they must build*. Praying that they might comprehend how wonderful God is, how vast His love toward them is, that they might enjoy Christ in all His fulness. Not merely knowing *about* God, but experiencing His love first hand. Which should be the desire for us all.

And Paul commits this to the only One who *can* make that sort of difference in our lives, saying:

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

And note, Paul doesn't merely say God is able to do abundantly, but exceedingly abundantly. And indeed, above all that we ask *and* think. And that's really quite something, isn't it? Don't we so often limit what we ask for because we have too small a view of God?! We need to remember that God is able to do more than we can even think, and that He also is willing to do so much for us. Remembering what Paul wrote in Romans chapter 8, saying:

Romans 8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

But that's not so say He will do *anything* we ask. He is not a genie in a bottle, after all. We must pray within His will. But when we pray that God will work in the hearts and lives of others, we really ought to pray that with confidence, knowing that God *does* want to save all men. And that He *does* want all those who are saved to walk worthy of that calling. God isn't going to force anyone against their will, but where there is a willingness, and where there is prayer for that individual, God will answer that prayer.

So let us pray. Let us pray for one another. Let us pray for all those in our fellowship, that they might be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. That they might walk closely with the Lord. Let us pray those things in our own quiet time. Let us pray those things in our times of prayer as a church family. That we would see hearts set on fire for the Lord. That apathy would disappear, that there would be a hunger and thirst for righteousness, that we would each seek what the Lord would have us do in all things. That we might be filled with all the fullness of God, as Paul prayed for these believers in Ephesus.

Sure, let us pray for our physical needs, let us pray for our practical needs — for health, for job difficulties, for challenges at school. But let us pray most of all that there would be a coming to Christ by all who walk through these doors, and closeness to Christ for all those who know Him. For those are far greater things to pray for. They are far more difficult problems to solve. But there *is* One who can save, who can set apart, who can fill with His Spirit. So let us pray.

And may God be glorified in us, as we read here in verse 21. That we may glorify God personally, that we may glorify Him in the way we conduct ourselves corporately as a church family, that God may be glorified not only in us, but in all the generations that are to follow in this place.

Application questions

So then, here is where the rubber meets the road. This is where you and I now need to apply these things to our lives. So will you? Will I? Will what we've looked at in this chapter this morning make any difference to us? That is down to us as individuals, but let us also pray for each other that it might well do that. That what we read here would change us.

To help, I urge you to ask yourself these questions:

- What does God want from you in your life's little interruptions?
- Are you showing humility like Paul, or pride like Diotrefes? (who we read of in 3 John)
- Are you as interested in the things of Christ as all of heaven?
- Are you praying for the inner man more than the outer man? (for yourself, and others)

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