

December 11th, FEFC

Ephesians 3:1-13

READING THE TEXT

Ephesians 3:1-13

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

2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you,

which are your glory.

Ephesians 3

INTRODUCTION

Paul begins this section with the words “for this reason.” Everything we hear is related to Paul statement in Ephesians 2:8-10 that we are saved by grace and not by works. Paul focuses again on the fact that the Gentiles and Jews have been made one people in Christ. They are both saved by grace. Since Jesus Christ came and died for our sins there is no other way to be saved for Jew or Gentile except through faith in him. However, he does not just want the reader to intellectually understand this fact. He wants us to marvel at what a big accomplishment this is to celebrate.

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

PRISONER OF WHOM?

Paul identifies himself as a prisoner. Paul was persecuted for his faith. But Paul was not a prisoner of Rome, he said he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus. If God wanted to remove Paul from prison he could have done so easily. God broke Peter out of jail in the past and he could have done the same for Paul. But this was God’s plan because the Gentiles needed him there. It was for the sake of the Gentiles that Paul was in prison according to the will of Christ Jesus.

It authenticates your friendship for another person when you are kind to them. But it authenticates your great love for a person when you are willing to stand up for them and suffer for them. By standing up to those who wanted to make Gentile outsiders, Paul was demonstrating great love and the great love of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles.

It is a great honor to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. Paul would have seen his imprisonment as an honor. In fact some people in Paul’s day renounced their faith rather than facing prison or persecution. Paul did not renounce his faith. He was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Paul was not in jail for writing bad checks or DMUI (driving your mule while under the influence

:) He was in jail for Jesus.

HOW COULD PAUL HAVE AVOIDED TROUBLE?

If Paul had preached Jesus Christ to Jews only he may not have gotten into all kinds of trouble. The only reason Paul was in prison was because he thought Gentiles had the same access to God that Jews did.

If he had been willing to keep Gentiles on a lower plane he may not have gotten into so much trouble. But Paul was working with all his might to bring Jews and Non-Jews together into one house of worship on equal footing.

Apparently this is a HUGE deal to Paul. Not only should we tolerate Gentiles, we need to treat them as equals. This unity found in the church through Jesus Christ is a big deal. In fact this is the fulfillment of a covenant promise given to Abraham in **Genesis 12:3** that he *would be a blessing to all nations*. Thousands of years later the promise finally arrive. This unity between different types of people goes to the heart of God's faithfulness to keep His word and His covenant promises.

I do not think we can truly understand how astounding it was for Jews and Gentiles to fellowship together. Perhaps an illustration will help us.

STORY - "REDEEMED SINNER"

One of my dear friends served as pastor at a main-line church. He was serving God faithfully. Then he had an encounter that would change everything for he and his fellowship. My friend Pastor Josh somehow came to meet with a former convicted pedophile named Ben. Ben ask Pastor Josh if he could come to church. Pastor Josh was very concerned for safety of the children at the church so he asked him some questions. How long ago did this happen? What were the circumstances? What happened to change you? What have you done to make sure this never happens again?

This was one of the rare cases where there were no excuses or self deception. This man had sinned. And he was ashamed of his past. But then he came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. His whole life changed. He had been faithful to the Lord for 15 years and served and loved God with all his heart. He had very solid accountability and boundaries established.

So now what should Josh do? Should he exclude a person from fellowship when the bible commands us to meet together? The same kind of feelings you may have right now in processing whether we would join with this man in fellowship are the same feelings that Jews had about fellow-shiping with Gentiles at the same church. There are some people that we just can not imagine having in our homes or breaking bread with. It's too much trouble. Think of what could go wrong. And this was exactly the struggle with Jews and Gentiles.

Josh could not deny fellowship to a repentant sinner with good accountability and a true heart and life change. Yes he established good boundaries and safety measures. Ben was an asset to the church. Josh stood up for him and as a result Pastor Josh was persecuted.

2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery (what was formerly hidden) is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S GRACE

Paul is a steward of God's grace. If he failed to carry out his task the gentiles will be deprived of God's grace.

The phrase "administration of God's grace" is a reference to the way that God chose to organize and communicate the truth of His grace to people. The way God chose to organize and communicate how much grace he has is through bringing Jews and Gentiles together into one church.

These things were hidden in the past. But now the administration of God's grace was no longer hidden. It was revealed to the apostles and prophets.

In the Old Testament we had two groups of people. We had the Jews who were a covenant people and we also had Gentiles who were enemies of God and whom used to attack and try to wipe out God's covenant people.

We know from the Old Testament that often God himself fought against the Gentile nations surrounding Israel. So God himself was at war with Gentile nations who fought against Israel. That was part of God's covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-2 which states that God would curse those who curse him.

These gentile people in the past found themselves on the wrong side of the pillar of smoke and fire in Egypt, and they were inside the city of Sodom when the fire rained down, and they were inside the walls of Jericho when they fell.

These people whom God himself fought against were now invited into the church to share deep love with the Jews and their Messiah. This was the way that God chose to show off his grace to the entire universe.

STRANGERS AT THE READING OF THE WILL

This would be like going to the reading of a will. But then you tell the person behind the desk to hold the reading and you go to the jail and post bail for a gang of people who tried to kill you. You bring those people back with you to the reading of the will. Then you force the family to split all the inheritance evenly with the people you sprung from jail. That is what God did when he gave non-Jews a full share of salvation and grace.

REVELATION (SPECIAL = NOT PREVIOUSLY REVEALED)

We read that what was at one time a mystery is now understood by Paul through revelation. The meaning of this mystery was given by revelation to apostles and prophets. Let's look at the term revelation. We will look at the role of apostles and prophets in more depth in chapter 4. But let's hit the pause button and consider the term "revelation."

The kind of revelation to which Paul refers is special revelation.

SPECIAL REVELATION

Special revelation is when God tells something to a prophet or apostle and the prophet or apostle says to people “thus saith the Lord” and they speak God’s words infallibly to the people. When an apostle or prophet hears from God he is acting as a “go between” from God to men.

The bible is God’s special revelation to all people. The apostles and prophets heard from God and wrote and spoke infallibly what God told them to say.

**2 Peter 1:20-21²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.
²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

2 Timothy 3:16¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Throughout the years other teachings from so-called prophets have come along to confuse people. It really is very simple to sort out a false prophet from true prophet. God only reveals Special Revelation such as a book of the bible to Apostles and Prophets. To qualify as an apostle you had to be a witness of baptism, the life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No one after the death of the apostle John could meet that criteria.

To be a prophet in a way that you can proclaim; “thus saith the Lord” and write words in the bible - requires that you give the sign of a prophet. The sign of a prophet is the working of miracles such as raising someone from the dead.

Paul claimed that his words were a revelation from God. Therefore the church could look at the words of Paul with the same authority as the Old Testament Scriptures. And Paul did meet the criteria of both an apostle and a prophet. Paul raised someone from the dead and did many miracles to show the sign of a true prophet of God.

OTHER REVELATIONS

You may not have a special revelation to record in the bible. But if you are a mature Christian you probably have heard God speak to you in a number of ways. If not, I think you should.

Revelation is when God himself reveals something to a person that they could not come up with on their own. For example; one time God spoke to me very clearly and told me that I should go back to seminary and leave the industry in which I worked.

Another time God put it on my heart to call a person with words of encouragement. Just as I called they were experiencing a real crisis that I could not have been aware of. And through that revelation God changed lives.

Other people listen to the words of fellow Christian and they land deeply in our soul and actually impact us so much that we make significant changes in our live. This could be God speaking to you through another Christian.

And some people when they read the word of God or hear it preached are deeply encouraged or healed or convicted of sin. God reveals himself and speaks to us through scripture by a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

That type of revelation comes by the fact that every Christian has the Holy Spirit living inside of them. If you have the Spirit of God inside of you then you can expect to hear from God. This is spiritual discernment.

By hearing what God revealed to me I was not adding to the pages of scripture. I do not dare say; "Thus Saith The Lord" and claim to hear God in an infallible way for other people. I was simply given the guidance from The Holy Spirit to apply the bible to my life and serve others according to God's will. These types of actions could be a result of spiritual discernment or could be a spiritual gift such as a word of wisdom or word of knowledge. All these revelations and words of spiritual insight must be tested against the word of God.

There is nothing in scripture that says God no longer speaks to His people. The only thing that is limited is that the bible is complete and we do not need prophets to speak for God. The scriptures say that we live in a day right now when we no longer need someone to say to us; "thus saith the Lord" because everyone will hear from God.

We do need to know how to apply the bible to our lives, our circumstances and our church through spiritual discernment and other gifts

of the Holy Spirit.

GENERAL REVELATION

Then of course the third form of revelation is general revelation. This is when God reveals himself through the wonders of nature. Romans 1 tells us that God reveals himself through nature and His creation so powerfully that no one has an excuse to deny God.

So God revealed himself through special revelation to prophets and apostles to write the bible. He reveals His will and His guidance to Christians through gifts and activity of the Holy Spirit. And he also reveals himself through his creation.

We have a God who reveals himself to people. We do not have to guess at what God is like or what He wants from us. He reveals himself through his Son and His word and His Holy Spirit.

8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Paul calls himself the "least of all the Lord's people..." Before he was born again Paul was trying to get rid of church. He chased down and persecuted Christian leaders. But Paul said; this "grace was given me." And then he shared what this grace was given for. Grace was given to act upon. Paul was given the grace to preach to the Gentiles and to explain how God had made two people groups into one people group. We often remove grace from action. But true grace is supposed to turn into action.

Brian was given grace to speak to people who struggle with alcohol and drug addictions. His grace is for an action and purpose that brings glory to God. Grace always turns into kingdom works.

10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.13

MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD

The wisdom of God is shown off. To whom is the wisdom of God being shown off? To the rulers and authorities.

RULERS AND AUTHORITIES ON THE HEAVENLY REALMS

This is a reference to all angelic authorities, whether fallen or holy. God is using the people in his church to show off to the angels more of what God is like. The angels never had the Son of God die for them. If angels fell, then they would be cast out forever. And so among the angels the fuller understanding of the wisdom and grace and other attributes of God is learned by the way Jesus built the church.

In his wisdom God found a way through Jesus Christ to take people that used to be enemies of God and turn them from sinners into saints.

YOUR BEHAVIOR TEACHES ANGELS

Your life is part of a statement to other people and even to angelic authorities of what God can do with us. Other people may not be watching you, but your life however you live it, preaches all the time, even to the unseen realms.

Each time you extend grace and love and forgiveness and reconciliation to others your life preaches to others and it also preaches to angels. Apparently we were invited to worship the Jewish Messiah for a reason bigger than just our own personal blessing. It seems that God wanted to extend us grace in order to show off His great attribute of wisdom and grace to all the authorities of the universe including Satan and his generals as well as God's holy angels. When they look at our lives and how God's grace has been given to us and how it changes our lives it teaches them something about God and His amazing wisdom.

We are saved by grace and we act in a holy way because we are led by the Spirit of God to want to obey all that is written in the word of God. If you find yourself gossiping, or hooked on some addiction; or perhaps you never take the time to pray and read the word of God and grow your personal relationship with God; perhaps you don't think beyond yourself and you never pray for opportunities to serve other people...know that you are missing an opportunity to allow your life to teach authorities about how

God's grace has changed your life.

APPROACHING GOD WITH CONFIDENCE

What does it look like to approach God with confidence? A good way to look at this is to see what it was like at one time to approach God with a lack of confidence. Before I knew Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior I could not approach God with confidence. In fact I recall the first time God revealed the truth to me that he was a personal God. I was terrified because i knew that I had to face a personal God and explain all of my sins to Him. It did not take me long to repent of my sins and turn my life over to God.

And now when I sin or fail to do what I know I should, my confidence to approach God is a little shaken. But I know the price that Jesus paid for my sins is enough. And so I press through my shame and defenses and go to God with confidence because I have access to God through Jesus Christ.

Before Christ a Gentile would have a difficult time approaching God. They would not understand that the God of the Jews wanted to include them and adopt them. But now, because of Christ and because of Paul's work of grace, Gentiles knew they could approach God with confidence.

I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

The glory is that God appointed his best guy to show great love to you by suffering for you and standing up for you. This suffering shows the love and grace of God to those who once felt like outsiders.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Are you more likely to play it safe and say nothing or take a stand for someone that is being excluded?
2. When is the last time you read God's special revelation on your own? Is God giving you a growing thirst for reading His word?
3. When is the last time you prayed and focused on God long enough to hear Him speak truth into your heart and guide your life?
4. If your life is supposed to teach angels about God's grace, what do you think they can learn from your life? What would you want them to learn and

what changes do you need to make in order to see that happen?

5. Do you approach God with confidence?