

# Ephesians 3

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## Introduction.

- A. As we study the Bible, it's often important for us to remember that even though the text is inspired, the verse numbers and chapter breaks, especially the chapter breaks, aren't. Instead, they're the product of later copyists of Scripture, who inserted them to give the text more structure and make it easier to find a particular passage. Certainly, we use the chapter breaks all the time, and we'd be at sea without them, but we need to remember the downside that is associated with them as well. When a human author writes a book with chapter breaks in mind, he concludes his flow of thought at the end of one chapter and begins another thought in the next. In the Bible, although that is sometimes true, sometimes it isn't. Sometimes, a Scriptural author doesn't reach the point he's making until one or more chapter breaks have been passed.
- B. This is certainly the case in Ephesians 3. Even as we look at Ephesians 3:1, we see that it begins with the phrase "For this reason," which clearly refers back to a point Paul has already made. In fact, it refers to a point Paul started in Ephesians 1:19, when he began to explain the greatness of God's power toward all Christians. In Ephesians 2, we saw two manifestations of that power. First, it saved us from our sins. Second, it united us together with other Christians and with God. Ephesians 3 is going to present a third manifestation: the power of God exerted in Him revealing His will to us, and the results that this revelation has. Once Paul finishes with this discussion of the power of God, he returns to an even earlier theme, the prayer he began in Ephesians 1:15-18, and finishes that prayer on the Ephesians' behalf.
- C. In the course of doing all this, Paul answers a number of questions that are critically important today. If we want to know how we can find out the will of God, the answer is here. If we want to know where God will help us go as Christians, the answer is here. Let's look at these ideas, and many others, in Ephesians 3.

## II. Paul's Mission.

- A. The first big chunk of text that we need to examine here is Ephesians 3:1-6. Paul begins, as we've come to expect from Ephesians thus far, by referring to the point he's just finished. Back in the tail end of chapter 2, Paul has described the transformation that has occurred in the spiritual lives of the Ephesians through Christ. He says in vs. 1 that that transformation is the reason why he now is a prisoner for Christ Jesus. Think of Paul like a pawn in a chess game. Just like a chess master is willing to accept the loss of a pawn if he can exchange it for a queen, God was willing to expose Paul to imprisonment if the result of that exposure was that the Gentiles could hear the gospel. What's more, Paul is perfectly fine with being used in this way. In vs. 2-3, he describes this mission to preach to the Gentiles as a stewardship of the grace of God. In other words, God has entrusted him with preaching the gospel like we would ship a package by FedEx. It's FedEx's responsibility to make sure that the package gets there on time, no matter what, and it's Paul's responsibility to make sure that the Gentiles hear the word of revelation from him. If he doesn't, he's letting God down.
- B. We need to understand our lives in this way too, friends. Just like Paul, we are stewards of the grace of God. It's not ours to hoard for ourselves. It's ours to pass on to as many people as possible. Certainly, just as there were in Paul's time, there are obstacles to the gospel today. We may not be imprisoned, but we may be ostracized by our friends or frowned on by our employers. Just like Paul does here, we need to have the courage to say, "Bring it on!" The life-transforming power of the gospel is too great for us to keep it in check.
- C. From there, in vss. 4-6, Paul describes two things: the mystery of Christ, and his special insight into the mystery. First of all, the mystery of Christ is quite literally that: God's plan of salvation, embodied in the person of Jesus, who came to earth to die and save us all in a way that no one predicted or understood. In fact, without the Bible, we STILL wouldn't understand the significance of Jesus' life and death. God chose to clear up our ignorance by using His Spirit to reveal the mystery to the apostles and the prophets.
- D. However, no one apostle or prophet was taught exactly the same thing. James is not a carbon copy of 1 Peter, nor is 1 John exactly like Mark. Instead, God gave different parts of the revelation to different men. Paul here describes his part as his "insight into the mystery." Some translations really mess this up, but it's actually Paul's insight into the mystery that he's describing in vs. 6. Paul's special piece of revelation is the idea that Gentile Christians have the same status in the body of Christ as do Jewish Christians, that there's not any division between the two peoples anymore. That's why Paul calls himself "the apostle to the Gentiles" in Romans 11—they were his special mission. Paul says, though, in vs. 4, that he has entrusted his insight into the mystery to writing, so that the Ephesian Gentiles, once they read what he's written, can understand it.
- E. It's critically important that we grasp this concept, not just so that we can sort out the Jew-Gentile thing, but so that we can understand the way that God speaks to us. God started off with an entire revelation of His mystery in mind. He entrusted different pieces of that revelation to different messengers, who, at different times, recorded it in the writings we have as books of the New Testament. Just like the Ephesians did with

Paul's writing, we can do with any inspired writer's writing. We can read it and understand that writer's insight into the mystery. Then, when we take all of those different insights and combine them, we, by ourselves, can understand the entirety of God's revelation. We don't need helpers. We don't need interpreters. We can sit down, read, and get it. That idea is at the heart of genuine Christianity.

### III. God's Power in Paul.

- A. To the Ephesians and to us, that might seem like an awful, awful lot for Paul to claim. Who does he think he is, that he says he's God's special messenger? Paul addresses this question in Ephesians 3:7-13. Notice where he starts out in vs. 7-8. He says he's no big wheel. Instead, he's just a servant. What made him a servant in this way was not his own merit, but the power of God acting to favor him. In fact, Paul in this text goes to such great lengths to emphasize his own insignificance that he makes up a word. Where some translations say "the very least" in vs. 8, a literal translation of the Greek there would be "leaster," which isn't a word in Greek any more than it is in English. Paul's telling us that he's not just the least. He's the lesser of the least!
- B. However, even if Paul is the lesser of the least, his mission is anything but unimportant. That's the point of vs. 8-10. God's power in him is so great that a pipsqueak like Paul can tell the Gentiles the most important thing they will ever hear. God's power in Paul is so great that he has been entrusted with revealing a mystery that has been hidden since before the beginning of time, a mystery that the most profound of human minds could never figure out. God's power is so great, in fact, that a church made up of nobodies like Paul can show the angelic rulers of the heavens what God has been doing for all this time. Paul is puny, but God is great.
- C. Friends, we need to consider our spiritual lives in this way as well. In the grand scheme of things, by ourselves, few if any of us are very wise or very important or very meaningful, and if we believe otherwise, we're wrong. But whatever our shortcomings may be, they are irrelevant. Whenever we serve God, it is not we ourselves who are doing the serving, but His power working through us. There may be tasks before us to which our abilities are unequal, but nothing is impossible with God. Come what may, let's trust in Him.
- D. This might seem like a weird way to set things up: puny, flawed servants carrying out the will of an omnipotent God, but vs. 11-13 tell us that it's just the way God planned things from the beginning. In fact, we see the same pattern in Jesus, who looked like a nobody, but proved to be the most important human being ever to live. Because we know that's God's plan, we can have confidence that God's plan is going to work out, whether we're the Ephesians mourning over Paul in his prison cell, or us today, struggling with some spiritual battle nobody else even knows about. We don't have to worry. We just have to trust.

### IV. God's Power in the Ephesians.

- A. That gets us out of Paul's big ole parenthetical in the middle of the prayer that started in Ephesians 1:19. We see the conclusion of the prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. The way that Paul re-begins this prayer in vs. 14, he's appealing to God as a Patriarch of patriarchs, head of everybody in the way that the Roman *paterfamilias* was head of his household. He asks that just as God has shown his power in the Ephesians just as much as he did in Christ—think back to our chapter 2 discussion there--so too he wants God to strengthen the Ephesians with His power just like he strengthened Paul. For our purposes today, perhaps the most important manifestation of this power is through the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation, just as powerful now as then.
- B. Paul expects that this power will have three main results. First, in vs. 17, it will cause Christ to dwell in their hearts through faith. As with the other personal indwelling language in the Scripture, this doesn't mean that some piece of Christ will literally inhabit us. Instead, it means that through God's power, bit by bit, we will come more and more under the influence and control of Christ. Then, Paul redefines the working of God's power by describing it as rooting and grounding the Ephesians in love. This rooting and grounding will cause the Ephesians to grow in their understanding. With other Christians, their experience of God will cause them to know the dimensions of the infinite, unknowable love of Christ, a love so profound that human language cannot express it. This in turn will fill them with the fullness of God. Just as Paul, though an earthen vessel, overflowed with God's power and love, so too he wants to see that happen to the Ephesians.
- C. That takes us to the final part of this chapter, vs. 20-21. To me, this is one of the most beautiful and powerful sections in all of Scripture. This is the conclusion of Paul's prayer. Notice that Paul doesn't use the magic words of "in Jesus' name we pray," to round his prayer off, but no one reading this can doubt that he has been brought to his knees by the authority and majesty of God. Not only, Paul says, can God do more for us than we ask. Not only can God do more for us than we even dare to imagine. In reality, God's power is so great that His work in our lives will be far, far beyond our wildest dreams, if only we put our faith and trust in Him. Nor is this greatness, this power going to be wasted on us and our puny selves. Instead, the result is that God will be continually glorified through his church until the end of time. And to that, Paul says "Amen."
- D. This, friends, is what Christianity is about. It's not about showing up at a building three times a week, singing a few songs, listening to a sermon, and then going home. It's about being transformed by the power of God, far beyond ourselves, so that we can give Him the glory He has always deserved. That's what God expects.

**Conclusion.** If you want to have the power of God at work like this in your life, come to Him today.