

Ephesians 3:1-6, Part 1

The Scriptures are not a bunch of magic words and phrases, that somehow these spiritual truths can bypass our human comprehension and do a spiritual work in our heart without first landing in our brain.

For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of your Gentiles assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly, when you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men and other generations, as it has been now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets, by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone.

What is the plan of the mystery, hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God, might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus, our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I asked you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being. so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength, to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and the length, and the height, and the depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who was able to do far more abundantly than we all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be the glory in the Church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

So now, as we begin in chapter three, the point of Ephesians, is starting to become clear to us. The purpose—the point of Ephesians is the Church. We talked about this last week, as Paul has this introduction, that is the introduction to end all introductions. As he spends chapter one and chapter two—at least half of chapter two—there just given us some of the richest theology of the New Testament of the person of Christ, of the work of Christ, of the choosing of God's people before the foundation of the world, the adoption of God's people, the redemption of God's people, the work of the Spirit to seal God's people for their Blessed Hope, and their inheritance. All of those things were some of the most magnificent truths of the person of Christ and the work of Christ, and the work of God the Father prior to the creation, and the work of the Spirit in creation. Yet, all of that was really just introducing the main topic of the letter, which is the Church, the nature of the Church, the character of the Church. As we said last week, if we want to know about the Church, if we want to know what the Church is, Ephesians is the place to go. Because the entire letter is focused to the character of the

Church, the nature of the Church, and most especially to the unity of the Church. And the letter is going to speak to us some lofty truths about the Church. And it's going to show us a picture of what I like to call the most beautiful thing on planet Earth, which is the Church of the living God.

So as we turn to chapter three now, and we begin—all of chapter three is really going to be about the same thing that Paul has already talked to us about. He is, in a sense, going to be backing up and saying what he said all over again. And the reason for this, among other reasons, the reason I think the main thing that's going on here is that Paul is so compelled by the importance of what he's saying, and the difficulty of what he's saying, that he feels the need not only to stop and pray that we would understand these things, but he also feels the need to stop and back up and say them all over again. So that's what we're coming against in chapter three. So I think it'd be helpful to begin just by looking at some nuts and bolts and we'll take some pieces apart, and I believe that this will help us to manage the passage a little more effectively.

So as Paul begins here at the beginning of chapter three, he says, “For this reason.” So that that statement right there tells us that that's tying together very closely what he's about to say to what he just said, kind of like when he says, Therefore, for this reason, I just gave you a reason. And because of that reason, I'm now going to say this. So what he just said, I'm going to tie that together, really, we could, we could tie it together with everything he just said previously, but that would be too much to do right now. We'll just tie this together with the most recent thing that he said, which was this great statement about the oneness of the Church, the oneness of the Gentile—the believing Gentile—and the believing Jewish Church, just from verse, oh, I don't know—19. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ, Jesus Himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord in him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

So we talked last week about this, the magnitude of what those verses mean to us. But that's what's on Paul's mind when he says, For this reason, now, I'm gonna say this. So he says, For this reason, and the next thing he says, is I, Paul. So that's sort of a code that Paul uses, he'll say that and maybe about half a dozen of his letters. He has that formula. I, Paul—and when he says, I, Paul, that sort of a signal for us that he's about to say, the most probably the most profound thing of the letter. Each time he uses that little phrasing there—I plus his name—he's about to say something. It's like by saying that he wants us to kind of lean forward on our seat and pay special close attention, because what he's now coming to is going to be the crux of the letter.

So I, Paul, and there's the subject right there. A sentence, right, has a subject. So the subject here is I, Paul, and where do you think the verb for the sentence occurs?

If you look down, not in verse two, not in verse three, not in verse four, not in verse five. Not in verse six...verse 14, is where the verb for that subject occurs. So you kind of get, once again, the idea of just the intricacy of Paul's thoughts. So the subject is I, Paul, the verb comes in verse 14, when he says, “bow my knees,” you see how he says, “For this reason,” again, he said that so that we could know—okay, I'm picking back up on that subject that I laid before you have 14 verses ago.

So that helps us to connect with the verb there is bow my knees, I, Paul bow my knees. So what he's about to do is pray for the Ephesian believers, once again, just as He prayed for them in verse one. However, before he prays for them, he has 13 verses of parenthetical statements. So if you want to just take a pen, and just draw a little parenthesis around verses one through 13, that's really what Paul's doing. He says, I, Paul, and he's about to say, pray for you, and here's what I pray. But before I say that, let me say these other 13 verses before we get there, so verses one through 13, are essentially going to be—I'm not gonna say a recap—but they're going to be a restatement of what he said back at the second half of chapter two.

So he's going to approach it from a little bit of a different angle, he's going to take a different perspective. And what he says and these verses is going to be really driving home and restating the, all the things that we talked about last week, about the glorious, beautiful oneness of this new humanity and Christ from the to one man. And that's not a man, that's mankind, that's a New Humanity. And so before he goes to the prayer, before he gets to the prayer, he says, "I'm going to pray for you believers. But before I do that, let me just make sure that you understood what I just said."

So from that, I want to just draw a, I think, a helpful point, but a quick point. And that point is this before Paul prays for them, he wants to make sure that they understand what he just said to him. So in other words, the things that he said to them, Paul recognizes these spiritual truths cannot do anything for you until you comprehend them on a human level.

So, we know that the scriptures are spiritual writings and we require the work of the Spirit to understand the things that He has given to us. First Corinthians two, right? We recognize that and affirm that, however, we should be careful to understand that that doesn't mean that the Spirit does his work with his Word, without our comprehension of that Word.

The Scriptures are not a bunch of magic words and phrases, that we just repeat and say without understanding, and the Spirit somehow just takes those and uses those in our heart in some unknown kind of way, right? There, it's not magic words, remember the Bugs Bunny cartoon? One of my favorite ones: Magic Words and Phrases. Remember that one? Where Bugs is like in this old castle? Transylvanian Castle, right, and there's the Dracula. And then there's the two headed bird thing, the Witch thing, right? And he can't sleep, so he pulls that book off the shelf magic words and phrases. And he's flipping through. And it's all just nonsense words, nonsense words that don't mean anything. But when you say that word, something happens.

And he's walking around, you know, "hocus pocus" and changing things, right? Magic Words and Phrases—the words themselves have no meaning. But the speaking of the words, changes things. Sometimes we can think of our Scriptures that way.

That somehow these spiritual truths in the pages of Scripture can bypass our human comprehension and do a spiritual work in our heart without first landing in our brain. And that's not how the Scriptures work. First, we must understand, on a human level, what the words and phrases mean. That's what we do on Sunday morning, we endeavor to understand what the words are saying to us, so that the Spirit

can then take those words and implant them into our hearts and do a spiritual work with earthly words. See how that works?

So think about for example, we remember on the road to Emmaus, Luke chapter 24. So remember, here, the reason Jesus is walking with the disciples, and as he's walking, you remember, they don't recognize him at first, and they're talking, they're all sad about how they thought that Jesus was the one but turns out, well, we guess he really wasn't the one after all. So take a look at Luke chapter 24, in your notes, verses 25. So he said to them, "Foolish one slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." And look at what he's going to do now. He's going to explain what the prophets have spoken, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

So you see him explaining here, "And then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures to things concerning Himself." And then two verses later, "Their eyes were opened." Now the opening of the eyes was in conjunction with the breaking of the bread. But still, you see the progression there, there was the explaining, there was the understanding, and then there was the spiritual work that took place. So that's what we must be careful to do.

And this is what Paul was careful to do. He says, I'm going to pray for you, I'm going to pray that on a spiritual level, you are able to comprehend these things, that you're given the spiritual strength to understand these things and apply them into your heart. But first, I've got to make sure you understood what I said. So I'm going to say it again, in a different sort of way, which is oftentimes what the Scriptures are doing for us, right? They are teaching us again, and again, what they have taught us previously, because we need to hear these things, we need to hear them from different perspectives from different angles. That's why we have four gospels and not one gospel so that from four different perspectives, we can come to an understanding of Christ.

So that that comprehension, then gives tools to the Spirit to do that work in our hearts. This is what Paul is going to do. He says, I'm gonna explain this to you. Again, I'm going to pray for you. But let me interrupt myself, before I pray, I'm going to explain this to you again. So he says, "For this reason, I, Paul." And then he's going to again, 13 verses later, eventually get to the prayer after he does some more explaining.

So one more quick point for us to point to and then we're going to move on to what I think are some of the more central points of the of the text. And that's this: just to kind of take a look at the pattern of what Paul's doing. Once again, he is teaching and praying, teaching and pray. He teaches and prays. Now, this is the pattern that we've seen throughout the letter. So let me just pause a little bit here. And I want to do what I did last week. Last week, we looked at chapter two. And I pointed out some of the compelling parallels in chapter two, the first half of chapter two deals with how it is that God moves the individual sinner from a state of sinfulness to a state of grace. The second half of chapter two deals with how God moves the Church from a state of sinfulness to a state of grace. So we talked about the parallels that are seen there.

But I want to do that in a bigger scale right now, because again, not just to spend some time up here, but just to make sure that we got this, because I think it's a really help us to begin putting the nuts and bolts together a Paul's letter at this point.

So there's some parallels for us to see here. Let's parallel chapter one and chapter three, because chapter one and chapter three are really parallel chapters to one another. Chapter one begins with these profound revelations about the person of Christ, about the work of Christ, how God has chosen his Church, how he has adopted his Church redeemed his Church, and it's these profound revelations about God and His work for the Church. Followed by a prayer that Paul's readers would understand that. Chapter three follows the same pattern. It begins with these revelations that we're going to get into this morning and continue for the next couple of weeks, these revelations about God, these teachings about God, and it's followed up by a prayer that the listeners, the readers would understand that.

So you see the same pattern teaching prayer, teaching prayer, in the middle of that is this section—chapter two—that tells us this is how God takes a lost sinner or Corporate lost sinners—which is the Church—and then brings them into a state of grace.

So we see that pattern right here. And the pattern for us to see is again, teaching prayer, teaching prayer, which is what a spiritual leader does. That's what a pastor does. We remember from Acts chapter six, remember that whole story in Acts chapter six, where this, the formation of the deacons is about to happen. And the whole reason, the whole catalyst behind that was the apostles were being taken away from their primary duty, which was teaching and prayer. From Acts chapter six, verse four, "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

So the apostles at that point, they say, we can't, these are valid needs, these are true needs. And we need to, as a Church, we need to address these needs. But we can't be taken from our primary duty, which is teaching, praying for those that we teach, teaching, praying for those that we teach. So here's just a quick takeaway there. If you ever find yourself, wherever you are, find yourself in a Church in which you do not know for certain that the pastor not only teaches, but prays for you regularly, weekly, then let me suggest to you—you are not being pastored. That you do not have a pastor, because that is the essence, the fundamental essence of what happens in spiritual leadership, is teaching and then praying for those that you teach, teach and pray for those whom you teach. So if you find yourself in that place, wherever you may be, in your spiritual journey, if you find yourself where you cannot say for absolute certainty, that this person is teaching me and praying for me, then you need to find a pastor who will do that because that is what the Word teaches us, is the role of the spiritual leader.

So this is what Paul is doing. Once again, he's taught and prayed, taught and prayed. So here, here it begins. Now this other section, the second sort of a section of teaching, so chapter three, verse one, again, for this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and we'll kind of skip over that. But just to sort of make note of this, we'll come back to this. He calls himself a prisoner for Christ Jesus make note of the fact that Paul often calls himself a prisoner. Never once does he call himself a prisoner of Rome. Never once does he call himself a prisoner of the Jews. He calls himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus or for Christ Jesus on behalf of you, Gentiles. We'll talk about that next week.

Verse two, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you. So we'll come back to that next week. Because that's also going to have some benefit for us to take a look at. Because typically we think of grace, as that which comes to us salvifically, that that which comes to us to save us. We've talked about this in chapter two, "For by grace you have been saved," twice. For by grace you have been saved. So we typically think of grace as that work of God, which comes to us to save us sinners, to make us alive to God and dead to sin. However, Here Paul is going to use grace in a different way, not as the work of God that's coming to a sinner for salvation, but instead something that's given to Paul, that he is then to minister or the word here is steward to others.

So just a brief note about that, sort of plant that into your mind and be thinking about that. We'll come back to that next week.

So assuming verse two, again, that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, verse three, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation. So here we'll stop here for a little while. And this will be the bulk of what we say today. This mystery that was given to me by revelation, so we see that word mystery, maybe are your sort of perk up. You probably have a subheading at the top of this section of your Bible that says probably something to the effect of the 'Mystery of the Gospel Revealed,' something like that. So we hear that word mystery sort of gets our attention, because we like mysteries. mysteries are fun to read, fun to watch on TV and movies and that sort of thing. But we've heard this before, but it's worth repeating. When the New Testament talks about a mystery, it's talking about something categorically different than what we understand as a mystery in our present culture today. We think of a mystery as something that we don't know. But we got to figure it out.

Right so think Agatha Christie, think Colombo, right, there's something that you don't know, but you got to sort of figure it out and it's to coin a word, it's "figure-out-able."

That's the modern concept of a mystery, where the New Testament uses the word mystery and uses it frequently 21 times in the New Testament, almost all of those by call six times in Ephesians. When the New Testament talks about a mystery, it's not at all talking about something that is unknown, that you need to figure out, instead is talking about something that was previously unknown, and could never have been figured out. But God has now told us, that is the definition, the understanding of mystery in the New Testament, something some truth of God that you couldn't know. You could never figure it out. But God has now shown it to us.

So the scriptures will talk about a lot of mysteries that have now been revealed to us. The New Testament's gonna talk about, for example, the mystery of how Christ was incarnated into man. So that's something that the Old Testament saints didn't, there was no understanding in the Old Testament of the Incarnation of Christ. That was a mystery that was revealed in the New Testament. Or, for example, the permanent, full indwelling of the believer by the Spirit. That also was something that was not understood in the Old Covenant Scriptures, but was made plain, was revealed in the New Covenant.

So we've got a lot of these mysteries that come in the New Testament things that are truths of God realities of God, we never could have known these things, but God has now revealed them. So you see here the connection between 'mystery and 'been revealed' or 'revelation,' those two concepts always go together, they must go together, because neither one of them makes sense without the other. So if there's a mystery, by definition, by New Testament definition, that mystery has been revealed, if it's if it hasn't been revealed, it's not a mystery. It's just an unknown.

So the revelation, the revealing, and the mystery are two things that must go hand in hand, if there's a mystery. There's also a revelation. If there's been a revelation, then there's a mystery. So we see here, Paul says that there's this mystery, how the mystery was made known to me, by way of revelation. So isn't it a blessing to know that we serve a God who desires to reveal himself? That's something that's easy to kind of overlook the fact that God who is not visible he has no physical presence for us to see, wants us to know Him, and shows Himself to us. That that is something that's easy to not thank God for, because it's so I guess, fundamental to just knowing God, is that He has shown himself to us and revealed Himself to us. But that is a tremendous thing to thank God for, that he wants to be known. He desires to show himself He's, He's not hiding Himself. He's not concealing Himself. Neither is He complacent about whether or not He's known. He wants to be known. Psalm 19 says that the heavens declare the glory of God. Day after day they speak speech and words that speak about God all day long every day because God wants to be known. What a thing to be thankful for, that we know a God who wants us to know Him and thereby has revealed Himself to us.

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