

## **Ephesians 3:1, 7**

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Each one in the body receives from the Lord, a type of spiritual gifting. And that spiritual gifting is always intended to edify the body.

So we are here in Ephesians chapter three. And we've seen now Paul has clearly brought out what the point of the book is, the point that he's making is all about the church. Ephesians is a letter about the nature of the church, and the character of the church, specifically, the oneness, the new humanity that is created in Christ Jesus, the believing Gentiles, and the believing Jews, who once hated one another. Now, they don't just get along with one another. They're not just friends with one another. They're not just put aside their differences. God has made them one, he has fused them together in their souls, he has made them one new humanity.

And this is the glorious truth of the gospel—how the gospel breaks down every social barrier, every human barrier known to man, the gospel is capable of crushing that, and making one new man out of those who were enemies, those who had nothing otherwise in common with one another, those who shared no background with one another, the gospel makes them one.

Today, we're gonna look at some other things in verses one through seven. But next week, we really are going to return to this topic of the oneness of the church and the purpose of the church, the nature of the church and the character of the church. Next week, we'll really delve into that more as we return to that next week.

This week, as we look at verses one through seven. Let's all—we'll begin by reading verses one through...I'll read down through verse 14, or 13, (I'm sorry).

So let's begin to verse one. "For this reason, I Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you 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 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 Word, God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very 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 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 we asked you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”

So as we begin here, in verses one through seven, the way I want to approach these verses, I want to kind of work backwards, just because I like to do things backwards. So we'll begin, we're going to cover through verse seven, and we'll begin down at verse seven. And we'll start there and we'll work backwards and look from there to some things in verse two.

So beginning from verse seven 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.”

So just make note here of what Paul calls himself, he calls himself a ‘minister,’ That word minister, we all are familiar with that words, the word ‘diakonos,’ which we know to mean ‘servant.’ There's, of course the office, the church office of deacon, or servant of the church, but we all are servants.

But notice here how Paul just embraces this title servant of Christ. It's as though that is a type of badge of honor for him that he would...he doesn't see a servant of Christ as something that's maybe a stepping stone to something better. He's a servant now, but he's going to be something better in the future. He looks at the servanthood that is his in Christ and he sees that as his highest possible accomplishment.

If he could be a servant of Christ, he's overwhelmed that Christ would make him a servant. So notice how his servant heart just embraces this, he calls himself a servant here to the to the Ephesians. He will do the same thing to the Corinthians, in First Corinthians chapter four, he says, “This is how you are to think of us, (you're to think of us in two ways: one) as servants of Christ and (two) as stewards of the mysteries of God.”

So it's the same two things that he's talking about here: servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries. Again, in Second Corinthians, he'll say to them, “I am your servant.” So think of me as your servant. This is the apostle Paul.

And this is not a young Apostle Paul, this is now an elderly Apostle Paul, who has been the leader of the church, a revered leader of the church for decades, now, He says, “I'm your servant, think of me in that way.”

Or in Acts chapter 26, as Paul is speaking here to Agrippa, and he's recounting to Agrippa his story of this Damascus Road encounter with the risen Christ. And he says, to Agrippa that this is what Christ said to me, “Rise and stand for this purpose, I will make you a servant.”

So this was Paul's identity. He embraces this identity of a servant of Christ. He calls himself to the Philippians, a slave of Christ, he will say that he is in this passage in verse eight, he says that he's the very least of the apostles. The phrasing that Paul uses, there is translated “very least.” But what he's

saying here is, "I'm not just the least, I'm the least of the least of the least." He calls himself to Timothy, "the least of the saints," the most sinful heart was his own heart.

And so he has this view of himself that is enveloped in this humility that sees himself as he says to the Romans, he sees himself rightly, as a servant of Christ.

So this humility, that is Paul's, I want to suggest to us is a real insight into the power that God placed upon the ministry of Paul, how Paul through his entire life through this conversion experience on the Damascus Road, to the end of his life, he consistently sees himself in humble terms—terms of humility, not exalted, but lowly. And I think this is an insight to God's hand upon his ministry, because as we know, the Bible tells us in multiple places, like for example, James chapter four, verse six, that "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble."

So in a very clear fashion that tells us that God stands in opposition to human pride, but to humility, God stands in a relationship of favor. And so God is pleased to favor the humble. And I think that this is a real key to God's favor upon Paul's ministry, and Paul's life—is Paul's humility here.

Now, what's really interesting to me is that this humility wouldn't have been an easy thing for Paul to maintain, seeing as how he was the main vehicle for the revelation of God to the church. God uses Paul to reveal to Paul things about the character of God, the nature of our salvation, the church, these things that we talked about in chapter one, Paul has been the receiver of such incredible revelations from God, that that must have been a difficult thing for him to maintain his humility.

However, what he says to the Corinthians, in Second Corinthians 12, he says that it is actually the grace of God that enables him to remain humble so that he can receive more grace—remember the thorn in the flesh? And he calls that thorn in the flesh to the grace of God, that God gave to him, to enable him to maintain a humility in the face of this extraordinary grace that God was showing to Paul so that God could show him more grace, see how that works? What a beautiful thing God is doing here for Paul.

And it just shows us, I think, some indication of just how greatly God is pleased to favor the humble.

And so he calls himself this servant of Christ, this lowly steward of Christ, but take a look. Now we'll leave from verse seven. And I want to just make note of that. And now let's go back up to verse two. And let's pick up from verse two from verse one. "For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, (verse two), assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you."

So I am this prisoner for Christ on behalf of you Gentiles. And I want to make this assumption—we'll come back to this—assuming that you have heard the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you. So notice how Paul refers to this grace. We mentioned last week that grace is often what we think of in terms of God's saving activity in the sinner, in the life of the sinner, of the heart of the sinner.

But here Paul uses grace in a little bit of a different manner, not to, to mean the grace that comes to us to save us to make us alive to God. But instead, he speaks of grace as something that's given to him for others, that he's made a steward of.

God has given this grace to him. And the grace is intended for the Ephesian believers, and by connection, other believers as well.

So God gives a gift of grace—twice Paul calls it a gift—He gives this gift of grace to Paul, that's really for the Ephesian believers, and other believers as well.

So notice here how he calls himself a steward of this grace, your translation might have 'dispensation.' But the word here just simply means: one who doesn't own anything, but instead is made the manager of someone else's property or someone else's affairs. So we, we understand how a steward sort of works: you care for someone else's stuff, or someone else's affairs, you manage someone else's itinerary, or you manage someone else's property, or something of that nature.

So Paul refers to himself as a steward of this grace of God, God gives this grace to the Ephesians. But he gives it to Paul to give to them. He says, here's this grace that I want to get to the Ephesians, and the grace is the revelations, the mysteries, the understanding of who they are in Christ, their blessings, their privileges in Christ, their new standing in Christ, this grace that Paul that God gives to the Ephesians, he gives it to Paul and says to Paul, "it's for them over there."

And so Paul is the steward of the grace that God has given to them to them by way of Paul here. So Paul has this gifting from God, and the gifting has indebted him to the Ephesian believers, that God has given these revelations to—follow Paul's train of thought here.

So much like Paul refers to himself in Romans, chapter one, verse 20. In Romans one, verse 20, Paul says, "I am a debtor, I'm under obligation to the Greeks and barbarians." So he says, I owe this debt to the Greeks and to the barbarians, and to these others, and the debt that he owes them, is the debt of the gospel.

So we've talked about this not too long ago, how we can owe a debt in two ways. There's two ways that you can owe a debt. You can I owe a debt, if someone gives you something and you need to pay them back for it, or someone does something for you, and you need to pay them back for that. You can owe a debt in that way.

But you can also owe a debt in the sense that someone gives you something that's intended for someone else, and they put it into your care. And they say this is for them. Will, you give this to them. And until you do that, you owe that to the person that it's given to.

If I were to give Abby \$20, and I'd say, Abby, this this \$20 is for your mom, Leanne, give this to Leanne. First of all, that's kind of ridiculous. I don't ever have \$20. But if I did, you would, then owe, not me, you would owe Leanne. And that's the sense in which God or Paul says, I'm a debtor to the Greeks,

because God has given me this gospel for them. And until I deliver it to all these, all these people that need to hear this message, I owe them that message.

In the same way, Paul says, I am a debtor, I am under obligation, I am a steward of your gift of grace. God has sent this message of grace to the Ephesian believers, and I'm under obligation to give this to them.

So there's this gifting that Paul has. This gifting of the revelations, the understandings that God has given to Paul, there's this gifting. And Paul says, this gifting is not for me, this gifting is for you.

And so let's just take a moment and just recognize that that is the nature of all spiritual gifting in the body. As believers, all of us—the Scripture tells us—that God gifts, all of us with spiritual giftings. All spiritual giftings are given for the purpose of the church. All spiritual giftings are given for the use within the context of the church. The New Testament knows nothing about any kind of a spiritual gifting that is not intended to be exercised in the context of the church.

Now, this is just something I'm going to introduce right here, because Chapter Four is really going to bear down on the on this topic, of how the church is to view the giftings of God. And so we'll deal much more with this in chapter four. But here's a great opportunity just to introduce this and say: God gifts, no one in the body of Christ, with some type of a spiritual gift that is not intended for use in the church.

Let me show you from the scriptures. How the Scriptures teach us this very thing. First Corinthians chapter 12, verses four through seven. Now, First Corinthians in a real sense, the entire book is really dominated with the topic of spiritual giftings, because there's been a lot of misunderstanding and abuse of spiritual giftings within the Corinthian church. And so in large measure, that letter is written to help correct some of those misunderstandings about spiritual giftings.

But we can't look at the whole letter but it's sort of comes to a climax here in chapter 12. In chapter 12—really, the whole chapter is dealing with this very subject—but just to kind of look at a couple of verses, verse four. “Now there are a varieties there are varieties of gifts.” People in the body have all kinds of spiritual giftings. All sorts of giftings from the Lord exists within the within the body. “There's a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities. But it is the same God who empowers them all to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit (and here it is) for the common good.”

So each one in the body receives from the Lord, a type of spiritual gifting. And that spiritual gifting is always intended to edify the body, to build up the body, to be used within the context of the body. God gifts, no Christian, with some type of a spiritual gift that can only be used outside of the body of Christ. All the giftings that we're going to talk about in chapter four, all the offices and the different occupations and activities within the church. All of those are giftings of the spirit, that God says I'm giving this to the church, Romans chapter 12, we could look at that. But take a look at First Peter chapter four and verse 10, “As each of us has each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.” Use it to serve one another. Chapter four, verse 10, through 13, is going to say much the same thing to this same type of effect.

So Paul says, I've received this gift. And this gift is not for me to sort of go around through the Gentile world preaching to unbelievers and making a big deal out of myself. This gifting is for the church. And I am to use it in such a way to minister to the body in that way.

And so Paul is the receiver of these revelations. So with that being said, here's the takeaway, and then we'll move on. First of all, the Ephesians have an important role in the supernatural unity of the body. And this is what Paul is introducing right here. And again, chapter four, he's going to take this and bring it to the surface. But here, let's just notice it. Let's just see it. And then we'll sort of put it on the backburner. And we'll come back in chapter four.

Here's the truth. This, the Ephesians have a role to play in this supernatural unity that God has created, this one new man, this one new humanity. Their role that they play, is not what we often think our role in church unity is. We think about church, togetherness, church, a oneness. And we think, what do we contribute to the unity of the body? And what we always want to think as well, the way that we contribute to the unity of the body, is we get along with everybody. We don't make ourself hard to get along with, we don't enter into conflicts within the body. Thinking that the unity of the body is something that's rooted in grounded in the absence of conflict.

However, that's not what Paul's message is. Paul's message is going to be. God has created a supernatural unity in the body, but you have a role to play. God doesn't just create this unity, wrap it up in a nice bow and say, "Here, here's the oneness of a church, enjoy."

Instead, God creates this unity, he gives it to the church. And he says, "Your part in this unity is to exercise your spiritual gifts within the context of the church and do it faithfully."

That's the role that we play in the oneness of the church, the role that we play in this new humanity, in order to strengthen, in order to nourish, in order to grow this oneness, the supernatural oneness that God has created, what we do, is not so much avoid conflict, as it is exercise faithfully, the giftings that God has given to us, which he really has given to who?

The body, our spiritual giftings are yours. My spiritual gifting of teaching and preaching is not mine, it's yours. This this is what God has given to you.

Now, we often think about spiritual giftings as the obvious ones, right? The preaching, the teaching the music, or the serving, like, like Sister Alicia, the obvious the visible ones. But Chapter Four is going to show us all kinds of ways that the Spirit gives gifts of grace to the body, and he does it through a member of the body, a part of the body.

And so that's the role that we play in this whole oneness of the new humanity thing. Our role is not so much avoiding conflict because you know what? conflict within the body is not necessarily an inhibitor of oneness. We often think that oneness in the body and conflict in the body are the opposites. They're not always the opposites. Oftentimes, God uses conflict, to increase oneness. We'll talk more about

that in chapter four. But our role, what we do to nurture and grow and strengthen the oneness of the body is faithfully exercising our giftings to serve the body