

Ephesians 3:1-2, Part 1

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Oneness in the church is not based upon the tolerant acceptance of divergent ideas. Oneness in the church is rooted upon the right preaching and teaching of God's word, and the right receiving of God's Word.

Verse 2, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you.

So this phrase, "assuming that you've heard this," let's talk about this for just a minute now, assuming is not in the original text. It is supplied, but it's a good supply. That's Paul's train of thought, and so he says, assuming that you've heard of this gift of grace, assuming that you've heard the revelations, the mysteries that have been given to me, assuming that you've heard this, let me go on.

Why would he say, assuming that you've heard these revelations that God has graced me with? What Paul is doing here. He's not hoping that they've heard about the revelations that God has given to Paul, he's not hoping that the Ephesian believers have heard about God's gifting a Paul. He's using instead a rhetorical device, so to speak, in order to make a point. And the point is this: If we are not in agreement on this, then there's no need for me to continue.

If we are not in agreement, if you are not in recognition, that the things that I'm writing to you are the revealed word of God, then Paul's point is: you can stop reading right now. Because nothing that I have to say to you in this entire letter means squat—if you don't recognize that what I'm writing to you is the revealed word of God.

And so likewise, in the same way, this morning, you can leave right now, and get the same amount of benefit, if you, too, are not under the understanding that what you are hearing is the word of God, I have nothing beneficial to say to you, you will benefit nothing, if you are hearing this, not believing that this is the word of God. In the same way that Paul says, I'm assuming that you and I are on agreement that I'm speaking to you have these revelations that I've received from God. And based upon that assumption—now, let me go on to say the other things that I'm going to say.

So what Paul is not saying to them, he's not saying, let me sort of lay out my point of view. And hopefully I can convince you that my point of view is the correct one. No, that's not what Paul is saying. Paul is saying: what I am laying out for you is the revealed word of God. And for the revealed word of God to impact your life, you must receive it as the revealed word of God.

As Paul is going to say to the Thessalonian believers in First Thessalonians, he's going to commend them, saying that, "You received the word when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what is it what it really is the word of God, which is at work and you believers."

So Paul's not saying: I hope to, I hope that you will concur with my views. What Paul is saying is: What I'm about to say to you will only matter in your life will only make any difference in your life, if you accept and believe with confidence that what I'm saying to you is the word of God.

The oneness in the church, is not based upon the tolerance of divergent ideas. The oneness in the church is based and grounded upon right doctrine that is rightly preached and rightly received.

Let me say that again. Oneness in the church is not based upon the tolerant acceptance of divergent ideas. Oneness in the church is rooted upon, grounded in, founded upon the right preaching and teaching of God's word and the right receiving of God's word. That's the foundation, that's the basis. That's the grounding of oneness in the church.

Take a look at Paul's words to the Philippians, in Philippians chapter one, verses 27 And verse 28. "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm and here it is in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents, this is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation."

A clear sign of your salvation, says, Paul, is that you are one mind with the other believers.

Or he's gonna say chapter two verse two, "Complete my joy by being of the same mind having the same love being in full accord and of one mind." So the unity of the church that Paul is talking about, is rooted and grounded upon the right preaching of God's Word, and the right receiving of God's word as what it is—God's Word.

Now, let's sort of flesh this out just a little bit. The church, as we said, is not a place for the free exchange of divergent ideas. Instead, the church is a place for us to come to hear the right, true and correct preaching of God's Word.

And God's word has a right and true preaching of it. Take a look at Second Timothy chapter two and verse 15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as One approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed," and you have no need to be ashamed as Paul because you "rightly handle the Word of God."

That word rightly, literally means cut straight. Now, there's only one way to cut straight, right? I mean, you can't cut a straight line four different ways. There's one way to cut a straight line. And that's a straight line. And so Paul is saying, there is one way to handle the Word of God, and that's a right way, and the others are wrong. So if there is a right way to handle the Word of God, then there is a wrong way to handle the Word of God.

How many have heard this said, you don't have to raise your hand because it will be everybody in the room. How many have heard this said, "That's his interpretation of the scriptures. I have my own," or "Everybody has their own interpretation of the scriptures. And nobody knows what's right?" How many times have you heard that?

I quite honestly, I've heard that I'm sick of hearing that. "Everybody sort of has their own interpretation of Scripture, nobody knows, which is the right interpretation of Scripture." Let me tell you: that's not how scripture sees itself.

Scripture views itself as having a right interpretation and a right understanding. And that right understanding is not based upon your understanding or your understanding or your understanding or my understanding. It's based on God's meaning.

Peter says, in Second Peter chapter one, verses 20 and 21. "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation."

So this receiving of God's word as God's word, this recognition that it is God's Word in the recognition that God's word has a right and true understanding and a right and true interpretation, and we are here as God's people to hear that—that is not something that we would believe that and accept that and say, well, "let's just toss aside the whole spirit of the Bereans." Remember the spirit of the Bereans?

Acts chapter 17, Luke commends the Bereans he says, "The Bereans received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

So that's what we sometimes call the 'spirit of the Bereans.' It's just a spirit that says, I'm gonna measure everything by the word, right? So we embrace that, we affirm that we hold on to that, while recognizing that scripture has one meaning, Scripture does not have multiple meanings. Scripture does not have one meaning for this person and one meaning for this person and one meaning for this person—it has one meaning,

Our task is to discern that correct and true meaning and receive that correct and true meaning for what it is. So that's the task that's set before us, understanding that, you know, if we want opinions, if that's what we really want, then you can save a lot of time on Sunday morning, because the world has tons of opinions for you. And they're happy to give them to you.

If you want the right and true understanding of God's word, then the church is the place to find that.

So the question then becomes, how do we know?

If the Scriptures teach us that Scripture is not just open to whatever sort of understanding you want to apply to it or whatever meaning fits you? Instead, Scripture has one meaning, how do we know what that one meaning is? How do we rightly ascertain that. And that's where the Spirit of truth comes into play.

So we'll talk a little bit about the spirit of truth and how the Spirit of Truth works, and how it is that the Holy Spirit works in the believer to assure us of the true and right meaning of Scripture.

But before we do that, let's just recognize that Scripture is given to us with certain points of emphasis. And certain points that are not as emphasized, right? God doesn't spend the same amount of time on all topics. There are many things in the pages of scripture that God spends much less time on. And by doing so, he is indicating to us that this is of lesser importance, there are things in the scripture that are of lesser importance, and things in the scripture that are more difficult to understand.

So this is not to say that there's not grace—that the scriptures that does not give us the grace of coming to certain parts of the scriptures that are not fundamental to our faith, that are more difficult to understand, while recognizing Well, you know, brothers and sisters can understand this differently and still worship together and still be a part of the same church. It's not to say that at all, but it is to say that all those passages do have one meaning.

Our difficulty is to discern the right meaning.

Now our problem is that we are still sinful, fallen people. And so as we ascertain the meaning of Scripture, as we seek to understand the meaning of Scripture, we're doing so through a lens of a fallen mind, a heart that still attached to this world, a heart that is still in some level, alive to sin. And so those are the things that we must battle against.

But none of that is to say, Well, okay, now scripture has multiple meanings. It doesn't. Scripture has one meaning—each passage of scripture has one meaning.

So again, the question is, how do we understand that? How do we know that? How do we know what meaning is the right one? And what meaning is the wrong one? Because haven't would we all heard people who are skilled at taking a Bible and showing you this verse and that verse and telling you what this means. And that means and then what where they end up is, is a different place than where somebody else ends up? Have you all experienced that? How do you know?

And this is the role of the Spirit of Truth, otherwise known as the Holy Spirit.

So how does the Holy Spirit lead us to know with certainty? What is the truth of scriptures, of the scriptures? How does how does the Holy Spirit do that? And more importantly, let's try to understand what the Holy Spirit does, and what the Holy Spirit doesn't do.

Because I have found that I think a lot of believers have an understanding of what the Spirit of Truth does, that's not really what he does. And that can lead us to some false expectations of the Spirits work in the believer. And quite frankly, it can lead to some frustrations in our heart, when the Spirit doesn't do what we mistakenly think he's supposed to be doing. Okay.

So what does the spirit of truth do? Let's start by saying what the Spirit of Truth or the Holy Spirit does not do.

The Holy Spirit does not teach you the meaning of Scripture.

Now, that sounds provocative, I understand that. But let me show you from the scriptures how we know that the Holy Spirit's role is not to teach us the meaning of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit doesn't whisper in our ear. What this passage means. And I think that's where a lot of believers can get frustrated. They think that if the Holy Spirit indwells them, and they open God's Word, and the spirit is acting in their heart, that he's going to communicate to them what that passage means.

And then they read it, and he doesn't. And they close their Bibles thinking, "Well, I guess the holy spirit isn't working for me." Or, "Maybe I'm not really a believer, after all, you know, the light didn't go on for me just illuminating what the meaning here is in this passage." And that's not the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not called the spirit of comprehension.

Instead, God has made us as people who are capable of comprehending the meaning of the words and the phrases and the sentences in Scripture. All of us in the image of God, we are capable of reading and understanding the meaning of the Scripture.

And so God doesn't give us His Holy Spirit to say, well, I'm going to short circuit, I'm going to bypass over that whole comprehension thing, and I'm just going to supernaturally give you the comprehension of the message. That's not what the Holy Spirit does.

Instead, we as people in the image of God can read the pages of Scripture, and we can understand what that meaning is.

Romans chapter one, and verse 20. Paul says that "His invisible attributes have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation, namely his divine power and His eternal Godhead in those that have been made, so they are without excuse."

So Paul says, even without the scriptures, we're capable of perceiving. And we're capable of understanding and comprehending what God's message to us is.

So we're capable, without the Holy Spirit of opening the pages of Scripture and understanding what the paragraphs mean.

So, you might say, Well, wait a minute, doesn't the scripture say that that's what the Holy Spirit does that he will "lead you into all truth." Doesn't the scriptures say that?

It does say that, and says that on more than one occasion. In John's gospel, first of all, in chapter 14, here's what we read in John chapter 14. "But the Helper," and just to be clear, Jesus says, by the Holy Spirit. That's who I'm talking about, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things."

So doesn't that say to us that the Holy Spirit teaches us the meaning of Scripture? No, it doesn't.

What that says to us is that the Holy Spirit will teach the apostles all things, because that's who Jesus was talking to.

You see, one of the mistakes that we can sometimes make in studying our scriptures is we can sometimes assume that everything God says in the scriptures, he said to us, and that's not always the case. Often, God is speaking to a certain group of people, or to a certain person, and what he says to that person, or that group of people, he means for all people. But that's not always the case. There are some things in Scripture that were communicated in a certain context to certain people or to certain persons, and it wasn't necessarily intended for all of us. We can just continue reading in this in the rest of the sentence and see that. "The Holy Spirit He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance, all that I have said to you." Now, does the Holy Spirit do that for you? Does he bring to your remembrance what Jesus said to you, because I wasn't here when Jesus was on the earth. Jesus hasn't said anything to me directly.

All the that Jesus has communicated to me he's communicated to the Holy Spirit. And Holy Spirit is not bringing reckoned recollection of words, Jesus spoke to me. So clearly, Jesus is saying to the apostles, "The Holy Spirit will lead you into all things, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things, and he will bring back to your remembrance, everything I've said."

Jesus said a lot over three years to his apostles, right? I doubt that they humanly would have been able to remember it all. But do you ever read through the Gospel accounts and a gospel writer...

...You ever read through the Gospel accounts, and you ask yourself, how this gospel writer is...So he's writing this interaction, or this thing that happened or this conversation that took place, maybe the first year of Jesus's ministry, and he's writing this 20 years after Jesus has ascended to heaven? How did he remember all that? Holy Spirit brought it to his recollection. Okay.

So Jesus is in the upper room right here, only the apostles are there. And he's saying to only the apostles: here's what the Holy Spirit will do.

Now, take a look at the second instance, John, chapter 16, verse 13, when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth or he will not speak of His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak. So there you go, Holy Spirit, leading us into all truth, once again—to the apostles, because here's how the sentence ends, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Is anybody here this morning, that the Holy Spirit declares to you the things that are to come? Not me.

The Holy Spirit doesn't teach us things that are to come, he doesn't work that way in your heart, he doesn't tell you this is what's going to happen to you in the future.

Instead, Jesus is speaking to the apostles, who would be the writers of the New Testament, and the foundation of the church. The teaching of the apostles, and the writing of the New Testament, that is the body of teaching that God will build his church upon. And for those apostles, the Holy Spirit worked

for them in a specific way, to lead them into all truth, to lead them into all understanding, and to bring to their minds everything that Jesus taught.

But that's not how the Holy Spirit works for us. Instead, the Holy Spirit does not bypass over our efforts of comprehension.

God wants us to exert effort to understand what he's written to us. He's made us capable of understanding the meaning. And he wants us to exert the effort to understand that meaning. Why? Because we are benefitted through the effort of applying ourselves to the Scriptures. That effort, that application of ourselves to understand the scriptures is beneficial to our soul. And God wants us to do that.

Take a look at Peter's words, in second Peter one. He says, "For this reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with knowledge."

So the Holy Spirit does not take away the need for us to read the scriptures, comprehend the scriptures or listen to the Scriptures preached, or listen to the Scriptures taught, and apply ourselves to understanding the meaning.

The second thing that Holy Spirit does not do is the Holy Spirit does not take away the need for preachers and teachers of the word.

So if the role of the Holy Spirit was to teach you the meaning of Scripture, why doesn't the New Testament say somewhere, now that the spirit has come, you don't need preachers anymore?

Why now the spirit has come you don't need teachers anymore. You don't need to be taught anymore, you got the spirit. The New Testament never says that. In fact, the New Testament says the opposite.

Think about what James says about teachers and a stricter judgment placed upon them. Or just think about the increased revelation that the New Testament brings to us. The need for teachers is even accentuated under the New Testament, under the under the new covenant.

So the Spirit's being given, he doesn't teach us the meaning of Scripture, and he doesn't take away the need for us to have teachers and preachers of the word.

So take a look with me at Ezra chapter seven, Ezra chapter seven, verses nine and 10, "For the good hand of his God was on him (speaking of Ezra,) for Ezra had set his heart" To do what? "Study the law of the Lord, (or the Word of God to study the law of the word) and to do it and to teach his (meaning God's) statutes and rules in Israel."

So here's Ezra, and Ezra sets himself to first of all, study the Word. Secondly, live the Word, and thirdly, teach the Word.

Now, look with me in Nehemiah chapter eight, Nehemiah chapter eight verses...Nehemiah and Ezra are parallel books, they're really they're relating to us essentially the same timeframe and the same events. So Nehemiah chapter eight, beginning from verse one, "And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Watergate, and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So as were the priests brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could...understand what they heard."

So there is another recognition that these people who gathered for the preaching of the word were capable of understanding it.

So verse three, "He read from it from early morning until midday, and the ears of the people were all attentive to the book of the law, and Ezra opened the book in the sight of the people, and he was above the people. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen. Amen.' Lifting up their hands, and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground, also, Jeshua..."

And there's 13 difficult Jewish names there that I kind of skipped over—felt a little bit bad for that, you know, you think, you get your name in the Bible, and then some preacher puts an ellipsis over your name.

But Jeshua, Pellaiah and (11 other) Levites (look at this) helped the people understand." Literally, they 'caused the people to understand.'

So here's what happened. Ezra was was preaching, he was teaching, and there was these 13 Levites, going around helping the people to understand what Ezra was teaching.

They were going around, maybe like in little groups and saying, "Now, do you get this? He was just talking about this? Did you understand what he was saying? Let let me further explain if he didn't quite get that."

So then we read this, "While the people remained in their places (verse 8), they read from the book from the law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense." Literally, that means they 'set the meaning.' They gave the sense, they set the meaning, "so that the people understood the reading."

So here's what they're doing. Ezra is preaching from the law, he's reading from the from the Word of God, he's teaching from the Word of God. And they're also explained that this, this is the meaning, this is the setting. This is the context. This is what this means.

In other words, they're doing what I do, right now. This is what we're doing. We're setting the meaning, we're we're taking the Word of God and we're saying, This is what this is saying to us.

So let me be careful here to say that this coming of the spirit, the coming of the spirit of truth does not mean that we no longer need teachers and preachers, but also at the same time, that doesn't mean

that what I say is perfect. I'm human, I'm sinful, I'm fallen. And so sometimes my sinfulness can inhibit my understanding of the Scriptures.

Instead, it's saying that the Spirit uses both the speaker and the hearer, and he's working on both ends. And God is using both of those. So the spirit of truth does, here's the first two things, or here's the two things to make sure that you understand the spirit of truth does not do: The Spirit of Truth does not teach you the meaning of the passage. Nor does the Spirit of Truth remove or negate the need for teachers and preachers.

So if the Spirit of Truth does that does not do that, what does the Holy Spirit do? How does the Spirit of Truth lead us as God's people into the right and correct understanding of God's Word?