

## **EPHESIANS 3**

### **The Mystery Revealed (vs. 1-7)**

**Vs. 1** – Paul was under house arrest (a prisoner) in Rome for preaching and about Christ and he preached that God revealed to him a new program of uniting believing Jews and Gentiles into one body called the church that had not been revealed in the Old Testament. The religious leaders in Jerusalem who felt threatened by Christ’s teachings and didn’t believe Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, pressured the Romans to arrest Paul and bring him to trial for treason and inciting rebellion among the Jews. Paul had appealed his case to be heard by Caesar and was awaiting trial (*Acts 26-28*). But even under house arrest Paul maintained his firm belief that God was in total control of all that happened to him. This begs the question for us: Do circumstances make you wonder if God has lost control of this world? Do you wonder where is God in the midst of this pandemic – racial unrest – and the presidential election process? Like Paul we need to know God is in total control no matter what happens; God is directing the nation’s and the world’s affairs.

**Vs. 2-6** – Paul was not only a *prisoner* but was also a *minister*. God gave Paul a *dispensation* or a stewardship that he might go to the Gentiles not only with

the Good News of Salvation through Christ, but also with the message that Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ. So what does the word “dispensation” mean? The word dispensation comes from two Greek words that mean house (*oikos*) and law (*nomos*) combined it means the *law of the house or as it’s more commonly called “stewardship.”* God has different ways of managing His program from age to age and these different stewardships Bible scholars often times refer to them as *dispensations - a method of interpreting history that divides God’s work and purposes toward mankind into different periods of time.* We currently live in the dispensation of the age of Grace – sometimes called the church age. And after this age concludes there will be the dispensation called the Millennial Kingdom of Christ or Millennial Age. God’s principles don’t change, but his methods of dealing with mankind do change over the course of history. In vs. 3 Paul says, “*How that by revelation:* - Paul wanted them to know, he’s not making this up; it was not his invention. God gave Paul the revelation through the Holy Spirit and Paul is just communicating what He was told from God. The word for mystery here is referring to the special stewardship, trust, or commitment that Paul had been given to preach the Good News to the Gentiles and they would be grafted in with the Jewish believers to form one body – one church with Jesus its head. Vs. 5-6 reveal God’s plan was not revealed to previous generations not

because God wanted to keep something from His people, but because He would reveal it to everyone in His perfect timing. This truth had not been revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures; it was revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit and God had revealed it directly to Paul. It was known in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would receive salvation (*Isaiah 46:9*); but it was never revealed in the Old Testament that all Gentile and Jewish believers would become equal in the body of Christ. You see there is no room for prejudice and systemic racism in Christianity. Like Joseph in the Old Testament Paul's faithful stewardship resulting in false arrest and imprisonment; but in the end it brought glory to God and salvation to the Jews and the Gentiles. God ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts (*Isaiah 55:8*).

**Vs. 7** – When Paul began spreading the Good News, God gave him the ability to speak effectively. You may not be an apostle or even an evangelist, but God will give you opportunities to tell others about Christ (divine appointments). And with the opportunities He will provide the ability, courage, and power if we yield to the Holy Spirit's prompting of us to go witness. Whenever an opportunity presents itself, strive to make yourself available to God as His servant. As the song writer says, Lord, I'm Available to you....are you

available to be used by God? *In the midst of this pandemic who would like to share of an opportunity God provided for you to share the Good News?*

**Purpose of the Mystery (vs. 8-13)**

**Vs. 8-9** Because Paul has been appointed by God to preach this revealed mystery of the church to the Gentiles Paul feel less than the least of the saints...This same Paul said something similar in **1 Corinthians 15:10** (get reader to read this) I am what I am by the grace and mercy of Jesus. The name Paul in both the Greek and the Latin means “little or small” – a small whisper that propagates into a roaring multitude. Paul realized that understanding the deep truths of God should not give a person a “big head” but rather it should give person a broken and contrite heart. The Greek word translated “*preach*” literally means “*to announce good news.*” Paul’s preaching was simply the announcement of the good news of what God has done in Jesus...he was to announce the Good News of the “mystery” unveiled to the Gentiles. When Paul says the “*unsearchable riches of Christ*” this mystery is like great riches for the Gentiles. They can now come before God in a standing they could only dream of before. God’s riches are unsearchable; we will never know them completely. Now when Paul says in **vs. 9** - *To make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery* - having been entrusted with such riches, Paul’s passion was to make this gospel known to all people. He wants

everybody to see and share in the fellowship of this mystery – which is a mystery precisely because it was unknown and unknowable until God revealed it. No one is saved to be preserve on a shelf...we must go share the gospel.

**Vs. 10-12** – God’s wisdom is *manifold* – it’s *multi-faceted*; it’s *intricate*, *complex*, *has great beauty*, and it’s *beyond human understanding*. Yet God says if any man *lacks wisdom* we can do what **James 1:5** says. The phrase “*Might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers*” explains how God will reveal His wisdom, and to whom He reveals it. He will reveal it by *His work in the church*, and He will reveal it to *angelic beings* (principalities and powers). Most often when we see the words *principalities and powers* they are associated with the devil but since the text says these powers reside in heaven, we know the text is referring to angelic beings not demonic. And these angelic beings see us perfectly and know us far better than we know them. We are surrounded by invisible spiritual beings, and they intently look upon us. Here, Paul draws back the invisible curtain that hides these beings (Get someone to read **2 Kings 6:17**) – “*Elisha prayed at Dothan, LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.*” Now regarding the phrase *we have boldness and access with confidence* in **vs. 12** – it is an awesome privilege to be able to approach the Lord with freedom and confidence. Most would be

apprehensive to be in the presence of a powerful ruler. But thanks to Jesus, by faith we can do like the writer of *Hebrews 4:16* says (read verse). We're God's children so we are welcomed with open arms, so don't be afraid to call on the name of the Lord to talk to Him about any and everything. He's waiting to hear from you.

**Vs. 13** – Although under arrest for the sake of the gospel, Paul asked his readers to *not lose heart*. Paul didn't want them to be discouraged for his sake, because Paul was still being used in the service of God's eternal plan.

*Sometimes, what seems like a “setback” is really a “setup” for something better than what you could have imagined.* Paul's Roman imprisonment produced the 4 books of the New Testament – the prison epistles - Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. God's ways are not our ways nor His thoughts our thoughts. Just like a mother endures the pain of childbirth in order to bring new life into the world, Paul endured the pain of persecution in order to bring new believers to Christ. Obeying Christ is never easy...the devil is a real enemy but remember *1 John 4:4b* – greater is He that is in you, than he that is of this world. Jesus calls us to deny self, take up our cross and follow Jesus daily in *Matthew 16:24*.

*Appreciation of the Mystery (vs. 14-21)*

At this juncture of the letter *Paul moves from what we are to believe to how we are to live*. This is the second prayer in this short letter or epistle. The first prayer (1:15-23) was a *prayer for enlightenment*; Paul prayed that we might come to know God's power. In this second prayer, the *emphasis here is for enablement*, Paul prays that we might use that power. Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, informs the church in chapters 1 thru chapter 3 verse 13 that Christians have been showered with God's kindness, we've been chosen for His greatness, marked with the Holy Spirit, filled with the Holy Spirit, freed from the penalty of sin, salvation is by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, and that God has unveiled a significant mystery to the church that Gentiles and Jews will comprise one body – the church. And now he wants the church to access the power source to be all that God is calling the church to become.

Vs. 14 - Paul starts his prayer by saying *"for this reason I bow my knees"* so for what reason is he referencing this? It is because Paul understands that God is calling the Jew and Gentile to be established and fused into one body called the Church and that we will be fit vessels strengthened by God for this important task. *So Paul does what any good leader should do for those he leads - He prays for the church.* In our day and age; kneeling before the Lord to pray is common...but why is it interesting to note that Paul kneels before the Father in the era of him writing this epistle? In Paul's day, the common

practice was to *stand with your hands outstretched and your face pointed toward God*. To this day in Jerusalem they have a “Wailing Wall” and Jews go to this wall to pray and when they pray; they pray standing with outstretched hands.

*So with God is posture important when we pray?* Well, the Bible has enough prayer not on the knees to show us *that it isn't required*, but it also has *enough prayer on the knees to show us that it is good*. *God is most concerned with the condition of the heart when we pray than our posture*. But our posture often times highlights our attitude - Kneeling represents an attitude of submission or humility before God. Yes, the bible tells us we can come boldly but we have to come reverently also – God is still God. My grandmother was a “walking praying woman” especially in the midst of spiritual warfare; especially when she was praying for a wayward grandchild. Praying kneeling is great to do as you pray onsite with insight. The phrase to “*bow the knees*” is a Hebrew expression meaning “to collapse”: to stumble, fall down, crumple. In modern English we say that someone’s knees buckled. “Bow the knee” is an expression Jewish people used to describe the person praying that he was preoccupied, intense, passionately concerned, in the grip of something crucially important and therefore unmindful of all else. Paul is this concerned about the congregation in Ephesus. He’s pleading for them. He isn’t tossing off a pretty little prayer before he hops into bed and falls asleep. He’s

passionate and urgent about something. In light of all the Father has done for us to make us His own, in joining the Jew and Gentile into one big family both on this earth now and in heaven so that the Church is a new entity in the universe, Paul's only response is one of being so overcome that he falls to his knees. If we want to see this pandemic go away we should pray like David prayed in *2 Samuel 24*...if we want to experience revival we should pray like the psalmist did in the 85<sup>th</sup> Psalm and the writer of 2 Chronicles does in *2 Chronicles 7:14*. If we want to see our ministries grow we ought to be praying for the ministries and the ministry servant leader. A prayer-less ministry is a power-less ministry, and if our church is to be a great church for God's glory – one that is used by God to do great things, then it must be a church that prays individually, prays corporately, and prays for one another. Even when we don't know how to best express ourself in prayer (private or public) we have the Holy Spirit to aid us (*read Romans 8:26*). Finally, it is through prayer that we lay hold of God's riches that enable us to behave like Christians and battle like Christians.

Vs. 15 - Paul illustrates that once we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior we then become one big Christian family – Jesus is our savior - God is our heavenly Father and all other believers are our brothers and sisters in Christ. *Christians are called together to fellowship and not to isolation; we are knit*

*together in love as stated in **Colossians 2:2**. God desires that we be more than a name on the church membership role. And everyone in the Christian family has at least one spiritual gift that they are to use to edify the church and glorify God (affirmed in **1 Peter 4:10**).*

**Vs. 16-17** - Paul informs the church that God will enable them or empower them to do what He is calling the church to do. The source of this strength is the Holy Spirit that is found in the inner man or the soul. Paul tells the church that this strength is already in them – when you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, we received the Holy Spirit – the one called alongside us. In **vs. 17** Paul says *“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”* You can’t be a growing Christian and not have faith – you can’t pray an effective prayer and not have faith. **Hebrews 11:6** affirms *“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”* Prayer is the key and Faith unlocks all God wants to do in your life. When Paul said that Christ may dwell in your hearts the verb *“dwell”* literally means “to settle down and feel at home.” Certainly Christ was already resident in the hearts of the Ephesians, or else Paul would not have addressed them as “saints” in **Ephesians 1:1**. What Paul is praying for is a deeper experience between Christ and His people. He yearns for Christ to settle down and feel at home in their hearts – he did not want them to have a surface relationship. Paul is not talking about people who want to know and

experience God only on Sunday's from 10:15am – 12pm – not folk who pick up their bible weekly (in church/online) only to read the sermon text...not folk who want to live for Christ at the “church or on Sunday's during the worship service time frame only” but then a different person Mon – Saturday; or right after the worship service on Sunday. Paul says that Christ wants to come into our lives and feel comfortable there. *So...how about the house of your heart today?* Is Christ comfortable with what's there? Is there any area of your life you haven't turned over to Him and allowed Him to change it to fit His needs? Perhaps it's your language, your habits, your check book, your body, your time, what you watch on TV, what type of internet sites you view. How about truly saying to Jesus, “Lord, make yourself at home in my life today.” In vs. 17 Paul also says, “*that you, being rooted and grounded in love.*” Rooted is an *agriculture metaphor* – to be rooted in something means you're getting all your nourishment, your nutrients, your minerals from it (*John 15:5*). You're absorbing all of the life of the love of God. That's what fuels your love – you are drawing upon the love which is in Jesus Christ. “Grounded” is an *architectural metaphor* – Paul is comparing the Christian to a building established on love as a foundation. This kind of “grounded” love doesn't fall apart the moment the first storm or trial comes...it does not fall apart if you have a disagreement in how ministry is carried out – it does not fall apart

because of who you are voting for...for President. This kind of “grounded” love allows you to agree to disagree without breaking fellowship.

**Vs. 18** - Paul goes on to tell us that this love is best seen and comprehended with all the saints in **vs. 18**. You know Love should be the Hallmark Trait of the church – Love should be the one thing the church does best. If we’re going to be effectively used by God to win souls for Christ we must radically love people. **John 3:16** says “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” I don’t care who you are, everybody responds to Love. **You cannot sow hate and division and then reap love and unity.** Paul said in **1 Corinthians 13:1** “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*” And we have to love more than those who love us back – we must love our enemies too. Now notice the words he uses to describe this love – width, length, depth, and height. The **width** of Christ’s love reaches the whole world and beyond. The **length** of Christ’s love stretches through all of time. The **height** of Christ’s love raises believers to the heights of heaven. The **depth** of Christ’s love reaches down into the depths of this sin soaked world to bring redemption. Paul was so confident of the Love of Christ he said it like this in **Romans 8:38-39...** “*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor*

*powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Christ’s love is total, complete, eternal, and all - encompassing - It reaches every corner of our experience.

**Vs. 19** - Paul is praying the church be filled with all the fullness of God, until we become veritable fountains of His love and grace. You see to be filled with God we must be void of self. Paul said ***Galatians 2:20*** that *He had been crucified with Christ and he no longer lived but Christ lives in him.* We must die to our own imaginations, desires, and burdens and allow God to fill us with his plan. ***Are you willing to pray that kind of prayer along with Paul?*** Are you willing to say, "God fill me up so that my life is all you and none of me." I want to live in the fullness of life and power that comes from You – I am an empty vessel before a full fountain - fill me up with Jesus Now in contrast to those who want to be filled, there is a unique group found in most churches who have allowed themselves to become spiritually anorexic - we are in a church filled with sound biblical teaching – we have 52 sound expository sermons on Sundays, we have Sunday morning bible study, S.H.O.P. and Wednesday night Bible study. Now typically a person is anorexic by choice. They have access to food but by choice they choose not to eat for various reasons. I read an article that talked about suburban teens choosing to be

**anorexic because they want to look the role of a model or even be model.**

**They will eat savory foods but soon thereafter regurgitate it so that they will not gain weight. You may say that's gross or their crazy. Well, spiritually, many people in the church do the same thing. We view and/or listen to sound expository sermons/teaching on Sundays and Wednesday nights – we get some savory spiritual food but as soon as its happy hour on Friday, as soon as they get around their worldly friends, many regurgitate their spiritual food and go on with life doing as they please. That is why when we think of the fact God is always willing to hit the reset button with us when we confess and repent of sins...we should praise God like never before; no one should have to pump us up to praise and worship the Lord.**

**Vs. 20 - Paul's spirit is soaring in prayer in verse 20, and he closes the first half of his letter with this magnificent doxology or prayer of praise to God. You see Paul had just experienced an illumination of the word of God. He realized that if the church would adhere to the word of God – if they would pray in faith, if the church would be rooted and grounded in love then the church can ask God to do anything that is of kingdom advancement and something very special is going to happen. What made Paul's knees buckle in verse 14 is the illumination the Holy Spirit gave him here in verse 20. Paul realizes that IN the church God can do more than we have asked him to do**

and more than we can ever think he could do. When we realize how eager God is to provide the things we need for kingdom advancement we'll have the entire church praying God centered thy will be done prayers instead of self centered my will be done prayers. Our Prayer meetings will increase from the faithful few to hundreds if not thousands. So many prayer meetings across the country are filled with the same request week after week. You would begin to think that everyone in the church is either sick or broke if not sick and broke. Now I am not being insensitive to real need prayer concerns for health and material or job needs. But those prayer requests should be apart of the prayer requests not the exclusive or even the predominate prayer requests. WHY? BECAUSE Jesus said in *Matthew 6:33* - "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.*" Our prayers are far too often add on prayers. We're spending all of our prayer time asking God for what He says he is going to add to us if we seek Him first. When you closely exam verse 20 you can view it as a Staircase to Heaven's treasures.

**Able**

**Able to do**

**Able to do what we ask**

**Able to do what we think**

**Able to do what we ask or think**

**Able to do all that we ask or think**

**Able to do above all that we ask or think**

**Able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think**

**Able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think**

**He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think!**

**Because - of verse 16, He is doing it according to the riches of His grace - and you can't get any richer than that! The more we yield to Him, the more our prayers will be answered in a greater way than we could ever imagine. God can take what we ask or think and enlarge it – He can improve upon it.**

**Nowhere in this verse does Paul refer to God granting us exceedingly and abundantly more material things – this verse is talking about kingdom advancement. Now in process of God giving the church more than it can ask or think secondarily you may receive a material blessing greater than what you ask or think but it's not the primary blessing. It's an add on blessing.**

**Name it and Claim it and health, wealth, and prosperity false doctrine**

**misquote and appropriate the meaning of this verse for their own selfish reasons.**

**Vs. 21 - To ensure that none of us misinterpret why God does exceedingly and abundantly more than what we can ask or think for the church is verse 21.**

**This verse forces us to Pump our Brakes – SLOW OUR ROLL - because the reason God gives us more than what we can ask or think to accomplish His plans is “to Him be the Glory.” Our lives are to glorify Christ – Jesus said let your light so shine that men may see your good works and glorify the father.**

**The Psalmist said in chapter 50:15 ‘Call upon Me in the Day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.’ God does everything for His Glory.**

**We are to Glorify God in our personal lives; we are to Glorify God in Public Worship and Service. I just can’t understand how a Christian can come into the worship service Sunday after Sunday and not give God Praise. He is so worthy of our praise. God wants us to move from comfort to commitment ...**

**He wants us to move from the Church House into the Fields – we have too many House Christians we need more Field Christians. You may be in a situation today where your marriage is on the rocks, your child may be a prodigal child, you may desire to live the Christian life but you have so many strongholds – you may not even know who Jesus Christ is but I tell you today God is Able to mend your marriage, He’s able to bring your prodigal child**

**home, He's Able to break your strongholds, He's Able to heal the sick, and MOST IMPORTANT HE IS ABLE TO SAVE THE LOST. The Fields are Ripe are we ready to step out on Faith into the Harvest. Whatever it is He's Able to do it not because this phrase sounds churchy – He's Able to Do it because His Word Declares it.**