***Paul’s Gospel Testimony***

**Message #5, Ephesians 3 October 4, 2020**

***This mystery is that through the gospel
the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body,
and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus.
I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace
given me through the working of his power.***

**Ephesians 3:6-7**

**Structure**

(3:1) Paul gets ready to pray:

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles . . . .*

(3:2-13) Paul shares his gospel calling
*2Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, 3that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. 6This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

 *7I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. 8Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

(3:14-19) Paul gets back to his prayer
*14For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

(3:20-21) Paul ends Part 1 with a doxology
*20Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

**What we learn about Paul (and ourselves!)**

*2Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, 3that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets . . . .*

*7I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. 8Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

Ephesians 3:2-13

 1) Paul administers the gospel , the key to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 2) Paul sees himself as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 3) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ transcends tribulation

**What we learn about the gospel (and about ourselves!)**

*6This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus [of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace give which was given to me according to the working of his power.]*

Ephesians 3:6 (3:7 should not be a new sentence, see the NASB as opposed to NIV and ESV)

 1) The gospel is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 2) Together \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , together \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , together \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 3) Promise ( *epi + aggelion* ) and Gospel ( *eu + aggelion* ) are both God’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Praying again with Paul**

 1) A Spirit kind of power

*14For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being .* . . .

Ephesians 3:14-16

 This means for me: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 2) Jesus moving in

*17so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*. . . .

Ephesians 3:17

 This means for me: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 3) Christ’s big, big love

 *and that you, being rooted and grounded in love 18may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19and to know this love that surpasses knowledge . . .*

Ephesians 317-19

 This means for me: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 4) Topped off and staying full

 *that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Ephesians 3:19

 This means for me: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 5) The doxology

*20Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Ephesians 3:20-21

 This means for me: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**My working outline of Ephesians**

 Overall Theme:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Chapters 1-3 | The Glory of God in the Church |
| Chapter 1 | The glory of God in redemption |
| Chapter 2 | The glory of God in reconciliation |
| Chapter 3 | The glory of God in the revelation of the mystery of the church |
| Chapters 4-6 | The Glory and Pleasure of God through the Church |
| Chapter 4 | The glory of God in the unity and growth of the church |
| Chapter 5 | The glory of God in the imitation of Christ by the saints |
| Chapter 6 | The glory of God in victory of Christ |

**Resources for further studies of Ephesians**

For studying Ephesians 2:
Horatio Bonar’s short study at [*https://www.monergism.com/without-god*](https://www.monergism.com/without-god)
Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21*](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21)J.C. Ryle on “One Family” at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/pr16.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/pr16.htm)

This is a wonderful Bible Project introduction on youtube: [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\_continue=12&v=Y71r-T98E2Q&feature=emb\_logo*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=12&v=Y71r-T98E2Q&feature=emb_logo)

Bob Deffinbaugh’s Ephesians series is at [*https://bible.org/series/ephesians-glory-god-church*](https://bible.org/series/ephesians-glory-god-church)

Spurgeon’s series of messages on Ephesians are at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r\_eph.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_eph.htm)

Kim Riddlebarger’s sermons on Ephesians are at [*http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/sermons-on-ephesians/;jsessionid=3799445CA50CA06F2F395D4FBE89D586.v5-web017*](http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/sermons-on-ephesians/;jsessionid=3799445CA50CA06F2F395D4FBE89D586.v5-web017)

ThirdMill has produced “Paul and the Ephesians” at [*https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/19/version/*](https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/19/version/)

Desiring God, John Piper’s media ministry, has some wonderful resources at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/ephesians/1/messages*](https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/ephesians/1/messages)

Mark Johnston’s “Preaching Ephesians” at [*https://www.reformation21.org/articles/preaching-ephesians.php*](https://www.reformation21.org/articles/preaching-ephesians.php)

Doug’s favorite commentaries are John R. W. Stott’s *The Message of Ephesians* (IVP, 1979), William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (Baker Book House, 1967); Ephesians in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981) by A. Skevington Wood; and, much shorter, F. F. Bruce’s *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Revell, 1961).

Martyn Lloyd-Jones has a wonderful seven volume series on Ephesians (Baker Books, 1978).

The text we spent the most time on in Darrell Johnson’s class was Timothy Gombis’ *The Drama of Ephesians* (IVP Academic, 2010)

The Gospel Coalition has resources on Ephesians at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/ephesians/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/ephesians/%20)

Alexander Maclaren’s commentary on Ephesians 1 is at [*https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/ephesians-1.html*](https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/ephesians-1.html)

F.F. Bruce’s paraphrase is available at [*https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1962-3\_163.pdf*](https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1962-3_163.pdf)



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# Paul’s Imprisonment, His Prayers, and His Praise (Ephesians 3:1-21)Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21*](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21)

*1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.*

*14 For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.*

*20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

### Introduction

God is a mysterious God. Throughout history, God has had both men and angels scratching their heads, trying to figure out how He would accomplish what He promised. God’s ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). The things God has prepared for His children are those which our eyes have not seen, and of which our ears have not heard. They have not entered the hearts of men (see 1 Corinthians 1:9). When the plans and purposes are completed, men must marvel at the wisdom which He has displayed, a wisdom which did not require our counsel, and which was conceived and accomplished by God alone (see Romans 11:33-36).

Easter is the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His rising from the dead, one of the great mysteries of the Bible is suddenly solved, and the implications are indeed glorious. Easter is therefore not only a celebration of our Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection, but the celebration of the certainty of our own, at the second coming of our Lord.

In Ephesians, Paul speaks of a related mystery, the mystery which centers on Jesus Christ, and on His church. Because God is a God of mysteries—a mysterious God—we need to understand what a mystery is. Contrary to popular thinking, a mystery is not something which has never been the subject of biblical revelation. This may seem to contradict Paul’s words in our text:

4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 **which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit**; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Ephesians 3:4-6, emphasis mine).

The mystery, Paul tells us, is Christ. Certainly we can all agree that Christ is the subject of Old Testament revelation. There was, however, much about the Lord Jesus which was mysterious, and which was only clear after His first coming and the inspired commentary on His life in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies by the apostles. Specifically, it was not understood that in Christ Jews and Gentiles would become one, and that all racial distinctions would be nullified in the church.

A biblical mystery is something like a treasure hunt. In a treasure hunt, you are given clues. You must figure out one clue in order to discover the next. Finally, after finding all the clues, you arrive at the treasure. It is not until you find the treasure that the mystery is solved.

Our Lord Jesus is the treasure. In the Old Testament God gave men many clues about the Messiah. Nevertheless, men did not understand how all the clues fit together, like pieces of a puzzle, to make a complete picture. Even the Old Testament prophets themselves did not understand their own prophecies, and thus found them to be a mystery (see 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Early in the Book of Genesis, we find that death is the penalty for sin. From Genesis chapter 3 onward, all men die. It was also in Genesis chapter 3 that we are told that through the offspring of Eve, salvation will be provided. Who would have ever imagined that this salvation would come about by His death? And when the Old Testament prophecies began to foretell the death of Messiah (see Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13–53:12), no one could understand how this could be true. Even the disciples could not understand how Jesus could speak of His death (see Matthew 16:21-22). It was not until after our Lord’s resurrection from the dead—a mystery to the disciples—that they came to understand the significance of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, all of which the Old Testament prophecies spoke. The pieces of the puzzle were revealed, but the big picture was still a mystery, until after these prophecies were fulfilled.

In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul returns to the mystery of which he has been speaking in the first two chapters of this epistle. In chapter 1, Paul indicated that the mystery was the purpose of the Father in summing up all things in Christ:

In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth (Ephesians 1:8b-10).

In chapter 2, the term “mystery” is not found, but the mystery is there, and is explained by Paul in chapter 3, in our text. Our task, as we approach Ephesians chapter 3, will be to discover what the mystery is, and how it effects the life of the Apostle Paul. From this, we will gain insight into the way in which this mystery also relates to our own lives. Let us look to the Spirit of God, through whom the mystery is made known and communicated to the sons of God (see 1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

### The Structure of our Text

Our text has three major divisions. Verses 1-13 describe the mystery which has been entrusted to Paul and its relationship to his ministry. Verses 14-19 contain Paul’s second prayer for the Ephesian saints, a prayer based upon the revelation of chapter 2. And verses 20 and 21 conclude the first half of the Epistle to the Ephesians with a benediction.

### Paul’s Chains and Paul’s Calling (3:1-13)

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart[58](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21#P1313_376170) at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

We know from the first three words of chapter 3 that this chapter is directly related to chapter 2. Paul begins, “For this reason …” We find the same expression in verse 14. Paul is about to pray, as he has already done in chapter 1. It would seem, as though Paul may have moved his hand in writing, and that the chains by which he was bound may have somehow caught his attention.[59](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21#P1315_376913) Perhaps they were clinking as Paul’s hands moved from his ink supply to his parchment. Perhaps the links of his chain became tangled, keeping his hands from moving freely. Nevertheless, Paul was somehow reminded of his status as a prisoner, not only a prisoner for Christ, but also a prisoner for his Gentile readers.

Paul’s words concerning his imprisonment in verses 2-13 are prompted by his concern for the impact his incarceration might have on his readers. They know, of course, that he is writing from prison. We know from the first chapter of Philippians that there were some who sought to capitalize on Paul’s imprisonment by implying that his suffering was divine discipline. They wanted it to appear that Paul was wrong, and that God was chastening him. They, of course, were right and would be more than happy to give the saints the “truth.”

The final words of Paul concerning his imprisonment, recorded in verse 13 reveal his motive for bringing up the matter of his own personal situation. Paul does not, by any means, wish for sympathy, but rather he seeks to share the truth which will enable the Ephesian saints, like the Philippians (see Philippians 1:14), to become even more bold in their proclamation of the gospel. Let the Ephesian saints not be discouraged by his imprisonment, but rather let them take courage, knowing that his suffering is for their glory.

Paul’s chains were the result of his faithfulness to his calling, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. There was no doubt in Paul’s mind as to what his calling was:

16 ‘But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me’ (Acts 26:16-18).

5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name’s sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; (Romans 1:5-6).

15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15-16).[60](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21#P1322_379645)

Paul’s calling was a stewardship, a stewardship of God’s grace (verse 2). He understood his calling to be prompted by the grace of God. God was gracious to take one who formerly persecuted the church and to make him a preacher of the gospel. God was gracious in sending Paul to the Gentiles, so that those who believed might become partakers of His blessings, by grace.

Paul’s ministry was the stewardship of a mystery. Broadly speaking, the mystery was about Christ, and about the salvation which He would accomplish on the cross of Calvary for both Jews and Gentiles. These things were spoken of in the Old Testament, even though they were not fully understood. What was utterly new and unexpected (a complete mystery) was that Jews and Gentiles would be reconciled to God as “one new man.” No one expected the equality of Jews and Gentiles, and no one expected the birth of the church.

It was not a welcome thought to unbelieving Jews. It was not even quickly or enthusiastically accepted by Jewish believers. Let us pause momentarily to trace the revelation and development of this mystery through history, and its reluctant acceptance by the Jewish Christian community.

The “mystery” of salvation, of which Paul speaks in Ephesians chapter 3 is illustrated in the relationship of two statements, both of which are found in the Scriptures. These statements are:

 (1) Salvation is of the Jews (see John 4:22, KJV), and

 (2) Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9, KJV).

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God promised that salvation would be provided through the “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15). Later, God specified that His promised blessing (which included salvation) would come through the “seed” of Abraham:

And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3).

When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He indicated to her not only that “salvation was of the Jews,” but that He was the Jew through whom salvation was to be provided:

“You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit; and those who sonship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.” (John 4:22-26).

Later, the Apostle Paul indicates that the promised “seed” of Abraham, through whom all the nations would be blessed, was not the Jews in general, but one Jew in particular, Jesus:

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed, He does not say, “AND TO SEEDS,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “AND TO YOUR SEED,” that is, Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Judaism misinterpreted the Old Testament promises concerning blessing and salvation. They wrongly interpreted the expression, “salvation is of the Jews.” They thought that salvation was the automatic possession of all Jews. This error was exposed by many, including John the Baptist and Paul:

9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 “And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:9-10).

1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: “through Isaac your descendants will be named” (Romans 9:1-7).

21 He said therefore again to them, “I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.” 22 Therefore the Jews were saying, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” 23 And He was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. 24 “I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins” (John 8:21-24).

The Jews further believed that only those Gentiles who became Jews could be saved:

1 And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

You can imagine the shock and horror of the prophet Jonah when God instructed him to preach to the people of Nineveh, Assyrians who were Israel’s dreaded foes. He knew that they would be saved, and he sought to prevent it. Only after his ordeal did Jonah begrudgingly confess, “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). And even here he still evidences the pride and prejudice of a self-righteous Jew, looking down on the pagan Gentiles:

“Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to Thee With a voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord” (Jonah 2:8-9).

Jonah did not delight in God’s mercy and compassion, he resisted it. He did not praise God for His grace, he protested against it:

1 But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. 2 And he prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. 3 “Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life” (Jonah 4:1-3).

The reason for Jonah’s protest is clear. He did not think that he, as a Jew, needed grace. He believed that Jews deserved God’s blessings. Here is self-righteousness in its most crass and ugly form. And Jonah is not the exception, he is the rule. He typifies the reason why the Jews resist the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. They do not want to be saved by grace, on the same basis as the Gentiles. They expect God to bless them because of who they are—Jews, as though they are superior to Gentiles. They fail to understand that the Law was given to them, not to make them superior to the Gentiles, but to condemn them as sinners, just like the Gentiles, so that they can be saved by grace:

9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. “ 13 “Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “The poison of asps is under their lips”; 14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”; 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 Destruction and misery are in their paths, 17 And the path of peace have they not known. “ 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:9-26).

Salvation, as Jonah reluctantly confessed, is not the private possession of the Jews, but it is the possession of God. He is the one who has accomplished it through the cross of Jesus Christ. And He is the One who has the right to bestow it upon any whom He chooses, by grace.

The reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Christ and in His church was a mystery which no Old Testament saint (including the prophets) understood. It was a reconciliation accomplished by our Lord on the cross of Calvary, and the message of the apostles and prophets (including Paul), who proclaimed it. It was a message which self-righteous Jews hated intensely, and this is why the Apostle Paul found himself writing to his readers from a prison cell.

When Jesus introduced Himself to the nation Israel as her Messiah, He made it clear that He had come to save Jews and Gentiles. This was a message the Jews were not eager to hear (see Luke 4:16-30). The Great Commission, given to the apostles by our Lord before His ascension, was a command to take the gospel to all nations (see Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Nevertheless, the Jewish apostles were reluctant to carry out this command.

It was not through the planning or program of the Jerusalem church that Gentile evangelism commenced, but rather through the sovereign work of God. The vision God gave to Peter prompted him to take the gospel to the household of Cornelius, a Gentile. As a result, the leaders in the church at Jerusalem came to acknowledge the work which God was doing among the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–11:18). The stoning of Stephen brought about great persecution on the church in Jerusalem, which caused these saints to scatter abroad. Most of the Jewish saints shared the good news only with their fellow-Jews, but a few intrepid souls began to evangelize the Gentiles, which brought about the birth of the church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-26). Before long, the church at Antioch was instructed by the Holy Spirit to send out Barnabas and Saul to commence evangelism among the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-4).

As the number of Gentile converts increased, certain Jewish legalists began to insist that the Gentile believers must become Jewish proselytes. They insisted that these Gentile believers must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. And so the Jerusalem Council was convened to determine what was to be required of the Gentile saints. It was determined there that since the Jews were not able to be justified by the law, but only by grace, the Gentile believers must not be placed under the law either (Acts 15:6-29).

Even after the decision of the Jerusalem Council, some of the Jews persisted to resist Gentile evangelism, or they sought to “Judaize” them as much as possible. The epistles of Paul to Timothy, along with others, warn of the speculative and heretical teachings of such Jews (see, for example, 1 Timothy 1:5-11). Peter, followed by Barnabas and others, were intimidated by certain Jewish brethren, and began to disassociate with the Gentile believers, and Paul strongly rebuked them for this (Galatians 2:11-21). The centuries old hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles would not quickly or completely be eradicated. And so it is that Paul finds it necessary to write this epistle to the Ephesians, describing the new unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

Proclaiming this mystery of the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ was Paul’s stewardship, even though it involved suffering (see also Colossians 1:24-29). It was a privilege, a gift of God’s grace, both to Paul and through him to the Gentiles. Let not any of his readers misinterpret the glorious privilege Paul had of suffering for the sake of the gospel. And let not any of them allow his suffering to deter them in rejoicing with him, to the glory of God.

### Paul’s Prayer (3:14-19)

14 For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.

Paul’s prayer, begins with the expression, “For this reason …” By these words, Paul is telling us that his prayer is based upon good reason, and that reason is the purpose of God, as previously described by Paul in the first two chapters of this epistle. The purposes of God are the basis for Paul’s prayers.

God had purposed to redeem fallen men, both Jews and Gentiles, for the praise of His glory and grace (see Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). Prompted by His kind intentions, God provided a redemption for sinners through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who He saves, He seals with His Holy Spirit, securing our salvation for all eternity. And those whom He saves He gives the blessed hope of dwelling in His presence forever, holy and blameless.

God has purposed to save and to sanctify both Jews and Gentiles, and to reconcile them to Himself in one body. He has purposed to “sum up all things in Christ” (1:10), who indwells His church, who serves as its head, and who fills it with all of His fulness (1:22-23). Because God has purposed and provided for the salvation and sanctification of Gentiles, as well as Jews, and because God has called Him to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul now prays for the Ephesian saints, to whom he writes. Paul’s prayer is consistent with God’s purpose.

The motivation and confidence of Paul’s prayer is indicated by these words: **“from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”** (verse 15). The paraphrase by J. B. Phillips more accurately conveys the thrust of Paul’s choice of words: **“From whom all Fatherhood, earthly or heavenly, derives its name.”**

It is not the “familihood” of earthly creatures that is in focus, but the supreme “fatherhood” of God which Paul has in view. The earth knows of natural fathers, and of the families which they produce, but above and beyond every other “father” is the ultimate and supreme Father, God the Father. It is to this “father” that Paul prays.

And why does Paul find assurance and confidence in praying to the “Father in heaven”? Because we have been instructed to address our prayers to Him:

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do no be like them; for you Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: “Our Father, who art in heaven …” (Matthew 6:7-9a)

In the next chapter of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus encourages His disciples to pray by reminding them about their heavenly Father, to whom they address their prayers:

7 “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. 8 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. 9 “Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 “Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:7-11).

No wonder Paul reminds us of the Fatherhood of God. He is not just the “Father” of the Jews, but the “Father” of all who call upon Him through faith in the person and work of His Son.

Paul’s prayer does not sound very similar to many of the petitions which we address to the Father. The reason is that Paul’s prayer is shaped by the purpose of God, as revealed in the earlier chapters of Ephesians. Note the things for which Paul does not pray, the very things for which we often pray. Paul does not pray for …

* The material prosperity of the Ephesian saints
* Their prevention, removal, or quick relief from pain
* Their physical health and well-being
* Their emotional or psychological well-being
* A transforming or ecstatic spiritual experience

Paul cannot pray for these things because they are often inconsistent with God’s purposes and with the way in which He works in the lives of His children (see, for example, Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 4-5, 11; 2 Timothy 3:10-12; Hebrews 11-12; 1 Peter 4). What he can pray for is that which God has purposed and promised, and which He has assured us He will accomplish, to His glory and to our good.

Paul prays for the spiritual strengthening of the believers in the power of the Holy Spirit. We often pray for the “outer man,” which is perishing; Paul prays for the “inner man,” which is being renewed day by day. It is as the outer man perishes that the inner man gains strength:

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Paul prays also for that as a result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Christ will dwell in the hearts of his readers, by faith. Every Christian has been united with Christ, by faith. Every believer is “in Christ,” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:1-11) and yet our Lord instructs His disciples to “abide in Him” (John 15:1-11). Even so, Christ is in every true believer, but Paul prays that His dwelling in us might be enhanced. Paul desires spiritual growth, so that each day God is more evident in our lives, and that we are more aware of and devoted to Him.

Prominent in this pray of the apostle for the Ephesian saints is his request that the saints come to a greater knowledge, appreciation, and manifestation of the love of God:

And that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:17c-19a).

God’s love is the starting point. It is also the life-long pursuit of the saint. And it is the goal. The love of God is infinite, boundless. Exploring the love of God is something like studying the universe. The more of it we know, the more of it we find is still unmapped and unexplored. We can spend our whole lives exploring its boundaries, but then discover that we have not pressed its true boundaries at all.

Finally, Paul prays that the Ephesian saints will be “filled up to all the fulness of God” (verse 19). In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul spoke of the relationship which exists between the Lord Jesus Christ and the church: “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church is the “body of Christ” and He is its “head.” The church is the fulness of Christ, who fills all in all. In chapter 3 Paul therefore prays that the church would be filled with all the fulness of God in Christ.

Before we leave this prayer of the Apostle Paul, let me make several additional observations about this prayer.

**(1) Paul’s prayer was for other saints, for their spiritual growth and edification.**

**(2) Paul’s prayer concerns that which God has purposed. His prayers are shaped by what he has learned of God’s will for all creation, and especially for the church.**

**(3) Paul’s prayer is for what is infinite. These requests of Paul are permanent, never to be removed from Paul’s “prayer list.”** This is because they are never fully answered in this life. Just as he could pray these things all his life, so we can pray for them life-long too, because these prayers will never be fully answered until we are with Christ in the kingdom of God. In this life, we will never fully fathom the love of God and yet we can pray for it life-long and continue to grow in our grasp of that love every day of our lives.

**(4) Paul’s prayer is for what is already true, in measure, but which God has purposed for us to comprehend and appreciate in even greater measure.** Christ does abide in us, yet Paul prays that He will abide in our hearts. We are strengthened by the Holy Spirit, who has sealed us and who constantly indwells us, and yet Paul prays that we will be strengthened. Paul prays here, not for something which we do not possess, but for something we do possess, and should possess even more as we grow in Christ.

### Paul’s Doxology (3:20-21)

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

These last two verses are a benediction of praise. Here is the close of the first half of Paul’s epistle. Paul’s words are not unlike the closing words of our Lord in the so-called “Lord’s prayer”: “For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen” (Matthew 6:13). Note the emphasis of this benediction. First, it is God-centered. Paul will not end other than with his eyes fixed on God, and with these words he seeks to turn our eyes on Him as well. Second, Paul’s words focus on the goal of the church, and of every true saint, and of all creation—bringing glory to God. The ultimate goal of the church and every Christian is to bring glory to God. Christians differ from unbelievers in this matter. They, too, will bring glory to God, not by their obedience, but by their disobedience (see Romans 9:17). But while God’s purpose is to glorify Himself through sinners, it is only the saint who has the glory of God as his or her goal. We should strive to bring glory to God as our ultimate goal (see 1 Corinthians 10:31). Unbelievers unwittingly glorify God, in spite of themselves.

Third, Paul’s words focus our attention on the power of God which is at work in us. God’s power is the means by which His glory is achieved. It is He from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Romans 11:36). The power of God is infinite. The power of God is at work in us. The infinite power of God is at work in us to bring glory to Him. To God be the glory! This should be the theme of our lives, as it was with the Apostle Paul.

### Conclusion

The third chapter of Ephesians is dominated by three dominant themes: (1) Paul’s prayers; (2) Paul’s imprisonment; and, (3) Paul’s calling. Paul’s prayers were a reflection of the divine purpose of God and His provision in Jesus Christ. His prayers were not for himself, but for Gentile believers. He prayed for those whom he would have tortured or put to death before his conversion, he now prays for as an apostle. What a marvelous conversion Paul’s salvation was. And when Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints, it was for their spiritual growth, not for their physical and material well-being. He prayed for what God purposed in the lives of His elect.

Concerning his status as a prisoner for Christ, Paul avoids speaking of his circumstances, or of the details of his suffering. He speaks rather of the reason for his incarceration. His imprisonment was due to his faithfulness to his calling. His arrest in Jerusalem (which led to his incarceration in Rome, see Acts 21-28) was brought about by unbelieving, legalistic Jews, who understood the nature and implications of Paul’s calling and wanted to kill him to keep the gospel he preached from spreading (see Acts 22:21-22). While Paul did not take a Gentile into the temple precincts, as he was accused (Acts 21:28), he could have. Paul chose not to focus on the negative aspects of his circumstances, but on the positive dimension of the mystery which had been revealed to Him. If Paul were to have written a book for publication, expounding the mystery of the gospel, it could have been entitled, *How To Be A Christian Without Becoming a Jew*.

Paul’s imprisonment was mentioned as a part of his credentials, showing him to be divinely appointed to proclaim the gospel. Unlike some television evangelists who promise prosperity to their followers and who flaunt their own extravagance as proof of their message, Paul points to his prison chains as proof of his calling, showing that the gospel does not promise present prosperity, but does assure the Christian of eternal blessing. How different Paul is from the religious hucksters of our time. They have leaned the “secret to prosperity;” Paul learned the secret of the gospel which led to suffering. Let the frauds be compared with Paul and see how they and their message stand up to the scrutiny of Scripture.

Paul’s calling was, first and foremost, to become a believer in Jesus Christ. His conversion delivered him from the condemnation which he rightly deserved as a self-righteous Pharisee, making him an unworthy soul saved by grace (see Philippians 3:1-16; 1 Timothy 1:12-17). Beyond this, Paul’s calling was as an apostle to the Gentiles (see Romans 1:5; Galatians 2:9).

In addition, Paul’s calling was to proclaim the mystery which was not fully disclosed in the Old Testament, and which the Jews so strongly opposed. This mystery was that of the gospel, that in Jesus Christ Jews and Gentiles would be reconciled to God and to each other, not as two different categories of Christian, but as “one new man,” as “one body” in Christ.

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, {leading} to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 16:25-27).

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (Colossians 1:24-29).

Finally, the third chapter of Ephesians focuses our attention on Paul, and upon his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. The last half of chapter 2 dealt with the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to God and to each other, but Paul is not content to leave this matter alone. It is an essential element of the gospel, and one of the reasons for the strong Jewish reaction to Paul and the gospel which he preached.

In chapter 1, Paul spoke of the gospel as a “mystery,” as the “summing up of all things in Christ” (1:9-10). In chapter 2, the term “mystery” is not used, but it is a prominent theme in chapter 3. While God had clearly revealed the fact that He purposed to save and to bless both Jews and Gentiles through the seed of Abraham, it was not revealed that this would be accomplished in such a way as to make Jewish and Gentile saints one in Christ and to unite them in the church, the body of Christ. This was indeed a mystery which no Old Testament saint or prophet anticipated. No wonder that the Jewish apostles required some time to grasp this fact and to see it as a vital part of the gospel.

As I have reflected on this “mysterious” dimension of the gospel, I have concluded that it is a significant truth which many Christians (including myself) have failed to understand and appreciate. As we conclude this lesson, let me focus our attention on the mysterious element of our Christian faith.

**(1) The gospel is mysterious.**

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, {leading} to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 16:25-27).

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (Colossians 1:24-29).

**(2) All spiritual truth is mysterious.**

6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.” 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:6-13).

**(3) Christianity is mysterious because God is mysterious.** God is infinitely wiser than we. He is all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful. He often employs things which are paradoxical or even incompatible to us. He can use sinful men to achieve His purposes and to demonstrate His power and majesty (Romans 9:17). He chooses the weak and foolish things to confound the wisdom of the wise (1 Corinthians 18-31).

6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD (Isaiah 55:6-8).

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36).[61](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-paul%E2%80%99s-imprisonment-his-prayers-and-his-praise-ephesians-31-21#P1414_412890)

**(4) The Christian life is mysterious because God has chosen to reveal Himself and His purposes progressively.** The term “progressive revelation” is often used with reference to the Bible. God does not reveal His plans and purposes immediately in the Bible, but progressively. And so we find the first promise of Messiah in Genesis 3:15, and throughout the rest of the Old and New Testament more and more is revealed about God’s purposes for Messiah. What we may fail to see is that God’s revelation is still partial and incomplete:

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known (1 Corinthians 13:9-12).

2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

God is not only revealing Himself to men, but also to the angelic host. The angels are stooping to see what is happening (1 Peter 1:12). The angels are learning from what is going on in the church (1 Corinthians 11:10). Paul tells the Ephesian saints that the church is the classroom for angelic beings (see Ephesians 3:10). You may never have thought about it, but many of the mysteries for us as saints are also mysteries for the angelic host. God is keeping the angels in suspense. He is keeping the angels “on their toes” because He is progressively revealing the mysteries of His will to them throughout history and into eternity.

**(5) The Christian life is mysterious because there is much going on of which we are ignorant, which is beyond the scope of our knowledge and understanding.** Job did not know that God was teaching Satan through his sufferings (Job 1 and 2). Elisha’s servant was not aware of the involvement of the angelic hosts in the affairs of men (see 2 Kings 6). Finite men are not naturally aware of those things beyond our own understanding and frame of reference. We think in terms of time, and not in terms of God’s eternal purposes. We think in terms of what is seen, but there is much that is going on that is unseen (see Hebrews 11:1). And so it is in Ephesians that Paul speaks of God’s plans and purposes, established before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-14). He speaks of their fulfillment, which is yet to occur at the second coming of Christ (see Ephesians 1:10-14, 18). He tells us of the instruction of the angelic hosts, which are unseen to us, and of the spiritual war which is currently going on and in which we are engaged (Ephesians 2:7; 3:10; 6:10-20).

**(6) The Christian faith must therefore rest on divine revelation, not on human reasoning.** Men will not find God on their own because they do not seek Him. There is none who understands God’s ways (Romans 3:9-18). We would not know God apart from His self-revelation in nature and in His Word (see Psalm 19; Romans 1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:1-3; 4:12-13).

**(7) Even the revealed Word of God is beyond the grasp of man’s understanding, apart from divine illumination of the Holy Spirit.**

11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:11-16).

7 “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. 12 “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 “He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you (John 16:7-14).

There are several implications to this mysterious nature of God’s dealings with His creation. Let me close with several of them for you to consider.

**(1) If God and His working is mysterious, then we should expect that there will be much we do not understand.** If we expect to understand all that God is doing we are self-deceived. We do not need to understand why God has commanded us to act in a certain way, but only to know that He has commanded it, and that we are to obey.

**(2) We should not focus our attention on the things which God has chosen to conceal, but rather endeavor to understand and obey what He has clearly revealed to us in His Word.**

29 “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. 7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:6-7).

14 Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:14-15).

23 But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels (2 Timothy 2:23).

14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

**(3) We should expect to live by faith, not by sight, in obedience to the Word of God, as illuminated by the Spirit of God.**

Think of all the times in the Bible when the people of God were called upon to act, solely on the basis of God’s Word and God’s faithfulness. Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat of one tree, when that tree would have given them the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). Abraham was directed to leave his homeland and family, and was not even told where he was going (Genesis 12:1). He was promised a son through Sarah, when this couple was “as good as dead” with respect to child-bearing (see Romans 4:17-22). By faith, Abraham was ready to take the life of this child, when all of God’s promises rested on him (Hebrews 11:17-19). All of the Old Testament saints lived as though God’s promises were true even though they did not receive them in their own lifetime (Hebrews 11:13-16).

You and I are called upon to live in time in the light of eternity. We are to live on earth in the light of heaven. We are commanded not to lay up treasures on earth, but to lay up treasure in heaven. We are told not to take revenge, but to leave justice to God. We are to walk by faith, and not by sight.

**(4) We should not be as intent to know the particulars of God’s plan as we are to understand the overall plan and purpose of God as He has revealed it, and to live in a way that is consistent with that plan.** More and more I am convinced that Christians are too self-centered. They wish to know “God’s will for their life,” and they ignore God’s plan for creation. As I understand Paul’s life and writings, Paul sought to understand God’s plan—the big picture—and then endeavored to live his life consistent with the big plan. Let us take heed, then, to this exhortation of Paul, and seek to practice it as he did:

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:15-17).

**(5) If the angels are being instructed by the conduct and the practice of the church, it is imperative that we obey God’s imperatives for the church, whether we understand and agree with them or not.** If the angels learn from the conduct and the practice of the church, then what we do is vitally important. If we only practice the Scriptures we understand and agree with, we limit ourselves to obeying only what is not a mystery, of acting only apart from faith, and of trusting our own judgment above God’s Word.

10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels (1 Corinthians 11:10).

**(6) Finally, if God’s ways are a mystery to men, which men will not arrive at through their own reasoning, we should be diligent to faithfully proclaim the Word of Truth, the good news of the gospel, to those who are perishing.** The gospel was not merely Paul’s stewardship; it is our as well. Let us seek to be good stewards of the gospel as we proclaim it to a lost and dying world.

14 How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:14-15).

58 “The infinitive (present active) *enkakein* is a late and rare word (see already Luke 18:1; II Thess. 3:13; II Corinthians 4:1, 16; Gal. 6:9) and means to behave badly in, to give in to evil (*en*, *kakos*).” A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932) IV, p. 532.

59 For referemces to Paul’s imprisonment see also Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1:9.

60 See also Acts 13:1-4; 15:12; 21:17-19; Romans 16:25-27; Galatians 1:11–2:10.

61 See also Job 38-41.