

Ephesians 3:1-3 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

Ephesians 3:1 For [this reason](#) I, [Paul](#), the [prisoner](#) of [Christ Jesus](#) for the [sake](#) of you [Gentiles](#) ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [Toutou charin ego Paulos o desmios tou Christou \[Iesou\] huper humon ton ethnon](#)

Amplified: FOR THIS reason [because I preached that you are thus built up together], I, Paul, [am] the prisoner of Jesus the Christ for the sake and on behalf of you Gentiles— ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

Barclay: It is for this cause that I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of you Gentiles ([Westminster Press](#))

NET: For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- ([NET Bible](#))

NLT: Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus because of my preaching to you Gentiles ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: - It is in this great cause that I, Paul, have become Christ's prisoner for you Gentiles. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: On this account I, Paul, the prisoner of the Messiah, Jesus, on behalf of you, the Gentiles (Eerdmans)

Young's Literal: For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the nations,

FOR THIS REASON I, PAUL, THE PRISONER OF CHRIST JESUS: Toutou charin ego Paulos o desmios tou Christou [Iesou]:

- 2 Co 10:1; Galatians 5:2
- Ep 4:1; 6:20; Lk 21:12; Acts 21:33; 26:29; 28:17, 18, 19, 20; 2Co 11:23; Php 1:7; 1:13, 14, 15, 16; Col 1:24; 4:3,18; 2Ti 1:8,16; 2:9; Phile 1:1,9; Rev 2:10
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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**THE SYMMETRICAL STRUCTURE
OF EPHESIANS**

EPHESIANS 1-3	EPHESIANS 4-6
Spiritual Wealth	Spiritual Walk
The Position of the Believer	The Practice of the Believer
God Sees Us in Christ	The World Should See Christ in Us
Privilege	Practice
Doctrine	Duty
Doctrinal	Practical
Revelation	Responsibility
Christian Blessings	Christian Behavior
Belief	Behavior
Privileges of the Believer	Responsibilities of the Believer
Our Heritage In Christ	Our Life In Christ
Know your Resources (Riches) in Christ	Live by faith in the light of your Resources (Riches) in Christ
Work of Christ	Walk of the Christian
Work of Christ In Us	Work of Christ Through Us
We in Christ	Christ in Us
Word of God	Walk of the Christian
Heavenly Standing	Earthly Walk
Who You Are In Christ	Whose You Are In Christ
Identity	Responsibility
Position of the Believer	Practice of the Believer
Theology	Ethics

Why is Paul spending so much time explaining to the Gentiles their

"before/after" picture and emphasizing their place of equality with the Jews in one body, the body of Christ? It is because he wants to be sure that the Gentile believers don't take their new found salvation for granted (which has to a large extent occurred in the church in America, some of whom don't even know that Jesus was a Jew, much less that the early church was virtually all Jewish) so that they have a proper appreciation and sense of gratitude for their salvation. Paul knows that when the Gentiles grasp these truths, this truth has the potential to radically impact their conduct, so that they are motivated to walk worth of their new calling in Christ and not according to their former corrupt way as pagans. For many Gentile believers, there is a tendency to "skim over" the doctrinal truths in the first three chapters (except our favorite verses like Eph 2:8, 9) so that we can get into the "practical" section of Ephesians 4-6. The problem is that the character of our walk in the last 3 chapters is intimately related to a proper understanding of the doctrinal truth in the first 3 chapters. We love to talk about being filled with the Spirit, but don't spend much time appreciating the mystery of Christ which makes it possible to even be filled with the Spirit!

For this reason - refers back to the building together of the saints - "seeing that you (Jew and Gentile) are being built together". Because you Gentiles are fellow citizens with God's people, and especially because you Ephesians are included in the temple of God, a dwelling of God.

John Eadie has an picturesque introduction to this chapter...

HAVING illustrated with such cordial satisfaction and impressive imagery the high privileges of the Gentile converts, the apostle, as his manner is, resolves to present a prayer for them. But other thoughts rush into his mind, suggested by his own personal condition. 1 He was a prisoner ; and as he was now writing to Gentiles, at least was at that moment addressing the Gentile portion of the Ephesian church, an allusion to his bonds was natural, and seems to have been introduced at once as a proof of the honesty of his congratulations, and as a circumstance that must have prepared his readers to enter into the spirit of the earnest and comprehensive supplication to be offered on their behalf. But the impressive theme on which he had been dilating with such ecstasy still vibrated in his heart, and the mention of his imprisonment, originating in his attachment to the Gentiles, suggested a reference to his special functions as the apostle of heathendom. These ideas came upon him with such force, and brought with them such associations, that he could not easily pass from them. The clank of his chain at length awakens him to present reality, and he concludes the parenthesis with a request that his readers would not mope and despond over his sufferings, endured for a cause in which they had so tender and blessed interest. The 1st and 13th verses are thus in close connection, and the apostle, as if describing a circle, comes round at length to the point from which he originally started. The connection is "

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles " " bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." ([Commentary](#))

Ray Stedman explains "**for this reason**" writing that "Sometimes it is difficult for those who do not read Greek to see how Paul builds his letters. This is particularly true of this passage, because Paul begins "For this reason ... " -- but he doesn't give the reason toward which he is moving until Verse 13! This is the way the apostle's mind worked. He starts out to say one thing but then is captured by the truth of something else he is going to say. So he begins to bring it in ahead of time. Then he is carried along from one truth to another until finally he gets back to what he started to say in the beginning. If you read it this way: "For this reason... " then skip down to Verse 13: "... I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory," you will understand what he is trying to say in the intervening sentences. ([Ephesians 3:1-6: Great Mystery](#))

William Barclay writes that "To understand the connection of thought in this passage it has to be noted that verses 2-13 are one long parenthesis. The for this cause of verse 14 takes up again and resumes the for this cause of verse 1. Someone has spoken of Paul's habit of "going off at a word." A single word or idea can send his thoughts off at a tangent. When he speaks of himself as "the prisoner of Christ," it makes him think of the universal love of God and of his part in bringing that love to the Gentiles. ([Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press](#))

Wayne Barber comments on "**for this reason**" writing that...

in 3:1. Paul says, "For this reason I, Paul." I want to stop right there. If you move down to verse 14, he uses the exact terminology: "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father." Paul starts off to pray in chapter 3, but immediately he backs away. Before he prays, he wants them to understand something. **Verses 2-13** could be put in **parenthesis**. He starts his prayer, suddenly stops, and then starts up again in verse 14. Why does he do that? Well, he wants to tell them of a mystery that has been revealed to his heart. The bottom line is that he is going to pray that what has been revealed to him will be revealed to them. That is what gives us our title, "God's Divine Mystery." Let me give you a little outline of verses 1-13 that might help you.

- Ephesians 3:1-3: Mystery revealed to him
- Ephesians 3:4-6: Explanation of mystery revealed
- Ephesians 3:7-9: Defense of preaching of revelation of the mystery
- Ephesians 3:10-13: Proclamation of results of preaching the mystery
- Ephesians 3:14-21: Prelude to prayer

You see again that he is going to pray that God would reveal to them what God had already revealed to him. (Ephesians 3:1-3 God's Divine Mystery - 1)

In regard to Ephesians 3:2-13 being a parenthesis note that verse 1 begins with his status as prisoner ("the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles") and that this same thought is picked up again in verse 13 ("my tribulations on your behalf"). This suggests that Paul is continuing the same thought that broke off from verse 1 to verse 2 as he began to elaborate on the mystery in verses 2-12. A number of commentators feel that Paul was on the verge of praying in verse 1 but was inspired to first explain the mystery after which he then returned to his desire to pray. Note that he had just taught about their being built into a **dwelling** of God in the Spirit. Then he prays that they be strengthened so that Christ might **dwell** (verb form of the noun "dwelling") in their heart.

The following **alliterative outline of Ephesians 3** is modified from John Phillips ([Exploring Ephesians](#))

1. **Paul as a Prisoner for the Truth** (Eph 3:1)
2. **Paul as a Pioneer of the Truth** (Eph 3:2-4)
 - a. The Truth Entrusted to Him (Eph 3:2)
 - b. The Truth Enlightening to Him (Eph 3:3-4)
 - i. Communicated To Him (Eph 3:3a)
 - ii. Communicated By Him (Eph 3:3b-4)
3. **Paul as a Partner in the Truth** (Eph 3:5-6)
 - a. How the Truth Was Concealed (Eph 3:5a)
 - b. How the Truth Was Revealed (Eph 3:5b-6)
4. **Paul as a Propagator of the Truth** (Eph 3:7-9)
 - a. The Working of It (Eph 3:7)
 - b. The Wonder of It (Eph 3:8a)
 - c. The Wealth of It (Eph 3:8b-9)
 - i. Its Hidden Resources (Eph 3:8b)
 - ii. Its Heavenly Resources (Eph 3:9)

Warren Wiersbe nicely alliterates Ephesians 3 as...

A **PURPOSE** - "For this reason" Ephesians 3:1, 14

A **PARENTHESIS** - Mystery of the Church Ephesians 3:2-13

A **PRAYER** - Ephesians 3:14-21

MacDonald adds that "**for this reason**"...

looks back to what he had just been saying about the place of privilege into which believing Gentiles are brought as a result of their union with Christ. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

Prisoner ([1198](#)) (**desmios** from **desméō** = bind from **desmos** = bind, chain) is a captive or one who is bound or who is in bonds. Prisoners in Paul's day often had time to think, read, write, etc. (see comments below)

Here are the 16 uses of **desmios** - Matt. 27:15, 16; Mk. 15:6; Acts 16:25, 27; 23:18; 25:14, 27; 28:17; Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Philemon. 1:1, 9; Heb. 10:34; 13:3

Most agree that Paul wrote this epistle during his first Roman imprisonment during which he was under house arrest, and yet he describes himself not as a **prisoner** of Rome but **of Christ Jesus**. Paul understood his imprisonment as God's will for him. And Who better to be a prisoner of than the Lord Jesus Christ?

Paul evidently wrote this epistle while he was imprisoned in Rome "for the hope of Israel" as Luke records in Acts quoting Paul's defense of his imprisonment before the leading men of Jerusalem writing...

"For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel." (Acts 28:20+)

Paul had been a prisoner ever since he was taken captive in Jerusalem at the command of the Jewish leaders, Luke records that...

the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. (Acts 21:33+).

For at least two years, however, he was given a certain amount of freedom Luke recording that Paul...

"stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered. (Acts 28:30-31+)

As previously discussed it was most likely during this time of "house arrest" that he wrote the letter to the Ephesians.

Clearly Paul was a prisoner of men (probably in Rome) but he viewed his circumstances from a divine perspective. Thus while he was the prisoner of the Romans, in his mind he was really the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Paul recognized that it is by the sovereignty of God that he was where he was. He was the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles. Why was he there? Because God had appointed him an Apostle to bring the

ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. As he explains at the end of this letter he was "an ambassador in chains" because he had proclaimed "the mystery of the gospel" (See **notes** Ephesians 6:19; 6:20)

Rich Cathers observes that...

In a sense, we're all a prisoner of something. We're all bound to something. Some people are bound to dangerous things like addictions to drugs or alcohol. Others are bound to pleasure – they live for the next time they'll experience pleasure. It would seem that the three young men sentenced to prison on Friday for their sex-party with a girl were prisoners of pleasure. Now they're prisoners of the state of California. Some people joke about being a "prisoner of love". Some people are imprisoned to others. They are always wondering how they can please their father. For some it's a friend or spouse. Their life's aim is to get that other person to be happy with them. Bob Dillon had a song years ago where he sang, "You gotta serve somebody ..." The way Paul might rephrase it is, "you have to be a prisoner of somebody" Paul chose to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He lived for one thing, to serve Jesus. You might say he was "captured" by His love. Paul said "the love of Christ controls me" (2Cor. 5:14) Who are you a prisoner of? ([Sermon Notes](#))

Ray Stedman writes that Paul was apparently "in Rome, a prisoner of Caesar, awaiting trial before Nero. But never once does he say that he is a prisoner of Caesar; it is always "a prisoner of Christ Jesus." The reason is obvious when you read his letters. He saw that Caesar was not the one who had the final say about him; Jesus did. The duration of his confinement was not determined by Caesar, but by the Lord Jesus. As Paul came to understand the One whom he served, he knew that Jesus is in control of history. He saw him as John did in the book of Revelation -- as sitting on his throne, holding the reins of government in his hands. He is the One who opens, and no man shuts, who shuts, and no man opens, who orders, and his will is carried out. Paul knew, therefore, that anytime the Lord Jesus decided Paul's imprisonment would be of no further value, he would be set free, that when the Lord Jesus spoke, Caesar acted. Therefore, he never saw himself as being the prisoner of Caesar. This is a tremendous lesson to us, who sometimes become worried and anxious about what the political powers-that-be are doing in the world today. Would that we had the faith of this mighty apostle who understood so clearly that Caesar was not in control; Jesus is. ([Ephesians 3:1-6: Great Mystery](#))

Ruth Paxson puts it well writing that "Paul was in a Roman prison when he wrote this epistle, but one would never know it. There is no smell of a prison in Ephesians. As you open the book it is just like going into some vast, open expanse and breathing the fresh air of heaven. There is no clank of prison chains to be heard, for Paul is not bound in spirit. He is there as the prisoner of Rome, but this he will not admit, and claims to be "the prisoner of Jesus Christ." What is the secret of such victorious otherworldliness? Paul's spirit is with

Christ in the heavenlies though his body languishes in that foul Roman prison. ([Paxson, R: The Wealth of the Christian](#))

William Barclay in noting that Paul never thought of himself as the prisoner of Rome but of Christ adds this note "One's point of view makes all the difference in the world. There is a famous story of the days when Sir Christopher Wren was building St. Paul's Cathedral. On one occasion he was making a tour of the work in progress. He came upon a man at work and asked him: "What are you doing?" The man said: "I am cutting this stone to a certain size and shape." He came to a second man and asked him what he was doing. The man said: "I am earning so much money at my work." He came to a third man at work and asked him what he was doing. The man paused for a moment, straightened himself and answered: "I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul's Cathedral." If a man is in prison for some great cause he may either grumblingly regard himself as an ill-used creature, or he may radiantly regard himself as the standard-bearer of some great cause. The one regards his prison as a penance; the other regards it as a privilege. When we are undergoing hardship, unpopularity, material loss for the sake of Christian principles we may either regard ourselves as the victims of men or as the champions of Christ. Paul is our example; he regarded himself, not as the prisoner of Nero, but as the prisoner of Christ. ([Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press](#))

John Phillips writes that "The Jews were infuriated when Paul taught that believing Gentiles were full members of God's family and the fellowship of saints. The Jews' national pride was stung. Even in the church many Jewish believers thought that Gentiles should become Jews in order to be Christians, or at least they should be regarded as second-class citizens in the kingdom. Paul's emancipating gospel annoyed many Jews, even within the church. They disliked his wholehearted acceptance of Gentiles into the church, free from all Jewish laws, traditions, and customs. They resented his vocal and tireless championship of the Gentile believers' cause. They felt threatened by his zealous, far-reaching efforts to bring more and more Gentiles into the church. The vast majority of unbelieving Jews regarded Paul with horror and considered him a dangerous heretic. Paul, however, did not criticize the Jews for opposing him. He knew where they were coming from; he had been there himself. ([Phillips, J. Exploring Ephesians](#))

FOR THE SAKE OF YOU GENTILES: huper humon ton ethnon:

- Galatians 5:11; Colossians 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 2:15,16; 2Ti 2:10
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:1-7 Grateful for the Gospel](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:1-4 The Unity of the Body, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur

**PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT
HAD PURPOSE**

For the sake of ([5228](#)) (**huper**) means on behalf of or in place of. He explains the reason for his imprisonment - **for the sake of you Gentiles**. In fact, the event that triggered Paul's arrest and shipment to Rome for trial before Caesar was a false charge that he had taken Trophimus, an Ephesian, into area of the temple area that was out of bounds for Gentiles (Acts 21:29). (See notes on Ephesians 2:18)

Paul was a prisoner because he believed in God's previously undisclosed and unknown program of uniting believing Jews and Gentiles into one new body, the church. The non-believing Jews in Paul's day considered the Gentiles ("the Uncircumcision") dogs," but some of the believing Jews did not have a much better attitude toward their Gentiles brothers in the faith.

At the time of Paul's salvation Christ commissioned him to go to the Gentiles, declaring...

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 delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 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+)

Paul was a man on mission. He has left an example of single minded determination to fulfill the call of God on his life. We do well to imitate his zeal. Live as you will wish to have lived after you are dead or as **Adoniram Judson** the great missionary to Burma said

"The motto of every missionary, whether preacher, printer, or schoolmaster, ought to be 'Devoted for life.'"

We too can end the Christian race well, even if we began late, started slow, or faltered along the way. The secret is to stay true to Christ to the last moment.

Gentiles ([1484](#)) (**ethnos**) refers to non-Jews or the heathen. When **ethnos** is preceded by the definite article ("the") in the Greek, it means "the nations" which is synonymous with the **Gentiles** marking them out as a distinct class. **The Gentiles** implies those who practice idolatry and are ignorant of the true God.

There are only 16 uses of **ethnos** in the NT -

Matt. 27:15, 16; Mk. 15:6; Acts 16:25, 27; 23:18; 25:14, 27; 28:17; Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2Tim. 1:8; Philemon 1:1, 9; Heb. 10:34; 13:3

All of mankind can be divided into Jew and Gentile and thus "**Gentile**" is a synonym for anyone who is non-Jew, who is not a member of the "chosen people". The Hebrew word corresponding to Gentile is **goyim**. From Genesis 12 through Malachi 4 the majority of the Scriptures were about God's dealings with the Jews, while Gentiles were mentioned only as they interacted with the Jews. The NT does have more mention of the Gentiles after the

formation of the Church but after the church, Christ's Bride has been raptured to heaven, God will resume His program with Israel nationally. We find this described in the book of the Revelation (where there is no mention of the church after Revelation 3). Many people are surprised to discover that the Revelation of Jesus Christ has a heavy emphasis on Israel, which explains why there are over 200 OT quotes or allusions to OT passages.

As **Wayne Barber** reminds us "We are Gentiles today, and we live in a country that has a Gentile mentality. We think it started with us. It didn't start with us, we were brought in at the appropriate time. We were shut out until Acts 8 when God singled out the minister named Paul, to preach the message to the Gentiles. The center of evangelism shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch, and then the message went out into all the world that any man, whether Jew or Gentile, can come in through the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 3:1-9 God's Divine Mystery - 2)

Ray Stedman reminds of the background from Paul's imprisonment writing that...

Paul cites some reasons for his imprisonment. The first is that he was a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles. This refers not only to the fact that his arrest had come about because he was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, but also to the fact that it benefited the Gentiles. Do not forget that the reason Paul was charged by the Jews with sedition against the emperor was because they were so angry that he would carry any message from God to the Gentiles. Jewish scruples and prejudices were terribly offended by the fact that Paul had the nerve, the effrontery, to say to the Jews that the Gentiles were received by God equally as they, that the Gentiles could have equal standing before him. When Paul spoke to the Jewish mob in his own defense, after he was arrested in the temple courts, the thing which triggered their renewed ire was the word **Gentile** in his message.

(**Ed note:** Acts 22:21, 22, 23 records Paul's statement of what Jesus told him to do "Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles." And they [Jewish audience] listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!" And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air...)

They had been listening carefully to him as he spoke of his conversion, of how he had been called by God, until he stated that he had been sent out unto the Gentiles. Then all hell broke loose again. They mobbed him and would have lynched him on the spot had it not been for the intervention of the Roman guard. So it was because of this great message that he was a prisoner. ([Ephesians 3:1-6: Great Mystery](#))

Whose Prisoner?- A story is told of Scottish minister Alexander Whyte, who was able to look at the bleakest situation and yet find something to be thankful for. On a dark Sunday morning when the weather was freezing, wet, and stormy, one of his deacons whispered,

“I am sure the preacher won’t be able to thank God for anything on a day like this. It’s absolutely horrible outside!”

The pastor began the service by praying,

“We thank Thee, O God, that the weather is not always like this.”

The apostle Paul also saw the best in every situation. Consider his circumstances as he wrote to the church in Ephesus while he awaited trial before the Roman emperor Nero. Most people would have concluded that he was a prisoner of Rome. But Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Christ. He thought of his hardship as an opportunity to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

These words of Paul should challenge us:

“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).

Paul, a prisoner of Christ, saw himself as being given the privilege to serve God and present the “riches of Christ” to many.

Whose prisoner are we? —Albert Lee ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Afflictions may test me,
They cannot destroy;
One glimpse of Thy love
Turns them all into joy. —Willett

The trials that imprison you need not limit God’s work in you.

Grateful for the Gospel

Steven Cole has the following excellent sermon on Ephesians 3:1-7

The Thanksgiving holiday reminds us that we often take God’s gifts for granted, rather than giving thanks. God gives us many common blessings, such as the gift of sight to enjoy a beautiful sunrise or sunset. He gives us the gift of sound, so that we can enjoy

the laughter of children or conversation with friends or a favorite song. He gives us the gift of taste, so that we can enjoy good food. We enjoy many material blessings in this country—our homes, cars, and many gadgets that make life more comfortable. Traveling to some of the poorer areas of the world helps you to see how life could be, had you not been blessed to be born in America! So we should be thankful!

But the greatest gift that God gives us is the gospel—the good news that Jesus Christ came into this world to save us from our sins. If He has opened the eyes of your heart to trust in Jesus Christ as the One who bore your eternal punishment on the cross, then even if you are going through terrible suffering, you have reason to rejoice and be thankful! And if God has saved you, He also has given you some way that He wants you to serve Him. The fact that former selfish, rebellious sinners could be redeemed and now put into service for the King of kings should fill our hearts with joyful gratitude to Him. This is what the apostle Paul both says and exemplifies in our text:

We can be joyfully grateful even in our trials, if we remember God's gift of salvation and the gracious privilege of serving Him.

These verses are a bit difficult, so track with me as I try to explain them. In Ep 2:11-22, Paul has outlined the unprecedented blessings that God has now poured out on the Gentiles. For 2,000 years from Abraham to the time of Christ, God's blessings were mostly restricted to the Jews. The Gentiles were excluded from the nation of Israel, were strangers to God's covenants of the promise, and thus they had no hope and were without God in the world (Ep 2:12).

Then comes that glorious contrast (Ep 2:13), "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Paul shows how through the gospel, Christ now has reconciled the Jews and Gentiles to one another and He has reconciled both groups in one body to God through the cross. As a result, the Gentiles are no longer strangers and aliens, but they are fellow citizens of God's new people, they are members of His household, and together with the Jews, they are being built into a holy temple where God now dwells (Ep 2:19, 20, 21, 22).

In light of these wonderful truths, Paul is about to pray for the Ephesians, that God would make these truths a reality in their experience. He will pray (Ep 3:17) that Christ will dwell in their hearts by faith, in line with what he has said about them being built into the dwelling of God (Ep 2:22). In line with the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, he will pray (Ep 3:17) that they may be rooted and grounded in love.

But, before he gets to his prayer, something diverts Paul's attention. Perhaps he heard his chains clank and it brought him back to his present situation, of being a prisoner. Paul's persistent enemies, the Judaizers, were no doubt plaguing the Ephesian church, arguing that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses to be saved. One of their arguments was to discredit Paul. If he really is God's apostle, then why is he in prison?

So Paul begins (Ep 3:1), "For this reason [because of the reconciliation of the Jews and

Gentiles to one another and to God], I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—” but then, instead of launching into his prayer, he interrupts himself. He will come back to the prayer in Ep 3:14, but he goes into a digression to show the Ephesians that his imprisonment in Rome should not cause them to doubt God or to question Paul’s apostleship. Rather than losing heart because of his sufferings, they should see that his tribulations on their behalf were actually for their glory (Ep 3:13). So in this digression, he reminds them again of God’s great gift of the gospel and of the gracious privilege of being able to serve and to suffer for Christ’s sake. Rather than grumbling about his imprisonment, Paul overflows with joyful gratitude to God. He not only tells us, but also shows us, how to have this same joyful gratitude in the midst of our trials.

1. All believers will suffer, but in our sufferings we need to maintain God’s perspective.

The teaching that God promises health and wealth to all of His children is heresy. But, although most of us don’t buy into that error, we often think that if we walk obediently with the Lord, He will reward us with protection from trials. Or, when trials come, some teach that it is okay to get angry with God. The assumption behind this is, “I don’t deserve this kind of treatment!” I once saw a booklet from the ministry that publishes “Our Daily Bread” titled, “Forgiving God”! That’s a blasphemous title, because it implies that God did something wrong! It was about a woman who had lost her four-year-old, and how she had to learn to forgive God for this tragedy! But, if Job (the most righteous man on earth) did not need to forgive God for taking all ten of his children in one accident, then neither do we need to forgive God, no matter how difficult our trials. He never treats us unjustly or sends trials into our lives without a loving purpose on His part.

Paul was suffering unjustly from a human perspective. He had not done anything wrong. He was suffering because he had gone to a lot of personal bother to do something good. He had raised a gift from the Gentile churches and had personally taken it to Jerusalem to help alleviate the suffering of the Jewish people. Behind his actions, no doubt, was his strong desire to see the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church united in love. But when he got there, some Jews saw him in the temple and started a riot by falsely accusing him of bringing some Gentiles beyond the barrier in the temple. The riot led to Paul’s imprisonment, which had been going on now for about five years. During those years, Paul easily could have grown bitter towards the Jews who had falsely accused him, and even toward God, who had allowed this to happen.

Also, Paul was not suffering because he denied the truth, but rather because he boldly proclaimed the truth. You can dodge a lot of hassles as a preacher if you tiptoe around difficult doctrines and just preach “nice” messages that make everyone feel good. But God had revealed certain truths to Paul, and he lived to please God, who examines the heart, not to please people (1Th 2:4). It would have been much easier for Paul just to make peace with the Judaizers, saying, “We don’t agree, but unity is more important

than truth.” But, instead, he always stood firmly for the truth of the gospel of grace, even if it meant hardship and persecution.

When Paul says (Ep 3:2), “if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you,” he is not implying that some of the Ephesians had not heard. Probably Paul was using irony (H. C. G. Moule, *Ephesians Studies* [Christian Literature Crusade], p. 110). His ministry to the Gentiles had been well known for many years and was at the heart of why he was in prison. So here, he is using understatement to say, “If perhaps you have heard a few things about my ministry to the Gentiles...”! They were Christians because of his ministry to the Gentiles!

Note one further thing about Paul’s perspective on his sufferings: Although he did not deserve to be in prison, he was joy-fully grateful because he understood and submitted to God’s sovereignty over his sufferings. He calls himself (Ep 3:1), “the prisoner of Christ Jesus.” If Paul had seen himself as the prisoner of the Jews, he would have been bitter at the Jews. If he had seen himself as the prisoner of the Roman government, he would have been angry about the miscarriage of justice. But, he saw himself as the prisoner of Christ Jesus. Paul knew that the Lord only acted toward him with grace and kindness. And so, he could rejoice even in his sufferings.

There is an error today called “open theism” that teaches that God is not sovereign over the tragic things that happen. He is just as upset as you are, but He can’t do anything about it. They are trying to get God off the hook for all of the evil and suffering in the world. But, it is fundamentally unbiblical. In the Bible, God makes it clear that He is sovereign over everything, including our trials (Ex 4:11; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6). Also, by denying God’s sovereignty over our trials, the open theists take away the only source of comfort in our trials, namely, that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Ro 8:28).

So here is Paul, suffering for no wrong that he had done. But there is not a hint of self-pity or complaint on his part, because his focus was on Christ Jesus as his sovereign Lord, and also on helping the Ephesians understand God’s purpose in Paul’s imprisonment. But, there is more:

2. We can be joyfully grateful in our trials if we remember that we are beneficiaries of God’s gracious salvation.

Paul never ceased to be thankful for God’s grace that had been shown to him in the gospel. Though he was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor, yet he was shown mercy, and God’s grace was more than abundant for the chief of sinners (1Ti 1:13, 14, 15). If you think about where you used to be as a sinner, and where you would be today if God had not broken into your life with His grace, it will cause you to overflow with gratitude. Note four things about God’s grace in the gospel:

A. God’s grace in the gospel is a precious, undeserved gift.

Paul was so moved by God’s grace in saving him that he just can’t stop repeating

himself. In Ep 3:2 he writes, "if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you..." Then, again in 3:7, he says, "of which I was made a minister [servant], according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power." He continues (Ep 3:8), "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." He just couldn't get over it! Neither should we!

No one has ever come to Christ by his own intelligence, will power, or good works. If you are a Christian, it is not because you thought through all of the options and due to your superior intelligence and high moral standards, you decided to follow Jesus. Rather, the Bible indicts us all (Ro 3:10-18):

As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

If you're thinking, "Well, that may describe others, but it doesn't describe me," then you do not understand God's grace in the gospel. Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to

repentance (Luke 5:32). You have to feel how lost and helpless you are before you will cry out to Jesus, "Save me, Lord, or I perish!" Salvation is totally a precious, undeserved gift of God's grace.

B. God's grace in the gospel cannot be grasped by human reason, but God must reveal it to us.

Paul writes (Ep 3:3, 4, 5, 6), "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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; 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...."

To understand Paul's flow of thought we need to understand what he means by mystery. He uses this word 21 out of the 27 times in the New Testament, and with different shades of meaning in different contexts. But the basic meaning is that it refers to God's revelation or disclosure of something that formerly was hidden. Such information cannot be attained by human reason or wisdom, but only when God reveals it by His Spirit (1Co 2:7, 8, 9, 10).

In Ephesians, Paul first refers to the mystery in Ep 1:9, where it refers to God's revealing His eternal purpose to sum up all things in Christ. So the key idea in the mystery centers

on God's eternal plan of bringing all things together in the person of Jesus Christ. When Paul says (3:3) that he wrote before about this in brief, he is referring back to Ep 1:9 (see, also, Col. 1:25, 26, 27).

But, this one supreme mystery has a number of applications (Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 110). Thus in our text, Paul refers to the general sense of the mystery of Christ (Ep 3:4), but then specifies the application of that mystery to the now revealed truth that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Ep 3:6). Paul had written about that aspect of the mystery in Ep 2:11-22. So, to sum up (O'Brien, p. 236, citing John Stott), "The mystery or open secret of Christ is 'the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ.'"

When Paul says that this aspect of the mystery had not been made known in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets, he means that God has revealed new truth with regard to the church. The Old Testament often spoke of God's blessing on the Gentiles, but it was always through the Jews. But now, (Gal. 3:14) "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." In other words, the newly revealed truth that Paul and the New Testament ("holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit") proclaim is that the Gentiles are equal with the Jews in the church. They are (Ep 3:6) "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

The point to apply is that the truth about the centrality of Jesus Christ and the gospel is not something that anyone can arrive at by human logic, intuition, or study. It's not like math, where if you work at it, eventually you can get it. Rather, to understand God's truth, especially the truth of the gospel, He must open your eyes (see, Matt. 13:11, 12, 13). So, if you do not understand the good news about Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross, cry out to God for understanding and search the New Testament as if you were looking for buried treasure until you find Him!

C. God's grace in the gospel comes to us by the working of His power.

Paul mentions (Ep 3:7) that the gift of God's grace "was given to me by the working of His power." God's mighty power transformed a violent racist like Paul into the apostle who now loved the very people he had hated, the Gentiles! Maybe, like the Ephesians, you were into the occult and all manner of evil. But, God's mighty power transformed these people who engaged in sexual immorality at the pagan Temple of Diana into a holy temple in the Lord (Ep 2:21).

Not all conversions are as dramatic as Paul's or the Ephesians were, but all conversions require the same working of God's mighty power. Maybe, like me, you were raised in a Christian home and were at church every time the door was open. You still need to be saved from your self-righteousness, pride, hypocrisy, lust, greed, and other sins by God's mighty power. Beware of cultural Christianity, where you assume that you're a Christian because you live in a Christian country and attend a Christian church! You are not a

Christian unless you know the life-transforming power of God in your heart!

D. God's grace in the gospel is a special privilege that we now enjoy.

To overflow with joyful gratitude, even in your trials, keep in mind that you enjoy God's revealed grace in a way that millions in history never have. Paul says that the mystery of Christ was not made known in other generations as it now is made known! But even now, there are hundreds of millions of people around the globe who live in spiritual darkness in countries where the gospel is hardly known.

But, we have these transforming truths revealed to us in the New Testament as a precious treasure! If it was revealed to you that somewhere in your back yard, a strongbox with a million dollars was buried, you'd be out there this afternoon with pick and shovel, and you wouldn't stop digging until you found it! Well, you've got something far greater than money—you've got "the unfathomable riches of Christ" (Ep 3:8), hidden in your Bible! Start digging!

So, we can be joyfully grateful even in our trials if we remember God's gift of salvation, revealed in Jesus Christ. Finally,

3. We can be joyfully grateful in our trials if we remember that we have graciously been given the privilege of serving God.

Being an apostle was not Paul's career choice! Rather, it was given to him as a sacred stewardship of God's grace. When he says that he "was made a minister" (Ep 3:7), it is a passive verb, meaning that he didn't choose it. Rather, God acted on Paul. On the day of Paul's conversion, the Lord told Paul (Acts 22:10), "Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do." He was drafted!

"**Minister**" (Eph. 3:7) is not a stained glass word, referring to a member of the clergy. That concept is foreign to the New Testament. Rather, it is the Greek word, diakonos, meaning, servant. It referred to one who waited tables. As such, a servant obeyed his master. He was not free to do his own thing, but he did what his master commanded.

Although none of us are apostles and although you may not be in so-called "full time ministry," if you know Christ, you are His servant. Even if He calls you to suffer for His name's sake, from your prison cell you can joyfully serve Him if you remember what a great privilege it is to be a steward of His amazing grace.

Conclusion

Before his conversion, John Wesley, who was very religious outwardly, but lacked the inward reality of God's grace, had a conversation with a poor porter at his college that deeply impressed him. Wesley discovered that the man had only one coat and that he had not had any food that day, but only water. And yet his heart was full of gratitude to God. Wesley said, "You thank God when you have nothing to wear, nothing to eat, and no bed to lie upon. What else do you thank him for?"

“I thank him,” answered the porter, “that He has given me my life and being, and a heart to love Him, and a desire to serve Him.” (In *The Inextinguishable Blaze*, by A. Skevington Wood [Eerdmans, 1968], p. 100.) That porter knew the reality of God’s saving grace. Like him, we can be joyfully thankful even in our trials if we re-member God’s gift of salvation and the gracious privilege of serving Him.

Application Questions

Some teach that it is okay to be angry at God when we suffer and that we should be honest in expressing our feelings. Why is this at odds with Scripture?

How can a person who grew up in a Christian home get a deeper appreciation of God’s abundant grace in salvation?

Who is more difficult to reach with the gospel: a thorough pagan or a self-righteous churchgoer? Why?

Why is it important for every believer to see himself as a steward or servant of Christ? How does this attitude help us? (Pastor Cole's entire series on Ephesians is highly recommended - It functions much like a verse by verse commentary - see [Ephesians Series](#))

Ephesians 3:2 [if indeed](#) you have [heard](#) of the [stewardship](#) of [God's grace](#) which was [given](#) to me for you ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [ei ge ekousate](#) (2PAAI) [ten oikonomian tes charitos tou theou tes dotheises](#) (APPFSG) [moi eis humas](#)

Amplified: Assuming that you have heard of the **stewardship** of God’s grace (His unmerited favor) that was entrusted to me [to dispense to you] for your benefit, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

Barclay: you must have heard of the share that God gave me in dispensing his grace to you, ([Westminster Press](#))

KJV: If ye have heard of the **dispensation** of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

NET: If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ([NET Bible](#))

NKJV: if indeed you have heard of the **dispensation** of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

NLT: As you already know, God has given me this special ministry of announcing his favor to you Gentiles. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: For you must have heard how God gave me grace to become

your minister ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: assuming that you heard of the **administration** of the grace of God which was given to me for you, (Eerdmans)

Young's Literal: if, indeed, ye did hear of the **dispensation** of the grace of God that was given to me in regard to you,

IF INDEED YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S GRACE WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME FOR YOU: ei ge ekousate (2PAAI) ten oikonomian tes charitos tou theou tes dotheises (APPFSG) moi eis humas:

- Eph 4:21; Galatians 1:13; Colossians 1:4,6; 2Ti 1:11
- Eph 3:8; 4:7; Acts 9:15; 13:2,46; 22:21; 26:17,18; Ro 1:5; 11:13; 12:3; Ro 15:15,16; 1Co 4:1; 9:17,18,19,20,21,22; Galatians 1:15,16; 2:8,9; Colossians 1:25, 26, 27; 1Ti 1:11; 2:7; 2Ti 1:11
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:1-7 Grateful for the Gospel](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:1-4 The Unity of the Body, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur

A STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S GRACE

Beginning in **Ephesians 3:2** Paul begins a new sentence which does not end until verse 7. The thought continues to verse 13 and thus this section (verses 2-13) seems to serve as a "parenthesis" or digression. As an aside Paul had 8 very long Greek sentences in this letter.

Vincent agrees writing that "Here begins a long digression extending to Eph 3:14".

If ([1487](#)) (**ei**) is a particle of conditionality (in this case referred to as a "first class conditional" statement) which when used with the indicative mood (as in this verse) indicates no doubt in the mind of his readers about the truth that Paul goes on to explain - that he was on special mission to the Gentiles. The idea is one of assurance. One could render it... "**Surely** you have heard" or "**Since** you have heard". They really had heard about Paul's **stewardship** of God's grace for them.

Regarding "**if indeed**" the **Net Bible Notes** comments that...

The author is not doubting whether his audience has heard, but is rather using provocative language (if indeed) to engage his audience in thinking about the magnificence of God's grace. However, in English translation, the apodosis ("then"-clause) does not come until v. 13, leaving the protasis ("if"-clause) dangling. Eph 3:2-7 constitute one sentence in Greek. (The NET Bible Notes. Biblical Studies Press)

Heard ([191](#)) (**akouo**) means to hear with attention or with the ear of the mind. The

Phillips paraphrase accurately conveys Paul's thought...

For you must have heard how God gave me grace to become your minister

Stewardship (3622) ("administration," "dispensation," "commission") (**oikonomia** from **oikos** = house + **némo** = manage, distribute) is referred to the office of a steward or administrator in God's house. It is an administration, a management or an oversight one was given over a household. The **steward** was responsible and accountable to the owner for how he managed the property.

Here are the 9 uses of oikonomia - Lk. 16:2, 3, 4; 1 Co. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 9; Col. 1:25; 1Ti 1:4. **Translated in NASB** - administration(3), stewardship(6).

God had entrusted Paul with great truths. Paul was their custodian, their steward. He was under obligation to communicate them to others. He discharged this trust nobly through his preaching and writing.

Regarding the meaning of **oikonomia** in Ephesians **Vincent** writes that...

In Ephesians 3:2, the word is used of the divine arrangement or economy committed to Paul. In Ephesians 1:10 of the divine government or regulation of the world. (Word Studies in the NT)

Ray Stedman explains the KJV translation as "**dispensation**" writing that "the Revised Standard Version translates this word **stewardship** instead of **dispensation**, for dispensation is often misunderstood in our day. But if we see it as a **stewardship** we will understand it. A steward was a servant to whom a certain responsibility was committed, certain goods were given, that he might dispense them, might give them out to other people. This is the biblical idea behind the word dispensation. It is not a period of time at all; it is a responsibility to dispense something, a stewardship.

Wayne Barber explains that regarding "stewardship" - There are two aspects we need to consider -- One is somebody managing a household. The secondary meaning is that of being a steward itself. A steward is one who manages something that is not his own. He manages somebody else's household or business. Paul is saying, "This ministry to the Gentiles that God has appointed me to was not my idea. It is not something that is of me. It is not something that came from my schooling with Gamaliel. It is something that God raised up. God, who is the great family steward, gave it to me. I'm the one now assigned with this ministry."... God assigns ministries. God begins them. God ends them. Whatever happens, God does it. (Ephesians 3:1-3 God's Divine Mystery - 1)

Wuest explains that "Paul was given the responsibility of having oversight or management over the grace of God in the sense that he was to administer it in its publicity. He was given the revelation of the grace of God and the responsibility of properly preaching and teaching it. This grace given Paul for the Gentiles... (Wuest, K. S. Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: Eerdmans)

Paul was a **steward of God's grace** which parallels his statement in 1Corinthians where he writes...

Let a man regard us (apostles) in this manner, as servants of Christ, and **stewards** of the mysteries of God. (1Cor 4:1)

Grace ([5485](#)) (**charis**) in simple terms is God's unmerited favor and supernatural enablement and empowerment for salvation and for daily sanctification. Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything. Jowett defined grace as "holy love on the move".

Trench wrote that "it is hardly too much to say that the Greek mind has in no word uttered itself and all that was at its heart more distinctly than in this."

In its use among the Gentiles **charis** referred to a favor done by one Greek to another out of the pure generosity of his heart, and with no hope of reward. When it is used in the NT, it refers to that favor which God did at Calvary when He stepped down from His judgment throne to take upon Himself the guilt and penalty of human sin. In the case of the Greek, the favor was done to a friend, never an enemy. In the case of God it was an enemy (see **note** Romans 5:10), the sinner, bitter in his hatred of God, for whom the favor was done. God has no strings tied to the salvation He procured for man at the Cross.

Given ([1325](#)) (**didomi**) means to grant someone an opportunity or occasion to do something. Note the use of **passive voice** indicating God is the Giver.

Barclay writes "It is one of the great facts of the Christian life that we have been given the precious things of Christianity in order to share them with others. It is one of the great warnings of the Christian life that if we keep them to ourselves we lose them. ([Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press](#))

For you - i.e., for your benefit or literally unto you. You Gentiles.

God had specifically called Paul to preach to the Gentiles and subsequent developments recorded by Dr Luke in Acts demonstrate the fulfillment of Paul's calling...

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of Mine, **to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;** 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

Acts 13:46 (Context: At Pisidian Antioch in Asia Minor, the Jews saw the crowds listening to Paul and were filled with jealousy and so began contradicting the things Paul spoke and blaspheming) And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first (to the Jews first); since you repudiate (literally push it aside, thrust it away from, reject, refuse to listen to) it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, **we are turning to the Gentiles.** 47 "For thus the Lord has commanded us (the Jewish

Nation), 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE **GENTILES**, THAT YOU SHOULD BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'

Comment: Quoting Isaiah 49:6, Paul showed that he clearly understood God's intention for the Jewish nation to be a light to the Gentiles. Instead of quoting his own commission to the Gentiles given to him on the road to Damascus, he chose to quote God's commission of all Jews as found in the Old Testament. In rejecting that commission, the Jewish leaders who listened to Paul not only rejected the Gentiles and Paul; they rejected God Himself. As a result, Paul turned to the Gentiles, who immediately "began rejoicing and glorifying the work of the Lord." The result? "The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region." Yes, the nations are responsive to the gospel, if we will only bring it to them!

Acts 18:6 (Context: At the Jewish synagogue in Corinth) And when they resisted (literally "arrayed themselves against"! Oppose as one who draws together a host for battle!) and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. **From now on I shall go to the Gentiles.**"

Acts 22:21 "And He said to me, 'Go! For **I will send you far away to the Gentiles.**'"

Acts 26:17 (Jesus speaking to Paul declared "I will appear to you") 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 28:25 (Paul in Rome meeting with the Jewish leaders at the time of his first imprisonment = a "house arrest") And when they (Jewish leaders) did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, 26 saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; 27 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM.'" 28 **"Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."**

In Romans Paul writes...

I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as **I am an apostle of Gentiles**, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. (See **notes** Romans 11:13; 11:14)

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. (See **notes** Romans 15:15; 15:16)

In the epistle to the **Galatians** Paul explained **his calling to the Gentiles** writing that...

"you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when **He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb**, and **called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me**, that **I might preach Him among the Gentiles**, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. (**Galatians 1:13-18**)

In **Jerusalem** Paul met with those Jewish leaders "**who were of high reputation**" who concluded that Paul...

"**had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised**, just as Peter had been to the circumcised 8 (for He who effectually worked [energeo - English energy, energetic, etc] for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked [energeo] for me also to the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10 They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do. (**Galatians 2:7-10**)

Ephesians 3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: [[hoti](#)] [kata](#) [apokalupsin](#) [egnoristhe](#) ([3SAPI](#)) [moi](#) [to](#) [musterion](#).

[kathoo proegrapsa \(1SAAI\) en oligo,](#)

Amplified: [And] that the mystery (secret) was made known to me and I was allowed to comprehend it by direct revelation, as I already briefly wrote you. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

Barclay: because God's secret was made known to me by direct revelation, as I have just been writing to you, ([Westminster Press](#))

NET: that by revelation the divine secret was made known to me, as I wrote before briefly. ([NET Bible](#))

NLT: As I briefly mentioned earlier in this letter, God himself revealed his secret plan to me. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: and how he allowed me to understand his secret by giving me a direct Revelation. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: in accordance with which you are able when you read to understand my insight into the mystery of the Christ (Eerdmans)

Young's Literal: that by revelation He made known to me the secret, according as I wrote before in few words --

THAT BY REVELATION THERE WAS MADE KNOWN TO ME THE MYSTERY: [hoti] kata apokalupsin egnoristhe (3SAPI) moi to musterion:

- Eph 1:17; Acts 22:17,21; 23:9; 26:15, 16, 17, 18, 19; 1Cor 2:9,10; Gal 1:12,16, 17, 18, 19
- Ep 3:9; Romans 11:25; 16:25; Colossians 1:26,27
- Ep 1:9, 10, 11; Ep 2:11, 12, 13,14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:1-7 Grateful for the Gospel](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:1-4 The Unity of the Body, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur

THE MYSTERY REVEALED

By revelation - expresses the mode of the making known of the mystery. Paul's point is that he had not learned the mystery from anyone else, nor had he discovered it through his own intelligence, but by a revelation from God. The mystery spoken of here is that Jews and Gentiles would be equal heirs in the one body of Christ. This was unknown in OT prophecy but was revealed by the NT apostles and prophets.

Wayne Barber has a practical application of the fact that the mystery was revealed to Paul writing...

God revealed something to him, not just for him, but for others to

eternally benefit. God wants to do the same thing in your life. What He reveals in our hearts is never for just ourselves. It is always to be shared with someone else. (Ephesians 3:1-3 God's Divine Mystery - 1)

In his letter to the Galatians Paul wrote about a revelation of Jesus Christ...

For I neither received it (the gospel) from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ...to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ([Galatians 1:12,16-19](#))

Revelation ([602](#)) (**apokalupsis** from **apó** = from + **kalúpto** = cover, conceal <> English = apocalypse) (Click word study on apokalupsis) conveys the idea of "taking the lid off" and means to remove the cover and expose to open view that which was heretofore not visible, known or disclosed. It means to make manifest or reveal a thing previously secret or unknown. In all its uses, "**revelation**" refers to something or someone, once hidden, becoming visible and now made fully known.

Here are the 18 uses of **apokalupsis** - Lk. 2:32; Rom. 2:5; 8:19; 16:25; 1 Co. 1:7; 14:6, 26; 2 Co. 12:1, 7; Gal. 1:12; 2:2; Eph. 1:17; 3:3; 2Thess. 1:7; 1Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13; Rev. 1:1

Originally in secular Greek **apokalupsis** was not an especially religious word (other words were used in secular Greek to designate divine revelations) but meant simply the disclosure of any fact. It was used to mean "uncovering" as of one's head. It was used to describe the "disclosing" of hidden springs. In contrast apokalupsis as used in the NT always has theological meaning.

It was not that Paul was so good, but that God was so kind and so gracious as to reveal this glorious truth to him. It reminds us once again of the truth James so eloquently stated, a truth which should make us arise each morning with a song of praise and thanksgiving on our lips for...

Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. (James 1:17) (**Have you thanked Him yet today?**)

Made known ([1107](#)) (**gnorizo** from **ginosko** = acquire information by whatever means but often with the implication of personal involvement or experience) means to cause information to be known by someone. It involves communicating things which before were unknown or reasserting things already known.

Here are the 25 uses of **gnorizo** - Lk. 2:15, 17; Jn. 15:15; 17:26; Acts 2:28; Rom. 9:22, 23;

16:26; 1 Co. 12:3; 15:1; 2 Co. 8:1; Gal. 1:11; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 5, 10; 6:19, 21; Phil. 1:22; 4:6; Col. 1:27; 4:7, 9; 2 Pet. 1:16. **Translated in NASB** - bring information(1), have you know(1), inform(1), know(1), made known(13), make known(9).

Mystery - the "divine secret" which was revealed to Paul ("**made known**") and thus which is no longer secret! **Dr Charles Ryrie** explains the mystery this way...

A mystery was not something mysterious (in the modern sense) but something unknown until revealed to the initiated (cf. Ro 16:25). The mystery spoken of here is not that Gentiles would be blessed (for that was predicted in the OT) but that Jews and Gentiles would be equal heirs in the one body of Christ (Ep 3:6) (Ed: "one body" equates with "the church"). **This was unknown in OT prophecy** but was revealed by the NT apostles and prophets (Ep 3:5).

Mystery (3466) (**musterion** from **mustes** = one initiated [as into the Greco-Roman religious "mystery" cults] from **mueo** = to close or shut) (Click word study on musterion) is a sacred secret hitherto unknown, humanly unknowable, and now divinely revealed. As discussed more below the mystery was not unintelligible nor mysterious (like a Sherlock Holmes "mystery"), but was merely God's secret until He chose to reveal it to Paul and through Paul to all who read the epistle to the Ephesians.

The mysteries which are revealed in the NT are described in Mt. 13:11; Ro 11:25; 1Co 15:51, 52; Ep 5:32; 6:19; Col 1:27; 2:2; 4:3; 2Th. 2:7; 1Ti 3:16; Re 1:20; 17:5, 7.

In **Colossians** Paul gives us a definition of the Greek word **musterion** writing...

the **mystery** which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints (See **note** Colossians 1:26)

The "mysteries" are the sacred secrets that God knows about life, which men desperately need to know and which by His Spirit, He revealed to the "initiated", those who by grace through faith were now saints and now had ears to hear the "family secrets".

Paul first introduced the idea of "**mystery**" in chapter 1 writing that the Father...

made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 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 1:9; 1:10)

In chapter 2:11-22 Paul describes a new relationship between Jew and Gentile and between both groups to God, the substance of this section in fact dealing with the "mystery" even though he does not use the term.

Wiersbe writes that "In the New Testament, a **mystery** is not something eerie or inscrutable, but rather "a truth that was hidden by God in times past and is now revealed

to those who are in His family." A **mystery** is a "sacred secret" that is unknown to unbelievers, but understood and treasured by the people of God. ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

As **mystery** was used in classical Greek conveyed the idea of silence in the rites of the "mystery" religions so common in the Greco-Roman Empire. **Musterion** referred to religious secrets which were confided only to the initiated. Thus in Paul's day, musterion embrace ideas such as "a secret rite," "secret teaching," and "a divine mystery which is beyond human comprehension." The "mystery-religions" had their secrets and signs as modern secret societies have today. Those initiated into these pagan cults, knew these secret signs.

Musterion in Scripture takes on a completely different meaning and does not refer to truths know only to a select, initiated few but in contrast was is a previously hidden purpose of God which when uncovered is understood by the Spirit-taught believer. In other words musterion signifies those truths which are part of God's plan and can only be understood as He reveals them by His Spirit through His Word. Musterion is a truth which without special revelation would have been unknown and thus is commonly used with words denoting revelation or knowledge (e.g., "to know the mysteries", (Mt 13:11), "revelation of the mystery", (Ro 16:25) or "made known... the mystery", Eph 3:3)

The secret counsels of God remain hidden from the ungodly (to them they are a true "mystery" as the word is commonly used in English) but when these truths are revealed to the godly, they are understood by them. The **mystery** is not in the fact that the truths are difficult to interpret, but that they are impossible to interpret until their meaning is revealed at which time the truth becomes plain.

Mysteries in the Scripture fall into two categories. Some have already been revealed, and among these are the incarnation of Christ and the salvation of sinners. Others are yet to be seen, such as the general resurrection, the coming Antichrist, and the evil of the last day. It is comforting to realize that all the mysteries which bear on our salvation are already revealed to readers of Scripture.

Vincent defines **musterion** as that "which was kept hidden from the world until revealed at the appointed time, and which is a secret to ordinary eyes, but is made known by divine revelation." (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament. Vol. 4, Page 234-235).

MacArthur adds that "**musterion** does not carry the connotation that word has in modern English, as used, for example, of a mystery novel. In the New Testament it refers to something hidden in former times but now made known. Specifically, it refers to a part of God's truth that was not revealed, or was only partially revealed, in the Old Testament." ([MacArthur, J: Romans 1-8. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

Unger says that "The NT use of the term "mystery" has reference to some operation or plan of God hitherto unrevealed. It does not carry the idea of a secret to be withheld, but of one to be published... The term mystery, moreover, comprehends not only a previously hidden truth, presently divulged, but one that contains a supernatural element that still

remains in spite of the revelation."([Unger, M. F., Harrison, R. K., Vos, H. F., Barber, C. J., & Unger, M. F. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

AS I WROTE BEFORE IN BRIEF: *kathoo proegrapsa (1SAAI) en oligo:*

- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:1-7 Grateful for the Gospel](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:1-4 The Unity of the Body, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur

Wrote before ([4270](#)) (**prographo** from **pró** = before, openly, plainly + **grapho** = write) means to write previously or before. Prographo was used of posting important official notices on a placard in the marketplace or other public location for citizens to read. The word is found in early secular documents where a father posted a proclamation that he would no longer be responsible for his son's debts. It is also used for putting up the announcement of an auction sale.

This reference could be to his mention of the mystery in Ephesians 1:9; 1:10

He (the Father) made known to us the **mystery** of His will, according to His (the Father's) kind intention which He purposed in Him (Christ) 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. In Him. (**Comment:** In addition clearly **Ephesians 2:11-22** speaks about the outworking of the mystery even though that specific word is not used.)

Although not everyone agrees, most commentators feel that Paul is not necessarily referring to a previous letter now lost to us, but to the truths he had explained in the first two chapters. It is probably best not to be dogmatic.

Brief ([3641](#)) (**oligos**) means puny in extent, degree, number, duration or value. When reference is to time, it means little, short, or brief