

## Ephesians 3:1-21

In Ephesians chapter 2 we are presented with God's view of the church.

Not only is the church a trophy to the **"exceeding riches of his grace"**, but it is very unique in its structure.

Yes, as we enter this **"holy temple in the Lord"**, we are struck by the fact that there is no middle wall of partition separating Jews and Gentiles.

And this very interesting feature, like the church itself, has been a mystery, hidden in the mind of God throughout the ages.

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Let's take a few moments to talk about God's mysteries as they appear in scripture.

A mystery is a truth hidden in the mind of God until such a time that it is

revealed through His holy apostles and prophets.

I believe there are about 11 mysteries in the New Testament scriptures of which one of them is the Church.

And like all the rest, the church has been **"kept secret since the world began"**, to be revealed in all its splendour on the day of Pentecost.

No, in spite of what some people might think, the church does not appear in the Old Testament Scriptures, nor can it claim Israel's blessings.

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However, even though the church did not appear until the day of Pentecost, Jesus opened the door to God's secret ever so slightly during His earthly sojourn.

Remember the time when Peter said, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God**".

Actually, God had given him a special insight to which Jesus responded, "**and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**"

Also, during one of Jesus' parables concerning the Good Shepherd, He alluded to the church's unique makeup.

Remember His words in John 10:3, "**--- and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.**"

He was referring to the remnant in Israel who accepted Him.

Eventually, these same individuals would become the nucleus of the church.

And in V16 of this same chapter, He adds  
this comment --- **"And other sheep I  
have, which are not of this fold:  
(referring to the Gentiles) them also  
I must bring, and they shall hear my  
voice; and there shall be one fold,  
and one shepherd."**

That's when He revealed the unique makeup of  
the church.

It would be drawn from two folds, and become  
**"one fold" with "one shepherd."**

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In last week's lesson, we talked about the  
doctrinal foundation of the church  
laid down in the New Testament  
scriptures.

Certainly, God used some of Jesus'  
disciples, along with a few others, to  
record the New Testament scriptures,

but none so extensively as the Apostle Paul.

In fact, the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the church have all flowed out from his pen.

And as we observed in our last lesson, Ephesians chapter 2 documents the Gentiles' full membership in Christ's church, and on an equal basis.

No, they were not to be second-class citizens in God's family, but "**--- fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:**"

And that particular truth, which was so dear to Paul's heart, reappears in chapter 3 --- this time in the form of a parenthesis.

Well, sort of a parenthesis.

You see, it wasn't enclosed in brackets,  
which would be usual in such a case,  
but in every other way it looks very  
much like a parenthesis.

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Now, I'm sure most of you know what a  
parenthesis is, but for the benefit of  
those who might not, I will include an  
example.

Supposing I said, "I went sailing in a  
catamaran to a tropical island", and  
then, inserted some additional  
information concerning the physical  
makeup of a catamaran.

This additional information would be called  
a parenthesis, and should be enclosed  
in brackets.

Grammatically speaking, the sentence would  
be complete without it, but some

important information would be missing.

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In Paul's case, the principal subject of chapter 3 is his prayer for the Ephesians.

And then, right in the middle of this chapter, he inserts some additional information concerning the mystery he had been talking about in chapter 2.

And since he didn't enclose it in brackets, let me suggest where I think it begins and ends.

In V1, Paul prefaces his prayer with the words --- **"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,"** --- and then continues, in V14, **"-- bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"**, and so on.

In between verses 1 and 14, he explains the nature of the mystery contained in Chapter 2 and his involvement in it. So, let's read Paul's parenthesis in its entirety.

Eph. 3:2-13 **"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward:**

**3: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, --- probably referring to the last part of Chapter 2 or elsewhere.**

**4: Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)**

**5: Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;**



6: That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

7: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

8: Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

9: And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

10: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly

places might be known by the church  
the manifold wisdom of God,

11: According to the eternal purpose  
which he purposed in Christ Jesus our  
Lord:

12: In whom we have boldness and  
access with confidence by the faith of  
him.

13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint  
not at my tribulations for you, which  
is your glory."

In V3 Paul makes this statement --- "that by  
revelation he made known unto me the  
mystery; (as I wrote afore in few  
words ---".

But then, in V5-6, he adds --- "as it is now  
revealed unto his holy apostles and  
prophets by the Spirit;

6: That the Gentiles should be  
fellowheirs, and of the same body, and

**partakers of his promise in Christ by  
the gospel:"**

So then, he isn't claiming exclusive  
revelation, but he is claiming direct  
revelation.

And, in Gal.1:11-12, he defends this point -  
-- **"But I certify you, brethren, that  
the gospel which was preached of me is  
not after man.**

**12: For I neither received it of man,  
neither was I taught it, but by the  
revelation of Jesus Christ."**

And then, jumping down to V17-18, **"Neither  
went I up to Jerusalem to them which  
were apostles before me; but I went  
into Arabia, and returned again unto  
Damascus.**

**18: Then after three years I went up  
to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode  
with him fifteen days."**

So the bottom line is that Paul wasn't a student of the apostles.

He was a student of God by direct revelation.

In the solitudes of Arabia, God took this man, who had been steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures, and to whom He had given a keen intellect, and poured His mysteries into him.

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And then Paul says, in Eph.3:7, **"Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power."**

So you see --- God hadn't given him this special revelation in order to keep it under a bushel.

He was to be God's minister to the Gentiles.

And **"by the effectual working of his power"**

he was to proclaim the good news far  
and wide.

It was a high calling, but it was a calling  
that would exact a heavy price.

In Ephesians 3:1, he refers to himself as "  
**-- Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ  
for you Gentiles,**" and he wasn't  
kidding.

In fact, this very epistle was written in a  
Roman prison.

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So, let's take a few moments to review the  
events that led up to Paul's  
imprisonment.

As the book of Acts records, Paul spent a  
good deal of time in the Roman  
province of Asia, and while there,  
great multitudes of Gentiles,

including those in Ephesus, had been gathered into the fold.

However, even though his converts were predominantly Gentile, he hadn't been neglectful of God's Chosen People.

Following the principle of **"to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"**, he had made it a priority to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the local Jewish population.

However, as was usually the case, when the Jews rejected his message, he turned to the Gentiles.

So, as time went on, an increasing number of Gentiles were added to the faith, and an increasing number of Asian Jews became his mortal enemies.

Yes, they looked upon him as a despicable traitor.

Here was a Pharisee who had zealously  
persecuted the church, and now he was  
standing with them, and even  
proclaiming that abominable doctrine  
that Gentiles could have direct access  
to their God.

And I'm sure that last proclamation was the  
salt that irritated their wounded  
pride most severely.

As far as they were concerned, they were  
God's Chosen People and the Gentiles  
were dogs.

*How dare that wretched man preach such a  
doctrine!*

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And yet, this very doctrine is contained in  
their scriptures.

That's right, even though the church is not  
mentioned in the Old Testament

Scriptures, the ingathering of the Gentiles is.

For instance, in Isaiah 11:10 we read, **"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious."**

And again, in Zachariah 2:10-11 **"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD.**

**11: And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee."**

And again, in Malachi 1:11 **"For from the rising of the sun even unto the going**



**down of the same my name shall be  
great among the Gentiles; and in every  
place incense shall be offered unto my  
name, and a pure offering: for my name  
shall be great among the heathen,  
saith the LORD of hosts."**

Nevertheless, they had managed to overlook  
all of these scriptures, and labelled  
Paul's teaching a damnable heresy.

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And they weren't the only ones who had taken  
exception to Paul's teaching.

This new revelation was not too popular in  
the church either.

In fact, many of the Jewish Christians were  
convinced that the Gentiles should  
become sort of Jewish, being  
circumcised and accepting some of the  
laws of Moses, before they could  
become true Christians.

No doubt they were clinging to the old Jewish proselyte idea, but Paul would have none of it.

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So there was a problem, and the whole thing came to a head when Paul visited Jerusalem.

As you would expect, Paul made contact with the local church, and found the elders sort of walking on eggs.

Oh, they weren't opposed to Paul's work among the Gentiles.

In fact, Acts 21:19-21 records --- **"And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.**

**20: And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord** (but they had a problem) **and said unto him, Thou**

seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

21: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

Now, as is often the case, this rumour was completely false.

Paul hadn't tried to dissuade the Jewish Christians from circumcising their children, etc.

He had simply insisted that the Gentiles should not be pressured to do so.

However, this piece of misinformation had stirred up a lot of animosity, and the elders were anxious to set the record straight.

Acts 21:23-24 "Do therefore this that we say  
to thee: We have four men which have a  
vow on them;  
24: Them take, and purify thyself with  
them, and be at charges with them,  
that they may shave their heads: and  
all may know that those things,  
whereof they were informed concerning  
thee, are nothing; but that thou  
thyself also walkest orderly, and  
keepest the law."

Well, Paul agreed; and by doing so, he  
jumped from the frying pan into the  
fire.

You see, the Jews who lived in Asia had come  
up for the feast, and no doubt were  
keeping a close eye on him.

When he entered the temple to participate in  
this ritual, they jumped to  
conclusions.

Acts.21:27-29 "And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,  
28: Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.  
29: (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)"

Again, Paul was being falsely accused.

He had brought Jews, not Gentiles, into the temple.

And even if he had, he wouldn't have taken them beyond the wall that separated

the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple.

But, as is often the case, the real facts didn't really matter.

This false accusation started a riot, which in turn got the Roman authorities involved.

One thing led to another, and in due time, Paul found himself in a prison in Rome.

And it was from that very prison that he was writing this letter to the Ephesians.

So you see, Paul really was "--- **the prisoner of Jesus Christ**" for the Gentiles.

But he wasn't looking for sympathy.

In fact, in V13 of this same chapter, he writes --- "**Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**"

No, Paul wasn't licking his wounds; he was rejoicing in his commission.

In fact, he was simply amazed that God had used him at all.

Eph.3:8-9 **"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;**

**9: And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:"**

Yes, God had used him extensively.

In fact, He had used him so extensively that He must take the necessary precaution of giving him **"a thorn in the flesh"**.

Paul mentions this in 2 Cor.12:7 --- **"And lest I should be exalted above measure**

**through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."**

Initially, Paul had struggled with this infirmity, but he had finally accepted God's wisdom in the matter.

He had also come to terms with the suffering he must endure as a result of his unpopular message.

Actually, his only concern was for the negative affect his suffering might have on the believers in Ephesus.

Eph.3:13 **"Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."**

And he was also concerned for their spiritual growth.



In fact, it was this same concern that gave rise to the prayer recorded in the rest of this chapter.

V14-15 **"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15: Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named".**

And God does have a very large family.

There are the Old Testament saints, and those in the bride of Christ, and thousands of believers who will be brought into the fold during the tribulation.

Added to this are myriads of angels who fill His courts with praise, and, of course, other heavenly beings.

And it was to this Almighty Father that Paul was making his request --- V16 **"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be**

**strengthened with might by his Spirit  
in the inner man".**

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I am told that John D. Rockefeller, that great oil magnet and philanthropist, was in the habit of giving his caddie a single dime for a tip.

There's no question that he was paying him out of his riches, but had he been paying him **"according to the riches"**, that young man would have gone home with his pockets jingling!

Well, Paul wasn't looking for a dime.

His prayer was based upon the riches of God's glory, and not surprisingly, on another resource that had been obtained in answer to Jesus' prayer.

Remember His promise to His disciples --

**"And I will pray the Father, and he shall  
give you another Comforter, that he  
may abide with you for ever".**

So then, with complete confidence, Paul was asking --- **"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man".**

When it comes to our physical environment, God has given us five senses to keep us informed.

However, when it comes to spiritual things, our **"inner man"** must depend upon God's Holy Spirit.

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And then Paul continues in V17-19 **"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,  
18: May be able to comprehend with all**

saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;  
**19: And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."**

The real essence of Christianity is Christ living in us.

For 33 years our incarnate Lord lived among men, and then He returned to heaven.

Nevertheless, He still makes His presence felt through the lives of His saints.

As Paul says in Gal. 2:20 --- **"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me".**

And one of the telltale signs that Christ is in control of a believer's life is a heart that is **"rooted and grounded in love"**.

Now, the term "**rooted**" brings to mind a plant that is growing and developing because of the nutrients that are supplied through its roots.

So then, if a Christian's heart is not rooted in love, there will be a complete absence of that beautiful fragrance of Christ wafting up to heaven.

That's what 1 Cor.13:1 tells us, doesn't it?

**"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (or love), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."**

The other terminology used in this verse is "**grounded**", which is translated from a Greek word that gives the idea of a foundation.

And a local church that is not grounded on a foundation of love will soon lose its power.

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Also, it is only as Christ dwells in our **"hearts by faith"** that we will **"be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;**  
**19: And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge".**

How else can we understand the breadth of God's love contained in Jesus' words -- **"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"** --- as He wrapped His loving arms around the world.

And as for the length of God's love, it existed **"before the foundation of the**

**world"**, and it will continue to exist throughout eternity.

And then there's the depth of God's love poured out at Calvary as His Son **"became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."**

As to the height of God's love, it brought Jesus all the way from glory to the grave, and has lifted us **"out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay,"** and has set our feet upon a rock.

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Eph.3:19 **"--- that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."**

That seems like a rather ambitious prayer, doesn't it?

Is it possible to be **"filled with all the fullness of God"**?

Isn't that kind of like asking the Pacific Ocean to be contained in a teaspoon?

Well, Paul thought it was possible, even essential.

And if you look at the life of Jesus, you will see what being **"filled with all the fullness of God"** is all about.

In a word, it's about obedience.

Listen to Jesus' words in Heb. 2:8 --- **"Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God."**

Phil. 2:8 **"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."**

And then, as we see Jesus staring into that cup of suffering, which we have filled so full for Him, we hear His words, **"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."**



Yes, experiencing "**the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge**" and being "**filled with all the fullness of God**", will lead us down the pathway of obedience.

Can we do it?

Of course we can't!

But Christ can.

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Eph. 3:20 "**Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think ---**".

Certainly there are a lot of legitimate things a Christian should pray for, but God "**is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think --**".

Look at Paul's life, for instance.

He wanted to visit Rome as a free man, and God sent him there in chains.

As a result, we have been blessed by the  
Epistles: to the Ephesians, the  
Philippians, the Colossians, and to  
Philemon, all written during his  
captivity.

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And then V20 ends with these words ---

**"according to the power that worketh  
in us ---".**

And I'll stop right there.

Yes, it is God's good pleasure to work  
through His saints.

Consider Peter, that impulsive hard to  
control fisherman, whom God fashioned  
into an outstanding servant.

And even Paul, that great enemy of the early  
church, was to be moulded into a  
unique vessel for His purposes.

Yes, God **"is able to do exceeding abundantly  
above all that we ask or think,**

**according to the power that worketh in  
us ---".**

I'm so glad He doesn't limit Himself to our  
ineffectual plans.

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And then Paul ends the doctrinal part of  
this epistle with a benediction ---

V21 **"Unto him be glory in the church by  
Christ Jesus throughout all ages,  
world without end. Amen."**

A basic guide to understanding Scripture is  
the recognition of the fact that God  
does everything for His glory.

And where, in this darkened world of sin,  
does God get the glory?

It is in His church, which has the distinct  
privilege of glorifying Him publicly  
down here, and will continue to do so  
throughout eternity.