

Ephesians 3

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[0 : 00] I don't know how many of you were here or will remember but in the summer I did two talks! from Ephesians chapter 2 so I thought it only natural to carry on with Ephesians chapter 3 and! these chapters are certainly linked because Paul starts chapter 3 for this reason well that must come from what he's been saying before and what's the last thing he's been saying before it is that Christ has broken down, Jesus has broken down by his death on the cross the dividing wall between Jews and non-Jews, Gentiles. That the people who before like us Gentiles, non-Jews who were far away from God can be brought near and united to be one people by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ Christ and this brings about peace between different people, diverse people. The Jews looked down upon the Gentiles, they called them dogs and the Gentiles didn't think a great lot of the Jews thought they were a very strange people how can they worship to God that no one could see. But this division was going to be dealt with, removed in the Lord Jesus Christ. And of course we face a world today where there is division. You switch on the news you hear about fighting. Syria, disturbances in Nigeria, Egypt, continued fighting in Afghanistan and so the list goes on. But here today in the Lord Jesus Christ we have the good news, the gospel about Jesus the Prince of Peace, the one who can bring peace between peoples. And as we get into chapter 3 here, the chapter headings and the paragraph headings, they're not really part of the text, they've been added by the editors. But this first part, summarising 3.1 to 3.13, it's right that it should be headed the mystery of the gospel revealed. The mystery of the gospel revealed. And you ask what is the mystery? Now it's intriguing but the word mystery doesn't occur that many times in the Bible. I didn't count it up.

There's one famous one you may recall.

Behold, I tell you a mystery. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, when the trumpet sounds, when the dead will be raised. But here, in the first nine verses, mystery four times. First of all, verse 3, the mystery was made known to me by revelation.

Verse 4, you can perceive my insight into the mystery. Verse 6, the mystery is, ah, we're going to get the real answer there. And verse 9, to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God.

Mystery. Mystery. If I say that word to you, you may think, ah, ah, like I do, watching, ah, ITV and it talks about mystery dramas, detective stories, etc. That isn't what Paul is talking about here.

[3 : 47] Mystery, in the Bible sense, in the sense in which Paul uses it, is something previously hidden, now made known. Something previously hidden, something previously hidden, didn't know about it, and now it is revealed, made known.

So, looking through these first verses, that talk about mystery four times, let us find out what is the mystery of the gospel.

And in fact, you'll find it's exactly in line with what Paul's been teaching in chapter 2 and verse 11 going on. Paul's situation is, he's a prisoner in Rome. Paul, a prisoner for Jesus Christ.

Because of his preaching the gospel, he's been imprisoned in Rome. Because he has been preaching to Gentiles, non-Jews. He says, I assume you've heard that God entrusted me, and God was gracious to me, and he's given me, and he's given me, a message of his grace, of his unmerited kindness towards you.

And he has, God has made known to me, this mystery by revelation. In other words, Paul hadn't made it up, it was something that God had shown to him, that God had unveiled, had revealed to him.

[5 : 12] Paul says, when you read this letter, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.

What is revealed about the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we've already known some things about Jesus, about his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension.

What more is there to be made known concerning Christ? What is this mystery? Paul says it's something that wasn't made known to previous generations.

It wasn't known before, but now it's been revealed. It's been revealed to the apostles and prophets, the foundation of the church, by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has taught as apostles, Paul says. And what is this new thing that is revealed concerning Christ?

[6 : 10] Well, it's there in verse 6. The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promises in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Paul is saying this is good news for the whole world. Because the message of the gospel, the good news, is for everyone. Jews and Gentiles, Jews and non-Jews.

In the past, God revealed himself through the Jewish people. Starting with Abraham and the patriarchs and Moses, David and the kings and prophets, etc.

And his message, his agreement, his covenant, his special relationship was with the Jews. Now this new thing that is revealed, Paul says, good news for all, is that the gospel salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ is for everyone, Gentiles included.

Before, only Jews inherited God's promises and hope of salvation. The rest of the people were far off. But now everyone can be an inheritor of salvation, of eternal life, of God's promises.

[7 : 35] This is what has now been revealed, says Paul. He's already been talking about it, as I said before, in chapter 2. But it's interesting, the three things that he says here about the Gentiles.

What their status now is. The good news revealed for them. So first of all, their fellow heirs. That is, they now have a part in God's promises and God's salvation.

To inherit eternal life through trust in God's promises in the Lord Jesus Christ. But also the second thing he says, that the Gentiles are now members of the same body.

It's likening the new people of God, the church, to a body. It's interesting, he finished up in chapter 2. By likening the church to a temple.

In him, that is Christ, you are also being built up into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. There probably was still a temple in Jerusalem when Paul was writing this.

[8 : 54] But he's talking about a new and superior temple. A new dwelling place of God. In his people. In his church. But the second figure of speech that he uses concerning the church.

Is that now Gentile Christians are members of the same body. Now it may surprise you to learn. That this is the first time in literature. That this idea of what we call a corporate body is expressed. This is original thinking.

And it's from the Apostle Paul. And you'll know how elsewhere in his letters he tells this in detail. That Christ is the head.

And we are members. And one member must not look down upon another. Because we're all essential for the functioning of the body. And I think that's what we will call in English a corporate body.

[9 : 55] And this idea of being members together in one body. It's come first of all from Paul. It's now a common thing.

In understanding of different things in our culture. The lawyer will tell you about corporate bodies for example. He's saying he won't tell us about corporate bodies.

But you might be able to ask him afterwards. It's interesting. The concept of a corporate body. Like a company. Is something that we know in the West.

I understand it's totally unknown. In Islam. That there's no such concept of a corporate body. I had a friend who was in a state of Nigeria.

Living under Sharia law. And she explained to me. That I said well. You know. Has anybody's hands been chopped off for theft? When there's so much embezzling.

[10 : 55] Particularly of government money. And she said oh that doesn't count. Because stealing from the government is stealing from a person. I.e.

We would say the government was a corporate body. But there was no sense of that. In their understanding of Sharia. But that's what we are.

As a church. As a people of God. We are a body together. Members in Christ. And of one another.

And so each one is important. Paul elsewhere says. You know. Don't let a finger. Despise a thumb or whatever. No. We are all important together.

We are members in one body. And that is Christ's body. Here on earth. His church. And he says. We are fellow heirs.

[11 : 50] We are members of the same body. And we are partakers of the promise. In Christ Jesus. Through the gospel. All God's promises of salvation.

The ones that started. Even to Adam in the garden of Eden. And were made more clear. To Abraham. All God's promises. Come. In Christ Jesus.

And we hear them. Through the preaching of the gospel. Paul says. He's been made a minister. A servant. Of this gospel. By God's grace.

God's unmerited favor. He was given. A gift. To proclaim. This. Good news. And he says. God's power.

Worked in me. Even though. I'm the least of all the saints. He says. He's undeserving. Because formerly. He was a persecutor. Of the church. But he says.

[12 : 44] This grace. Was given to me. To preach. To the Gentiles. The unsearchable. Riches. Of Christ. And we know. That was his primary calling.

That Peter. And some of the other apostles. Went first to the Jews. But it's Paul. Who goes. To the Gentiles. It's Paul. Who is taking the gospel.

Throughout. The known Roman world. At the time. And what is this good news. Well we've already. Had one description of it. Of being united together.

As one new people. But here. It is to know. The unsearchable. Riches of Christ. Christ. How rich it is. To believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ.

And see the wonder. Of his salvation. We see something of it. We're brought up in a Christian home. Right from our infancy. Or if later on.

[13 : 38] We come to believe in the gospel. We begin to see something. Of how great and precious. The Lord Jesus is. But as we go on. In the Christian life. We should be seeing. More and more.

Of the unsearchable. Riches of Christ. Unsearchable. Doesn't mean you can't look into them. It means you never get to the bottom of them. Because Christ.

He is the fountain. The deep deep well. Of love. As the hymn writer. Tells us. So Paul says. I was to bring to light. For everyone.

What is the plan. Of the mystery. Hidden for ages. In God. Who created all things. This was a mystery. That God had hidden. Throughout the millennia.

Since he had created the world. But now. It's made known. And to what purpose? Verse 10. So that through the church. The manifold wisdom of God.

[14 : 34] Might now be made known. To the rulers. And authorities. In the heavenly places. That's very interesting. He says. God's purpose. Is that the church.

Should show forth. The varied wisdom of God. And make it known. To the spiritual rulers. In the spiritual realm. In other words.

The church. The body of Christ. Is to show forth. God's wisdom. And I believe here. He's saying. God's reconciling power.

How sad it is. That very often. God's wisdom. We may be keen on. Individual life. As a Christian. But somehow. We may. Neglect. The corporate life.

That we should have. As a church. Because it's our corporate life. Together. That should be. Our witness. To the watching world. And to the spiritual realm.

[15 : 31] What did they say. Of the early Christians. In Antioch. See how they love. One another. If an unbeliever. Comes into our church. For any of our meetings. Will they see.

Something different. Something new. Some real love. Through what the Lord Jesus Christ. Has done for us. And what we have found. In him. Paul says.

This was God's purpose. For all time. And it's been realized. In Jesus Christ. Jesus. Our Lord. And he is the one. Who gives us boldness.

And access. With confidence. By faith in him. We have access. To God. You know. Under the old Jewish system. There were various courts. In the temple.

And barriers. To someone. Coming near. To the most holy place. Where God revealed himself. There was an outer court. The Gentiles. An inner court.

[16:25] Where the Jews could go. And then one for the priests. And then the place. Where only. The high priest. Could go. One day in the year. On the day of atonement. But now.

We have free. And full. And confident. Access to God. Because Jesus has died. And he has brought us. To God. The Father. So Paul.

Coming back to earth. In a way. He says. Don't worry about me. Don't worry about my suffering. For you. He says. I am going to pray for you now. And we end.

With this wonderful prayer. From Paul. For the spiritual strength. Of we who are following. The Lord Jesus Christ. He says. He kneels before.

God the Father. And he asks. That according to the riches. Of God's glory. And surely the riches of God's glory.

[17:20] Are infinite. He may grant you. To be strengthened. With power. Through his spirit. In your inner being. So that Christ. May dwell.

In your hearts. Through faith. Please note here. People who say. The Bible never mentions. The Trinity. Yes. It never mentions the word.

But it mentions the Trinity. Lots of times. And here is one of those mentions. Paul bows before. God the Father. And he asks that God.

Would strengthen. The Christians. With power through his spirit. There is the Holy Spirit. So that Christ. God the Son.

May dwell in your hearts. Through faith. Here is Father. Spirit. And Son. Together. Working out. God's great salvation.

[18:14] In us. And. Please note. It says. Christ may dwell in your hearts. Through faith. Well. Where does Christ dwell? He dwells in his human body.

The God man. At the right hand of God. On the throne in heaven. Now. How can he dwell in our hearts. By faith. Well that is because. The Spirit of Christ.

The Holy Spirit. Dwells in each one of us. Who has come to faith. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Turning from our sin. And finding new life. In Jesus.

And. This is going to make a difference. In your life. If God is at work. In you. He says. He prays. That you be rooted. And grounded. In love.

And may you be strengthened. To comprehend. To understand. With all the saints. How great the love of Christ is. The breadth. And length. And height. And depth.

[19:12] And to know the love of Christ. That surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled. With all the fullness of God. I get the impression. You know. Paul is. He's not lost for words.

But he's running out of superlatives. He's running out of things to say. About how great it is. To have God at work in you. By his spirit.

By his spirit. In the salvation. That Jesus has brought. That we should grow. In love.

That we should grow. In knowledge. That we should grow. Into the fullness of God. And so he ends with a doxology. His doxology.

His praise to God. Final hymn of praise and prayer is. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly. Than all we ask or think.

[20:08] That's fantastic. We may comprehend. With the things that we'd like God to do. But he can do more. He is able to do more abundantly.

Than all we ask or think. Because he's God. And he's got infinite power. Infinite love. And infinite grace. Towards us. God is the one who can do more abundantly.

Than all we ask or think. And he'll do it according to the power. That's at work within us. What's that power at work within us? It's God's own spirit. It's the Holy Spirit.

At work within us. To him be glory. In the church. And in Christ Jesus. Throughout all generations. Forever and ever. Amen.

I think this chapter has just gone up. To a pyramid summit. Of praise. And wonder. At the glory of who God is.

[21:06] And what he can. And will do. In and through us. So let us end now. With a prayer to the Lord. Thank you.