



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: Ephesians 3:2-13*

1. Paul's Commission, his Ministry (Eph. 3:2, 7-9)
  - a. "The administration [stewardship] of God's grace" given to Paul for the believers (Eph. 3:2)
  - b. "I was made a servant [minister] of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me..." (Eph. 3:7)
  - c. "In Eph. 3:2 the word *stewardship* refers to the grace associated with Paul's apostleship: 'the stewardship (stewardship) of God's grace given to me' (Eph. 3:7-8). This grace involves the proclamation of the gospel message to the Gentiles...In this context the referent for *stewardship* in Eph. 3:2 is not the present dispensation [age/era] of 'grace.' It is more likely a reference to...Paul's apostolic office ('the stewardship [stewardship] of God's grace given to me')...In Eph. 3:2...the word *stewardship* refers to the special appointment & trust of Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles." [John A. Bertone, "Seven Dispensations...", in Peter Althouse (ed.) *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies*, p. 67]
  - d. "Paul tells his readers that God has given to him 'the administration [stewardship] of the grace of God' (Eph. 3:2). The cosmic significance of such a stewardship can hardly be overstated. God has chosen Paul to be the agent of his salvation in the world...It is by means of the proclamation of the gospel by Paul that God calls the church into being, bringing people from darkness to light, freeing them from bondage to sin, & demonstrating thereby his triumph over the powers ruling the present evil age...That this commission was given to Paul 'according to the exercise of [God's] power' (Eph. 3:7b) is an especially significant claim, since the exertion of God's power appears at key points in Ephesians. By the working of his power, God raised Christ from the dead & seated him at his right hand in heaven (1:19-23)...Also by the working of the power of God that the church grows in the knowledge of the love of Christ (3:16-19, 20), & engages in conflict with the powers & authorities (6:10). The commission of Paul to his ministry by the exertion of the power of God has a similar cosmic significance." [T. Gombis, "Eph. 3:2-13: POINTLESS DIGRESSION...?" *WTJ*, Vol. 66, pp. 316-317]
  - e. Given by God's grace (Eph. 3:2, 7)
  - f. To the least of all saints (Eph. 3:7)
  - g. To make known the mystery given to him by revelation (Eph. 3:3, 9)
  - h. Paul's stewardship in God's enterprise (Eph. 3:2, 7)
    - a. "given to me for you" (Eph. 3:2b)

- b. A steward, minister (Eph. 3:2, 7a)
- c. Paul had his part—"to proclaim to the Gentiles"—the whole thing wasn't given to Paul (Eph. 3:8)

## 2. The Mystery Revealed – secret no longer a secret (Eph. 3:3-6, 9)

### a. Many mysteries within an overall mystery—here's a mystery (Eph. 3:3-6) within the big mystery (Eph. 3:9)

- a. A mystery (Gk. *mysterion*) in the biblical sense, is not a curious or imponderable thing, difficult or impossible to explain. Rather, a (biblical) mystery, is something previously unknown & previously unrevealed. Once it is revealed it may be perfectly easy to understand. [Holman NT Commentary]
- b. "In Ephesians 3...Paul's apostleship...figures centrally...The mystery of God's plan (*oikonomia* Eph. 1:9-10) is now Paul's stewardship (*oikonomia*)...given...to Paul by revelation...into the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:2-3). The mystery... is specifically that 'the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, & partners in the promise in Christ...through the gospel' (Eph. 3:6). The mystery of God's will (Eph. 1:9-10)...is the uniting of 'all things' in Christ...The mystery [of Christ] revealed in Ephesians 3...is a more narrow expression of the mystery of God's will in Ephesians 1. It must be that the reconciliation of Jew & Gentile within [Christ's] one Body...is a [preliminary] realization of the mystery of [God's] will (Eph. 1:9), a concrete expression in the present of what God intends [for] the future." [J. Holloway, *Poetics of Grace*, p. 219]

### a. Now revealed, it's written, you can understand (Eph. 3:4)—'go check it out, read for yourself' – Eph. 1 & 2

- a. "When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ..." (Eph. 3:4)
- b. "This is a hidden [implicit] exhortation to read the letter aloud in the congregation & reflect on it carefully." [Ben Witherington, *Ephesians*, p. 265]
- c. "The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, & partners in the promise...through the gospel." (Eph. 3:6)

### b. Gentiles are (Eph. 3:6):

- a. Heirs together with the Jews – inheritance (eternal life, kingdom, new heaven & earth, NJ)
- b. Members together of the same body – today, present relationship with each other
- c. Sharers together of the same promise – the Spirit

- a. "Paul's use of [Gk.] sun- compounds implies more than...'partakers with Christ' ...it is demonstrating the union between and among believers thereby pointing to the notion of community...[In Eph 3:6 Paul] calls the Gentiles 'fellow-heirs,' 'fellow-members,' & 'fellow-partakers.' The 3 adjectives are plural:
  - a. 'Fellow-heirs'...We are heirs together with those who have received the promise. We are all getting a share...
  - b. 'Co-members, fellow-members' 'belonging to the same body.' We participate with Christ & we participate with other members of His body...
  - c. 'Fellow-Participants or fellow-partakers of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is surely a community organism...Believers have a particular identity in belonging to Jesus Christ. This identity changes everything. This change begins with membership they have with other believers. The Church universal is a living organism one to which individuals belong &...some level of responsibility is expected.
- b. The [co- prefixes] are part of Paul's [means] to explain the participation of believers both with Christ & with one another" [Melton B. Winstead, "Participatory' Language in Eph.," in *NT Philology*, pp. 229, 241-2, 5]

### d. Not that they are accepted but how they are accepted (on what basis)

- a. "Although the OT declared God's intention to bless Gentiles (Gen. 12:3), the manner and extent to which God would accomplish his saving purposes by incorporating both Jews & Gentiles on equal footing into one body in Christ was not made known until the NT era." [Zondervan NIV Study Bible]
- b. An exposition of "'the mystery' is found in Eph.3:1-11...The 'administration' [*oikonomia*] of 'the mystery' given to [Paul]—about the nations...now being 'of one Body-together...through the gospel' (Eph. 3:2, 6, 9). [This] refers back to...God... uniting all things 'on earth' in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10). The Creator who made 'every human nation' [*ethnos*] from one 'blood'...spreading them...into separate territories (Acts 17:26; Dt.32:8), is now bringing them...back together as one Body according to God's eternal purpose (Eph.3:6, 11)...As a multi-ethnic gathering of 'fellow-citizens' (Eph.2:11, 19), the Church is intended to...make known the 'many & varied' wisdom of God to the powers that now govern separate human groupings (Eph. 3:10-11)." [J. Mellis, H. Schreck, "Church & Multiculturalism," *Glocal Conversations*, Vol. 3(1) (Dec. 2015) p. 35]
- c. "The secret's revelation [Eph. 3:5-6] spells the doom of all the plans of the powers of darkness to divide the cosmos on the basis of racial & ethnic preferences. The overcoming of the barrier between Jews & Gentiles [signifies] the overcoming of all such human & cosmic barriers in the universe. Christ will reconcile & pacify [subjugate] all. The existence of the church heralds the victory of Christ over the cosmic powers." [Ben Witherington, *Philemon, Colossians, & Ephesians*, p. 267]

### c. Gentiles & Jews having equality (Eph. 3:6)

- a. In status within God's mission—joint (equal) heirs, joint (equal) -members, joint (equal) -partakers
- b. In the promises given
  - a. "The revelation of the [mystery]...is the inclusion of the Gentiles as equal heirs, equal members of the same body, & equal partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ (Eph 3:6). The mystery is more than: [just] about the church itself, or that the Gentiles would be part of that church...The revelation is specifically that 'through the gospel' the Gentiles are included in an equal status & position, into the same relationship to God as the Jews." [Timothy van Aarde, "O??ovo?i?...in Ephesians," *Verbum et Ecclesia* Vol. 37 #1, p. ]

### d. Different yet equal

- a. "The [mission of God] in Christ & Spirit have overcome the enmity between Jew & Gentile, not by erasing their differences, but by enabling Gentiles to become 'coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel' (Eph. 3:6). Yet, the formation of a new people of God, consisting of those despised by each other before, would not come easily. Paul thus pleads & implores—Eph. 4:1-6. What the Spirit does in achieving this new people of God is not automat[ic]. Rather, the [Spirit's mission] involves the empowerment of difficult life together." [Amos Yong, *Mission after Pentecost*, p. ]
- b. "God...designed the church – & this is the heart of Paul's mission – to be a fellowship of difference & different. It is a mixture of people from...across the map & spectrum: men & women, rich & poor. It's [in the US context] a mix of races & ethnicities: Caucasians,

African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Latin-Americans, Asian- &, Indian-American – I could go on but you see the point.” [Scot McKnight, Fellowship of Differents, p. 16]

c. The Church is the Message, the Means, to Display God's Wisdom (Eph. 3:10)

a. Making known the multi-faceted wisdom of God

- a. “Given God's incredible work of reconciling two hostile groups [Jews & Gentiles] into one organic body, the church is the perfect means to display God's wisdom. Insofar as the church exists as a spiritually united multi-ethnic community, it accomplishes this task.” [Zondervan NIV Study Bible]
- b. “In securing peace through His death, Christ demolished all racial & ethnic barriers in the church. The church should be the world's most racially-integrated community.” [Apologetics Study Bible]
  - a. There should be different kinds of people in the church to show the multi-faceted God
    - a. “Transcending differences in Christ does not mean eradicating differences. Eradicating differences is what happens when we're tempted toward uniformity...Getting a new mind & living in the Spirit mean we transcend our differences while remaining different as we live with one another. Our difference is not eliminated, for difference is the vitality of our fellowship.” [Scot McKnight, Fellowship of Different, p. 95]
  - b. The church as a whole testifies something that one person or a ministry can't testify.
  - c. Paul's ministry produced the church by preaching Christ's unsearchable riches & unveiling the mystery.
  - d. Paul would never accept being a 'celebrity preacher'

b. Through the Church—the Church itself is the 'Message'—to the cosmic dark powers

- a. “So that God's...wisdom may...be made known through the church to...heavenly rulers & authorities” (Eph. 3:10)
- b. “Paul sees the church itself as the powerful sign...to the watching principalities & powers...”—N. T. Wright
- c. Eph. 3:10 “is one of the NT's most powerful statements of the reason for the church's existence: the rulers and authorities must be confronted with God's wisdom, in all its rich variety, & this is to happen through the church! Not...through what the church says, [but] rather, through what the church is—the community in which men & women & children of every race, color, social & cultural background come together in glad worship of the one true God.” [Tom Wright, Paul for Everyone: Prison Letters, p. ]
- d. God's wisdom is exhibited not simply through the proclamation of the gospel by the church, but through the reality of the church herself...The...Church...[is] the medium [means] de facto for the divine wisdom to become known. The church is...the mirror, [it's] God's display, picture window.” [Richard L. Saucy, in Craig Blaising, Dispensationalism...& the Church, pp. 152-153]
- e. “Paul sees the church itself as the powerful sign...to the watching principalities & powers that a new way of being human has been launched....and that there is a new Lord...” [N. T. Wright, “Paul & Missional Hermeneutics,” in S. McKnight (ed.) Apostle Paul & the Christian Life, p. ]
- f. “In Eph. 3 we have a statement of...[the] missional understanding of the church. The coming together of Jew & Gentile in Messiah means that 'God's wisdom...[is] made known to the [heavenly] rulers & authorities—through the church!' (Eph. 3:10).” [N. T. Wright, “...Hermeneutics,” in S. McKnight (ed.) ...Paul & the Christian Life, p. ]

c. To the rulers & authorities in the heavenly realms (Eph. 3:10)

- a. “The mystery has not been revealed to the cosmic powers...[They] are spectators as the wisdom of...God's cosmic drama is now being acted out [by] the church (Eph. 3:9-10).” [L. Ryken (ed.) Dict. of Biblical Imagery, p. 241]
- b. “Paul's extraordinary thought: The mere existence of the church demonstrates that Christ [is] victorious & is enthroned. The mere existence of a Gentile believer as a full member of God's people displays God's wisdom & the malevolent beings who...defy God...see the evidence...every time they see the church.” [Christopher Green, The Message of the Church, p. 27]
- c. “The Church reveals God's secret in action...The [church's] presence...[as] a community defined not by ethnicity, race or socioeconomic status, whose unity in Christ overcomes ancient hatreds...makes known to the rulers & authorities—the powers—God's wisdom, God's mystery...It is through the presence...of this witness to...gospel [reconciliation] that God's triumph over the powers is...evident.” [J. Holloway, Poetics of Grace, pp. 219-220]