

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

An Object Lesson

Ephesians 3:7-13

Intro: Paul has spilled quite a bit of ink in **ch2** discussing and explaining in detail the blessings Gentiles believers receive by being “in Christ” not the least of which is the new-found unity they have with all other believers including Jewish believers. As **ch3** begins, it seems as if Paul’s intention is to move on to another point but is quickly pulled back into another lengthy discussion concerning Jewish and Gentile unity in the church. The reason for this is not because Paul enjoys beating a dead horse; he has some further insight into the ramification of this new unity. In our last study, we saw that this unity was, in fact, a mystery. It was a concept that was previously unknown in the OT but had been divinely revealed to Paul and others in the NT era. But, while others had been made to understand this new dispensation of the grace of God, Paul was used specifically by God to declare how this unity would operate in the Body of Christ.

This is not all Paul has to say about the matter either for we still have 7 more verses of this discussion! You may wonder what more could be said about this subject but let me assure you, we haven’t even gotten to the most exciting part. Paul’s been very clear in explaining the physical and emotional blessings that occur from this wonderful unity of believers from different backgrounds, social classes and nationalities but he is about to peel back the curtain and give us a glimpse into the spiritual world as he reveals God’s own purposes for the mystery of this unity. But before we can dig into that subject, we must pause and look at a couple more titles that Paul refers to himself with.

7-8 – Here we see Paul refers to himself as a minister. With the advent of Christianity, especially in modern times, this title has taken on a sort of aura about it. People, especially church people, have used it as a title of exaltation, equating it with the title of Reverend. This is a title that some have aspired to for less than spiritual reasons. Some denominations see this title as little more than a job description, a position to be held by someone trained in theology and positive people skills. Others just get it in their head that this is something they would like to do, or rather, something their parents would like them to do. Instead of being Spirit-called and God-

sent, they're momma-called and poppa-sent. To be a minister, as Paul describes it here, involves so much more than desire or aspiration.

For starters, this title of minister as Paul uses it here is a title of service, not exaltation. In classical Greek literature, the minister (diakonos) was *a table waiter who is constantly at the bidding of his customers*. This is much closer to the job description of a minister of the gospel: you're always on call, not to be served but to be ready to serve your Master and your flock. Like the old joke where the young preacher is asked how he likes the ministry. His reply was, "I love the ministry; it's the people I can't stand!" Clearly he's missing something because the people **are** the ministry! Could it be that he entered the position with less than stellar intentions?

Don't get me wrong, entrances into the ministry come in many various ways. Peter and Andrew were called off the boat; Matthew was called while on the job; Paul was knocked off a donkey. I heard Pancho Juarez say that when he was a young Christian, he began leading a Bible Study for people in his neighborhood. When the group began to grow beyond his perceived expectations, he went to the leaders of Calvary Costa Mesa and told them they needed to send a pastor to take over the Bible Study and maybe plant a church. In his own words, they lovingly told him, "You're the pastor, fool!" What a way to enter the ministry! But, as different as all these callings were, what they all had in common, the one thing that was of the utmost importance was that each one was called by God!

That's exactly the point Paul makes in **v7-8**, many times over. He said he became a minister but the Greek word literally means to cause to be or, in other words, "I was made a minister." Paul understood that God had put him into this service. His calling was a gift (of grace) that he was given (by God-the source of the gift) and this grace is accomplished by the working of God's power. Paul was divinely called and divinely equipped to be a minister and the success of his ministry is attributed solely to the effective working of God's power in his life. Paul was under no delusion as to how and why he was in the ministry and this truth clearly humbled him.

Paul goes on to call himself a saint in **v8**. As we learned in our very first study in **Eph 1:1**, to be a saint is simply to be set apart by God for His special purposes. But Paul didn't see himself as just any saint, he considered himself to be less than the least of all the saints – the

lessermost! This isn't just Paul poor-mouthing himself, he was truly humbled by God's grace that granted him forgiveness of his sins, not the least of which was his tenacious persecution of the church and God's people before he was converted. Although he labels himself a saint, he views himself as the lowest of all the saints. In **1 Cor 15:9** he calls himself the least of the apostles and in **1 Tim 1:15** he declares himself to be the foremost of all sinners, or the chief of sinners. While Paul was clearly thankful for his ministry, his success in it greatly humbled him. An overabundance of grace is a sure cure for pride

Yet, though humbled by God's grace, Paul still marveled at the grace given to him, by which he was called to preach the gospel for it was this very preaching by Paul and others that made the mystery of Jew and Gentile unity a reality! The Greek word rendered "preach" literally means to announce the good news. He was simply announcing what God had accomplished in Jesus and yet, this mystery is like great riches for the Gentiles. They can now come before God in a standing that they could only dream of before. Paul recognizes that the riches of Christ are unsearchable. Do you see his dilemma? Paul has been called to search out the unsearchable; to explain the unknowable! How could he ever do this, let alone be successful at it without the grace and power of God working in his life and ministry? Paul saw himself as a servant of the King who was given a commission to announce the good news of a Jewish Messiah Who has provided a way of reconciliation to God and with God's people. But these aren't the only titles Paul claims.

9 – Having been entrusted with such unsearchable riches, Paul's passion was to make the gospel known to all people. He wants everyone to see and share in the fellowship of this mystery. This phrase may seem a little odd to us as the word fellowship generally conjures up images of pot-luck meals and dinner on the grounds at church but that's not what Paul is talking about here. In the Greek, the word translated fellowship also means stewardship. In fact, it's the same Greek word that's translated dispensation in **v2**. There, it refers to the implemented strategy of God's plan within the church. Here, it refers to the stewardship of that plan: the serving, maintaining and propagating of that plan to a lost and dying world. Paul sees himself as a steward of God's great mystery – do we do the same?

10-11 – Now we have come to it – the spiritual and eternal ramifications of

the mystery of Jewish and Gentile unity.

God is a being of infinite wisdom and glory and He wants His creatures to know His great and manifold wisdom. One purpose in his great plan of the ages is to reveal this wisdom. Knowing the character of God, we can say that this revelation is not for a selfish or self-glorying motive in the same way a proud person likes to show off their intellect or accomplishments. God does this for the glory of His creatures because the glory of the creature is directly connected to the glory of the Creator.

God's wisdom is also manifold. The ancient Greek word carries the idea intricacy, complexity and great beauty as in a variegated or multi-colored plant. All of these adjectives accurately describe the working of God's wisdom both in the history of the church and in the history of the world. You could go so far as to say that this is the central purpose for all of human history. Paul also says this wisdom must be made known. The words might be made known are emphatic in the original language and are presented in stark contrast to the idea of hidden in [v9](#). What was hidden in the OT must be made known to the world today!

In [v10](#), we learn exactly how God will reveal His wisdom and to whom He reveals it. Oddly enough, Paul doesn't say that God will reveal His wisdom to the church but that He will reveal His wisdom by His work in the church and He will reveal it to the angelic beings. Of course, God desires to reveal this wisdom to the church; we have it right here! But in the bigger picture of His eternal purposes, God doesn't use the angels to reveal His wisdom to the saints but He does use the saints to reveal His wisdom to the angelic beings, both faithful and fallen angels. This should remind us that we are called for something far greater than just our own individual salvation and sanctification. We're also called to be the means by which God teaches the universe a beautiful lesson, an object lesson as it were.

We are surrounded by invisible spiritual beings and the Bible tells us that they look intently upon us. Paul draws back the invisible curtain that hides these beings, just as Elisha prayed at Dothan, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see" in [II Kings 6:17](#). These angelic beings see us perfectly and know us much better than we know them. These angelic beings are not only interested in the lives of Christians, they are instructed by them as well. As one scholar put it, "The history of the Christian church becomes a graduate school for the angels."

This is why the conduct of the church is so important: because angelic and demonic beings are looking on and God's intention is to teach them through us. Several passages refer to this: in [1 Cor 11:10](#), Paul gives instruction on conduct within the church because of the angels. In [1 Peter 1:12](#), Peter states that the gospel contains things which angels desire to look into. In [1 Tim 5:21](#), Paul delivered a charge of Christian conduct to Timothy before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels. We should take this responsibility seriously because the angels are given the task of carrying souls to heaven at death ([Lk 16:22](#)) and will be the reapers of the final harvest ([Mt 13:39-43](#)).

So, God is educating the angels by means of the church but what exactly do the angels learn from the church? What is the manifold wisdom these heavenly authorities are to see? What is the particular purpose of God made known in the worldwide community of God's people? The passage suggests a couple of things.

1. The bringing together of otherwise divided individuals in Christ. This is the main thing Paul's thinking about. He's writing to Gentiles, who before were cut off from Israel's spiritual blessings and despised by the covenant people, and he's telling them that the period of alienation is now over and that the dividing wall of hostility has been broken down. Gentiles are now one with Jews within the fellowship of Christ's church. But there's more to this unity of people. Paul's reference to God as the Creator of all things ([9](#)) draws our gaze back to the pristine days of earth's history in which the originally perfect world was marred by man's sin.

Before the Fall, the harmony between Adam and Eve was illustrative to the harmony within the Godhead. It was a unity of mind, purpose, goals, and will. After sin entered, that unity was broken. Adam and Eve hid in an attempt to escape God's presence. It was an illustration of their rupture with God. Immediately after this, when God called them out to answer for their conduct, they began to excuse themselves and blame others, revealing a similar alienation on the human level. In his response to God's query, Adam blamed both Eve and God, and in doing so he displayed that wretched self-righteousness which is a persistent and devastating fact of human history.

In the church God is bringing these otherwise alienated and mutually

accusing entities together on a basis that excludes any real cause for alienation. The church is a community of sinners redeemed by Christ and forgiven by God. If salvation were of works, the alienation would not have been removed. A person could still feel superior to others and boasting of moral or spiritual worth would tear the church apart. But, salvation isn't achieved by works. God has achieved it and made it available to us by grace alone. By this, boasting is excluded, and men and women of all races and nations meet as forgiven sinners within the church's fellowship. This is something the angels might well look upon and marvel at.

2. Proof of the principle that suffering for truth and righteousness is the way to glory and the secret of true happiness. The way of Jesus is the way of suffering (Jn 15:19-20). Is the purpose of the church revealed in some "promise" of Jesus to make you blissfully happy and solve all your problems, to make you materially prosperous, successful, esteemed, and healthy? Hardly! Here in a nutshell is an accurate assessment of the purpose of the church, as demonstrated in the lives of those who have been saved from sin by Jesus.

When Satan rebelled against God and carried a host of fallen angels (demons) with him into eternal ruin, God could have crushed the rebellion and annihilated Satan and his hosts forever. That would've been just and reasonable. It might even have been merciful; for if God had gone on to create Adam and Eve, as He had no doubt determined to do beforehand, Satan wouldn't have been there to tempt them, the pair wouldn't have fallen and sin and death would not have passed upon the race. This would certainly have shown God's power and even His mercy but it wouldn't have shown His manifold wisdom. It wouldn't have shown that God's way, the way of truth and righteousness, is the only really good way and the only sure path to happiness.

So instead of annihilating Satan, God took an entirely different path: "I've already determined to create the race of man and I know in advance that Satan will seduce him from My righteousness and plunge him into misery. Satan will think he's won. But while Satan is turning the human race against Me and setting individual human beings against each another and even against themselves, I will begin to create a new people who will glory in doing what's right, even when it's not popular, and who will delight in pleasing Me, even when they suffer for it.

Satan will say, 'Your people serve you only because you protect them, only because you provide for them materially.' But here and there in a great variety of ways I will allow them to be greatly abused and persecuted, and I will show by their reactions that not only will they continue to praise Me in their suffering, and thus bring glory to My name, but that they will even be happier in their sufferings than Satan's people will be with their maximum share of fame and fortune." The faithful angels watch the outworking of God's plan of salvation and they praise Him for His wisdom!

But there's another facet of this truth that should be pointed out. What do fallen angels learn from God's mystery? They learn that their leader, Satan, doesn't have any wisdom! Satan knows the Bible and he understood from the OT Scriptures that the Savior would come, when He would come, how He would come and where He would come. He even understood why He would come, as far as redemption is concerned. But no where in the OT would Satan find any prophecies concerning the church, the mystery of Jews and Gentiles united in the Church. Satan couldn't see these 2 vastly alienated groups united in one body, seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and completely victorious over him! Had he known the far reaching results of the cross, Satan would have altered his plans accordingly.

Paul says in **v11** that all of this was done according to the eternal purpose which God accomplished in Jesus. The mystery of the unified body is according to that purpose. And, although the church may very well be the focal point of all human history, it's still merely a preview of what Jesus will ultimately do in the fulfillment of summing all things up in Himself (**1:10**). It appears that the church is simply God's pilot scheme for reconciling the entire universe in the future, to be administered in the fullness of times when all things in heaven and on earth are finally brought together in Christ.

12-13 – then, in speaking of Jesus Christ, Paul reiterates that the fact of this unity is shown by the truth that we (both Jews and Gentiles) have the identical boldness, access and confidence before God – because it has nothing to do with nationality, ethnicity, gender or social/ financial status. It is only possessed by having faith in Him! The Greek word translated boldness carries the idea of freedom of speech. We have both the access and the freedom to come before God and express ourselves without fear or shame. We have the freedom to say anything and everything – to speak it all. And

we have this freedom in the blessed privilege of prayer.

We also have the blessing of confidence. Understanding God program in this day doesn't just bring confidence in prayer, it gives us courage in the difficult circumstances of life. Paul's sufferings for the Gentiles would mean glory for the Gentiles. In the OT economy, when God's people obeyed, He blessed them materially, nationally and physically. When they disobeyed, He withdrew the blessings. That's not the way He deals with the church today. Our blessings are spiritual, not material, and they have all been given to us completely in Christ. We appropriate them by faith but if we disobey God, He doesn't revoke them. We simply lose the enjoyment and enrichment of them.

Paul was a dedicated, Spirit-filled minister and yet he was suffering as a prisoner. Paul's example make is clear that physical, material blessings are not always the experience of the dedicated Christian. In fact, Paul is living out the very object lesson he's telling us the church is meant to teach. God had made Paul a steward of this God-revealing mystery. The amazing reality for us today is that God has made **all believers** to be faithful stewards of this great truth! This great mystery which was so important to Paul, to the Gentiles and even to the angels is now in our hands. Do we have butter fingers? Pater says angels desire to look into the things of the gospel, do we?

God is letting history unfold like a great drama upon a cosmic stage. The angels are the audience. We are the actors. Satan is there to do everything he can to resist and thwart God's purposes and the angels are straining forward to look on. Are they seeing the "manifold wisdom" of God in you as you go through your part and speak your lines? They must see it, for it can be seen in you alone. It is there—where you work and play and think and speak—that the eternal purpose of God is found. ☺