

EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

Message #10

Ephesians 3:1-13

On November 29, 1825, in Pennsylvania, George N.H. Peters was born. He grew up, went to a Lutheran college and became a Lutheran minister. In fact, he pastored several Lutheran churches in Ohio. He is best known for his massive three volume work on prophecy, *The Theocratic Kingdom*. George Peters saw in the Scriptures a major distinction between Israel and the Church and he came to understand the grace dispensation and premillennialism. As a result, many religious leaders attacked him and there were times he hid simply because he understood the dispensation of the grace of God. History repeated itself when George Peters came to understand grace because it did the same thing with the Apostle Paul.

In the first two chapters of Ephesians, Paul has unraveled the riches of God's grace as it relates to individuals. We were dead in sin and God's program was in no way even connected to us. God in His amazing grace saved us and made us alive and brought us into a relationship with Him. You would think everyone would be thrilled with this message, but they weren't.

As we come to chapter 3, Paul continues to unravel the riches of God's grace as it relates to the whole dispensation of the Grace Age and Church Age. **Paul now switches from the individual to the Church, which is the corporate body of Jesus Christ.**

You and I are living in the Age of Grace, or the Church Age. The link we have to God is an amazing package of wealth. This age was a mystery in times past, but now God has revealed it. The more we grasp this point, the richer we are.

PAUL WANTS GRACE AGE BELIEVERS TO REALIZE THAT HE SUFFERED GREATLY IN ORDER TO PREACH THE MYSTERY OF THE GRACE GOSPEL AND THE GRACE AGE DISPENSATION OF THE CHURCH.

Paul wanted believers to realize just how rich they were and one of the keys to this is for us to realize just how blessed we are to live in this Church Age of grace.

From a grammatical perspective, **Ephesians 3:2-13** is one long section. It is comprised of 189 words. The main idea is found in **verse 13**. Paul did not want the believers in Ephesus to lose heart because the great Grace Age teacher was in trouble. He wanted Gentiles to understand the grace of God and it was the grace of God that got Paul in trouble. This section is a very personal and very practical section:

Now we will notice from **verse 1** that Paul was literally in jail because he was taking the grace Gospel to the Gentile world. The Jews hated the fact that he was preaching grace to Gentiles and in Acts 21-22 they mobbed him and arrested him. He was a prisoner of Christ Jesus which means Jesus Christ was the reason He was in jail. He was preaching that anyone could be saved from their sins by faith in Jesus Christ. **His outreach to non-Jews got him into serious trouble.**

He was specifically teaching that any who believed on Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, were reconciled in their relationship with God and they formed a new body, the Church. Jews hated Paul's message of grace and as a result Paul found himself the target of vicious attack.

There are four other times when Paul refers to himself as being a prisoner (Philemon 1, 9; Eph. 4:1; II Tim. 1:8).

There are six personal facts brought out by Paul:

PERSONAL FACT #1 – This grace Gospel for the Church Age was a stewardship given to Paul. **3:2**

Now the Greek grammar is very emphatic here. It was Paul who was the apostle that was singled out by God to unlock the doctrine of the grace of God. The idea behind the word "stewardship" is the idea of managing someone else's business. The new Grace Age had actually started in Acts 2 with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. However, it would not be until God singled out Paul until this doctrine would fully be unraveled. God gave Paul the management responsibility to head up the Grace Age.

The word "stewardship" promotes the idea of dispensationalism because this word means that Paul was the manager appointed by God to develop grace. God's program is like a big house with many rooms or dispensations. Paul was put in charge of the grace dispensation. Almost everyone had heard of the fact that Paul was traveling around preaching grace. In fact, these very Ephesians knew of the grace of God and knew that it was Paul who taught the grace of God.

Paul had not been in Ephesus for 5-6 years so he reminds them of what they heard from him when he was there. He communicated God's grace to them and he says you know that was my job.

PERSONAL FACT #2 – This grace Gospel was a mystery given to Paul by direct revelation from God. **3:3a**

A mystery in the Bible is something that is only known to God and not known to us until God decides to reveal it. There are at least twenty-one mysteries in the New Testament:

- 1) Mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven. Mt. 13:11
- 2) Mystery of the Kingdom of God. Lk. 8:10
- 3) Mystery of Israel's hardened heart. Rom. 11:25
- 4) Mystery of the salvation Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rom. 16:25-26
- 5) Mystery of the N.T. Scriptures. I Cor. 4:1
- 6) Mystery of the Rapture of the Church. I Cor. 15:51
- 7) Mystery of God's will. Eph. 1:9
- 8) Mystery of Dispensation of Grace. Eph. 3:2-3
- 9) Mystery of Christ. Eph. 3:4
- 10) Mystery of the Church. Eph. 3:9
- 11) Mystery of Christ and the Church. Eph. 5:32
- 12) Mystery of Christ in us; the hope of glory. Col. 1:26

- 13) Mystery of Christ in us. Col.1:27
- 14) Mystery of Christ. Col. 2:2
- 15) Mystery of Christ. Col. 4:3
- 16) Mystery of lawlessness at work. II Thess. 2:7
- 17) Mystery of deep truths of the faith. I Tim. 3:9
- 18) Mystery of godliness. I Tim. 3:16
- 19) Mystery of 7 stars (angels). Rev. 1:20
- 20) Mystery of final details of Tribulation. Rev. 10:7
- 21) Mystery of Babylon the great. Rev. 17:5

There were two major theological revelations given by God to Paul in the course of his life. **First**, there was the revelation of grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone apart from any human merit (Gal. 1:11, 12). Paul was given the privilege of developing the grace doctrinal truths that were connected to Jesus Christ. **Second**, there was this dispensational distinctive concerning the Grace Age in that both Jew and Gentile would form one body known as the Church.

The dispensation of grace is a revelatory doctrine that Paul received by direct revelation from God. Prior to this, grace was somewhat revealed, but a time period in which grace, not Law-ruled was not. Paul was the one chosen by God to receive this direct revelation.

PERSONAL FACT #3 – This grace Gospel was written down by Paul. **3:3b-4**

This verb “I wrote” is only used four times in the N.T. (Rom. 15:4; Gal. 3:1; Eph. 3:3; Jude 4). **Now the purpose of the written Scriptures is stated in verse 4, to give understanding.** That is why God put His Word in written form. So people could understand truth about Him and His grace. The specific emphasis here is on the fact that God has revealed His mystery grace Gospel and dispensation in written form. God expects that we will pore through the written Scriptures so we may grasp His grace.

PERSONAL FACT #4 – This grace Gospel was not known before like it is now at this time. **3:5**

This is a very critical point. Grace was in the Old Testament, but not the Grace Age and the Church. Dispensationalism and the Dispensation of Grace, or the Church was not known until God revealed it to Paul. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said “That the Church is a new purpose of God could not be more clearly stated than it is in verse 3 to 9, yet certain schools of theology contend that the Church in her present form is but a continuation of God’s one purpose from the beginning of the human family” (*Ephesians*, p. 88).

But now not only did Paul understand Grace Age/Church Age truth but so did the other apostles and prophets. Paul was not the only one to realize we are in a new dispensation called the Grace Age.

Now I want you to notice that the gift of an apostle and the gift of being a prophet was a gift by the Holy Spirit. Both of these gifts were foundational to the church and both gifts were gifts in which the Holy Spirit permitted these men to understand truth and communicate truth.

PERSONAL FACT #5 – This grace Gospel mystery reveals that Gentiles (non-Jews) are now fellow heirs, fellow members and fellow partakers of the eternal program of God. **3:6**

Until the Grace Age, the entire program of God favored the Jew and not the Gentile. Starting in Genesis 12 the whole scope of the program of God is connected to Israel. But now, God's program moves out from Jews to Gentiles. This was revolutionary.

The mystery that Gentiles would be saved was not new because God told Abram that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed. The mystery was that Gentiles and Jews would be elevated in the Grace Age to form one body, the Church.

PERSONAL FACT #6 – This grace Gospel is that which God specifically assigned to Paul. **3:7-9**

There are two major grace areas spelled out here:

Grace Area #1 - The grace of God given to Paul. **3:7-8**

Four grace realities are revealed here:

(Reality #1) - God made Paul a minister. **3:7a**

The word “minister” is diakonos (διακονος) from which we get our English word deacon. The emphasis is that he was made a minister whose job it was to serve the doctrine of grace to the world. Here is really the whole point of grace- God makes us what we don't deserve to be.

(Reality #2) - God gave a gift to Paul. **3:7b**

The word “gift” actually refers to something given without cause and without payment. We could literally understand “gift” as meaning “grace for nothing.” Again, Paul did not look for this gift of an apostle; God gave him this gift.

(Reality #3) - God gave power to Paul. **3:7c**

Two different words are used here, “working” and “power,” which mean God was the one who gave Paul the dynamic energy and the strength and might to carry out his ministry.

(Reality #4) - Paul did not consider himself worthy of having this grace ministry. **3:8a**

Paul considered himself to be the least of all the candidates for ministry. This is what grace does.

It works in the lowliest of people who don't deserve to even be saved and it entrusts them with sacred things. Notice how Paul connects this to grace. Giving something to someone who does not deserve it or merit it is exactly what grace is.

Grace Area #2 - The grace responsibilities of Paul. **3:8b-10**

(Reality #1) - Paul was given the grace Gospel. **3:8b**

The unraveling of the unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor of God that is a free gift found in Jesus Christ was the Gospel given by God to Paul.

(Reality #2) - Paul was responsible to preach grace. **3:8c-10**

Do not miss this point. Paul's responsibility was to preach the grace Gospel to the entire Gentile world. The word "preach" is one that means to announce and proclaim the good news of the grace of God (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 184).

Paul says my job is to preach grace. It is not to preach politics, social reform, or to conduct marriage seminars or financial investment seminars or to preach psychology. My job is to preach grace. He qualifies his responsibilities of the grace he is to preach:

Responsibility #1 - Paul was responsible to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ. **3:8c**

The doctrine of the grace of God is very, very deep. The depths of the theology of grace are unsearchable. Think about the fact that justification means you are judicially declared righteous from all of your sin and given a righteousness that means you are fully accepted by God. Think about the riches of God's love for you as His child, in that nothing can ever separate you from His love. Think about the fact that the providence of God for His people is so profound that all things work for good. Paul says my job was to proclaim these deep rich doctrines.

We make a fatal mistake when we think this world can give us riches. Let us suppose that you accumulate a sum of money that the world would say is impressive. At best you will have it a while and leave it all here. If your focus is about holding on to this life, it is a wrong focus because you won't be here long. Our wealth is in Christ. The riches that we do have and will have with God are unfathomable.

Responsibility #2 - Paul was responsible to bring to light the dispensation of the Church Age. **3:9**

Paul not only was responsible to reveal grace, but also reveal the mystery of the Church Age. Let me give you four key mysteries of the church that Paul reveals:

- 1) Jews and Gentiles now form one body the Church through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1-12).
- 2) Jesus Christ now indwells every believer (Col. 1:24-27).
- 3) The Church is the bride of Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:22-32).
- 4) The Church Age will end when the Church is raptured (I Cor. 15:50-58; I Thess. 4:13-18).

Responsibility #3 - Paul was responsible to show the manifold wisdom of God through the Church. **3:10-13**

I want you to ponder **verse 10** because it shows us how sacred the Church is to God. The angels monitor the Church. The angels monitor the preaching in the Church and how people respond to the preaching in the Church and then they monitor how grace affects us. We are an audio visual display for the angels. Think how important the Church is when angels monitor every church service to see what is happening. They know who is there, who is listening and responding. Can you imagine what those angels saw last Sunday night in most churches? They saw a football game. But when they looked here, they saw a group of serious believers who came to sit under the Word of God.

Paul says my job is to preach grace that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal purpose of God is that His grace would save any sinner and make them part of the family of God. Jesus Christ is now forming His body the Church and Paul's job was to proclaim that.

In fact, Paul says in **verse 12** that in Christ we have boldness and confidence to access God through faith in Jesus Christ. Every believer in Jesus Christ has a right to access God even in your worst moments.

Perhaps you have failed and you feel worthless. You run right to God. You confess your sin and connect yourself to the wonderful fellowship that you have with your God. God gives us sinners the right to boldly and confidently come to Him by faith.

We are not perfect, the Church is not perfect, but God's grace is still operative with is and in us. Paul says this is the grace I preach and he ends by saying in **verse 13**, don't let negative things that happen cause you to lose your focus on God's grace.