



Ephesians

Part 19

Ephesians 3:1-13
Week of July 18, 2021

Before Connect Group

- Read Ephesians 3:1-13
 - Watch the sermon by going to <http://switzerlandcommunitychurch.org>
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For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Ephesians 3:1-13, ESV

Sermon Notes

What are you building as a church? This is not about you hunting for something but about you being something.

What makes a good church? God's expressed purpose of the Church is to be glorified in her and be declared by her, in the expression of the Gospel of Grace, through the mystery of Christ made known to her. Paul continues his "digression" before we enter his prayer that is coming in the next verses. This digression is more than Paul defending himself. There is an example of transformation through Paul's own confrontation with the Gospel, in the first 7 verses of this chapter. Paul's story is completely changed and the only thing he has to say about his life because of this Gospel is "I am a prisoner of Christ, for you" Ephesians is unique in the sense that it is most concerned with the purpose of the Church and less with the organization and function of the Church.

The Church as the Ultimate Declaration of the Wisdom/Mystery of God in Christ.

- "so that" (vs. 10) - The result of all of Paul's service, which is central to this entire section, finds its value wrapped up in the ultimate declaration to "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" specifically by the Church.
- The rubric for what constitutes a good church should be that it finds its value in God and declaring the manifold wisdom of God in the heavenly places. Making it known, not just to those in the room, not just to non-believers in the community, but boldly declaring it to the rulers and authorities in the heavens!
- Paul describes his chains as a work of God's grace for the "glory" of the Church
- There is power in the Church! Please don't fall into the deception that the Church is some organization or program. Don't allow yourself to simply categorize it as a non-profit recognized by the government. The Church is established through the grace of God in Christ Jesus. It was worth the service and suffering of the apostles, the prophets, missionaries, so many who have been transformed by the power of the Gospel and see the true power and purpose of the Church.
- Take a moment and follow the movement of revelation that is unfolding here in these first few chapters of Ephesians.
 - Ephesians 1:8-9 This wisdom and insight to know the mystery of His Will through Christ is a gift of His Grace and by His hand alone.
 - Ephesians 1:17 Paul's prayer over the Church takes up this topic of most importance... that God would give to you a Spirit of Wisdom.
 - Ephesians 3:3 This mystery was made known to Paul
 - Ephesians 3:5 This mystery was made known to the Apostles and the Prophets.
 - Paul and the Apostles and Prophets were all given to the Church.
 - *Ephesians 4:11-12 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*
 - Ephesians 3:10 The Church is then charged with the resounding declaration that is to resonate throughout the heavens.
- This is no small purpose for the Church.
- The accomplishment of this purpose is not fulfilled in a better organization. You will never find it in flawless music from the stage. It will never Echo in the heavens through engaging family programs. You won't see it happen through a "movement" that captures the right aspects of culture to cultivate growth. You won't find it through mine or anyone else's

proficiency in the pulpit.

- I have been called to serve the building up of the church through the labor and joy of the Word of the Lord.
- This glorious purpose of declaring the Wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities of the heavens is yours, not individually, but together.

The Declaration of the Gospel of Grace in the Lives of Those Who Are The Church

- Ephesians 3:8
- When you read verses like this, you might be tempted to hear the Apostle Paul as self-deprecating, or possibly through the lens of false humility. However, if you look closer you see that what he says in this one sentence is the outworking of the Gospel that he has declared in the entire opening of this text.
- *1 Corinthians 15:9-10 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*
- Not only is Paul the least among the apostles, but here in this text he is least among the saints, everyone who calls themselves a believer in Christ. But it is by the Grace of God, that he is of great value.
- Second part of the verse. This echoes the movement of chapter 2. Though we were dead and children of wrath with no inheritance or position in the family of God (2:1-3). God in his great mercy and grace brought us to life and seated us in the heavens with Christ! (2:4-8)
- Paul's value to the church is not because of his ability and intelligence. Though many may consider him to have much. It is completely wrapped up in the Grace of God to the most undeserving.
- How can one so insignificant be commissioned to such a high calling. By the grace of God alone.
- The great contrast in this single verse, least of the saints to preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, is to amplify the contrast between what we were to what we have been called to be.
- Paul is clearly communicating that there is nothing of value within himself that would bring more clarity and power to the proclamation of the Gospel than to see the truth of the movement from his persecution of the Church to now his chains for her glory (13).
- The greatest detriment to the Church is that we build something that we are able to manage.
- As A.C. Dixon once said; "When we depend upon organizations, we get what organizations can do; When we depend upon education, we get what education can do; When we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do."
- We must stop pretending that there is some other purpose for the Church and your part in it than to proclaim the Gospel of Christ through the very truth of our own lives.
- The crazy thing is that as awesome as Paul was, his call was to the Church. For the purpose of building the Church, to building you, for the greater work of declaring the Gospel to the heavens!
- Please do not be fooled into thinking that the purpose of the church is to create a comfortable and appealing atmosphere. The Gospel and the Glory of God are here!
- The Church is you.

The Declaration Of The Revealed Mystery of Christ

- Ephesians 3:9-10
- This is an important function of the Church.
- Remember that for Paul, this Mystery is the Gentiles in the church.
- This is a radical definition of Church. This is where Church and culture should depart from one another.
- If we are truly defining the Church by the Grace of God and specifically the work of Christ.
- *Ephesians 2:13-16 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*
- What would the Church look like if we took seriously the unity of worship and love that would declare to the heavens the Glory of Christ? What would separate us? Our worship style? Our order of service? Our tradition? Our modern tastes?
- Should we consider the hard word of coming together a commission of the church? The laying down of ourselves for the one voice we can raise together in the praise of our Father.
- *Romans 15:1-7 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*
- The declaration of the Joy and Hope we have in our Salvation through Christ.
- The lens through which we view our circumstances tells us a lot about what we are declaring to the heavens.
- We either hope for something better here, or we hold fast to what we know we have upon Christ's return.
- *1 Peter 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

What are you building as a church? This is not about you hunting for something but about you being something. We can find immense joy in the diversity of the Gospel proclaimed in the church. The heavens will shake at the glory of God shining through the church. This is the reality that we must be willing to ask whether we believe it or not.

Connect Group Discussion Questions

- What are some of the things that we tend to look for in a church? What preconceived notions of what church is, do we bring to the table in evaluating and discussing our church?
- How should a true church be defined? How do we determine whether a church is declaring the mystery and wisdom of God in Jesus Christ?
- What is the difference between our understanding that we do not go to church but that we are the church? What does it mean to be a part of the church?
- What role does the church play in the expressed unity of the world? Why is unity in diversity important for the church to truly thrive in the culture?
- How does our personal outlook change when we look to pursue the glory and mystery of God in our lives rather than looking to build our own self interests?

Challenge For The Week

The purpose of the church is to declare the mystery and wisdom of God through His grace. As the church, we do not look to our own interest but to whether the Gospel is being proclaimed.

- Where do you pursue your personal preferences in the church and where do you need to get involved in expressing your faith in the church?
- Who do you know who needs to know the Gospel of grace? How can you reach out to them this week to show them the Gospel?