

# **This is a Great Mystery**

## A Study of Ephesians

### Week 13 – Ephesians 3:1-7

**Opening Prayer** – Holy Spirit, work in our hearts that we would love the gospel so much that we would never grow weary or complacent in our hearing and reading of it. Thank you for revealing the plan of salvation to us through faith in your precious Word. Bless our study with your presence again today. Amen.

**From Last Week** – There was a lingering question about “access” and whether or not that always refers to prayer. I looked into the word that was used in 2:18 and it shows up two other times—**Romans 5:2** and **Ephesians 3:12**. Let’s read those and see what conclusion we reach.

I don’t think there was anything lingering from last week. Was there anything that you wanted to touch on?

**Ephesians 3:1-3** - Τούτου χάριν ἐγὼ Παῦλος ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν <sup>2</sup> εἶ γε ἠκούσατε τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς, <sup>3</sup> [ὅτι] κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον, καθὼς προέγραψα ἐν ὀλίγῳ,

**For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you, the Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> indeed you have heard about the stewardship of the grace of God that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery that was made known to me by revelation, just as I wrote briefly,**

1. “For this reason,” (Τούτου χάριν) reaches back to, really, the entire first two chapters.
2. “The prisoner” (ὁ δέσμιος)—Paul refers to his chains often in the letters he wrote during his imprisonments. However, his chains were never a source of frustration or sadness. Read the following verses to see why:
  - a. Ephesians 6:19-20 –
  - b. Philippians 1:13-14 –
  - c. 2 Timothy 1:8 –
3. Verse 1 begins one thought and then Paul seems to want to explain what he means; or the Spirit takes him on a tangent; or he is simply so excited about what he’s about to say that he can’t help but butt in on himself. He already did a similar thing in chapter 2:6-9. So, the next twelve verses are going to be this important, yet tangential, thought. It’ll pick up again in verse 14.
4. οἰκονομίαν is a word we touched on way back in 1:10, where Paul talked about “the *arrangement* of the fullness of time.” Here, a different word would have to be used. Stewardship comes from this word, which the English Standard Version (ESV) uses here. Other options are *administration* or *dispensation*. Looking at what Paul is talking about in verse 2, which choice do you like best? Why?

5. How have the Ephesians Gentiles already heard about the grace of God?
6. As mentioned last week, the *mystery* which Paul mentioned back in 1:9 makes its triumphant reentry into the line of thought. Recall, if possible: what makes the mystery of God such a mystery?
  - a. What is the main thing we are referring to when we talk about the mystery of God (both earlier and here)?
7. “just as I wrote briefly” (καθώς προέγραφα ἐν ὀλίγω,) – Whether Paul means a previous letter that did not make it into the Bible or just what he said earlier in chapter 1, we can’t be sure. But we do know that Paul had already touched on this with the Ephesians at some point.

What comments and questions do you have so far?

**Ephesians 3:4-5** - πρὸς ὃ δύνασθε ἀναγινώσκοντες νοῆσαι τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, <sup>5</sup> ὃ ἑτέραις γενεαῖς οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις ἐν πνεύματι,

**By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which had not been 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.**

8. Paul seems to be putting a lot of stock into his writing: “If you read this, you’ll know the mystery of Christ.” What did Paul know (and what do we know) about his words, so that he could be so confident?
9. In verse 5, what could some (wrongly) conclude that Paul is saying about the revelation of God’s mystery in the Old Testament?
  - a. What is Paul actually saying about God’s revelation in previous generations?
10. Note that Paul groups the apostles and prophets together again, just like he did in 2:20, with one article to govern both groups as one singularly-focused group.
11. “by the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι) – What is the doctrine to which Paul is referring here?

**Ephesians 3:6-7** - εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, <sup>7</sup> οὗ ἐγενήθη διάκονος κατὰ τὴν δωρεάν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.

**[This mystery is that] the Gentiles are to be fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow sharers in the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel, <sup>7</sup> of which I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me through the working of his power.**

12. The reason for the brackets is that these first seven verses are actually one long sentence. Obviously, the thoughts are clear enough that multiple sentences can be made. Many translations do that without an issue, otherwise it would be difficult for us to track the thought through seven verses.
13. Let's look at another set of "with" words or, as I've translated them here, the "fellows."
  - a. Συγκληρονόμα – "fellow heirs" – Heirs inherit things. Look at **Romans 8:17** to see what we, the Gentiles, get to inherit as fellow heirs with Christ?
    - i. Does that sound very appealing to someone who's an unbeliever?
    - ii. How does that change?
  - b. Σύσσωμα – "fellow body members" literally "with-bodies" – This is the only place this word takes place. However, this gives us a peak into what's coming in Ephesians 4, where Paul calls for unity in the body of Christ. You might remember 1 Corinthians 12 as a similar section of Scripture, in that it addresses the "many parts, one body" aspect.
  - c. Συμμέτοχα – "fellow sharers" – My mind goes to our concept of a shareholder. In what ways are we shareholders in the gospel?
    - i. In what way does that analogy limp?
    - ii. Also, interesting that in Ephesians 5:7, Paul will use this same word to warn the Ephesians about being *partners* with those who live sinful lifestyles. We'll touch more on that when we get there.
14. Paul says in Romans 1:16 that the gospel is the power of God. If you need evidence of that, just look at what the gospel accomplishes in the lives of Gentiles—it makes us fellow heirs of promises that did not belong to us for more than half of this world's existence; it makes us members of our Savior's body so that we can be his hands and feet as we serve others; it makes us partners with people we won't get to meet until we get to heaven. The gospel is indeed powerful—let's never forget that.

15. I am always struck by Paul's humility and awareness of what grace truly is in verse 7. What things do you see in that verse that highlight those two things?

What comments and questions do you have?

**Closing Song** The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace CW 288 v. 1, 4

**The gospel shows the Father's grace,  
Who sent his Son to save our race,  
Proclaims how Jesus lived and died  
That we might thus be justified.**

**It is the power of God to save  
From sin and Satan and the grave;  
It works the faith which firmly clings  
To all the treasures which it brings.**