

This is a Great Mystery

A Study of Ephesians

Week 14 – Ephesians 3:8-13

Opening Prayer – Dear Lord, your wisdom is so incomprehensible and multifaceted. If we were to spend our entire lives trying to understand it all, we would only ever scratch the surface. And yet, you have brought your wisdom down to us through Christ and your Word. Help us to strive to trust more fully in your wisdom day after day. Feed us with your Word that we would grow wiser in your ways today. Amen.

From Last Week – We didn't get a chance to share any questions at the end of last week's class; what comments and questions do you have from Ephesians 3:1-7?

Ephesians 3:8-9 - ἐμοὶ τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων ἀγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὕτη, τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαι τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ⁹ καὶ φωτίσαι [πάντας] τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι,

To me, the less-than-the-least-of-all-the-saints one, this grace was given: to proclaim good news to the Gentiles the incomprehensible riches of Christ ⁹ and to enlighten [everyone] as to what the administration (or dispensation or stewardship) of this mystery is, the one that, from the ages, had been kept secret in God, who created all things.

1. ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ (the less than the least) – Greek has a comparative (less) form and a superlative (least) form. Here, Paul combines the two to make a new word—a super-comparative or an extra-superlative. For what reasons would Paul, under the Spirit's inspiration, feel the need to do such a thing?
2. Notice that the word “grace” can refer to more than just God's undeserved love that has given us salvation through Christ. Certainly, the grace that Paul talks about here is only possible because of God's BIG grace, but Paul refers to a more specific gift of God here (note: *this* grace).
3. ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (the incomprehensible riches of Christ) – translations are all over the board on what word to use to describe the riches of Christ: boundless (NIV, NRSV), unsearchable (ESV, NKJV), incalculable (CSB), unfathomable (NASB), endless (NLT). I obviously went in yet another direction with “incomprehensible;” first, what point Paul is making about the riches of Christ?
 - a. What word do you think best encompasses Paul's thinking?
4. “Enlighten” has a special meaning behind it when we consider how the Bible talks about light/darkness. Let's look at just a few of those light/darkness passages to see why “enlighten” is used rather than “let everyone know” or “tell them about this.” We'll read them all first and then discuss.

- a. **Psalm 18:28**
- b. **Isaiah 9:2**
- c. **John 8:12**
- d. **2 Corinthians 4:6**
- e. **Ephesians 5:8-9**

5. I don't know if there's anything else in these verses that we haven't covered extensively in previous weeks. We talked about the administration concept; we've touched on the mystery; we've covered the extent to which the mystery was "hidden" or "kept secret;" however, in walking through these concepts, you might be caught off guard by "God, who created all things." What does that have to do with the revelation of this mystery?

Ephesians 3:10-11 - ἵνα γνωρισθῇ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ, ¹¹ κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων ἣν ἐποίησεν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν,

This follows the word order of the Greek: **[This grace was given to me] so that it might be revealed now to the rulers and the authorities of the heavenly realms through the church—the multifaceted wisdom of God—¹¹ according to the plan of the ages which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

What makes sense: **[This grace was given to me] so that, through the church, the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be revealed to the rulers and the authorities of the heavenly realms,¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

6. Ephesians 3:10 was brought up in our preliminary "What Do You Want to Know?" exercise back in April, specifically: what is the role of the church in carrying out God's plan? That is an evangelical and outreach-minded question. However, I'm not sure that's the main point here. Let's look at the entire line of thought in these verses to see. First, what/who is the church?
7. Second, what/who are the rulers and the authorities of the heavenly realms (see Eph. 1:20-21)?
8. Third, what does it mean when something is multifaceted? Can you think of something else that we would describe using that word?
9. Fourth, the "reveal" verb is passive and there is nobody connected to that verb as doing the revealing. When that happens with any passive verb, it often (but not always) means God is the implied "doer."
10. Here's my main point in bringing up those four things: Think about what Paul is addressing in this section; he's been talking about unity between Jew and Gentile in Christ. In other words, Paul is talking about how the church has become the church. And, through what God has accomplished by uniting the church around Christ (regardless of works and ethnicity and anything else), he has made it abundantly

clear to these rulers and authorities—to every plane of existence, as it were—that he is wise beyond all wisdom. So wise is he, in fact, that this is the way he planned all of this to happen from all eternity. That means that this verse is talking less about what the church is supposed to do and more about what God has done with the church as his precious object through which he reveals his wisdom.

- a. However, the church has a role to play in revealing God’s plan to the rulers and authorities of the heavenly realms. What is that role?

Ephesians 3:12-13 – ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ προσαγωγὴν ἐν πεποιθήσει διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ. ¹³ διὸ αἰτοῦμαι μὴ ἐγκακεῖν ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ἥτις ἐστὶν δόξα ὑμῶν.

In whom [that is, Christ Jesus our Lord] we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in him. Therefore, I ask you to not be discouraged because of my afflictions for you, which are for your glory.

11. Verse 12 is another place where translations can do a few different things with the words “boldness,” “access,” and “confidence.” Instead of asking for opinions on which words you prefer, let’s just focus on the main message—what can we do (or what do we have) through faith in Jesus?

12. Paul then ends this section with an encouragement to not be discouraged over his afflictions.

- a. What affliction would be on the mind of the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:1)?
- b. What did Paul remind the Ephesians of in verses 2-12? In other words, why didn’t they have to be discouraged over Paul’s afflictions?
- c. What present-day encouragements does that give us?

What thoughts, comments, or questions do you have?

Closing Song – Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing CW 443 v. 1 and 5
**Rejoice, my heart, be glad and sing, A cheerful trust maintain;
For God, the source of ev'rything, Your portion shall remain.**

**His wisdom never plans in vain Nor falters nor mistakes.
All that His counsels may ordain A blessed ending makes.**