

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

I. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS

6.

D. THE PRAYER OF PAUL'S PRAYER Ephesians 3:1-13

Paul continued to explain his eagerness to write to the Ephesians about the unity Christ eventually will give to all things by explaining why he had a special concern for that subject. At first, it seems that in these verses Paul was introducing himself to the Ephesians. Actually he was explaining his personal relationship to the subject of the eventual unity Christ will bring to all things. In this section of his letter, Paul explained why he had a special interest in that subject, why he was uniquely qualified to write to them on that subject, and why he was earnestly praying that they would understand that subject. He had explained to them the works of God on which he based his insights into God's work to bring all things together in perfect harmony. Now he needed to explain why he was earnestly praying for them to become engrossed in that subject, as he was.

D. *For this reason, I Paul* (3:1-13)

1. *The prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles* (3:1-6)--

a. *Indeed you have heard of the responsibility of God's grace* (3:2a)

(1) *The one given to me for you* (3:2b)

(2) *That by means of revelation the mystery was made known to me* (3:2c).

b. *About which I wrote briefly above* (3:4),

(1) *Which by reading you will be able to discern* (3:4b)

(2) *My understanding of the mystery of Christ* (3:4c),

(a) *Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men* (3:5)

(b) *As it now has been revealed*

[1] *To His holy apostles and prophets* (3:5b)

[2] *By the Spirit* (3:5c)

d. [That] *the Gentiles are* (3:6):

(1) *Joint-heirs* (3:6b),

(2) *And a joint-body* (3:6c),

(3) *And joint-partners of His promise* (3:6d-6f)

(a) *In Christ* (3:6e)

(b) *Through the gospel* (3:6f).

2. *Of which I became a servant* (3:7-12)

a. *According to the gift of God's grace* (3:7b-7d)

(1) *That was given to me* (3:7c)

(2) *According to the working of His power* (3:7d).

b. *To me, the least of all the saints, was this grace given* (3:8-12)

(1) *To proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ* (3:8b)

(2) *And to enlighten everyone* (3:9-12)

(a) *On what [is] the companionship of the mystery* (3:9b-9d)

[1] *Hidden for ages in God* (3:9c)

[2] *In God, the One having created all things through Jesus Christ* (3:9d),

(b) *So that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known* (3:10-11)

[1] *To the rulers and authorities in the heavens* (3:10b)

[2] *Through the church* (3:10c)

[3] *According to the plan of the ages* (3:11-12),

[a] *Which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord* (3:11b)

[b] *Through whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him* (3:12)

3. *So then I ask you not to be discouraged* (3:13)
 - a. *Over my difficulties on your behalf* (3:13b),
 - b. *Which is your glory* (3:13c).

Paul gave three reasons why he was especially qualified to write to them about God's plans to unite all things in Christ.

Verses 1-6. I am Christ's prisoner for your sake, so you can hear this truth. The first reason Paul was qualified to share with them about the unity Christ will give to all things was that he was in prison so they could know that truth.

Paul called himself Christ's prisoner. Paul's prison experience was a long and tortuous one. He had been arrested because of a riot against him in Jerusalem by people who had heard that he was desecrating the temple by bringing Gentiles into it (Acts 21:26-22:29). He had been found guilty of treason against the Jewish nation by the Jewish Sanhedrin for teaching that God accepts the Gentiles (Acts 23:1-10). He had been sent to Caesarea in chains to protect him from a plot to murder him (Acts 23:11-35). He had been retained in confinement in Caesarea for two years by Roman authorities without any just reason, which forced him to appeal to Caesar for justice (Acts. 24:10-26:32). He had been taken to Rome under guard of Roman soldiers and had experienced storm and ship wreck at sea along the way. He was at that moment under house arrest in Rome awaiting a trial before Caesar, the highest court in the world (Acts. 28:30-31). However, Paul claimed to be Jesus' prisoner, not the prisoner of the people in Jerusalem or of the Jewish Sanhedrin or of the Roman authorities but the prisoner of Jesus. He was Jesus' prisoner because his imprisonment was a result of his preaching Jesus' message across the Roman Empire. Jesus had called him to preach that message to Gentiles and Jews alike. Jesus had led him in ever enlarging pathways to spread that message across the Empire. In the course of his travels Jesus had led him to Ephesus, and he had ministered among them for three years. When he returned to Jerusalem to tell about their conversion, some Jews resented what he said so deeply that a riot resulted, during which he was arrested. So very directly, Paul was Jesus' prisoner for the sake of the Ephesians and other Gentiles.

When Paul acknowledged that his imprisonment resulted from his preaching to the Ephesians and other Gentiles, he was not complaining. He was saying it was so important for them to hear the message that he was glad to be a prisoner for the privilege of telling the message to them. Even while in prison he wanted to preach to the Ephesians the message Jesus had given him. Since he could not preach to them personally, he was writing it to them in a letter.

Paul seems to have intended to explain to the Ephesians why he was in prison, but then he broke off in mid-sentence to say, "Oh, you have heard all about the responsibility that was given to me by God's grace." No doubt, while he was ministering among them, he had told them many times about the call and assignment Jesus had given to him." He was not writing to them something they had not heard before. Nevertheless, he briefly reviewed the essentials of that message.

Paul first assured them that the message had come to him by revelation. Actually, he had resisted the message furiously and had persecuted those who believed it before him. He accepted it only when Jesus came to him personally on the road to Damascus and dramatically showed him that he was wrong. As a result of Jesus' appearance to him, Paul made a complete reversal in his beliefs and actions; but it still took him three years of study in Arabia before he understood the message well enough to go forth and declare it everywhere. During those three years, the Spirit of God continued to speak to him through the Scriptures to reveal to him the message he now was eagerly writing about to the Ephesians.

Paul noted that previously in this letter he already had written briefly about the message God had given him. He said that by reading what he had already written they would understand his insights into the mystery Christ had revealed to him. Probably he intended for them to read what he had written many times until they did understand. He

wanted them to be sure to understand, because what he was preaching had been a mystery to him and to almost all others, but now it was made known. It was a mystery no longer, and they needed to know about it.

Paul made it clear that the truth he was writing about had not been made known to him alone. He said it was now revealed also to the apostles and prophets. By "apostles" Paul meant much more than the twelve men whom Jesus called to follow Him during His ministry. He used the word to refer to people we call "missionaries." They were people like himself whom Jesus had called to go forth and share the gospel with those who had not yet heard it. By "prophets" he meant much more than foretellers of the future. He used the word to refer to men we call "preachers." They were people God had called to give their whole lives to receiving God's message for the day and sharing it with power to those who were willing to hear. God had revealed the message to missionaries and preachers and had called them to go forth and spread it abroad. Many of them were faithful to their calling and were busy spreading that good news everywhere.

Paul also stressed that the message was revealed to the apostles and prophets through the Holy Spirit. It was not a man-made message. It had been made known by God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit had the assignment to take the revelations Jesus had given to the world, put them in the hearts of the missionaries and preachers, and empower them to declare it in a way that touched and changed peoples' lives. The Spirit had done that work effectively, and now the message that previously was a hidden mystery was openly declared by apostles and prophets to everyone who was willing to hear it.

The newly-revealed message that God loved and accepted everyone actually was not a new truth. It was only newly-revealed. God always had loved all people of all nations, but all nations did not love Him. The Gentile nations as a whole rejected Him and chose other gods. The Jews as a whole chose to believe they were the only people God would receive, so they held others away. However, God Himself had always reached out to all nations,

waiting for the day when people would turn to Him all over the world. As a result The Old Testament tells of many Gentiles who accepted Jehovah God and who had been received on an equal basis among the Israelites. Just a few of them were the mixed multitude who went out of Egypt with the Israelites, Moses' two wives, Hobab, Caleb, Rahab, Ruth, the Philistine Pelethites who fought for David, the Shunammite woman who provided to refuge for Elisha, Naaman, and even the whole city of Nineveh when Jonah preached to them. Yet, in spite of God's clear willingness to receive the Gentiles, somehow neither the Jews nor the Gentiles had been able to understand that Jehovah was God of everyone and was willing to receive everyone on the same basis and terms. God's willingness to accept everyone was hidden, not because God had kept it a secret, but because both Jews and Gentiles were deaf when God told them of His universal love. Their own stubbornness had caused the glorious messages to be hidden. Now, however, through Jesus the hidden message had been made known, and men like Paul were seeking to spread it everywhere.

Then Paul summarized the newly-revealed message by saying it made known that the Gentiles were joint-heirs with the Jews, joint-members of the same body as the Jews, and joint-partners with the Jews in the same promises.

By "joint-heirs" Paul meant that Gentiles who previously had been excluded from the blessings promised to Abraham and his seed now were inheritors of those same blessings. Inheriting the same blessings did not mean they would receive identical places to live or the same family members or the same spiritual gifts or the same places of service. It meant they would receive the same types of blessings, except that their blessings would be designed for their particular need and opportunity.

By "joint-members of the same body," Paul meant that Gentiles who previously had been excluded from the Jewish nation were now members of a new nation that included all believers in Jesus. "Joint-members" did not mean that all members would perform the same functions as other members any more than every member of a human body possesses the same abilities as every

other member. It meant they would serve the functions God gave them as parts of one great coordinated mission, just as every member of a person's physical body provides a distinct function that is coordinated by the mind with the works of all of the other members to provide for the welfare of all

By "joint-partners in the same promises" Paul meant that the Gentiles who had been denied the promises made to the Israelites were now full participants in all of those promises right along with the Jews. "Joint partners" did not mean the promises would be applied to everyone in a way that is identical to all others. He meant they would receive all of God's promises, but God will apply the promises to each one in ways that are appropriate for his need and place of service.

No more distinctions remained between Jews and Gentiles. They share alike in all the blessings and promises of God. They were all one body of believers serving Jesus on an equal footing to carry His message to the whole world. Paul eagerly proclaimed that all of God's blessings were open to Gentiles through Christ Jesus and through the gospel message, just the same as they were to the Jews. The Jews had known of the true God for 2,000 years. The Gentiles had only known him in the last generation, but the blessings of God and His truth were open to Gentiles as fully and completely as they were to the Jews.

Verses 7-12. Christ commissioned me to share that truth with everyone. The second reason Paul was especially qualified to share with them God's intention to unite all things at the End was that Jesus had spoken to him directly to make him His servant with the responsibility of sharing that newly-revealed truth with everyone. That call came to Paul when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Soon afterward Jesus sent a disciple named Ananias to tell Paul he was going to suffer much to carry out his assignment, which was to carry Jesus' name "to Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:10-18). He then spent three years in Arabia restudying the Scriptures and preparing to carry out his assignment. After those three years of preparation, he had been busy ceaselessly carrying out Jesus' command.

Therefore, he had a unique responsibility and opportunity to share the good news with the Ephesians. He told the Ephesians that responsibility had been given to him as a gift of God's grace. It had been given to him by the working of God's power. His commission to spread the news of God's universal love to everyone came to him through the direct intervention of God as a definite expression of God's grace.

Paul called himself the least of all the saints. In other letters, Paul specified the reason why he considered himself to be the least of the saints. It was because he had persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:6). He should have been condemned to eternal suffering for his stubborn opposition to God's truth, but instead God's grace had been extended to him, not only to convince him of his folly but also to give him the privilege of sharing the truth he had received with everyone who would hear. He said that privilege had been given to him not for his sake but for the sake of the Gentiles, so they could know of the incalculable riches of Christ.

Paul acknowledged, however, that God had chosen him for a two-pronged ministry. He said God had called him "*to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ and to enlighten everyone.*" Jesus specifically appointed him to take the message to the Gentiles, but he was not to confine himself to them alone. He was not to exclude anyone, because everyone needed to hear the message. Paul was simply repeating the message that had been given to him by Ananias three days after Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. He was striving hard to do what he had been commissioned to do, even if he had to write a letter to share it with the Ephesians.

He defined again the message he was called to share. This time he called it "the companionship of the mystery." The word translated "companionship" refers to sharing, joining together, participating with others. It is often translated "fellowship," but Paul used it to describe a more significant sharing than an hour or two of friendship. He meant joining in a lifelong companionship and common ministry. Paul was called to make known the dynamic uniting of Jews

and Gentiles into one continuous cooperative relationship and one ministry. The mystery he was called to share was the comradeship that all believers of all kinds were to share with each other as they worked together to spread God's truth across the world..

Through all the previous ages that great truth had been hidden in God. It was not hidden because God had kept it to Himself, but because no one had been willing to receive it. God had protected it within Himself in His heart waiting for the day when people would be willing and able to believe it. That day had come because of the life and work of Jesus Christ. Now that the message had been made known, Paul was doing everything in his power to spread it everywhere.

Paul said he was spreading the message so that God's multi-faceted wisdom might be made known. The word translated "multi-faceted" means varied, having many faces and aspects, like a magnificently carved jewel. It took the many varied sides of God's wisdom to be able to unite all people together in one undertaking. Therefore, spreading the message of God's love for everyone made known the great breadth and variations of God's wisdom. Everyone needed to be told about that manifold wisdom, because it was an insight no person could discover for himself

Then Paul described three aspects of how God's magnificent wisdom was to be made known. He told to whom it was to be made known, by whom it was to be made known, and according to whose plan it was to be made known.

(1) God's magnificent wisdom was to be made known "to the rulers and authorities in heaven. That statement is breathtaking because it expands the ministry of Jesus' servants to a seemingly impossible extent. They are to make known the wonder of the newly-revealed truth not only all over the earth but also in heaven.

Paul's statement reveals some significant insights into heaven that are unknown or only vaguely implied elsewhere. It clearly reveals that God has a system of authority in heaven, to bring order and purpose among His people there. We

would like to know if those authorities are angels or people or both. We would like to know how they are chosen and how they function. None of that information is revealed here or anywhere else in Scripture. Paul's statement does let us know that heaven is a busy, active place, where people are organized so they can be useful to God and to all others who are there.

Paul's statement also reveals that the authorities in heaven can learn to understand God's workings more fully by knowing of His works on the earth. We would like to know how people in heaven can increase their understanding when they already know "as they are known" (1 Cor. 13:12) and how anything on earth can contribute to increasing their understanding of God's mighty works. That information also is not shared in this passage or in any other Bible passage. Nonetheless, Paul's astonishing statement reveals the awesome wonder and unspeakable power of the message that God entrusted to Paul. It was given to him to open the eyes of all people everywhere on earth to the amazing works of God and even to enlarge the appreciation of people in heaven for the unlimited outreach of God's love to everyone everywhere.

(2) God's magnificent wisdom was to be made known by the church. Jesus appointed the church to be His instrument for making the message known everywhere. The church was His appointed means of spreading the gospel to all the nations of the world.

The church was not really a new group. All believers in Jehovah God had always been one people. From the time of Moses onward, they had been called a "congregation" hundreds of times. The Old Testament Hebrew words for "congregation" have exactly the same meaning as the New Testament Greek word for "assembly." In English, we use the word "church." The Hebrew, Greek, and English words are all used to describe the whole body of believers united in heart and purpose. Prior to Jesus, God's congregation had been mostly confined to Israelites. With the coming of Jesus, God's congregation enlarged to include all believers everywhere, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, tribe, customs, age, or gender. However, the idea of God's congregation was not

new. The understanding of its membership had just been enlarged to include, not just Jews, but also anyone and everyone who believed in Jesus. In addition, the understanding of its mission had been enlarged to making the message known, not just to the Jews, but also to everyone everywhere, even to rulers and authorities in heaven.

Evidently people in heaven have some way to be informed about the accomplishments of the church on earth. They have an abiding interest in those activities, because only those activities can enable others to join them in heaven. Even in heaven, the authorities and rulers stand in amazement of God's power to use the church to accomplish His will and offer salvation to everyone on the earth.

(3) God's magnificent wisdom was to be made known according to God's plan of the ages. In other words, the message was to be spread according to a plan God had set in motion ages before. The newly-revealed message was not a new invention. It also was not a new effort or program God decided to use to replace His past efforts. It was the same plan He had had from the beginning. Even though the message of God's acceptance of all people who believe was new to people on the earth, it was not new to God. It had been His plan and intention through all the ages to include everyone. Furthermore, it had been God's plan from the beginning to make people know of His acceptance of everyone when His people were ready to tell it and other nations were ready to hear it. What Jesus had done and what was happening in Paul's day all fitted into the plan God had been following through all the ages. Believers had just now finally gotten ready to accept the intention God had had in His mind all along. Since people were finally ready to

receive the message, Jesus had come to make it known. Furthermore, now Jesus was using Paul and other missionaries and preachers to publish that truth everywhere.

Jesus' coming to reveal the message of God's acceptance of all people everywhere gave those who had faith in Him boldness to approach God without fear. It gave them access to God with confidence they would be heard with love and gladness. Paul had that kind of boldness; and he wanted the Ephesians to catch the same vision he had, so they too could exercise boldness to approach God and have confidence that they would be heard and answered. Jesus and His acceptance of all people would give them that kind of bold confidence.

Verse 13. I do not want you to be discouraged over my difficulties, because their purpose is to bring glory to you. The third reason Paul was especially qualified to share the message with them of God's acceptance of all people who believe was that he had suffered many tribulations to take to them the message that gave them glory. The glory his trials brought to them was the knowledge that they were loved and accepted by God the same as the Jews. Paul asked them not to be troubled and sorrowful over his hardships, because his sufferings all fitted into God's plan for enabling them to know the truth of God's love for all things. Instead of being saddened, they should recognize that everything had been done and was being done to bring glory to them through revealing to them God's love and favor. Therefore, they should rejoice greatly. He encouraged them not to be sad for him, because he was glad for them.

Conclusion. In this section of Paul's letter, he reminded the Ephesians of great and exciting truths the Ephesians already knew. His purpose, however, was much broader and deeper than just reminding them of those truths. Reviewing those truths was preparation for receiving an even more astonishing revelation. The greater revelation was that eventually God intended to expand the unity He had brought to Jews and Gentiles to include all believers and all created things in the whole cosmos. The day was coming when God was going to unite all things everywhere into one unbroken fellowship of love and harmony. Paul was about to pray the Ephesians and all saints everywhere would have the spiritual strength to grasp the wonder of that blockbuster truth.

Paul was now ready to pray the prayer that he had first mentioned in 1:16-19 and that he had been preparing them to understand ever since. He recorded his prayer in the next verses. It may very well be the most far-reaching prayer ever prayed in all history.