

Paul, A Prisoner with a Secret **Ephesians 3:1-7 (NKJV)**

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

What was the difference between the Gentiles and the Jews, Grace and Grace alone.

What is the difference between the non-Christian and the Christian, Grace and Grace alone.

When you come to realize that it gives you a distinct sense of spiritual humility.

But Paul is not saying these things to tear the Jews down but to build the Gentiles up.

Every person in Jesus Christ must realize that we are all equal in Him.

It also give us a hope in evangelism, because God can work grace in any sinner's heart just like He did in ours.

Let us look at this passage this morning.

- I. The reason for Paul's ministry.
 - A. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles
 - B. When he talks about this reason he is referring to most of what he has said in this epistle up to this time.
 1. That God had brought salvation to the Gentiles.
 2. And Paul was commissioned for that purpose.
 - C. But Paul was not a prisoner of or for the Gentiles.
 - D. He was not a prisoner of the Jews although they were the cause of his arrest.
 - E. He was not a prisoner of the Romans although he was in a Roman jail.
 - F. Instead he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
 1. The providence of God was not just something that Paul wrote about to others who were going through hard times.
 2. It was not just something that he accepted in his theology.
 3. Instead the providence of God that watches over every part of our lives

was Paul solace.

4. You would not find Paul feeling sorry for himself as he was held prisoner in Rome.
5. Jesus Christ had all of Paul and Paul accepted that.

II. Paul's dispensation of grace.

A. This word is variously translated by different versions.

1. Ephesians 3:2 (ESV) 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,
2. Ephesians 3:2 (NIV) 2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,
3. Ephesians 3:2 (NLT) 2 assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles.
4. [oikonomia /oy·kon·om·ee·ah/] n f. From 3623; TDNT 5:151; TDNTA 674; GK 3873; Seven occurrences; AV translates as "dispensation" four times, and "stewardship" three times. 1 the management of a household or of household affairs. 1A specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of other's property. 1B the office of a manager or overseer, stewardship. 1C administration, dispensation. James Strong, Enhanced Strong's Lexicon (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).
5. The way Paul saw his ministry was that it was an assignment, a stewardship.

B. Paul was the original missionary to the nations.

1. Even though the keys to the kingdom had been given to Peter and Peter used them to break the gospel out of Jewish ranks first to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10.
2. Paul took this responsibility very seriously.
3. He understood that He alone had this commission.
4. He spread the gospel over the Gentile world.
5. And God bless by granting repentance to the Gentiles.

III. This dispensation was a secret that God had NOT previously revealed in the OT.

A. God had revealed that the Gentiles would be blessed through the seed of Abraham.

1. But to the Jews this was by a process of proselytism.
2. The Gentile would in fact need to become a Jew in order to be saved.

3. But even then they would be considered a second class Jew.
- B. But now God had made a new thing, a new man, a new group.
1. The visible representation of this new group is the local church.
 2. In the church every person stands on equal standing.
 3. All are saved by grace whether or not they were Jews or not.
 4. This was a secret previously hidden to all.
 5. But Paul was one of the first to fully understand, accept and preach this secret.
- IV. The secret was that the Gentiles were TOGETHER WITH the Jews.
- A. “The chief thing Paul wants to say about the mystery of God’s creating one new people in Christ (which he does say in verse 6) is that Jew and Gentile, as well as all other types and conditions of men and women, hold their salvation blessings jointly in Christ’s church. This is more striking in Greek than in most English versions, because to make his point, Paul assembles (and in the opinion of John Stott, in one case invents) three parallel, composite expressions. In Greek these words each begin with the prefix *syn*, which means “together with.” It is added to the words: *kleronomoi* meaning “heirs”; *soma*, meaning “body”; and *metocha*, meaning “partner,” “companion,” or “one who shares in.” *James Montgomery Boice, Ephesians: An Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 97.*
- B. James Montgomery Boice puts it this way.
1. “*Heirs together with Israel.*” The word “heirs” was an important one for Paul, as his use of it in a number of key passages shows. In Romans 4 he uses it of Abraham, referring to God’s promise that he should be “heir of the world” through Christ’s righteousness (v. 13). In Galatians he extends it to all believers, saying, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). Titus 3:7 speaks of a future inheritance: “So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” Galatians 4:1–7 has a more immediate reference, contrasting the heir’s position as a child (when he was little more than a slave) with his position as a full-grown son, who has “the full rights” of a son. In Romans 8:17 Paul uses the very word (*synklēronomoi*) that he does in Ephesians, saying, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”
- These uses of the words embrace all that a person receives or will receive in salvation. It is the whole of God’s blessing, possessed jointly by all believers in and with Christ. So there is no inner circle or outer circle of the saved. The Jews are not first-rate Christians and the Gentiles second, or vice versa. All who are in Christ inherit all God’s blessing. And they inherit jointly! They hold it together in the one body of Jesus Christ.

2. *“Members together of one body.”* At the end of the preceding chapter Paul compared the church to a kingdom, a family, and a temple. But here he picks up on a theme introduced at the end of chapter 1: “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (vv. 22–23).

Paul comes back to this theme again in chapter 4. He mentions that “there is one body” (v. 4), and then he goes on to describe how God has built us all into a single body: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (vv. 11–16).

This image speaks of a mystical union possessed by God’s people in the church. But it also suggests that this is something into which the people of God must grow and toward which they must strive. That is, the unity between Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female (and all other human groupings) must be increasingly worked for and realized in this life.

How is this to happen? It is to happen only as we grow in the love and knowledge of the One who has brought us together. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says in his discussion of Ephesians 2, “We are all equally sinners. ... We are all equally helpless. ... We have all come to one and the same Savior. ... We have the same salvation. ... We have the same Holy Spirit. ... We have the same Father. ... We even have the same trials. ... And finally, we are all marching and going together to the same eternal home.” It is a knowledge and appreciation of these things that will draw us together.

3. *“Sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”* The Bible has many promises for those who trust God and come to him through faith in the work of Christ. But the word in this phrase is singular, “promise,” and for that reason must refer to “the promise of redemption, made to our first parents, repeated to Abraham, and which forms the burden of all the Old Testament predictions (Gal. 3:14, 19, 22, 29).”

To have that, as Paul says the people of God do, is to have a share in the greatest of all possible human blessings. To share it with others from a great variety of races, peoples, and cultures is to participate in the mystery which was revealed to Paul and declared by him.¹

James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 98–99.

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This passage is largely a parenthesis, which runs from verse 2 through verse 13. Paul begins a prayer for believers to understand their resources as one in Christ and then decides to reemphasize and expand some of the truths he has already mentioned. He does not actually get into the prayer until verse 14, where he repeats the phrase "For this reason" in order to pick up the thought originally introduced in verse 1. He seems to have felt that the Ephesians were not ready to hear his prayer in their behalf until they better understood—and were therefore better able to apply—the truths he wanted to pray about. And it seemed essential for Paul to affirm his authority for teaching such a new and far-reaching truth as the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ, which he does by saying that God Himself gave him the truth and the commission to proclaim it (vv. 2-7). *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Ephesians.*