

# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XXXVIII : DIGRESSION #2 - PAUL AS MINISTER OF THE MYSTERY TO THE GENTILES (3:1-13)

## Paul as Minister of the Mystery to the Gentiles (3:1-13)

*For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 KJV)*

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 NIV)*

*For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the nations, if, indeed, ye did hear of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me in regard to you, that by revelation He made known to me the secret, according as I wrote before in few [words] — in regard to which ye are able, reading [it], to understand my knowledge in the secret of the Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit — that the nations be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in the Christ, through the good news, of which I became a ministrant, according to the gift of the grace of God that was given to me, according to the working of His power; to me — the less than the least of all the saints — was given this grace, among the nations to proclaim good news — the untraceable riches of the Christ, and to cause all to see what [is] the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ, that there might be made known now to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenly [places], through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God, according to a purpose of the ages, which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have the freedom and the access in confidence through the faith of him, wherefore, I ask [you] not to faint in my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 Young’s Literal Translation)*

### PAUL BEGINS TO PRAY BUT DIGRESSES, PICKING HIS PRAYER UP AGAIN IN v. 14

— Verse 1 has no verb, therefore vv. 2-13 are best regarded as parenthetical with an anacoluthon at v. 1. We saw that Paul did the same thing in 2:1. *“In 2:11-22 Paul has explained the union of Jewish and Gentiles believers into one new person in Christ. He now proceeds to offer a prayer on behalf of these believers. However, just as he begins, he stops abruptly in the middle of his sentence (at the end of 3:1) and digresses to the subject of the mystery of Christ. He describes the mystery and his responsibility to make it known. After this digression he resumes his prayer beginning in verse 14.... This digression is intended to enhance what he had just stated, after which he returns to his new thought in verse 14 where again the words τούτου χάριν [toutou charin, ‘for this cause’] are repeated followed by the verb κάμπτω [kamptō, ‘I bow’], ‘I bend my knees.’ Briefly, Paul had just revealed that the ‘new person’ had been created, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles in which God’s Spirit dwells. It is at this point that Paul is going to pray for strengthened love toward one another as the outworking of this new union. However,*

**an-a-co-lu-thon** — a construction involving a break in grammatical sequence, as ‘It makes me so – I just get angry.’

before he offers this prayer he breaks into the middle of the sentence and gives additional information regarding the content and recipients of the mystery and Paul's responsibility to dispense this mystery to the Gentiles." [Hoehner, 417,419] "As there is no verb of which the words, ἐγὼ Παῦλος [egō Paulos, 'I Paul'] are the nominative, there is great diversity of opinion as to the proper construction of the passage. The most common view is that the sentence here begun is recommenced and finished in verse 14, where the words, 'For this cause' are repeated. The apostle intended saying at the beginning of the chapter what he says in verse 14, 'For this cause, I Paul, bow my knees,' i.e. 'because you Ephesians have been brought to God, I pray for your confirmation and growth in grace.'" [Hodge, 100] "3:1-13 is formally a digression on Paul's apostolic ministry to the Gentiles and on the mystery which had been revealed to him and was at the heart of his ministry. The original intention of the thought begun in 3:1 is not completed, because the reference in it to Paul as a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles leads to an expatiation on this theme. 3:1, then, is anacoluthic, and the repetition of the opening phrase τούτου χάριν, [toutou charin], 'for this reason,' in 3:14 suggests that at that point [Paul] takes up again the intention with which he had started out in 3:1, which can now be seen to be to intercede on behalf of his Gentile Christian readers." [Lincoln, 167] "The apostle having described himself as a prisoner for the Gentiles, is quite characteristically drawn off into a digression on the grace granted to him in connexion with this ministry to the Gentiles." [Abbott, 77]

**WHAT IS PAUL SAYING?** — Let us evaluate Paul's sentence so we can discover exactly what he is trying to say in this section of scripture. To do that, I will temporarily set aside some of what Paul is saying so we can concentrate on his main message. This is not to say those portions set-aside are not important. Allow me to give an example as to what I want to do and why. Consider the following sentence:

*"My oldest brother who lives in California with his family of nine, and whom I have not seen in over five years, just gave me a baby-blue Buick with all the accessories, having received the car as an inheritance from his father-in-law that passed away earlier in the year, a relative of whom I know for a fact my brother was not very fond."*

That is a long sentence but if we wanted to reduce it to its most basic sense can easily be broken down as follows:

- There are three parts of the sentence that modifies the subject, 'brother': he is the 'oldest', he lives in California with his family with nine members, and he is someone I had not seen in over five years.
- There are several parts of the sentence all describing the car itself: it is 'baby-blue' in color (yuck!), it has all the accessories, my brother had received it as part of an inheritance, and that inheritance came by the passing of his father-in-law.
- There is an additional clause describing the one who passed away: my brother was not fond of his father-in-law.

So as we temporarily set-aside those additional descriptive clauses, all the long sentence is actually saying is this:

*"My brother gave me a Buick."*

Everything else adds to what is being said and is important, but the most basic sense of what is being said is quite simple.

I want to do the same with Paul's sentences in Eph 3:1-13. I want to emphasize something: ***I am not removing these portions we are temporarily setting aside, nor are these portions to be considered unimportant. If in the above example those additional phrases adds much to what the sentence is saying, how much more is this true of the Word of God! But to discover the most basic sense of what Paul is saying, we will temporarily ignore the additional descriptive clauses.*** To do this, please refer to the addendum on the fold-out sheet at the back of this lesson.



Therefore the essence of what Paul is saying is as follows:

***For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles —***

***if, indeed, ye did hear of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me, namely, that He made known the mystery, that the Gentiles should be***

***joint – heirs***

***and joint – body***

***and joint – partakers***

***of His promise in Jesus the Messiah through the gospel;***

***this grace was given to me***

- ***to preach the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles***
- ***and to enlighten all as to what is the plan of the mystery***

***in order that [hina] the untraceable wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and to the authorities in the heavenlies through the ecclesia.***

***Therefore I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on behalf of you which is your glory.***

**ANALYSIS OF PAUL'S DIGRESSION** — According to the Stephens Greek Text of 1550 (which is a foundational text used for the making of our KJV / NKJV Bibles) vv. 2-13 is one long sentence. With 189 words this is the fourth long sentence out of the eight in this epistle (cf. 1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13, 14-19; 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20). It should be noted however that the Nestle-Aland 28<sup>th</sup> edition Interlinear NT does divide this into two sentences, vv 1-7 and vv 8-13. *“The digression falls into three sentences, two longer ones and then one short final sentence. The two longer sentences, vv. 2-7 and vv 8-12, provide parallel statements about the mystery which is central to the gospel with which Paul was entrusted. The first statement is framed by references to Paul’s apostleship in terms of grace and, in line with the reflections of 2:11-22, focuses on the mystery of the Gentiles’ participation in God’s people, the Church, while the second statement links the mystery with the Church’s role in God’s purposes for the cosmos and thereby recalls the earlier association of mystery with God’s plan for the cosmos in 1:9, 10. In its talk of the recipients of the revelation of the mystery, the first statement speaks of Paul alongside the holy apostles and prophets, while in the second statement the focus narrows to Paul alone as the proclaimer of the mystery. The final sentence, v 13, rounds off the digression neatly by taking up from v 1, but in a different formulation, the notion of the suffering apostle for the Gentiles, which had caused the digression in the first place.”* [Lincoln, 168] “The inclusion of the Gentiles had been part of God’s plan from the beginning, but had previously been kept secret; it has now been made known to Paul (v. 3) and others (v. 5). Paul also had been empowered to be the primary instrument for its accomplishment (vv. 7-8). Vv. 7, 8 hold together, though v. 7 is the conclusion of the first main sentence (vv. 2-7) and v. 8 the beginning of the second (vv. 8-12). They form the transition from the statement of Paul’s place in God’s plan to the outline of his fulfilment of his role. A revelation has been made whose content was the acceptance of the Gentiles into God’s people (v. 6). God’s plan has however an even wider cosmic ambit (v. 10), and this was his intention from the beginning through Christ (vv. 11-12). That Paul suffered was therefore of little importance and should not discourage the readers; in fact it was for their good (v. 13).” [Best, 292f]

**am·bit** — a sphere of operation or influence; range; scope; boundary; limit

**WHY DID PAUL DIGRESS?** — The reason for Paul’s digression is easy to discover; he tells us why in v. 13:

*‘Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.’* (Eph 3:13 NKJV)

*I believe this reveals the pastoral heart of the apostle Paul. Whatever we are to glean from vv. 2-12, we must remember he was writing all of this to encourage his Gentile readers!* The question is therefore *‘What was Paul saying in his digression that would encourage his Gentile readers?’*

*“Since 3:1 spoke specifically of his imprisonment, the hardships Paul has encountered in prison form the specific reason for his readers’ discouragement (cf. Phil. 1:17; 4:14). If Paul wrote this letter during the imprisonment described in Acts 28, then by the end of that period he had been a prisoner about five years (Acts 24:27; 27:9; 28:11; 28:16, 30). Although many of Paul’s readers knew him only by reputation, they may well have been discouraged that ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’ had for a number of years been unable to travel freely and proclaim the gospel in the manner described in 3:2-12. If they were being marginalized in their own cities and neighborhoods, then Paul’s fate may have seemed like a reflection of their own difficulties. During this period more than a few Christians in Ephesus must have wondered from time to time whether their commitment to the God of the gospel was a mistake. With their refusal to participate in the imperial cult or to sacrifice to the local deities, had they only succeeded in angering the gods who had placed Rome in power? Were Paul’s troubles — and their own — a result of Christianity’s demand for exclusive loyalty to the God of the Jews and his Messiah?”* [Thielman, 221] *Compare with these comments the reason for the Book of Hebrews.*

Here are some points Paul was using to encourage his Gentile readers:

- Paul (as well as others, note the NT prophets in v. 5) had received this message by direct revelation from God Himself. There was no question as to the validity of this teaching.
- Paul’s teaching was indeed a new doctrine, having been hidden in God until now — but the fact that this was a new teaching did not mean the doctrine was not from God.
- this message was bigger than just how the Gentiles and Jews were to relate to one another within their ecclesias; God was using this new earthly union to glorify and honor His incredible wisdom amongst the heavenly hosts.

Here are other thoughts as to why Paul digressed:

- **Paul gives the grounds for his right to address the Gentiles** — “That vv. 2-13 are parenthetical does not mean they are unimportant. *They give, in fact, the grounds for Paul’s right to address the readers.*” [Best, 292] “Paul’s imprisonment was integral to his special apostolic ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. Historically, his advocacy of a law-free Gentile mission was what provoked the opposition which led to his arrest and imprisonment. *Now it is not just Gentiles in general, but the readers in particular, who are to see themselves as indebted to the sort of apostleship which would suffer in this way, as the form of direct address, ‘you Gentiles,’ is continued from the previous pericope.*” [Lincoln, 173]
- **To remind the Gentile readers that they owe their salvation to the gospel** — “In discourses designed to persuade, the *digressio* was frequently found in association with the *narratio*, and could come at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the *narratio*. It was meant to treat a theme relevant, though not logically necessary, to the case being made, and

to do so in such a way as to secure the audience's favor. Here, at the end, *it increases the goodwill of the recipients by reminding them of the suffering apostle's ministry on their behalf. It underlines for the Gentile readers that they owe their participation in the salvation that had been promised, their membership in the same body as Jewish Christians, their part in the Church's cosmic role, and their access to God, to the gospel that was originally revealed to and proclaimed by Paul.*" [Lincoln, 171]

- **To answer the question as to why he was in prison for the Gentiles** — "Paul begins 3:1-13 with an emphatic self-reference to his imprisonment. The pathos of this reference seems to be an appropriate introduction to a prayer whose subject is his readers' understanding of the limitless love of Christ (vv. 14-19). Mention of his imprisonment on behalf of his Gentile readers then leads Paul into a sustained reflection on the responsibility he bears as a recipient of divine revelation about God's purposes for the Gentiles (vv. 2-13). Perhaps at some level Paul is answering in 3:2-7 the question implied in 3:1 of why he is in prison for the Gentiles." [Thielman, 189]