

# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XL : DIGRESSION #2 - 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 as Minister of the Mystery to the Gentiles (3:1-13)***

***Paul begins introduction to intercessory prayer ...***

<sup>1</sup> *For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles,*

***... but his mention of his ministry to the Gentiles leads him to expound upon his position, forming a digression about the mystery entrusted to him.***

<sup>2</sup> *if, indeed, ye did hear of the stewardship [administration] of the grace of God which was given to me towards you,*

***Paul further describes this grace he was given as being a 'mystery' (a thing hidden until revealed by God)***

<sup>3</sup> *namely, that He made known the mystery*

***This mystery Paul is about to describe is something he has just mentioned and by reading it, the Gentiles should be able to perceive Paul's insight and understanding into the mystery***

by revelation to me (as I wrote before briefly [lit., 'in a little, in a few'], <sup>4</sup> by which ye are able, when you read it, to understand my insight in the mystery of the Christ,

**Paul explains this mystery has only now been revealed in the providence of God**

<sup>5</sup> which was not made known in other generations to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit),

**Paul now explains the contents of the mystery**

<sup>6</sup> that the Gentiles should be

joint – heirs

and joint – body

and joint – partakers of His promise in Jesus the Messiah through the gospel,

**Paul explains he was a servant to declare the mystery**

<sup>7</sup> of which I became a servant

according to the gift of the grace of God given to me,

according to the working of His power;

**Paul explains he was given two tasks in this grace of the mystery**

<sup>8</sup> this grace was given to me,

the less than the least of all the saints,

**Paul uses two infinitives to describe the 'grace' God has given him:**

to preach the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles

<sup>9</sup> and to enlighten all as to what is the plan of the mystery

which was hidden from the beginning of the ages in God,

who created all things through Jesus Christ,

an **infinitive** is a verbal noun and therefore has features of both; it almost always begins with the word 'to'

**Why did the Lord give this grace of administering the mystery to Paul? The answer follows in what is called a 'hina' clause (ὅτι) which shows the purpose or result of something.**

<sup>10</sup> in order that [hina] the untraceable wisdom of God might now be made known

**To whom?**

to the principalities

and to the authorities

**Where are these principalities and authorities located?**

in the heavenlies

**What did the Lord use to make His wisdom known?**

through the ecclesia

**This was all done according to God's eternal plan:**

<sup>11</sup> according to the eternal purpose

which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord

<sup>12</sup> in whom we have the freedom and the access in confidence through the faith of him,

**Paul now gives the reason for his digression. Although he was a prisoner because of his actions on behalf of the Gentiles, Paul showed it was in the outworking of the larger, eternal plan of our Sovereign God to manifest His glory, and it was Paul's honor and privilege to be a part of this ministry of grace. His Gentile readers should therefore not be discouraged with his (and their) trials.**

<sup>13</sup> therefore I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on behalf of you which is your glory.

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 responsibility of managing 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.***

**v 2 —** The parenthesis or digression begins here. Paul has argued that the Gentiles are within the ecclesia because this was and is the way God arranged his plan of salvation (1:3-14; 2:11-22). Since mentioning his being in prison for the sake of the Gentiles, he gives more detail: Paul first needed to receive the revelation of God’s plan (3:2-7) then fulfilled God’s commission by preaching and teaching that revelation (3:8-12).

**PAUL QUESTIONED AS BEING THE AUTHOR OF EPHESIANS — if indeed you have heard, assuming you have heard —** εἴγε ἠκούσατε [eige ekousate] Paul’s digression is introduced by a conditional conjunction which could be used for emphasis (‘if so be’, KJV, RV; or ‘if indeed’ NASV) or for concession (‘assuming’, RSV, NRSV; or ‘surely’, NEB, TEV, JB, NIV, NJB). It was mentioned in the last lesson the paradox in my mind that the most personal and Pauline portion of scripture in Ephesians would be used by some to deny the Pauline authorship of the book. The reason for their questioning is as follows:

***“They base their argument upon the fact that the book of Acts assigns a lengthy ministry to Paul at Ephesus, making it impossible for him to write to the Ephesians, ‘If you have heard of my stewardship,’ for Paul knew that they must have heard of his stewardship.”*** [Hendriksen, 151]

***“This phrase occasions the question, Could this Epistle have been addressed to a Church familiar with St Paul? And it has thus seemed, to some extreme critics, an argument against the genuineness of the Epistle, a lapsus plumae on the part of a fabricator; and, in very different quarters, an argument against the special destination to Ephesus.”*** [Moule, 88]

**lapsus plumae** – Latin: lapsus = ‘a slipping’ + plumae = ‘of the feather or plume’, lit. ‘a slipping of the feather, a slip of the quill’, thus ‘An error made in writing.’

For those who question Paul as the author of Ephesians, there is no one single reason but rather an accumulation of reasons which in their minds produce doubt. This verse is one of the major reasons for their doubt. From the book of Acts we see the lengthy attention given to Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders, clearly revealing their mutual love in the ministry for each other (what follows is Acts 20:15-38; see also the entirety of Acts 19):

***“The next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them:***

***“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three***

years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship." (Acts 20:15-38 NKJV)

Therefore as we come to this verse, some understand the author to be saying, 'Are you aware of the stewardship of the grace of God given to me? Have you heard of my ministry to the Gentiles?' If the author in Paul's name was questioning their knowledge of Paul's ministry when the book of Acts shows they were intimately aware of Paul then yes, there may be reason to question Paul having written this. But there are other viable explanations as to the meaning here without having to question Paul as being the author.

**'IF' COULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS 'UNCERTAINTY' OR 'ASSUMPTION'** — William Hendriksen (Baker's NT Commentary Series) gives an excellent illustration of the use of our word 'if':

**"[That some use this verse to attack Paul as the author] proceeds from the assumption that the little word 'if' — whether in Greek or in English — must indicate uncertainty. But that is incorrect. Two contrasted examples in the English language will make this clear: (1) 'If our team wins, there will be a celebration.' Here 'if' expresses uncertainty, mere possibility. (2) 'If you do not know the day of your death, you should be prepared now.' Here 'if' indicates an assumption that is taken for granted. This 'if' could be translated 'since.'"** [Hendriksen, 151]

Since this could be understood in two different ways, can we determine how it is being used here? To help make a proper evaluation, let us look at the phrase in other passages and see how they are used.

The phrase in question is made up of two particles: εἰ [ei] + γε [ge]. Some of the Greek texts have these separate (εἰ γε, ei ge) while others combine these particles (εἰγε, eige); the meaning is the same whether combined or separate. The Lexicons define the particles as follows:

εἰ = 'conditional particle *if, since*' [Friberg Lexicon]

γε = 'an enclitic particle, answering exactly to no one word in Latin or English; used by the Biblical writers much more rarely than by Greek writers' [Thayer's Lexicon]; 'an enclitic particle intensifying a word, always adding emphasis but not always translated' [Friberg Lexicon]

**enclitic** – a word attaching itself closely with the preceding word as to not have an accent

The combination of these two particles is only used four other times in the NT, all by the Apostle Paul. He even uses these particles one other time in this same epistle:

'if indeed (εἰ γε, ei ge) *you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus'* (Eph 4:21)

'if indeed, (εἰ γε, ei ge) *having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.'* (2 Cor 5:3)

*'Have you suffered so many things in vain — if indeed (εἰ γε, ei ge) it was in vain?'* (Gal 3:4)

'if indeed (εἰ γε, ei ge) *you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.'* (Col 1:23)

The exact sense of these particles may be questioned in some of the verses but there is no question in Eph 4:21 that the sense is 'assuming, since, inasmuch as.' This is especially important since this is in the same epistle as our verse in question.

*"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."* (Eph 4:17-24)

Some comments about the use of the particles in v. 21:

**"As at 3.2 εἰ γε [ei ge] does not indicate doubt and may be paraphrased, 'At any rate if you have heard ... as I know you have.'"** [Best, 427]

**"Just as in 3:2, the γε [ge] adds emphasis to the εἰ [ei], and together the two words communicate an assumption — something Paul knows to be true, but not on the basis of firsthand experience: 'if, as I assume, you heard him.' Much**

*had changed in the more than seven years since Paul was last in Ephesus, and even when he was there, some of the Christians in the city had only a loose connection with him. There is no irony here. Rather, the slight note of uncertainty in the phrase εἰ γε [ei ge] probably reflects Paul's knowledge that false understandings of the Christian tradition were abroad (4:14; Col. 2:8-23). It is just possible, he hints, that some of his readers have not heard the Christian message 'as the truth is in Jesus.'*" [Thielman, 300]

Hendriksen also quotes commentators as using 2 Cor 5:3 as having no question as to the sense being 'assuming, since, inasmuch as.'

"Many commentators mention the fact that the expression εἰ γε [ei ge], used here in Eph. 3:2, has the sense of 'since' or 'inasmuch as.' They refer to 2 Cor. 5:3 as a parallel case." [Hendriksen, 151]

Thayer's Lexicon lists the following as examples of the sense being 'assuming':

"*that is to say; on the assumption that*': Eph. 3:2; 4:21; Col. 1:23" [Thayer's Lexicon]

Therefore of the four other times these two particles are used, three of those times are used by commentators and lexicons as examples of these particles meaning 'since, inasmuch as, on the assumption that.'

William Hendriksen brings forth other examples which do not include the second particle γε [ge]:

"The probability of the correctness of this rendering does not depend exclusively on the particle γε [ge], however. Even in the absence of this particle doubt is often excluded. Thus, the words, 'If [εἰ, ei] therefore there is any encouragement in Christ' (Phil. 2:1), do not mean that the apostle wonders whether there be such encouragement. On the contrary, the sense is, 'If then there is any encouragement in Christ, as there surely is.' For similar illustrations of this second sense of 'if' see 1 Cor. 11:6; 15:12, 32; 2 Cor. 3:7; Philem. 17; Heb. 2.2." [Hendriksen, 151f]

Frank Thielman sums up the situation very well:

***"[T]he essential force' of the particle γε [ge] 'appears to be concentration,' but it expresses this emphasis so delicately that it should be 'rendered in English by an inflexion of the voice, or by italics' rather than by words. Such a fine nuance inevitably makes the phrase εἰ γε [ei ge] ambiguous: it can imply either doubt or certainty, and sometimes the decision about which of these is in view is difficult (2 Cor. 5:3; Col. 1:23). Here, oddly, there is an element of both meanings: Paul has no real doubt that his readers have heard of him, any more than he doubts that they have heard about Jesus when he uses the expression again in 4:20-21. At the same time, the γε [ge] reveals some personal distance between Paul and his readers: 'If, as I assume, you have heard'.... [Some use this to deny the Pauline authorship] but it is at least equally likely that these elements are evidence that the real Paul dictated this letter (perhaps quickly and with some emotion) and that the εἰ γε [ei ge] reveals his intention that a wide audience of believers in Ephesus should read it or hear it read. After Paul's absence from the city for over seven years, nearly five of them in various forms of imprisonment, many of these intended readers would have had only a loose connection to him."*** [Frank Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series: Ephesians*, 192]

This conclusion is supported by the majority of the commentaries I have been using in these studies. These Bible teachers understand Paul to be the author of Ephesians and agree with the understanding that Paul is using these particles in the sense of 'assuming, since, inasmuch as'. Below are their comments. I have mentioned this before but it bears repeating: the purpose of gathering these writers is not to merely 'gather numbers,' as if to say "So-and-so agrees with me, and so-and-so agrees also; therefore it must be what God is saying." For example, I have a Catholic work associate that believes in evolution and in our last discussion used the Pope to support his beliefs. In my mind, quoting the Pope only showed they were both in error! ***Bible truth is not a game of numbers; rather I am adding these comments to show there are those who have spent their lives studying the scriptures and the original languages and are in support of the above comments.*** Their comments:

***"The word εἰγε [eige] rendered in our version by if, does not necessarily express doubt. Paul knew that the Ephesians were aware that he was an apostle to the Gentiles. The word is often used where the thing spoken of is taken for granted. Ephesians 4:21; 2 Corinthians 5:3. In such cases, it may properly be rendered, since, inasmuch as."*** [Charles Hodge, *Geneva Series Commentaries: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 84f]

F. F. Bruce translates the verse as follows: ***'you have heard, have you not?, if indeed you have heard, at least if you have heard.'*** ... "The words with which the digression begins — 'If indeed you have heard ...' or 'On the assumption that you have heard ...' — imply that the people addressed at least include some who were personally unacquainted with the apostle. To his friends in Ephesus he would more probably have said 'You know...'" [Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *New International Commentary Series: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 310f]

***"The Ephesians had heard all this, and St. Paul was now delicately reminding them of it."*** [Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary – vol 3, Galatians - Philemon*, 103]

***"'Surely' does not suggest that the Gentiles have not heard about Paul's responsibility with the gospel. It means 'if as I take for granted.'"*** [Snodgrass, 159] Klyne Snodgrass translates this verse as follows: ***"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you"*** [Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary Series: Ephesians*, 159]

*“The Greek does not imply doubt: ‘Assuming (what I know to be the fact, namely) that ye have heard,’ &c. ‘If, as I presume.’ The indicative in the Greek shows that no doubt is implied: ‘Seeing that doubtless,’ &c. He by this phrase delicately reminds them of their having heard from himself, and probably from others subsequently, the fact.” [JFB, Commentary on Whole Bible on CD]*

*“The compound particle εἴ γε [eige], or εἰ γε [ei ge] makes a supposition which is taken for granted, equal to ‘if, indeed, as I may assume.’ Whether the certainty of the assumption is in the particle itself or is derived from the context is still debated among grammarians.... Here it introduces a polite reminder of what these Ephesians certainly had heard — ‘a gentle appeal, expressed in a hypothetical form, and conveying the hope that his words had not been quite forgotten.’” [S. D. F. Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 302f]*

*“The particle here is not designed to express a doubt whether they had heard of it or not, for he takes it for granted that they had. Doddridge renders it, ‘since I well know you have heard,’ etc.” [Albert Barnes, Ephesians on CD]*

*“Some have detected an element of doubt in ‘surely’ (ei ge) and then wondered whether Paul could have written like this to any who knew him or even knew of him. But the expression is presumptive rather than suppositional. When Paul uses the same formula in Ephesians 4:21 he is not suggesting for a moment that his readers had never heard of Christ! **Either from Paul himself when he was with them or by report from others, the Ephesian Christians were acquainted with the apostle’s unique ministry.**” [Wood, Ephesians on CD]*

#### **EVEN THOSE QUESTIONING PAUL AS THE AUTHOR AGREE WITH THIS UNDERSTANDING OF ‘IF’ —**

*“εἴ γε [ei ge, ‘if, if indeed, assuming’], which occurs elsewhere in the NT only in Eph 4:21; Gal 3:4; 2 Cor 6:3; and Col 1:23, introduces a statement which makes explicit an assumption lying behind a preceding assertion. **It depends on the context whether such a strengthened ‘if’ implies doubt or confident assumption. Here, the latter meaning is clear.**” [Andrew T. Lincoln, Word Biblical Commentary Series: Ephesians, 173]*

Ernest Best argues from the syntax (εἴ γε, ei ge, ‘if, if indeed, assuming’) the readers knew Paul, although since Best does not believe Paul to be the author, writes in such a manner to argue, *‘The author of Ephesians would not have used Paul’s name if the recipients would have been unfamiliar with Paul.’* [Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 297]

**SOME BELIEVE THIS PROVES EPHESIANS TO BE A CIRCULAR LETTER —** *“This seems decisive against the supposition that the Epistle was addressed to a Church which had been personally instructed by the writer.... A preacher addressing a strange congregation might say ‘I am sure,’ or even ‘I know that you have been taught so and so,’ but no preacher addressing those whom he himself had taught would ordinarily express himself in this way....* It is said, indeed, that this argument proves too much, since ‘what was known of Paul in the Ephesian Church would practically be known of him throughout the missions of Asia’ (Moule). But this is just the kind of case in which the particle may be properly used, viz. where the writer may be ‘practically’ certain, but doubt is conceivable. Besides, the details which follow might be but imperfectly known to those who had not heard them from St. Paul’s own lips. And again, would he, in writing to the Ephesians, refer them to what he had just now written, that they may appreciate his knowledge in the mystery of Christ? Had they not had much more full proof of this during his long ministry? ... **The only hypothesis that agrees with the facts is that the Epistle was in some sense an encyclical or circular letter.**” [Abbott, 77f; also vi. of his introduction]

#### **OUR CONCLUSIONS —**

- **the sense of these particles seem to be ‘if, as I assume to be true...’**
- **if Ephesians was indeed a circular letter, undoubtedly there would have been some who had never met Paul personally; note that the use of these particles does not necessarily prove Ephesians to be a circular letter, see below**
- **many reading (or hearing the epistle read) would have known Paul personally but these words indicate Paul knew there would also have been many who only knew him loosely; this would not be surprising since it probably had been over seven years since Paul had last seen them, nearly five of which was when he was in prison**