

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LIII : 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)

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.

according to God's purpose that runs through the ages

in Whom we have freedom of speech, freedom of access in confidence through faith.

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

v 13 — **Wherefore** — Διὸ [dio] — most of the writers I have read believe this refers back to all of vv. 2-12, not just v. 12. “The final words of the paragraph are an entreaty to the readers not to become discouraged because of Paul’s sufferings. The inferential particle therefore draws out the implications of the great truths he has set before them (vv. 2-12). Paul has written about the eternal purposes of God, the place of his Gentile readers within the divine plan, as well as his own role in relation to it. God had appointed him to enlighten them about the mystery, and as a result he undergoes suffering for them. In view of so momentous a task given to him in his calling, they are entreated not to become disheartened at his sufferings, which he undergoes on their behalf.” [O’Brien, 250f] “Paul was then a prisoner at Rome. He had been made such in consequence of his efforts to diffuse the Christian religion among the Gentiles. His zeal in this cause, and the opinions which he held on this subject, had roused the wrath of the Jews, and led to all the calamities which he was now suffering. Of that the Ephesians, he supposes, were aware. It was natural that they should be distressed at his sufferings, for all his privations were endured on their account. But here he tells them not to be troubled and disheartened. He was indeed suffering; but he was reconciled to it, and they should be also, since it was promoting their welfare.” [Barnes, Ephesians on CD]

I desire — αἰτοῦμαι [aitoumai] — translated as ‘I desire, I ask.’ Ernest Best notes that ‘I desire’ lacks an object and ‘ye faint’ lacks a subject so both must be supplied from the context. He explains three possible renderings then gives his choice as follows: “‘I beg you not to lose heart because of my trials.’ ... This is the most satisfactory and provides the smoothest transition to the final clause. The readers are in greater danger of losing heart than Paul.” [Best, 330f]

that ye faint not — μὴ ἐκκακεῖν [mē ekkakein] — this word comes from the root κακός [kakos] meaning ‘evil.’ It’s most literal translation is ‘to act badly.’ It is used in the sense of ‘failing to hold out successfully or to lose courage,’ therefore ‘becoming weary or tired, giving up, being discouraged, losing heart.’ “The term ... could refer to a failure to perform one’s duty (Polybius, Hist.), but in the NT it always means ‘grow weary’ (Gal. 6:9; 2 Thess. 3:13) or ‘be discouraged’ (2 Cor. 4:1, 16; Luke 18:1).” “[Paul’s] readers know of [his] imprisonment and they might be afraid that they would also be imprisoned or might believe that God was no longer using Paul as his minister (in 2 Corinthians Paul defends himself against such ideas)... The readers are encouraged to believe that whatever befalls them should not lead to despair.” [Best, 331]

at my tribulations — ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου [en tais thlipsesin mou] — refers to Paul’s imprisonment. “The afflictions mentioned here do not refer to his whole ministry but rather to his imprisonment in Rome on behalf of them. No doubt, at this time he was waiting for the Jews to bring accusations against him before Caesar. In fact, after his arrest and trial in Jerusalem some Jews attempted to take his life after which he was delivered to Caesarea (Acts 23:12-35). There, after a trial and a request by some of the Jewish leaders to have him returned to Jerusalem to be retried, Paul appealed to Caesar (24:1-25:11) and that was when he was sent to Rome (chaps. 27-28). The main contention of the Jews against Paul was that he taught people to overthrow the law of Moses and brought Gentiles into the Jerusalem temple (21:28; 24:5-6; 25:7-8). In this way Paul was suffering tribulations because of his ministry among Gentiles, including the Ephesians. Paul’s willingness to suffer on their behalf is confirmed in a letter written in this same time period of Roman imprisonment where he states that he was willing to be poured out as a drink offering for the faith of the recipients (Phil 2:17). In this spirit Paul cautions Ephesian believers not to lose heart.” [Hoehner, 469]

for you — ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν [hyper humōn] — “His imprisonment is neither personal tragedy nor personal victory; it is the result of what he had done in making known the salvation of God for the Gentiles.” [Best, 331] “By the time Paul wrote Ephesians, many in his audience would have had no personal contact with him, but Paul considered himself an apostle to all Gentile Christians, even those whom he had never met (Rom. 1:11-15; 11:13; 15:14-16). Despite his physical and personal distance from his readers, his sufferings was for them.” [Thielman, 221f]

which is your glory — ἥτις ἐστὶν δόξα ὑμῶν [hētis estin doxa humōn] — Forgive the many references but I read so many comments which were so well said that I thought it important to include them all:

“In its appearances so far in Ephesians glory has been related to God rather than believers (cf. 1:6, 12, 14, 17, 18), but it is used in association with believers in Col 1:27 and 3:4, and in those cases also it denotes eschatological glory. In Paul’s thought one of the relationships between suffering and glory is that the former is a precondition of the latter (cf. 2 Cor 4:17; Rom 8:17, 18). But the one who suffers is the one who is later glorified, while here in Eph 3:13 the one who suffers is Paul but those who are gloried are believers. Such a relationship, whereby apostolic suffering

mediates salvation to others, is present in Paul's thought but expressed in different terms in 2 Cor 1:6 ('if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation') and 2 Cor 4:12 ('so death is at work in us, but life in you'). [Lincoln, 192]

"If it be asked how his afflictions could be their glory, Chrysostom replies, 'Because God so loved them as to give His Son for them, and to afflict His servants; for in order that they should obtain so great blessings Paul was imprisoned.'" [Abbott, 92]

"It is as if the apostle were saying, 'What an honor it is for you that in the very eyes of God you are regarded as being worthy of so much suffering endured by me in your behalf!' How precious you must be to him!" [Hendriksen, 162]

"All tribulation and affliction may be intended to do some good, and may benefit others, Eph 3:13. Paul felt that his sufferings were for the 'glory' — the welfare and honour of the Gentiles in whose cause he was suffering. He was then a prisoner at Rome. He was permitted no longer to go abroad from land to land to preach the gospel. How natural would it have been for him to be desponding, and to feel that he was leading a useless life. But he did not feel thus. He felt that in some way he might be doing good. He was suffering in a good cause, and his trials had been brought on him by the appointment of God. He gave himself to writing letters; he talked with all who would come to him, Ac 28:30,31, and he expected to accomplish something by his example in his sufferings. The sick, the afflicted, and the imprisoned, often feel that they are useless. They are laid aside from public and active life, and they feel that they are living in vain. But it is not so. The long imprisonment of John Bunyan — so mysterious to him and to his friends — was the means of producing the Pilgrim's Progress, now translated into more than twenty languages, and already blessed to the salvation of thousands. The meekness, and patience, and kindness of a Christian on a bed of pain, may do more for the honour of religion than he could do in a life of health. It shows the sustaining power of the gospel; and this is much. It is worth much suffering to show to a world what the gospel can do in supporting the soul in times of trial; and he who is imprisoned or persecuted, who lies month after month, or year after year, on a bed of languishing, may do more for the honour of religion than by many years of active life." [Barne's Notes on NT]
Note Albert Barnes died in 1870; Pilgrim's Progress has now been translated in over 200 languages.

"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.

"Gentile Christians, who recognized him as their apostle, the champion of their liberty, might well be dismayed at the thought of his being in chains, deprived of his freedom to move around for the advancement of the gospel and the strengthening of the churches. But let them not lose heart: he was as completely engaged in their interests under his present restraint as he had been when he was at liberty. Indeed, if they could only see the significance of his arrest and imprisonment, they would understand that, in the providence of God, their interests were promoted and not endangered thereby. Instead of being bewildered and discouraged, they would rejoice. If it was an honor for Paul to be Christ's prisoner on the Gentiles' behalf, it was an honor for the Gentiles themselves.... Moreover, Paul knew that his present endurance of affliction was preparing for him 'an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison' (2 Cor. 4:17), would be shared by those on whose behalf the present affliction was endured. Paul's afflictions should therefore call forth from his friends as wholehearted a doxology as they called forth from himself." [Bruce, 323]

What have we learned? (3:1-13)

Since you Gentile believers were formerly separated from the covenantal promises of God but brought into the congregation [the ecclesia] alongside the Jewish believers [as was discussed in the previous chapter], I Paul, a prisoner for the cause of Jesus Christ and for the sake of you Gentiles, want to pray for you. But having mentioned my imprisonment on your behalf, let me expand on that thought.

It has been many years since I have been in Ephesus so I realize there are many new believers of whom I have never personally met. But I assume you each did hear of my work, my responsibility of managing the grace of God, the gift that was given me, not for my sake but for you. That gift of grace was the revelation of something that had been previously hidden. I have already briefly mentioned it in this letter, by which you are able when you read it to understand my insight and comprehension into this thing previously hidden which consists in Christ. It was not made known to humanity in the earlier generations, a period of a different kind than this present time, but has been revealed by His Holy Spirit to those He set apart for this purpose, that is, His apostles and New Testament prophets. This thing that was hidden but is now revealed is that the Gentile believers are joint-heirs, joint-

body and joint-partakers of His promise in Jesus the Messiah through the gospel. This congregation [the ecclesia] to which you Gentile believers are joined together with Jewish believers is an entirely new entity, of which each believer is a fully equal and joint member with the others.

I was made a servant, a minister, a 'deacon', to that good news by that gift of grace the Lord had given me, according to the effectual working of His power.

To me was this gift of grace given; to me, one lesser than the least of all those who are believers, for two purposes:

to preach, to 'evangelize' to the Gentiles the riches of Christ that cannot be 'traced out', the riches of salvation that is unfathomable, infinite, beyond one's ability to imagine. These riches are not what Christ supplies but rather is Christ Himself...

and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of that which was hidden until revealed by the Lord. That which was hidden was formed before the ages of the world began, in eternity-past, and was hidden in God Who, as Creator of all things, has a sovereign right to rule His creation as He pleases!

The gift of grace was given to me in order that the untraceable wisdom of God might now be made known to the angelic beings in the spiritual realm by means of the congregation [the ecclesia], that body of believers consisting of both Gentile and Jewish believers, showing in a microcosm the eternal plan of God to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). This is all being done according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have both the freedom of speech in prayer and the freedom of access in confidence to God through the faith of him.

Therefore, while I am in prison for the sake of you Gentile believers, do not lose heart in my tribulations. It is all part of God's wonderful, inscrutable eternal plan and He is working this out for your glory.