

# Ephesians 3:1-13

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People are forever drawing circles around themselves and putting up fences to shut other people out. Sometimes this is done politely with the message: 'by invitation only.' At other times, this is done bluntly with the warning: 'keep out.' Some housing projects exclude children because they are adult condominiums. Other housing projects try to skirt the law and exclude minorities. Use of the country club is for members only. There are those who like to form exclusive friendships which are commonly called cliques. Some people, especially teenagers, are convinced that unless you wear designer clothes and have a certain hair-do, you cannot be a part of the group. People are constantly drawing circles around themselves and putting up fences to exclude other people.

With all of this exclusiveness around us, it is a fair question to ask "what about the church?" Do we intentionally or unintentionally put up fences or draw circles around the gospel which shut people out of the Kingdom of God? Is there a tendency to restrict the gospel to our personal needs and to the needs of our congregations? Is there a tendency to ignore the unchurched in our neighborhoods, our cities, our country or our world?

If there is even a hint of truth in any of these questions, we do well to consider the example of St. Paul and his letter to the Ephesians. In the first chapter of this letter, the apostle writes about the source of grace for sinful mankind, namely, God acting through His Son - our Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter two, Paul tells us who the recipients of this grace are: Jews and Gentiles alike. Great blessings have been bestowed upon the Jews and the Gentiles. They have been reconciled to God and to one another through their Savior. Now, Paul connects chapter three to what he has already written with the phrase "for this reason." As he does he describes his ministry of preaching the gospel emphasizing his commission to preach the good news to all people.

## **Chapter Three: Paul's Ministry (verses 1-13)**

### **Part 1 - God's Purpose Concerning-the Gentiles (verses 1-6)**

"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." (NIV)

It does not seem as though Paul intended, to say much about himself or his ministry as he wrote to the Ephesians. He begins: For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles..” Paul is the subject of the verse. The verb or predicate is found in verse 14. In order to make this verse complete, some suggest that εἰμί is to be supplied. However, the εἰμί is unnecessary since the break between verses 1 and 14 is an anacoluthon. Most people agree that this is an anacoluthon but there isn't complete agreement as to why it occurs here. Lenski maintains that the break is deliberate, something Paul did on purpose. Therefore, Lenski invites us to admire Paul's skill and mastery in using the Greek language to fully convey his message. The anacoluthon directs our attention to what Paul has to say about his ministry. Thus the anacoluthon serves to emphasize the apostle's ministry among the Gentiles.

While not casting any doubt on Paul's skill as a writer, Professor Habeck sees the anacoluthon differently. He states that Paul intended to pray for the Ephesians and he does beginning with verse 14. But before he prays, his mind is filled with many thoughts which the apostle wanted to express first. Even though

the digression breaks the rules of grammar, Paul expresses his thoughts before going on with his prayer. According to Professor Habeck, then, the reason for the anacoluthon is Paul's desire his unplanned desire if we may call it that, to write to the Ephesians about his ministry among the Gentiles. The thoughts Paul has to share about his ministry are these:

The apostle identifies himself as "the prisoner of Christ Jesus." Acts chapter 21 dives us the details of his arrest in Jerusalem.

"When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Men of Israel, help us: This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." (They had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done"(Acts 21:27-33).

Following his arrest, Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship and his case entered the Roman court system. Because of a plot against his life, he was transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23). There he appeared before Felix (Acts 24) and Festus and Agrippa (Acts 25). Since there was little real progress in his case before these officials, Paul appealed to Caesar. His case was sent on to Rome.

Luke describes Paul's imprisonment in Rome by writing

"When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him...For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him" (Acts 28:16,30).

Because Paul was not in a maximum security prison or a dark dungeon of some kind, Professor Habeck translates δέσμιος with the word "captive." He feels that the word captive better describes the relatively light detention Paul experienced during this his first imprisonment in Rome. Incidentally, that captivity lasted from approximately AD 61 to AD 63. The letter to the Ephesians is thought to have been written sometime during AD 62.

Yet in all of this, Paul maintains he is "the prisoner of Christ Jesus." He understood that Jesus had so shaped his career that he was now in bonds. Paul had been commissioned to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and that is what he did. Because of his ministry. Paul encountered the hatred of the Jews. The Book of Acts clearly testifies to that. The Jews hatred of Paul and of his ministry led to the uprising against him in Jerusalem which resulted in his arrest as well as his captivity in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and finally in Rome. It was because Paul was engaged in the Lord's service and because he carried out his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles that he was arrested. Therefore, Paul is the prisoner of Christ Jesus. The article need not be stressed but it does help identify Paul even more. Other people had been arrested from time to time for their Christian faith. Other people will be arrested in the future. But Paul was arrested because of his ministry to the Gentiles and in this sense is the prisoner of Christ Jesus who had made him the apostle to the Gentiles.

The apostle's words about his captivity also look to the future. Jesus had been the guiding force in his ministry. Paul was confident that Jesus would remain the guiding force in his life. The details of his

imprisonment and the outcome of his case before the imperial court were in the Lord's hands. The disposal of his case would be according to the Lord's good and gracious will.

As the verse closes, the emphasis is again on the reason for his arrest. Paul was not arrested for committing a crime. He was not in debtors prison. He was not a prisoner of war in the usual sense of the words. His imprisonment was an honorable one. He was in bonds for the Gentiles; for their sakes, in their behalf. In reality the Ephesian Gentile Christians, who were converts of Paul's, were the occasion for his condition as a prisoner. They were representatives of all of the Gentiles whom the apostle served.

Verse 2 begins with the words  $\epsilon\iota \gamma\epsilon$ . According to Thayer, the  $\gamma\epsilon$  strengthens the force of the  $\epsilon\iota$  and can be translated if or surely. Some critics pick up on the translation if and use it to cast doubt on the Pauline authorship of this letter and to cast doubt and uncertainty on whether or not this letter was intended for the Ephesians. Their argument is this: if Paul was the writer of this letter to the Ephesians, he should have known with certainty that the Ephesians did hear about the administration of the grace of God which was given  $\epsilon\iota$  to him. Since the writer of this letter seems to be unsure of what his readers had heard (if), there are two possibilities. First, Paul didn't write this letter. Second, Paul did write this letter but he intended it for someone else besides the Ephesians.

The common reply to these critics is that the particles are too thin a thread on which to hang the denial of the Pauline authorship and the Ephesian destination of this letter. As Thayer notes, when  $\epsilon\iota \gamma\epsilon$  are used together they can be used of a thing to be correctly assumed. Paul assumed that the Ephesians remembered what he had told them. Hendriksen offers an English example to illustrate that the word if can be used and is often used to express an assumption that is taken for granted. His example is a statement like: if you do not know when you are going to die, you should be prepared now. The word if in this sentence is interchangeable with the word since because we understand (assume, take for granted), that we will all die. Kretzmann sees  $\epsilon\iota \gamma\epsilon$  as a tactful, gentle appeal to the Ephesians to remember the things they had heard. Habeck sees the  $\epsilon\iota \gamma\epsilon$  as a jog to the memory as a teacher might use with his students to help them recall what they had been taught. Individually and collectively, these approaches answer the denials. The Ephesians had heard about the administration of grace God had given to Paul. Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians.

(v.3) To understand this verse, it is helpful to begin with the word grace. God's grace had been richly bestowed upon Paul when the Lord entrusted him with his ministry. Paul will have more to say about this grace shown to him in the following verses. For now, Paul wants his readers to know that God's grace wasn't shown to him for his personal benefit only. God's grace was given to him that he might administer it to the Gentiles. This administration was carried out through the preaching of the gospel. By His grace, God used Paul's preaching to work faith in the hearts of many Gentiles. By this Spirit-given faith, the Gentiles came into the possession of all the riches and blessings of God's grace.

Paul's thought is a stewardship thought. By the grace of God, we have been called to faith. By faith we enjoy the riches and blessings of God's grace. Yet, our faith is not to be a selfish faith. The Lord Jesus said:

“Go and make disciples of all nations...” (Mt. 28:19) and “...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”(Acts 1:8).

We are to be wise stewards of the gospel by believing it and by sharing it so that the Spirit might use the gospel to bring others to faith. That is what Paul says here. He acted as a steward or manager of the gospel by bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

(v.4) What the Ephesians had heard from Paul was the revelation of the mystery which had been made known to Paul. A mystery, as Paul uses the word here and elsewhere, is something which God alone knows. He, however, makes it known to human beings in order that they might share it with others. In other words, a mystery is not something which is to remain hidden but it is something that requires divine revelation to become known. The mystery which Paul specifically alludes to here is the election of the Gentiles; the great truth that Jesus was sent to be the Savior of the world and that all who believe in Him as their Savior receive the blessings He secured.

This is the mystery Paul received by revelation. It was a divine communication to him. In Acts 22:12 Paul states:

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes:

“I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it: rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ... I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus” (Galatians 1:11,12,16b,17).

As Paul’s words indicate, the mystery he proclaimed was not of human origin. Before his conversion, he was a Pharisee of Pharisees who held all Gentiles in contempt. He was also a persecutor of the church. It never occurred to Paul in his pre-Christian days that Jesus truly is the promised Messiah let alone that the Gentiles were to share in the blessings which the Messiah brought. After his conversion, the election of the Gentiles was not something which was passed on to him by the other apostles. Peter and the other leaders of the early church had difficulty in understanding the place of the Gentiles in the church. Or as Hendriksen puts it, they were plagued by their Judaistic exclusivism. They thought that the Gentiles should be taken into the church by first becoming proselytes. Being confused on this matter themselves, the other leaders of the church were hardly in a position to explain to Paul this great truth concerning the election of the Gentiles. How did Paul know about this mystery then? The mystery was revealed to him by revelation from God.

When Paul writes “as I have already written briefly,” he is not referring to another letter which has not been preserved for us. Rather, he is referring to his comments which he made earlier in this epistle. The reference is especially to chapter 1 verses 11 through 14 and chapter 2 verses 11 through 22.

(v. 4) When the Ephesians read this letter, it should be obvious to them that Paul had a full grasp of the mystery of Christ as it was revealed to him. In fact, it should be obvious that he had a remarkable insight into all that the mystery included. The insight wasn’t just into the person of Christ: that Jesus is the God-man conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Nor was the insight just into the work of Christ: that he offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice for sin. The apostle’s insight went much further. Jesus died for the sins of all people; Jews and Gentiles alike. Through His innocent suffering and death, through the shedding of His holy, precious blood, Jesus completed God’s plan of salvation. The result is that all who believe on Him as their Savior have the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation which He secured. This was Paul’s insight into the mystery. Jesus is the Savior of the world.

(v. 5) This great truth had not been completely unknown during Old Testament times. God had told Abraham:

“...through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed...” (Gen 20:18).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God says about the Savior:

“...I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6b).

At the Council of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts chapter 15, the question of the place of the Gentiles in the church was settled when James quoted the prophets. Numerous other examples could be cited to demonstrate God’s intentions concerning the gentiles.

However, in Old Testament times God’s intentions toward the Gentiles were not generally known. The Gentiles were in the dark about God’s plan and by and large the Jews did not make much of an effort to

enlighten them. But as Paul picked up his pen to write to the Ephesians, things had changed dramatically. Jesus had told his church:

“Go and make disciples of all nations...” (Mt 28:19).

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”(Mk 16:15-16). “...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit enlightened the apostles and the New Testament prophets so that they came to the understanding that the good news should be proclaimed to the world. Paul notes that this message had been revealed to “the holy apostles and prophets.” The word *holy* (*ἅγιος*) shows that the New Testament prophets are referred to. Some contend that since only one article is used, only one group of people is meant: the apostles who were also prophets. As this contention indicates, the apostles can properly be termed prophets since they received direct revelations from God as did the Old Testament prophets. Lenski maintains that the emphasis is on the revelation concerning the Gentiles and that only the apostles received this revelation. However, it seems that restricting this revelation to the apostles is unfair. In chapter four, Paul writes:

“It was he who has 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” (Ephesians 4:11,12).

The office of prophet was given to the early Christian church. In his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 14, Paul notes that prophecy edified the church. In these passages the exact content of the prophecies is not elaborated on. But by the same token, there isn’t any mention of these prophecies being restricted to certain subjects. Nor is there any claim that the apostles had an inside track on the revelation that the gospel was to be proclaimed to the Gentiles. It was the Holy Spirit who revealed to the apostles and the New Testament prophets the truths they proclaimed. Thus both groups can be called holy. The holy God used these men to receive and convey his holy revelations. Therefore, God made them His holy instruments.

(v. 6) The content of these revelations is now described. Paul uses three adjectives to relay what the Lord had planned for the Gentiles. The Gentiles are heirs together (fellow heirs), members together of one body (fellow members), and sharers together (fellow partners) with the believing Jews in the promise in Christ Jesus. What Paul speaks of here is not simply an alliance or friendly agreement or a partnership between the Jews and the Gentiles. Rather, this is a permanent fusion of the Jews and Gentiles as they are united into one holy Christian church. The Gentile Christians are fully on a par with the Jewish Christians concerning salvation. The Gentile Christians enjoy full equality with the Jewish Christians in the promise of Christ. In God’s house there aren’t any boarders only children and the Gentiles are the children of God by faith in Jesus. The Gentiles are members of the body of Christ. They are members of the church.

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (I Cor. 12:12,27).

The Gentile Christians share the promises of eternal salvation.

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men) - remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who

once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:11-13,19,20).

All of these blessings which the Jews and Gentiles enjoy together are centered in the Lord Jesus. They are inseparably connected with Him. Without Him, there is no promise of forgiveness, no promise of adoption, no promise of a future inheritance in heaven. But Jesus, the Savior, has come and has performed His saving work. He has offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice for all sins in order to secure forgiveness and salvation. "these blessings are offered to the Jews and to the Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel.

### **Part 2: Paul's Instrumentality (verses-7-9)**

"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."

Having spoken about the blessings of the gospel, Paul notes that he is a servant or minister of that gospel. A δούλος is one who serves in the interest and for the benefit of others. Paul served by preaching the good news of the Savior to the Gentiles.

As the verse unfolds, Paul reminds us that this ministry was a gift given to him by the grace of God. Because of the details the apostle records for us in his other letters about his former way of life, it is not difficult to see what Paul has in mind.

"For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:13,14).

As Professor Habeck remarks, if there was ever an unlikely candidate for the ministry it was Paul. Yet, nothing is impossible with God. He exercised His power for the benefit of his grace. Paul became a convert to the Christian faith and the apostle to the Gentiles.

In verse 7 Paul stresses that his ministry was a gift of God's grace; a gift he did not deserve. There was no personal merit on his part. It was not his wisdom, or personal magnetism or his 3 talents which caused God to be attracted to him. It was God's grace; a gift he did not deserve. There was no personal merit on his part. It was not his wisdom, or personal magnetism or his talents which caused God to be attracted to him. It was God's grace pure and simple which brought Paul to faith and into the ministry. Paul cannot get over the fact that God had done these things for him. He marvels over the enormity of God's grace as it was shown to him.

(v.8) Paul cannot shake his pre-Christian past. He knows that nothing could have turned his life around except God's grace. In verse 8 Paul continues to express his awe over this grace. "I am less than the least of all God's people," he writes. The contrast is between God's grace and Paul's complete unworthiness. He does not claim equality with the other apostles. He does not claim equality with the so called good Christians who were standing firm in the faith. He does not even claim equality with the weakest of Christians who needed to be nurtured along in the faith. Paul feels less worthy than all. To describe that unworthiness, he uses a comparative of the superlative. He says he was less than the least, lower than the lowest of all Christians. Yet, God bestowed his grace on Paul calling him to faith and apostleship.

As we consider Paul's words, we are reminded that the preaching and teaching ministry remain a gift of God's grace. If the apostle who wrote one half of the New Testament and who is remembered as one of the

greatest missionaries the church ever had (if not the greatest missionary) feels this way, how should we feel about the gift of grace God has entrusted to us?

“Any of us who have been entrusted with the public ministry will echo Paul’s sentiments. A doting mother or wife may think that we deserve this trust. But we know ourselves better. We have every reason to heed the apostolic injunction, “In humility consider others better than yourselves” (Php 2:3). We know our own sins best. We realize that it is pure grace that made us Christians as Paul reminded us in 2:8,9. And it is grace that made us ministers - amazing grace.”<sup>i</sup>

Paul demonstrates how God’s grace continued to show itself. He was entrusted with the preaching of the gospel and he was sent to the Gentiles. Paul has already written about the original wretched state of the Gentiles. Yet, he was sent to them with the good news. What Paul has said about his own unworthiness, can be applied to all people.

“There is no one righteous, not even ones there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”(Ho 3110b,11,12, 23).

But God so loved the world that He sent His Son. God so loves the world that His Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to bring unworthy sinners to faith. In this case, Paul was sent to the Gentiles with the good news of the Savior. Through Paul, God’s grace was extended to the Gentiles.

Professor Habeck sees a parallel to our ministry:

“Something similar makes our ministry marvelous. Looking from the divine side at those we are called to serve we see them as saints, as subjects of our divine King, as the family of our heavenly Father, as the temple in which he dwells by his Spirit. But when we look at them from the human side we see countless evidences of human frailty and sinfulness. All the flaws Paul exposes in the congregations to which he wrote appear also in our congregations. Our people grieve us, disappoint us, discourage us, even tempt us to give up on them. Still our Lord calls us to minister to them and to keep on ministering to them. That is amazing grace shown to them through us.”<sup>ii</sup>

Paul goes on to tell us the subject of his preaching. He proclaimed to the Gentiles “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” These riches are unsearchable because they cannot be tracked or traced. They are the Unlimited riches of the grace of God in Christ, ocean depths that can never be plummeted treasure-stores that are inexhaustible. The original picture that is presented with these words is that of a person trying to track someone by following his footprints. As he tracks the other person he comes across so many footprints that he cannot find his quarry. This is what happens when we try to comprehend the riches of Christ. When we think about the marvelous things about Christ, additional thoughts come to mind. These additional thoughts suggest even more thoughts about Christ. We can use the Second Article as an example. We confess that we believe

“in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

The Article summarizes our confession about Jesus but it by no means exhausts the riches of Christ. Each word in the creed suggests something else wonderful about our Saviors the name Jesus means Savior. Isaiah prophesied about Him by calling Him Immanuel, Gabriel quoted Isaiah when he announced Jesus’ birth to Joseph; Christ is a title meaning “the anointed one” which reminds us that Jesus was anointed to the offices of

Prophet, Priest and King and so our thoughts run as we think about the riches of Christ. If the world cannot hold all the books that would have to be written if everything Jesus did were mentioned, then a lifetime is too short to tell everything which is included in “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

(v. 9) Paul’s message also includes some thoughts on God the Father. He speaks about creation as an historical fact. God the Father is the creator of all things. Because he created all things, all things belong to Him and are under His control. This includes the Gentiles.

Before God began His creative work, he formed a plan. This plan is called a mystery because it was known only to God. This mystery is the mystery Paul has been writing about: the salvation of all people who believe in Christ Jesus. This plan had been hidden since the world began. Sinful mankind could not conceive of it or grasp it by nature. Even the angels were unaware of it. God had formulated the plan. God had determined how it was to be carried out. When His time was right, He put His plan into motion. What had been hidden for so long in God was now to be proclaimed. All people by nature are in the dark concerning the gospel and its message of God’s grace. It is necessary that they be enlightened. It is necessary that they hear the good news that the Holy Spirit might illuminate their hearts and minds. Paul was entrusted with the privilege and the responsibility of preaching that the Spirit might do just that.

### **Part 3: The Result (Verses 10-12)**

“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.”

The purpose which Paul has in mind in preaching to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make plain the administration of this mystery, in that through these activities, the church might display God’s marvelous wisdom even to the angelic world. The angels were interested in what God had foretold in Old Testament times.

“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things”(I Peter 1:12).

The angels remain interested. They are eager to learn about the wisdom of the almighty God. Through the church the interest of the angels is satisfied. The church, therefore, does not exist for itself. It exists for God and for His glory. When the angels in heaven behold the works and the wisdom God displayed in the church, their knowledge is increased, they rejoice and glorify Him.

Paul refers to the angels as rulers and authorities. There is some question as to whether these angels are good angels or bad angels. Paul’s words would seem to indicate that he has the good angels in mind. The church is God’s masterpiece. When the good angels scrutinized the beginning and development of the church through the ministry of men like Paul, they learned things about the wisdom of God they never realized before. For God’s wisdom is manifold. It is multi-colored and much variegated. It has an infinite diversity and sparkling beauty. The metaphor suggests an endless variety in what God plans and in the means he uses to carry out his plans. In every phase of redemption, God’s wisdom reveals itself. Habec demonstrates that with a series of questions.

“Who would have thought God could find a way to save man from what he had coming after he had slapped God in the face with his unbelief and disobedience? Who would ever have thought that God would plan to sacrifice his Son as the substitute for the human race? Who would ever .have thought God would plan to use human beings like Paul to tell about the Savior? Who would ever have thought their



message would have the power to make spiritual corpses alive? God did. When his plan unfolded and they saw what resulted the angels saw how wise he is. When we with them see God's endless wisdom revealed in the creation of the church, we surely can be certain that our Savior-God is able to supply our every need and solve every problem for us."<sup>iii</sup>

Hendriksen makes the same point about God's wisdom by using various paradoxes to demonstrate what God in Christ has done. In His wisdom God in Christ

"...produces life by means of death, glory by means of shame (the shame of the cross) the blessing by means of the curse, power by means of weakness etc"<sup>iv</sup>

This is the many sided wisdom of God.

(v. 11) The wisdom of God, which the angels saw, involved God's purpose. God's purpose spanned the ages, thus it is called His eternal purpose. Paul mentioned this purpose in chapter 1.

"In him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,"

It is the purpose which resulted in the election of grace. It is the purpose which is centered in Jesus.

(v. 12) Paul concludes his thoughts on God's purpose by highlighting a great blessing we enjoy by faith in Christ Jesus. "In Him and through Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." We have *παρρησία* when we approach God. We can feel free to speak to Him and tell Him all that is on our minds and all that is in our hearts. We can do this with confidence, understanding that God will listen to us and according to His gracious good will, He will answer our prayers. All of these things: the approach, the ability to speak without hesitation, the confidence that God will hear, are possible only through Christ. Since Christ is ours and we are His, bought with His blood and united with Him by faith, we can approach our heavenly Father. The relationship Paul describes with our heavenly Father reminds us of the Lord's prayer. We pray: "Our Father who art in heaven." Luther explains

"With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father."

Through faith in Jesus this is the blessed relationship we have with our God. Lenski summarizes the great facts Paul has presented to us this way:

- 1) The divine purpose going back to eternity.
- 2) Formed in Christ Jesus, our Lord.
- 3) Standing veiled in all past ages yet standing nonetheless.
- 4) Revealed in gospel preaching to all men including the Gentiles.
- 5) Establishing the church of the New Testament with its wonderful universality.
- 6) Unveiling even to the angels in heaven the wonderful wisdom of God contained in the divine purpose from its inception onward.
- 7) Putting us believers into possession of the enjoyment of the highest earthly communion with our heavenly Father.

In this masterly way and with such a sweep of thought Paul presents the significance of his apostolic work among the Gentiles in the great purpose and plan of God."

## **Part 4: The Application to a Proper Evaluation of his Captivity (Verse 13)**

“I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.” Paul brings this section of his letter to a close with a request. He understood that there was a danger that the Ephesians might become discouraged because of his imprisonment. They might grow weak and fainthearted. They might lose courage thinking the Christian cause is doomed with Paul in prison. But Paul encourages the Ephesians to look at the situation from his perspective. His imprisonment was their glory.

The Lord had blessed Paul’s ministry and had used this apostle to bring the Ephesians into the blessed relationship with the Father that he has just described. This relationship is so precious, Paul says, that it was worth all that it had cost him and more. Paul’s ministry was filled with tribulations. Yet, he considered them to be a necessary part of his office. The tribulations were the crosses he was willing to bear as he performed his work because of the blessings God bestowed on his preaching. To help the Ephesians understand this, Paul asks them to look at it this way: would it have been better if the Lord had spared him from the tribulations? No, it wouldn’t have been better because by doing so the Ephesians would not have heard the gospel. But the Lord allowed Paul to suffer tribulations so that the Ephesians were able to hear the good news and through it enjoy a blessed relationship with God. The suffering Paul endured to bring them the gospel ought to show the Ephesians how much God cared for them. Rather, than concentrate on his tribulation, Paul invites the Ephesians to take a broader perspective which looks beyond his troubles to see the wisdom and the love of God as he used Paul’s tribulations for the benefit of the Ephesians.

In this way, Paul brings this section of his letter to a close. The section emphasizes Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. He did not draw circles around the gospel or put up fences to keep people from hearing it. Instead, he proclaimed the good news of the Savior to all people. The example of Paul’s ministry is before us. May it help us carry out the apostle’s encouragement: “I give you this charge: Preach the Word”(2 Timothy 4:1b,2a).

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<sup>i</sup> Irwin J. Habeck, *Ephesians: Amazing Grace* (Milwaukee: NPH, 1985), page 64.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, page 65.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid, page 66.

<sup>iv</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), page 160.