

CONCERNING THE WAY

December 4, 2012

LESSON 147: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS



Chapter 3

Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, am the prisoner of the Messiah Jesus for the sake of you gentiles.

- For what reason? Because of God's grace that He has taught to the Gentiles, which he discussed earlier in his letter. We Gentiles were previously without hope, far from God, but now through Christ have been made part of God's family.
- Paul is in prison as he writes this, because of his attempts to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

Ephesians 3:2-3 Surely you have heard about the responsibility of administering God's grace that was given to me on your behalf, (3) and how this secret was made known to me through a revelation, just as I wrote about briefly in the past.

- "Responsibility of administering God's grace" – this is translated "stewardship" or "dispensation" in some versions. The number of the various dispensations of time in which God has dealt with mankind during the course of history is debated by scholars and theologians, but there are two distinct dispensations mentioned specifically in the Bible. One is mentioned here, the "dispensation of the grace of God", and that appears to be the administration we're currently living under.
- The "dispensation of the fullness of times" (Ephesians 1:10) refers to the eternal age to come when Christ comes back and has been universally accepted as Creator, Redeemer and Lord of the whole universe (Colossians 1:20; Philippians 2:9-11). Other possible dispensations include the Edenic, antediluvian, postdiluvian, Mosaic, tribulational, and millennial dispensations, which can all be inferred from the Bible as distinct ages that God deals in different ways with mankind.
- Paul is going to discuss in the next nine verses, which is all one sentence in the Greek, the fact that he was given the responsibility of taking the good news of the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. God's plan to join Gentiles and Jews into the church was a "secret", or mystery, unknown until Jesus revealed it to Paul. He'll reveal the details about this secret in the next verses.

Ephesians 3:4-6 By reading this, you will be able to grasp my understanding of the secret about the Messiah, (5) which in previous generations was not made known to human beings as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This is that secret: (6) The gentiles are heirs-in-common, members-in-common of the body, and common participants in what was promised by the Messiah Jesus through the gospel.

- The reader will be able to understand the secret by reading this – referring to these verses, and the last chapter where he started to discuss it.
- Paul is pretty clear here that this secret was not known before, not even to the angels in heaven (vs. 10), but some argue that it was partially revealed in the Old Testament, using verses like Isaiah 2:1-4 and Isaiah 61:5-6. But it is obvious that those verses are speaking of the Millennial kingdom, not the concept of Jews and Gentiles being joined together in one body, the church. This was a revolutionary thought at the time!

- We learn in verse 5 that the revelation was given to the apostles and prophets. But it was Paul's responsibility to be the administrator (or "steward") of this news to the Gentiles.
- So the secret is that the Gentiles are:
 - Fellow heirs of God's riches
 - Part of the body of Christ
 - Sharers of the promises of the Messiah
- This means not only can we claim the promises of eternal blessings to come that are talked about in the New Testament, but can claim blessings promised in the Old Testament like the Psalms and Proverbs.

Ephesians 3:7-9 I have become a servant of this gospel according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. (8) To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given so that I might proclaim to the gentiles the immeasurable wealth of the Messiah (9) and help everyone see how this secret that has been at work was hidden for ages by God, who created all things.

- Now Paul talks about his ministry of distributing this secret to the Gentiles.
- We see Paul's humility here as he calls himself the "very least of all the saints".
- This secret was hidden in the mind of God for ages, and the idea is that it was part of God's plan before He created the universe.

Ephesians 3:10-12 He did this so that now, through the church, the wisdom of God in all its variety might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm (11) in keeping with the eternal purpose that God carried out through the Messiah Jesus our Lord, (12) in whom we have boldness and confident access through his faithfulness.

- This is very interesting – Paul says that God revealed this secret so that the angels in heaven could see the amazing variety of the wisdom of God! This is speaking of all angels, fallen and unfallen. So it was not known by the angels that God was planning the church. As the angelic hosts witness the plan of the church being carried out, they must admit that having Jews and Gentiles in one body is evidence of God's wisdom.
- The angels are always observing and learning about God, His nature and His purposes, through His work of creating and redeeming men and women, who He created in His image. See also Job 1:3-2:10; 1 Peter 1:12; Hebrews 12:1. So "the church"—that is, the vast body of redeemed people, past and present—is teaching angels about God, including the angels that may be currently assigned to us as our individual guardians. I don't know about you, but I look forward to being able to meet these angelic friends, person to person, in the age to come, when Christ returns with all His holy angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7). We will actually even judge the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3)!
- The Greek word translated "variety" here has the meaning of the beauty of an embroidered pattern or the variety of colors in flowers.
- We have the incredible ability to approach God with boldness and confidence, because of what Christ has done.

Ephesians 3:13-15 So then, I ask you not to become discouraged because of my troubles on your behalf, which work toward your glory. (14) This is the reason I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, (15) from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its name.

- Paul ends this long sentence about the secret he was given, saying that the Ephesians should not be discouraged that Paul was suffering in prison, because it meant that they had received the good news about the incredible grace of God and it was for their benefit (“your glory”).
- In verse 14 we see that Paul was kneeling, about to offer up a prayer for the Ephesians and other readers of this letter, which comes next.
- He is praying to God the Father, from whom all families learn what being a father means. God is our ultimate Father, one we can all look to, especially if our earthly fathers have failed.

Ephesians 3:16-19 I pray that he would give you, according to his glorious riches, strength in your inner being and power through his Spirit, (17) and that the Messiah would make his home in your hearts through faith. Then, having been rooted and grounded in love, (18) you will be able to understand, along with all the saints, what is wide, long, high, and deep— (19) that is, you will know the love of the Messiah—which transcends knowledge, and will be filled with all the fullness of God.

- Paul asks that we would be strengthened in our inner beings and in our power through the Spirit, and that the Messiah would “make His home” in our hearts. This doesn’t appear to be speaking of salvation, where He begins to indwell us, but that Christ may, literally, “be at home in,” that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in, our lives. We should let Christ become the dominating influence in our attitudes and behavior.
- When that happens we are rooted (like a tree) and grounded (like a strong building) in love. The result is that we will be able to truly understand the love of Christ, which is beyond normal human comprehension, and “be filled with all the fullness of God”. Now, the sense of that last part in the Greek is that this is the goal. Obviously this does not happen all at once, and never on our own, but only through Christ.
- The fullness of the Godhead is only in Christ, and only through Him is a believer made complete (Colossians 2:9-10). In Christ this divine fullness belongs to us as believers already (our position), Paul prayed that it might be experienced by each of us. The ultimate fulfillment of Paul’s prayer for being filled with ALL the fullness of God will happen when Christ returns and transforms us into eternal beings, ending forever sin and weakness in us. Can you imagine what it would be like to experience ALL the fullness of God? No, you can’t!

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to the one who can do infinitely more than all we can ask or imagine according to the power that is working among us— (21) to him be glory in the church and in the Messiah Jesus to all generations, forever and ever! Amen.

- Paul ends his prayer with a doxology, which basically also concludes the first three chapters of his letter. That’s a pretty good way to end a prayer!

Chapter 4

Now Paul is going to give us practical application of all this great theology. This is how members of body of Christ, the church, are to live.

Ephesians 4:1-2 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to live in a way that is worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (2) demonstrating all expressions of humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another in love.

- Because of what we have been given in Christ, which Paul has explained in the first three chapters, we should live in a “way that is worthy” of that incredible gift. The word “calling” refers to not just our salvation, but also our union with other believers in the body. So our conduct involves not only our personal lives but our responsibility to others in the body. We should always express:
 - Humility – the opposite of pride. We should walk humbly with God. Believers are only proud of who they are in Christ, not anything they have done.
 - Gentleness – this is not being a weakling and letting people walk over you, but keeping your emotions under control. It is the opposite of being rude, harsh, or arrogant. A person who is controlled by God would be angry at the right time but should never angry at the wrong time. Moses was known as the meekest of all men (Numbers 12:3). But he got angry when Israel sinned against God (Exodus 32). Christ was meek and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29). But He became angry because some Jews were using the temple as a place to cheat people out of money (Matthew 21:12-13).
 - Patience – never giving up, enduring until the end. It is also self-restraint, keeping yourself from retaliating when someone does you wrong.

We’re supposed to display these virtues especially when it comes to dealing with other believers in the body, “accepting one another in love.”

Ephesians 4:3-6 Do your best to maintain the unity of the Spirit by means of the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit. Likewise, you were called to the one hope of your calling. (5) There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all.

- If we conduct ourselves in this way, there will be unity in the body. There can be no real spiritual unity without doctrinal unity, but because we want peace in the body we should lovingly tolerate each other, even when we have differences.
- Then Paul tells us the basis for unity among believers. There are seven, and they are all centered on the three members of the Trinity:
 - One body – the spiritual body of Christ - the universal church, all believers
 - One Spirit – the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers
 - One hope – we all have the same hope of our future with God
 - One Lord – Jesus Christ, the head of the church
 - One faith – the faith all believers have in Christ
 - One baptism – could refer to both water baptism and the spiritual baptism of the Holy Spirit, which places us in the body of Christ. Water baptism demonstrates spiritual unity with other believers.
 - One God and Father of all – the “all” is all believers, not all mankind. All believers are His children. He is over them as their Sovereign God; He lives through them, and manifests Himself in them.

Ephesians 4:7-10 Now to each one of us grace has been given proportionate to the measure of the Messiah's gift. (8) That is why God says, "When he went up to the highest place he led captives into captivity and gave gifts to people." (9) Now what does this "he went up" mean except that he also had gone down into the lower parts of the

earth? (10) The one who went down is the same one who went up above all the heavens so that all things would be fulfilled.

- Now we know the basis for our unity, next we learn that we keep this unity by using the various gifts that God has given believers.
- Verse 8 isn't quoting a specific verse, but seems to be summing up Psalm 68. Basically it is saying that a military victor has the right to give gifts to those who are identified with him. Christ, having captured sinful people by redeeming them, is the Victor and gives them individual gifts, which become gifts to the church.
- "the lower parts of the earth" – appears to be referring to the great pit at the center of the earth, shown in the Bible as the prison holding the souls of the dead, the place called Sheol in the Old Testament Hebrew and Hades in the Greek New Testament, but usually translated "hell" in the King James version. The Bible teaches (and the apostles understood), that:
- One of Christ's purposes when He came to earth was "to proclaim release to the captives, and ... to set free those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). This statement of Jesus was a quote from Isaiah 61:1, where it read "... to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners." When Christ died on the cross, He, in the Spirit, "went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19), that is, proclaimed His victory over Satan. Christ had said prophetically (Psalm 16:10), "you will not abandon my soul to Sheol" (Acts 2:27). He returned from Hades with "the keys of hell and death" (Revelation 1:18), bringing "captivity captive" with Him as He returned. His spirit returned to His body resting in Joseph's tomb, and He rose from the dead.
- The souls of those who had died in faith came with Him from their resting place in Hades in "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22), and then, in a great miracle, "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matthew 27:52). With the thief on the cross who had also believed, the Lord then took them all with Him into "paradise," in "the third heaven" (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4), where they will be with the Lord until He comes to earth again with them, and with the souls of all who have died as Christian believers since that time (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:14).
- Got all that? This is what Paul is referring to in verses 8-10. Christ is the one who went down into the lower parts of the earth and then went up above all the heavens.

Ephesians 4:11-13 And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers, (12) to equip the saints, to do the work of ministry, and to build up the body of the Messiah (13) until all of us are united in the faith and in the full knowledge of God's Son, and until we attain mature adulthood and the full standard of development in the Messiah.

- These people mentioned are Christ's gift to the church. There are just five gifts mentioned here, other lists of gifts are in Romans 12:7-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28-31. Let's break this down:
 - Apostles – someone who carried the gospel message with God's authority. This included the Twelve, who had the "office" of apostleship because they actually spent time with Christ (Acts 1:21-22) and were appointed by Him (which would also include Paul; 1 Corinthians 15:8-9; Galatians 1:1; 2:6-9). But "apostles" also included others who were recognized as apostles, such as James (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Corinthians 9:6), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7), possibly Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:7), and Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:6, 9). This group had the gift of apostleship but not the apostolic "office"

like the Twelve and Paul.

- Prophets - gave edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3). They probably revealed God's will to the church up to the time the biblical canon was complete. Once the canon was closed, the church had the completed Word of God, and apostles and prophets were no longer necessary. We have the testimony of the early church fathers to verify that these gifts faded away. Those who call themselves prophets and apostles in some charismatic denominations today are not the same as the New Testament versions and do not have the same authority from God.
- Evangelists – those who had the gift of spreading the gospel, similar to present day missionaries
- Pastors and teachers – the way the Greek uses these words show that these are probably two descriptions of the same gifted person, as in “pastor-teacher”. This person pastors believers (by comforting and guiding) while at the same time instructing them in God's ways (overseers or elders are to be able to teach; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9).
- The purpose of these gifted men is to prepare God's people for service, so they can minister to others. Everyone in the body of Christ is gifted in different ways and should be involved in ministry, not just the leaders. All the people using their gifts help to unify the church and grow everyone into maturity in Christ.

Ephesians 4:14-16 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed like waves and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, or by clever strategies that would lead us astray. (15) Instead, by speaking the truth in love, we will grow up completely and become one with the head, that is, one with the Messiah, (16) in whom the whole body is united and held together by every ligament with which it is supplied. As each individual part does its job, the body builds itself up in love.

- So the result of everyone using their gifts for the benefit of the church is maturity. If people are not using their gifts for the church then you have what we see in many churches today and what Paul is describing in verse 14, believers who are like little children, tossed around like waves and easily led astray by clever sounding false doctrine or teachers.
- The ultimate goal for each believer in the church is Christlikeness. When we speak, we should always speak the truth, in love. One important thing to notice is that Paul is emphasizing body growth here, not self-growth. If a person uses their gift for the body, self-growth will also happen naturally, but self-growth or self-fulfillment should not be our goal.

Ephesians 4:17-19 Therefore, I tell you and insist on in the Lord not to live any longer like the gentiles live, thinking worthless thoughts. (18) They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. (19) Since they have lost all sense of shame, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality and practice every kind of sexual perversion without restraint.

- Now Paul will give us some instructions on Christian conduct. Since coming to Christ, we should not live any longer like the world, our old way of life. The nonbelieving Gentiles think worthless thoughts because they are without God, unable to understand, they are insensitive to God and His ways.
- Even most unbelievers in America have historically known right from wrong, because of the Biblical foundation this country was founded on. But that has faded, and many people are unable to determine

right from wrong because they are ignorant about God and His Word and hard of heart. All they have is their own worthless thoughts.

- Because of their lack of sensitivity these Gentiles gave themselves over (“abandoned themselves”; see Romans 1:24, 26, 28) to sensuality (Mark 7:22; Romans 13:13; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:2, 7, 18; Jude 4), which don’t care about personal standards or social values. They practice every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more, always looking for selfish pleasure without thinking of others. It’s an ugly picture!

Ephesians 4:20-24 However, that is not the way you came to know the Messiah. (21) Surely you have listened to him and have been taught by him, since truth is in Jesus. Regarding your former way of life, you were taught to strip off your old nature, which is being ruined by its deceptive desires, (23) to be renewed in your mental attitude, (24) and to clothe yourselves with the new nature, which was created according to God’s image in righteousness and true holiness.

- We came to know the Messiah by listening to Him, learning to “strip off” our old natures, to allow the Spirit to “renew our mental attitude”, and clothe ourselves with the “new nature”, a holy nature created in us by God in His image. What a beautiful picture this is in contrast to the previous one!

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, stripping off falsehood, "let each of us speak the truth to his neighbor," for we belong to one another.

- We should always tell the truth to each other because we’re all members of the same body.

Ephesians 4:26-27 "Be angry, yet do not sin." Do not let the sun set while you are still angry, (27) and do not give the devil an opportunity to work.

- Anger itself is not sin. Sometimes anger is normal and right. But we can be angry and not sin. We should resolve anger quickly because the longer we let anger stew the more likely it will turn to sinful behavior.

Ephesians 4:28 The thief must no longer steal but must work hard and do what is good with his own hands, so that he might earn something to give to the needy.

- Isn’t this interesting. We should work hard not just for our own benefit or security, but so we’ll have enough to give to the needy! A thief takes from others for their own selfish benefit.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no filthy talk be heard from your mouths, but only what is good for building up people and meeting the need of the moment. This way you will administer grace to those who hear you.

- A Christian should always speak words that benefit and build people up, not using filthy (unwholesome, rotten) words that don’t do anyone any good.

Ephesians 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, by whom you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

- Failing at these things grieves the Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer and seals them permanently for redemption, when they receive their new body. This should be a strong incentive for us to live in a godly way, so that we don’t sadden and disappoint God.
- I remember that one of the reasons I tried to always do the right thing when I was a young man is

because the worst thing I could imagine was disappointing my mom or dad. It should be the same with God, only immeasurably greater.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, quarreling, and slander be put away from you, along with all hatred. (32) And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another just as God has forgiven you in the Messiah.

- Instead of the negative things Paul lists here, believers are to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving, because those are attributes of God.