

## The Book of Ephesians

### Week 8: The Mystery of the Gospel---Gentiles Welcome (3:1-21)

#### Overview

Chapter three aptly concludes Paul's three-chapter description of the Church and the mystery that surrounds it, namely, that Gentiles are now fellow heirs (3:6). Echoing his opening doxology and Eucharistic prayer from chapter one, Paul offers here an outline of his supplication for the Ephesian church, specifically, that they be strengthened with power in faith, love, and knowledge in the fullness of God (3:14-19). This succeeds an aside about the great mystery of the Gentiles' inclusion in the body of Christ (3:1-13).

#### The Mystery of the Gentiles' Inclusion (3:1-13)

Paul begins this section by again recalling his credentials as an apostle, alluding to his conversion, his being given special revelation about the mystery, and his being a steward of God's grace in the apostolic Office. The focal point of this section is verse six: *"The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."* After this pinnacle, he elaborates on this mystery and how it was formerly hidden but is now known on earth and "to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." The word boldness (*parresia*) in verse 12 is better translated as "joyful courage" and serves as a contrasting marker for the Gentiles, who formerly being unbelievers and under God's wrath, can now approach Him "as dear children [come to] their dear father," to echo Luther.

At times, Paul seems to degrade himself, but it isn't a false humility. Rather it comes from an acute awareness of his sinfulness and an equal awareness of his complete redemption in Christ:

*"Paul's self-humiliation isn't a make-believe modesty; it is the humility created spontaneously by faith in the forgiveness of sins within a Christian, who only can praise the gospel as he does, because he is ever conscious of his own sinfulness and worried about it."* Koehler, 334

#### Paul's Prayer for the Church (3:14-21)

Here Paul carries on where he left off in 3:1, "For this reason..." He describes his prayer for the Ephesians, asking God to grant them to know the love of Christ, being simultaneously grounded in faith and love. Upon a close examination of the text, it appears that just as 3:6 is the climactic "whereas," 3:16 serves as the climactic "therefore be it resolved." He lists in this verse and afterwards what he specifically desires for God to give them in light of their being included in the fellowship of the saints.

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Paul prays for a grounding of faith and love in the full knowledge of Christ's love because of the practical blessings and peace which such possessions would bring:

*“The simple fact of the Lord’s descent into death and judgment establishes the truth of the message, leaves no room for rumination and calculation, which only wearies the mind, but it conquers the heart and makes it fresh, frolicsome, and firm; and wherever the peace of God has entered in this wise, it is a small matter to wait in hope and in the meantime to exercise love toward everyone. **Again the solution of every practical problem of human life is found in the fact of Christ’s death. What Paul has described in the first three chapters is the simple history of every poor sinner who has found peace in faith.** This history is the same in the case of every Christian, in spite of the incalculable variations to which our life on earth is subject, and serves as an unfailing guideline through the impenetrable confusion plaguing the world, which again shows that the gospel, because of its utter simplicity, stands the test of time.”* Koehler, 358