



## Week 4: Paul's "Digression" and Paul's "Mission" (Eph. 3:1-21)

*\*This guide, as well as all the guides to follow,  
will prepare you for the text to be preached this upcoming Sunday.\**

### Monday: The Big Picture—What is happening in this passage? (10/12)

**Pray out loud** to begin this intentional time with the Lord.

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You have called Your church to be a conduit of Your love and hope. I pray this week You would open our eyes through Your Word and by Your Spirit, that we might see the people You have brought into our lives so that we could administer Your grace to them. Empower us with Your Spirit of wisdom and boldness to joyfully follow Your leading. Amen.*

**Because we will be studying an entire chapter this week, today will focus on an overview of the entire chapter. Days 2 and 3 will focus on verses 1-13 and Days 4 and 5 will focus on verses 14-21.**

**Read** Ephesians 3:1-21.

#### **Where Have We Been?**

**Ephesians 1–2** paints a grand picture of the Lord's pouring His fullness into one new humanity to make a glorious temple. Paul intends to draw out practical implications of the church's identity in Christ for daily Christian life, but he interrupts the direction of his letter to first explain the relationship of his ministry as a steward of God's grace to his imprisonment (3:1-13). Paul then resumes his flow of thought, and offers a prayer that will explain the gospel implications for new citizenship. This prayer will also serve as a transition to the practical outworking of the gospel that we will look at in coming weeks in **Ephesians 4–6**.

#### **Where Are We Headed?**

In an excursus (a detailed digression in a written argument), Paul uses the revelation of the mystery of the Gentiles' equal inheritance in Christ to exhort the Ephesians to maintain strength of heart in spite of Paul's imprisonment for the gospel. Paul then prays for the church to be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit to grasp the greatness of the love of Christ *in order to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God* (**Ephesians 3:14–21**).

**Read** through **Ephesians 3:1-21** again. Make note of words and concepts that seem important or stand out to you.

### **Making it Personal in Prayer**

Paul is very forthright about his calling in verses 1-13: to share the good news of the gospel with the Gentiles. Though very few of us share his specific vocational calling to preach the gospel in the formal sense of the word, we all like Paul share in the calling to be stewards and administrators of God's grace.

All believers share in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

In other words: **being a flourishing disciple of Jesus means being a disciple who makes disciples**—this is fundamental to obeying all that Jesus has commanded. As our FPC Youth Group sums up the heart of discipleship: *"Be One. Make Some."* As Paul prays in verse 6 of Philemon: **"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."**

With this in mind, pause now to ask God to open your eyes to the people He has placed in your life to experience the love of God through you. Write down their name(s) as He brings them to mind, and be honest with Him about where this seems overwhelming, intimidating, unlikely, or impossible. You might want to write out your prayer here.

After you conclude this time of prayer, set a reminder in your phone to pray for God to open their heart—and for yourself, to be sensitive and responsive to opportunities that He gives you to joyfully plant seeds for the gospel.

## Tuesday: Reflection and Discussion (10/13)

**Pray out loud** to begin this intentional time with the Lord.

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You have called Your church to be a conduit of Your love and hope. I pray this week You would open our eyes through Your Word and by Your Spirit, that we might see the people You have brought into our lives so that we could administer Your grace to them. Empower us with Your Spirit of wisdom and boldness to joyfully follow Your leading. Amen.*

**Read** through the first section of Scripture we will study for the next two days: Ephesians 3:1–13. Then review the following questions concerning this section of Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus and respond in the space provided.

### Revealing the Mystery (Eph. 3:1–6)

1. As a steward of God’s grace (or as other translations put it: “the administration of God’s grace that was given” to Paul for them), what responsibility does he have toward God and the Gentiles?
2. Paul is writing this letter as a prisoner in Rome. For whose sake is Paul a prisoner according to 3:1? What does this tell us about the importance of ethnic inclusion in the Christian faith?
3. Like Paul, our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are willing to share the gospel at any personal cost. They mirror Paul’s dedication in willing to be imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. A question worth considering is why—with seemingly lower stakes—we are less prone to share the good news. What roadblocks or obstacles exist in your own life that keep you from forming intentional relationships in which you can show the love of Christ to others? Pause for a moment and ask God to reveal this to you. Jot down the thoughts that come to mind.

## Making it Personal in Prayer

The band, Selah, makes an interesting turn in their song, “We Must Not.” Rather than framing sharing the gospel as news that we must share, they sing that “we must not keep the gospel from anyone.” How might the roadblocks God revealed above be “keeping the gospel” from the people in our lives? After considering these barriers in our own hearts and minds, we might return to God with a personal prayer of confession. As we do, remember that shame is a tool used by Satan—never by our Savior—to keep us running and/or hiding from God. Rather, *it is the kindness* of God that leads us to repentance—we do not show contempt for the riches of His kindness, forbearance, or patience by judging ourselves or others (Romans 2:1-4). If it were not for the kindness of God in forgiving us in the first place, there would be no gospel to share! Let your prayer of confession strengthen and renew you as a microcosm of the gospel as a whole.

## Wednesday: Reflection and Discussion (10/14)

**Pray out loud** to begin this intentional time with the Lord.

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You have called Your church to be a conduit of Your love and hope. I pray this week You would open our eyes through Your Word and by Your Spirit, that we might see the people You have brought into our lives so that we could administer Your grace to them. Empower us with Your Spirit of wisdom and boldness to joyfully follow Your leading. Amen.*

Today we will look in depth at **Ephesians 3:7-13**.

First, **read** through Ephesians 3:1-13 again for context.

### Encouraging the Church (**Eph. 3:7-13**)

1. Paul views himself as a “minister according to the gift of God’s grace” (**Eph. 3:7**) as well as the “very least of all the saints” (**Eph. 3:8**). Of what life event does Paul speak when he mentions the working of God’s power? (See Acts 9:1-19; see also how Paul shares his testimony in Acts 21:37-22:21 and 26:1-32). What does his understanding of God’s powerful grace say about his view of his imprisonment?

2. Verse 10 catches our attention as it describes God's intent to now make known "the manifold wisdom of God." Through whom and to whom does God intend this to be made known? In God's drama, who becomes the main character after Christ's ascension? In other words, through whom is Christ to continue to be made known?
  
3. Imagine the life of the church on display, as either a movie or a painting, for all beings in the heavenly realms to watch. *In what ways does the church display the incredible transforming power of Christ?*
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. While we never want to lose sight of the importance of missions for *people* to see and experience the transforming love of God, consider an additional "sphere" of witness as John Piper describes it on a cosmic scale. (See the quotation on the following page.) Have you ever considered the Christian witness of the church extending beyond other people to a cosmic scale? Does this change the way you view the significance of the church in God's big story?

*Missions exists, and the ingathering of God's elect exists, and the church exists **so that** angels would stand in awe of the wisdom of God. God displays his wisdom in history so that the worship of heaven would be white hot with admiration and wonder. The good angels never fell into sin, and only marvel at the wisdom of God's grace from outside, so to speak. No angel will ever sing "how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." They are not wretches and have never been lost. This is our song and our joy, and they can never sing it or know it. But God wanted them to see it. And so his aim in history is to display the wisdom of his grace in the way he saves the church by justifying the ungodly from all nations by faith alone on the basis of Christ alone. And the angels love to stoop down and get as close as they can to the wonders of redemption and how God prepared and saved and gathered his church (1 Peter 1:12).*

*And the demons (Ephesians 6:12)—the evil principalities and powers—must look at this painting and watch the wisdom by which they were defeated in the very moment they thought they had triumphed—in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in the blood of the martyrs...Just when God paints a dark color of the death of his witness and the devils begin to gloat, God picks up another brush and with orange and yellow and red makes that dark death serve the beauty of his wisdom. And the demons gnash their teeth. The final glory of [this] painting [depicting missions] is that every brush stroke will add to the infinitely intricate display of God's wisdom to the armies of heaven.*

## Thursday: Reflection and Discussion (10/15)

**Pray out loud** to begin this intentional time with the Lord.

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You have called Your church to be a conduit of Your love and hope. I pray this week You would open our eyes through Your Word and by Your Spirit, that we might see the people You have brought into our lives so that we could administer Your grace to them. Empower us with Your Spirit of wisdom and boldness to joyfully follow Your leading. Amen.*

**Read** Through Ephesians 3:14-17 for context.

### The Power of the Father and the Spirit (Eph. 3:14–17)

1. Paul appropriately kneels in humility before God the Father—the one who gives a measure of filial identity to all people on the earth. In what way are all people associated with the name of the Father? How does this naming relate to and magnify the new relationship of Jews and Gentiles that Paul revealed in Ephesians 2:11–3:13?
2. For the fifth time, Paul mentions the “riches” of grace found in Christ (compare Eph. 1:7-8; 2:7; 3:8, 16). He asks the Father to give the church power through His Spirit, out of His glorious riches. What is the nature of these riches according to chapters 1 and 2 and Colossians 1:13-14 and 2:13-15? What is the relationship of the working of the Spirit to these riches (see also Eph. 1:14; 2:22)?
3. Paul specifically asks God to grant strength to the Ephesians “so that Christ may dwell in [their] hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17). Paul is praying for the advancement of the Ephesians sanctification—their growth in personal holiness. Read Micah 3:8, Zechariah 4:6, Luke 4:14-15, and 5:16 (you can view all these passages together by clicking on the hyperlink provided). What is the Holy Spirit’s role in this sanctification process?

### **Making it Personal in Prayer**

Follow Paul's example—if able—and kneel for prayer. Spend time in prayer asking for the Spirit's power to combat sin (spend time in confession) and to grow in holiness (spend time in supplication, for a desire to look more like Jesus in your affections, thoughts, actions, and speech).

Afterward, reflect on if adopting this humble position with your body affected the posture of your heart. Ask God if He might be inviting you to engage this posture again, whether in prayer or other forms of worship, to help remind your heart of your need for humility before Him?

## **Friday: Personal Implications (10/16)**

**Pray out loud** to begin this intentional time with the Lord.

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You have called Your church to be a conduit of Your love and hope. I pray this week You would open our eyes through Your Word and by Your Spirit, that we might see the people You have brought into our lives so that we could administer Your grace to them. Empower us with Your Spirit of wisdom and boldness to joyfully follow Your leading. Amen.*

**Read** through **Ephesians 3:14-21** one final time before focusing on verses 18-21.

### **The Presence of Christ and His Plan for the Church (Eph. 3:18–21)**

1. Paul uses the agricultural language of “rooted” and “grounded” to speak of the positioning of the believers’ lives. What is Paul hoping the believers will *become*, if love does for them what soil does for a tree? What is he hoping they will *do* when they are grounded in love?
2. “Breadth and length and height and depth” express the great dimensions of the love of Christ (Eph. 3:18). Why is strength from God needed to comprehend Christ’s love? What would a lack of love within the church body have revealed about the Ephesian church?
3. “Filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19) points back to the “fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23). By what measure could the Ephesians determine if their congregation was experiencing the fullness of God? (Consider Ephesians 1-3, specifically Ephesians 2 and 3:17. How does this fullness relate to their identity with Christ in the present and the future, both spiritually and practically?)

4. Paul concludes the first three chapters of Ephesians with a doxology. What is Paul's final goal for the Ephesian church in Ephesians 3:20-21? What does this say about the hope of the gospel in each successive period of history?

### **TAKING IT PERSONALLY**

This chapter spanned Paul's imprisonment, the call to share the good news, the working of the Holy Spirit in our Sanctification, the working of Christ in the Church, and the riches we have inherited through Jesus Christ. Write down what encouraged you most this week. How can you encourage someone else with what encouraged you?