

Eph Ch 3 Vs 1-7

(Let me tell you a secret)

(2 corrections for 2nd service, #1 I made a scripture reference last week to Eph Ch 10 Vs23 in regards to holding fast to the confession of our hope of glory with out wavering because our hope isn't dependant upon our faithfulness but His and He who promised is faithful. and The only problem with that reference is that it doesn't exist, I meant to say Heb Ch 10 Vs 23, also I made reference to the physical act of circumcision being mutilation and I told you Galatians was where that reference was, and then as the Lord would have it I was reading through Philippians last week and lo and behold that scripture that says beware of the mutilation was right there in Ch 3:2, so forgive me please for giving you a couple of mis-references I assure you that it wasn't intentional.)

As we approach ch 3 understand that basically the 1st half, or really vs 2-13 are in reality in a parenthetical type of a position, and what I mean by that is that as you can see Paul was going to begin what's been assigned by man as ch 3 with a prayer. He says for this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you gentiles, and then he begins to revert, or digress in order to go back and explain this mystery that's been revealed to him and the other apostles and prophets in greater detail than he previously has. and Then in vs 14 he picks back up with his original intent of praying for them as you can see he goes back and says "for this reason" and continues on in what he was beginning with in vs 1.

Now these 1st 13 vs break down into basically 4 subdivisions, #1 vs 1-3, the dispensation and revelation of the mystery, #2 vs 4-6 the explanation, #3Vs7-9 the proclamation, and #4 Vs 10-13 the intention or the application of the mystery (which is to grant us boldness and access (to the Father) with confidence through faith in Him, that is Jesus Christ). The basic summary of it all is found as God would have it, right in the heart of the text which is right there in vs 6 which says, "*that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.*" That's the meat of this sacred secret, or this divine mystery that Paul wants to talk to us about, the rest of the text in these vs revolves around that truth, lets read this 1st little subdivision vs 1-3, along with vs 4 so as to complete the statement, and see what it is that the Lord has in store for us this morning.

Vs1-4

The words for this reason introduces the cause for Paul's prayer, as I was saying it would seem as though Paul's heart was being stirred to pray as he was writing the end of what we refer to as ch 2, and he eventually gets to that prayer beginning with vs 14. and The Spirit was no doubt leading him to share that prayer as we'll see, it's one of the most phenomenal prayers in all the word of God.

But previous to him getting to that prayer the Lord had this major matter that He wanted Paul deal with 1st. So we might refer to these vs before as an interjection or in that parenthetical position, but understand it's by no means an after thought in the heart of God.

But what was the reason that he was stirred to pray? Well it goes back to all the unifying truths that he just previously shared in ch 2, the fact that He Himself (that being Jesus Christ) is our peace, peace with God and peace with one another, though we were far off we've been brought near, when we're in Christ we're made a new man and all believers are in one body, the fact that all believers are equally citizens of the kingdom of God and members of His family and that we're all as the children of God having received Jesus Christ being built into a holy temple not made with hands to be the very dwelling place of God.

But before he gets into that prayer the Spirit prompts him to go ahead and re-emphasize the divine origin of these truths so that we might be well established concerning what was such at that time a radically new doctrine. and To be assured of the fact that this doctrine was straight from the heart of God, this isn't some mans neat concept; this is the heart and mind of God. But he writes here and he says I, Paul, and Paul is by far out side of the Lord Jesus Himself the dominant figure in the NT, he authored at least 13 of its books, is the dominating human instrument in the book of Acts and more than any other apostle the Lord seemed to use him to break down and explain the mysteries of the gospel.

It is interesting the title that he gives to himself here, he refers to himself as the prisoner of Christ Jesus, and he often made reference to this fact, in vs 1 of ch 4 we read (read 1st ½) and in vs 20 of ch 6 of this same letter he refers to himself as an ambassador of the gospel in chains. You see even though he was arrested on Jewish charges he didn't consider himself a prisoner of the Jews. Although he was imprisoned by Roman authority, he didn't consider himself a prisoner of Rome, as a matter of fact many of the Roman soldiers probably considered themselves to be prisoners of Paul.

Can you imagine what it would've been like to not be a Christian and be chained to Paul the apostle? Talk about prison ministry, Paul took it to new heights; as a matter of fact many of the guards that he was chained to eventually gave their own hearts to Christ. People in the very household of Caesar, in Phil 4:22 Paul writes, "*All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.*" and So even though while in prison he'd appealed to Caesar, he didn't consider himself Caesar's prisoner, but rather a prisoner of Jesus Christ He was able to see the divine perspective as it applied to his life, suffering was apart of the will of God for the life of Paul the apostle, those who purport that anytime you are suffering you're out of God's will or lacking in faith, err, not knowing the scriptures.

You remember Jesus Himself told Ananias in Acts 9:16 in regards to the life of Paul, *“I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”* and Paul would later write in 2 Tim 3:12 *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”*

But in all of Paul's sufferings, (shipwrecks, beatings, stoned and left for dead, and imprisonments) He maintained the divine perspective, and that is so critical for you and me, if the perspective I see the things that happen in my life is mine, then I'll probably give up quick and live my life defeated and in despair. But if the view point that we look upon our lives from is divine, that changes the whole picture, had Paul not been able to get beyond his immediate circumstances into the divine perspective, he'd have probably gave up long ago. He was in the hands of one jailor after another, beaten and persecuted beyond measure, subjected many times to the dictates of the government with out say in the matter, I mean these aren't the ingredients that make for a happy camper. But Paul trusted in the fact that God was in control even when it seemed like his circumstances were out of control, and that brought him great peace, you see it's not that he could foresee his future, or understood perfectly the purposes behind his afflictions, but you might say that he lived the cliché' that says I may not know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future. He didn't walk by sight, he walked by faith, and God's own word spoke to him as much as it does to you and me and so he had to trust in the fact that all things work together for good to those who love God, to the called according to His purposes. You see he not only preached it, but he had to live it as well.

Through it all he was able to say, *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* Rom 8:18 James said count it all joy when we fall into various trials, in Rom 5:3-4 Paul wrote, *“we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”* Paul was the prisoner of Christ Jesus, and he told the Philippians that that the things, which happened to him, actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, a big chunk of Paul's writings of the word of God came about while he was in prison. and He says that he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for us gentiles, he was in jail for the message of the grace of God to the gentiles and that they could be saved, not by becoming a Jew, but by simple faith in Jesus Christ He was imprisoned for the message of Christ and being able to save to the uttermost, even the gentiles, it's interesting how that even as Jesus wasn't crucified for His sake but for others, not that I would ever place them on the same level, Paul was a mere man, Jesus was the Son of God, but neither was Paul imprisoned for his sake but for the sake of others, namely the gentiles. He made an incredible sacrifice of unselfish service for the sake of bringing others into glory, as we see in vs 13 (and I won't take you there but you can look at 2nd Cor ch 4 beginning with vs 8 for a correlation to this.) Now we have this interjection beginning with vs 2)

Vs2

Now where it says “if indeed you have heard” in the Greek that’s a clause that’s assumed to be true so in essence he’s saying, “as I’m sure you’ve already heard” of the dispensation, or your bible might read administration, or stewardship of the grace of God, which was given to me for you. That word “dispensation” is the Greek word *oikonomia* (oy-kon-om-ee'-ah); from where we get our word economy, it basically means the law of the house, or the administration or stewardship of the house. In other words the steward was responsible for taking care of that which belonged to someone else, he’s basically saying, I’m sure you’ve heard of the fact that I’ve been entrusted as a steward with the message of the grace of God towards you gentiles.

As compared to the other apostles who focus was primarily toward the Jews, Paul wrote in Gal 2:7-9 that, *“when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”* The message wasn’t any different, to both peoples it was the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, Peter told the Jews in Acts 4:12 *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Paul told the Philippian jailor to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, so the message was the same, the thing that differed was the calling, Peter was called to minister primarily to the Jews and Paul was called to minister God’s grace primarily to the gentiles. 1 Tim 2:7 Paul writing concerning Jesus Christ *“for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle--I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying--a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”* 2 Tim 1:11 concerning the gospel, *“to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”* Rom 15:15-16 *“Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”*

The list goes on and on, Paul was a steward of the grace of God and he says that it was given to him for us, again so that we might understand the reality of God’s heart in wanting to bring us together, and reconcile us to Himself in Christ by His grace. Now Paul goes on to speak of how it was that he came into the fullness of this awareness, and it was by divine revelation, notice vs3

Vs3

The mystery that he's speaking of here came by direct revelation from the Lord, it was revealed to him, or unveiled to him divinely. Now remember we came across this word "mystery" in vs 9 of Ch1, and it's not talking about a mystery like we think of when we use the word mystery, you know the who done its? Agatha Christie or whatever, in the NT the Greek word for mystery differs from the English word for mystery, the Greek word basically means something that is beyond our natural knowledge, but has been opened to us by divine revelation through the Holy Spirit. and I think I gave you the Vine's Expository Dictionary definition last time but I'll give it to you again, *"In the NT it denotes, not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit. In the ordinary sense a "mystery" implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed."*

Paul gives us a pretty good idea of the meaning in Col 1:25-26 when speaking of the church he said, *"of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."* It's basically an open secret that's been made open to man by the revelation of God, that's the only way that man can know the mysteries of God, by Him revealing them to man, saying in effect here let me tell you a secret, thereby bringing man into a richer understanding of His plan and purpose and exposing just a little more of His heart to us.

Paul tells us here that he's already briefly written about this mystery of spiritual oneness in this letter, where at? Ch1 vs9, 10 (read) and Then also in vs 14-18 vs11-13 leading up to that point, lets look again at vs 14-18. So there Paul wrote briefly concerning that which he is elaborating on now, this mystery of spiritual oneness in Christ.

Vs4

He says I'm writing these things down so that when you read them you might understand, my insight into the mystery (notice) of Christ. Now the NT mentions many mysteries, I'll give you just a few, 1 Cor 15:51-52 *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: (again let me tell you a secret, a divine secret) We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— (What is this, the mystery of the rapture of the church) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."* Eph 5:32 *"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."* Paul says this is a big mystery, a big secret that I'm letting you in on, and you know what it's in regards to in the text?

Marriage, did you know that marriage is a mystery, those of you that are married are saying you're preaching to the choir brother. You can never know marriage the way that God intended just by being married, God has to reveal to you what it's really all about, why? Because marriage isn't about 2 people, it's about the Lord doing an awesome miraculous work of ongoing intimacy between 2 people.

He says I speak concerning Christ and the church, in other words marriage is supposed to be a picture of the love relationship between Christ and His Church, but how could you know that apart from the Lord revealing that and being apart of that, in the very center. 1 More, another one in Eph, Eph 6:19 Paul there seeking prayer for himself, "*that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.*" The gospel itself is a mystery, you can't know it, and you can't understand it or comprehend it until God Himself by the power of the Holy Spirit begins to open the eyes of your hearts understanding.

That's why John said that it's the Holy Spirit that teaches you, I can share with you the truths of the word of God until I start turning blue in the face, but if the Holy Spirit doesn't open your understanding you won't really get it. Oh you may grasp some intellectual understanding, maybe, but your heart won't receive it. So if you're tracking with me this morning praise the Lord, because the Holy Spirit is teaching you the mysteries of the gospel. But I would say that this is by far the biggest one, the one that's before us now, how could you get any bigger in the area of mystery than the mystery of Christ? Revelation, about who He is, and His work, and His purpose and His plan, that you'd never know even if you were saved for years and years unless you sought the Lord to give you understanding on it. Those are the things that Paul is talking about here, who Christ is, His work, purpose and plan notice vs 5.

Vs5-6

Vs 6 here is again the summation of this mystery, and in short it's in regards to the church, the fact that the gentiles would be established on an equal plain receiving all the rights of God's chosen people, the Jews, in Christ. In times of old, prior to Jesus Christ and the revelation of this mystery by the Holy Spirit no one, not even the greatest of the OT prophets had but a best a glimpse, but far from an understanding, of this truth that Paul is now disclosing, or revealing. Listen to the words of Peter in 1 Peter 1:10-12 "*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.*"

You see we have a much fuller grasp of many of the OT scriptures now only because they were explained in the new. No one fully understood what was being said in Gen 12 when God told Ab that in you all of the families of the earth will be blessed, until the Holy Spirit ministered to Paul and he wrote in what we refer to as Gal 3:8 *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”*

No one really grasped what Isaiah was saying when the prophecy was uttered through him in Isa 49:6 *“I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”* Until Paul who was defending his position before the Jews because they were so mad at him for seeking to include gentiles into the salvation of “their God” in Acts 13:46-47 where we read, *“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; (speaking of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ) but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’”* You see the Jews had sort of this 2-fold problem with the church, #1 they had a real problem getting past the idea that all of the saved world could come together and be united into one body whereby there would be absolutely no racial distinctions whatsoever.

These little clues that they had in the OT were just a mystery because there was too much information still lacking, and we’re reaping the benefits of the promise of Jesus when He said in John 14:26, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things.”* But you see this idea of separation between Jew and Gentile was so ingrained in them that you remember that’s why even the apostle Peter had such a difficult time accepting Gentile believers as being completely on the same level as the Jew. and Because of this deep seated mind set, that’s no doubt one of the reasons that in this letter Paul takes the time state and restate, and explain and explain again the reality of this awesome truth that, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Gal 3:28 and Again, Rom 10:12-13 *“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”* Guess what you are included in the “whoever” if you’re a “whoever” then you qualify, it doesn’t matter who you are where you’ve been or what you’ve done, if you’ll humble yourself and call upon the name of the Lord even this morning this door is open to you and you will be saved.

Paul was constantly reinforcing and reiterating this truth throughout his epistles, that we're all co-equals in Christ and that salvation is open to whoever will take God up on the offer, and if the Holy Spirit saw fit to repeat Himself so often, I believe we'd do well to heed this lesson and really allow it to soak into our hearts.

The 2nd problem that the Jews were confronted with is that they believed that the kingdom of God would be established immediately upon the appearance of the Messiah. The OT prophets couldn't really see this age of grace that God would bring into fruition from which God would be drawing from among the gentiles the body of Christ. and They would write of things that they didn't even really comprehend but they just wrote faithfully as the Holy Spirit moved upon them to write. Isaiah wrote of the coming Messiah and how He would sit *"Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."* and Yet later on he would write concerning the Messiah in Isa 53 that, *"He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."* He wrote of how He would be numbered with the transgressors, And He would bear the sin of many, And make intercession for the transgressors. and I have no doubt that Isaiah wrestled with what would seem to be to him some apparent inconsistencies, in the things that he wrote.

Daniel prophesied the day that the Messiah would come and then declared that He would be cut off. and Yet even through all of that there did remain this attitude among the Jews that the Messiah would set up His kingdom immediately upon His arrival onto the scene and that attitude was very prevalent, even among the disciples. and They were constantly looking for the immediate establishment of God's kingdom on earth, and so you read that even after the resurrection in the book of Acts ch 1 when Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit, that they asked Him if this would be the time that He would restore the kingdom to Israel.

They didn't really understand that there would be this dispensation of grace whereby God would be drawing out from the gentiles the church of Jesus Christ breaking down that wall of separation that existed between them so as to create in Himself one new man not considered Jew or gentile, but the church. and We would all co-exist equally in Christ, Paul is saying here in vs 5 this wasn't known in the past, at least in the fullness of it's revelation like it is now having been revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Holy apostles and the prophets.

Notice again that it's the Holy Spirit that is the divine agency of God's revelation to and through these men, 2 Peter 1:20, 21 says, *"knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."*

Again we have the privilege of reaping the benefits of the Lords promise in John 16:12-15 when He was speaking to His disciples and He said to them, *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. (things like the gentiles are going to be grafted into the kingdom on equal par with you) However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."* and What is one of the tremendous truths that He has declared to you, that should cause your heart to be overwhelmed with joy this morning if you know Jesus Christ?

Vs6-7

This is where Lord willing we'll resume next week.