

**Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**  
**Bible Study Notes: Ephesians 3**

*"God's Plan Revealed"*

7/10/13

**SUMMARY**

In this chapter Paul reminds his readers of God's grace that has been shown him regarding the revelation of the "mystery". By reading what he had written earlier, they would understand how the "mystery" pertained to Gentiles becoming fellow heirs in Christ, and Paul felt privileged to preach among the Gentiles what for ages had been hidden. Knowing that what he did was part of God's eternal purpose in Christ to make His manifold wisdom known by the church, he asked his brethren not to be discouraged by any tribulations he experienced on their behalf (1-13).

The chapter also contains Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians. He prays for their enablement, that the Father would strengthen them by His Spirit, that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith, that they be able to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and so be filled with all the fullness of God. He concludes his prayer and this chapter by ascribing that glory be given to God in the church by Jesus Christ for all eternity (14-21).

**I. THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY (1-13)**

**EPHESIANS 3:1**

Paul was under house arrest in Rome for preaching about Christ. The religious leaders in Jerusalem, who felt threatened by Christ's teachings and didn't believe he was the Messiah, pressured the Romans to arrest Paul and bring him to trial for treason and for causing rebellion among the Jews. Paul had appealed for his case to be heard by the emperor, and he was awaiting trial (see Acts 28:16-31). Even though he was under arrest, Paul maintained his firm belief that God was in control of all that happened to him. Do circumstances make you wonder if God has lost control of this world? Like Paul, remember that no matter what happens, God directs the world's affairs.

**EPHESIANS 3:2, 3**

Paul's "special ministry" refers to the special stewardship, trust, or commitment that Paul had been given. He had been assigned the special work of preaching the Good News to the Gentiles, God's great plan shown to Paul in a revelation.

## EPHESIANS 3:5, 6

God's plan was not revealed to previous generations, not because God wanted to keep something from his people, but because he would reveal it to everyone in his perfect timing. God planned to have Jews and Gentiles comprise one body, the church. It was known in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would receive salvation (Isaiah 49:6); but it was never revealed in the Old Testament that all Gentile and Jewish believers would become equal in the body of Christ. Yet this equality was accomplished when Jesus destroyed the "wall of hostility" and created "one new person" (2:14, 15).

## EPHESIANS 3:7

When Paul began spreading the Good News, God gave him the ability to speak effectively. You may not be an apostle or even an evangelist, but God will give you opportunities to tell others about Christ. And with the opportunities he will provide the ability, courage, and power. Whenever an opportunity presents itself, make yourself available to God as his servant. As you focus on the other person and his or her needs, God will communicate your caring attitude. Your words will be natural, loving, and compelling.

## EPHESIANS 3:8

When Paul describes himself as "the least deserving Christian there is," he means that without God's help, he would never be able to do God's work. Yet God chose him to share the Good News with the Gentiles and gave him the power to do it. If we feel that our role is minor, we may be right—except that we have forgotten what a difference God makes. How does God want to use you? Draw on his power, do your part, and faithfully perform the special role God has called you to play in his plan.

## EPHESIANS 3:12

It is an awesome privilege to be able to approach God with freedom and confidence. Most of us would be apprehensive in the presence of a powerful ruler. But thanks to Christ, by faith we can enter directly into God's presence through prayer. We know we'll be welcomed with open arms because we are God's children through our union with Christ. Don't be afraid of God. Talk with him about everything. He is waiting to hear from you.

## EPHESIANS 3:13

Why should Paul's suffering make the Ephesians feel honored and encouraged? If Paul had not preached the Good News, he would not be in jail—but then the Ephesians would not have heard the Good News and been converted either. Just as a mother endures the pain of childbirth in order to bring new life into the world, Paul endured the pain of persecution in order to bring new believers to Christ. Obeying Christ is never easy. He calls you to take your cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24)—that is,

to be willing to endure pain so that God's message of salvation can reach the entire world. We should feel honored that others have suffered and sacrificed for us so that we might reap the benefit.

## **II. PAUL'S SECOND PRAYER: FOR THEIR ENABLEMENT (14-21)**

EPHESIANS 3:14, 15

The family of God includes all who have believed in him in the past, all who believe in the present, and all who will believe in the future. We are all a family because we have the same Father. He is the source of all creation, the rightful owner of everything. God promises his love and power to his family, the church (3:16-21). If we want to receive God's blessings, it is important that we stay in contact with other believers in the body of Christ. Those who isolate themselves from God's family and try to go it alone cut themselves off from God's power.

EPHESIANS 3:17-19

God's love is total, says Paul. It reaches every corner of our experience. It is *wide*—it covers the breadth of our own experience, and it reaches out to the whole world. God's love is *long*—it continues the length of our lives. It is *high*—it rises to the heights of our celebration and elation. His love is *deep*—it reaches to the depths of discouragement, despair, and even death. When you feel shut out or isolated, remember that you can never be lost to God's love. For another prayer about God's immeasurable and inexhaustible love, see Paul's words in Romans 8:38, 39.

EPHESIANS 3:19

This "fullness" is fully expressed only in Christ (Colossians 2:9, 10). In union with Christ and through his empowering Spirit, we are complete. We have all the fullness of God available to us. But we must appropriate that fullness through faith and through prayer as we daily live for him. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is also for you. You can ask the Holy Spirit to fill every aspect of your life to the fullest.

EPHESIANS 3:20, 21

This doxology—prayer of praise to God—ends part 1 of Ephesians. In the first section, Paul described the timeless role of the church. In part 2 (chapters 4-6), he will explain how church members should live in order to bring about the unity God wants. As in most of his books, Paul first lays a doctrinal foundation and then makes practical applications of the truths he has presented.