



THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY 4 PAUL, THE PRISONER & PREACHER

Ephesians 3:1-21

In chapter 3 Paul continues addressing Gentiles, reminding them of the privileges the Gospel has brought them.

In this passage Paul discloses quite a bit about himself. He is in prison in Rome awaiting trial before Caesar (verse 1, 13). He has been 'commissioned' by Christ to preach to Gentiles (verse 2, see Acts 22:12-18). God revealed to him that all along his plan was to include Gentiles within the people of God (verse 3-6). He is very conscious that 'I am the very least of all the saints' (verse 8) because I once persecuted the church (see Philippians 3:6-11).

Q. 1. Many Christians around the world today are in prison for their faith. How would you handle imprisonment for being a Christian?

Q. 2. How did Paul handle imprisonment? Was he super human or can his experience be a model and encouragement for us?

In this passage Paul uses the word 'mystery' four times (verse 3, 4, 5, 9). We have already noted Paul's use of this word in Eph. 1:9. In verse 3 Paul defines the word 'mystery' as what 'was made known to me by revelation.' The mystery revealed to Paul, the other apostles and the early Christian prophets (verse 5) is that all along God planned to include Gentiles within the people of God (verse 6). This Paul says was God's 'eternal purpose' (verse 11).

Q. 3. Do you find the idea that God is always working to his plan reassuring? If so why is it reassuring to you? How do you cope when you pray and trust but things go wrong?

Q. 4. Again we meet up with the idea that God reveals his mind to believers. Some Christians argue that with the passing of the twelve apostles and Paul all that is and will be revealed is found in the Bible. While we should all agree that Biblical revelation gives the norm, and that no revelation to an individual can contradict or add to this, what do you think of the idea that God still communicates personally to believers? Have you experienced a personal revelation from God?

In this epistle, written in the first century, Paul reminds Jewish believers that Gentiles are 'fellow heirs, members of the same body (the church), and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel' (verse 6). Today, the Jew-Gentile problem is not an issue in our churches. However,

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the man-woman relationship certainly is in many churches. The Salvation Army from the beginning has made it a principle that men and woman are fully equal and should share leadership but in many evangelical churches women are excluded from leadership.

In Gal.3:28 Paul parallels the Jew-Gentile, slave-master and the man-woman division saying each is transcended in Christ. (Paul of course is not saying that when we become a Christian our ethnic, sexual or social differences are obliterated. He is saying that in Christ they should not to divide believers.)

- Q. 5. *Do you think that women who God values the same as men sometimes are made to feel second class Christians in our churches? Why does this happen all too often? Are you personally aware of such a situation?*
- Q. 6. *Why does the church so often find it hard to put into practice Paul's teaching that despite the fact that we are differentiated by race, sex and social status and in other ways, we are one in Christ, spiritually and socially? What are the obstacles that you have personally experienced?*
- Q. 7. *The Greek word translated 'Gospel' could be equally well translated, 'Good News.' That's what the English word "gospel" means. Why is the message of Christ crucified good news? Crucifixion hardly seems good news.*
- Q. 8. *In verse 7 Paul calls himself a deacon/servant/minister of the Gospel. In his world these terms were used mainly of slaves. Are we too ministers of the Gospel? If so what does this mean?*
- Q. 9. *What does Paul say qualifies him for this ministry (verse 7)? Have we too got this qualification?*
- Q. 10. *If you were to write out a job description for a church leader, what would be your top 3 criteria?*

Paul cannot speak too exuberantly of what God has done for us in Christ. In Eph. 1:7-8 he writes of 'the riches of God's grace ... lavished on us'; in 1:18 of 'the riches of our glorious inheritance'; in 1:19 of 'the immeasurable greatness of his (the ascended Christ's) power for us who believe'; in 2:7 of 'the incomparable riches of his grace'; and now in 3:7 he writes of 'the boundless riches of Christ'.

- Q. 11. *What impresses us most about how Paul speaks of the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ? Do we think of what God has done for us in Christ in these exuberant terms? If not why not?*
- Q. 12. *What are the 'boundless riches we have in Christ'?*

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In verse 10 Paul speaks of God making known his wisdom to the rulers in the heavenly realm ‘through the church’ on earth. This is the only time in the New Testament that the church is said to do this. In this comment Paul seems to be suggesting that what has taken place on the cross—here referred to as a revelation of God’s wisdom—that has brought into existence the Christian community on earth, is a challenge to the spiritual rulers in heaven opposed to God.

Q. 13. *How do you think the church threatens the spiritual powers opposed to God?*

Q. 14. *What have you learned from this passage? A number of people in the group may like to respond to this question.*

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