

# Ephesians: Blessed Beyond Belief to Build up the Body

## Lesson 5: No lone ranger Christians Ephesians 3:1-13

### Small Group Questions

1. When y
2. What is the

### Outline

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## Review

1:1–3:21 Positional Unity of the Church

1:1-23 God’s (life insurance) plan and benefits

1:1-2 A circular letter to those “in Christ”

Paul writes to those “in Christ—that they might experience God’s grace and peace.

1:3-14 Believers have: **Every spiritual blessing—to the praise of His glory**

*The plan, provision and protection of Salvation*

God is blessed, because He has blessed those “in Christ” with every spiritual blessing

“God has enriched believers with every spiritual benefit for their spiritual well-being.”<sup>1</sup>

*A reminder of the great things God has done for the individual believer*

**WOW**—it is all about God

All we have in salvation is for His praise and glory.

1:15-23 Prayer for insight to truly know God

**The prayer for those who have everything**—know God better

*Prayer for personal insight to their relationship with God for the purpose of deeper experiential appreciation of their riches benefits*

To realizing the hope, riches and power on their behalf—which is evidenced by Christ current exalted position

<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 301.

Paul prays that believer's know God personally and intimately—so that they would realize the hope of their calling (past), the riches of His inheritance in the saints (value) (future) and the extent of His power on their behalf (present)—which is evidenced by the power to raise and seat Christ and to subject all things to Him and to give Him to the Church as sufficient head (make Him head of the Church).

Why did He do this?

“In chapters 2 and 3 Paul explains the execution of the eternal plan by showing how God makes sinners into saints and builds them into the church, the body of Christ. In 2:1-10 Paul states how sinners, who deserve nothing but God's wrath, become trophies of his grace.”<sup>2</sup>

2:1–3:21 Steps towards fulfilling God's plan

2:1-10 God's plan (1:3-14) applied to individuals

Man's condition 2:1-3

Apart from God man is hopeless because they are dead in trespasses and sin

Condition apart from God (2:1-3)

- though dead in trespasses and sin resulting from
- nature/life—walk according to the values of the world
- devil—are controlled by the ruler of the world
- and actions of the will (enjoyment of sin)

“But God” (God's provision) 2:4-10

Man's condition, apart from God is hopeless because they are dead in trespasses and sin

as a result of their walking according to the values of the world, are controlled by the ruler of the world, and by actions in keeping with their desires.

But God

Who is rich in mercy (character), motivated by His great love (cause)

Applied His power to make believers alive, raised, and seated with Christ, so that they would be a revelation of God's grace

Based on His grace provided a gift

—a relationship with Him—no longer separated (dead) but unified (alive) as an expression of the surpassing rich of His grace

Obtained through faith

—not works

For the purpose of doing good works

—to reveal God's grace through actions

- Character—Who is rich in mercy
- Motivated—By His great love
- Based on—His grace
- Provided a gift
- Obtained—through faith
- Purpose—to do good works, which reveal God's grace in action

2:11–3:13 God's plan applied corporately

2:11-22 Our new position corporately

Now have been brought near to God and have been made into a new man—entity

2:11-12 Formerly

Those who were hopeless

Separated from God's promises

and Messiah—given to Israel

2:13-22 Now have been brought near to God

And have been made into a new man—entity

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<sup>2</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 305.

3:1-13

The mystery of the Church is revealed after Christ

Paul explains his role as administrator and dispenser of the mystery to the Gentiles

The church is not natural—unity in spite of diversity is difficult

To show the wisdom of God—even to the cosmic powers

## Introduction

“Individual sinners have obtained the gracious gift of salvation on the basis of God’s grace by faith. That is not the end. They are not left alone but are united with other believers into a corporate unity. IN 2:11-22 Paul discusses this union of redeemed Jews and Gentiles in the church, Christ’s body (cf. 1:22-23). This forms the basis of the discussion of the rest of the epistle. As stated in the introduction, the dominate theme of this epistle is love, and certainly no union can be truly successful unless is its basis and mode of operation.”<sup>3</sup>

## Questions

Did you have sibling rivalry?

When your sibling received attention was it at your expense?

If you had a second or third child, did they replace the significance of the first?

Did you love the second child at the expense of the first?

If there are inherent differences or if there are contrasting or even contradictory personalities/cultures/backgrounds—what is required to maintain unity?

#1 Love—a motivation greater than ourselves

#2 Purpose—purpose big than ourselves

## Context

### Context of Ephesians 2–3

The context of the passage (2:11–3:13)—which deals with the corporate aspect of salvation—has as its backdrop the historical day of Pentecost. On the Day of Pentecost the Spirit was poured out to create the church—by making many one. We are unified because there is one God, one Lord, one gospel, one Savior, one hope, and one church.

**Genesis 12:1–3** Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**” (ESV)

**Isaiah 49:6** he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (ESV)

The context of the above quotation is found in one of the Servant songs of the book of Isaiah. The speaker is none other than Yahweh, speaking to the Messiah. God says, I am not sending you to bless a tiny nation called Israel. You are going to take my grace to every nation on earth!<sup>4</sup>

Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, Isaiah 42:6, Psalm 72		Teach that the nations/ Gentiles the will be blessed by God.
Isaiah 11:10; 49:6; 54:1-3; 60:1-3		Teach that Messiah will come for the Gentiles.
Hosea 1:10		Teach that the Gentiles will be



<sup>3</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 351

<sup>4</sup> Reed Jolly, *Ephesians Study* (sbcommunity.org)

Amos 9:11-15 Psalm 2:8		saved by the Messiah.
Joel 2:28-29		Teach that the Gentiles will receive the Holy Spirit
What did the Old Testament not teach—Jews and Gentiles would be one		
Does this mean that Gentiles have replaced Jews—no		

## Overview

What he intended to do at this point was to explain again how he was praying for them, just as he had done in 1:15 – 23. But a glance at 3:1 and 14 reveals that, as in 2:1 – 5, Paul starts a thought, is diverted, and then returns to his original thought. In 3:1 he starts to describe his prayer for them, but the mention of “Gentiles” leads him to speak of his own apostolic ministry to the Gentiles and its significance. Then in 3:14 he returns to his prayer. Just as 3:14 – 21 is parallel to 1:15 – 23, 3:2 – 13 is in many ways parallel to 1:3 – 14. Both sections emphasize “administration,” “grace,” “revelation,” “mystery,” “glory,” and “God’s purpose.”<sup>5</sup>

- A. Paul the prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles (3:1)
- B. Paul the steward of grace and servant of the gospel (3:2 – 7)
- C. The purpose and significance of Paul’s gospel (3:8 – 13)

**To make sure that the Gentile audience did not see Paul as replacing the apostles—and they themselves as replacing the Jews**—he explains that his gospel is new in the sense that it was not revealed in the OT, but not in the sense that it was different in kind from that of the other apostles (3:1-7). Further, the content of the new, previously unrevealed, spiritual community is now made explicit: Jew and Gentile are fellow heirs, fellow body-members, and fellow partakers of the promise (3:5-6). Jew and Gentile thus were on equal footing in this new body. Not only could these Gentiles not claim superiority to Jews (and vice versa), Paul himself could not claim superiority to any Christian (3:8). But the Gentiles have been incorporated into the body of Christ not for their sake only, but even for the sake of angelic beings (3:10).<sup>6</sup>

## Structure

The whole passage might be a hinge—emphasizing the mystery (already explained) and how to live out this new relationship (chapters 4-6).

<sup>7</sup>Paul’s Relation to the Mystery of this New Spiritual Community (3:1-13)

- 1. The Content of the Mystery Revealed to Paul (3:1-7)
- 2. The Wisdom of the Mystery Revealed to Angelic Beings (3:8-13)

2B. Specific: Personal and Corporate Nature of Blessing (2:1-3:21)

3C. Paul’s Role In Establishing the New Community (3:1-13)

1D. The “Mystery” Was Made Known to Him (3:1-6)

2D. Paul Received Divine Grace... (3:7-13)

1E. To Preach Christ (3:7-8)

2E. To Unveil the “Mystery” (3:9-12)

3E. To Endure Suffering for the “Mystery” (3:13)

4C. Paul’s Prayer for the New Community (3:14-21)

<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne. “Original Meaning” In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, Ph.D. *Ephesians: Introduction, Argument, and Outline*, Biblical Studies Foundation, © 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, Ph.D. *Ephesians: Introduction, Argument, and Outline*, Biblical Studies Foundation, © 1999.

The NIV has placed [verse 7](#) with [verses 8 – 13](#) for convenience, for these verses explain [verse 7](#). Considerable overlap exists between [verses 2 – 7](#) and [8 – 13](#), for both focus on grace and revelation. Even though the revelation focuses on the mystery made known in Christ ([vv. 4 and 8](#)), neither Christ nor the salvation of the Gentiles is the real focus. Rather, Paul's message here has a higher purpose, the revelation of God himself. God is both the revealer and the One who is revealed ([vv. 2 – 3, 8, 10](#)). Note the use of the passive voice in [verses 2, 3, 5, and 8](#), all of which are “divine passives” (the passive voice used to describe an action of God).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne. “Original Meaning” In NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 158.

## Exposition

- I. **Paul’s relationship to the Mystery of the New Community—A recipient of Grace 3:1-13**
  - God is the sources of the Mystery**
  - A. **The Content of the Mystery revealed to Paul—by grace 3:1-7**
    - 1. **Paul’s prayer—interrupted 3:1**

### 3:1 For this Reason

Looking back to 2:11-22, where Paul has “just revealed that a ‘new person’ has been created, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles in which God’s Spirit dwells.”<sup>9</sup>

He intends to pray “for strengthened love towards one another as the outworking of this new union”<sup>10</sup> as can be seen in 3:14-21.

### I, Paul

Shows his personal involvement

### A prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles

Acts 21:21, 28

The only reason why Paul was in prison was because he thought Gentiles had the same access to God that Jews did. If he had been content to be a Jewish Christian with a mission to Jews or if he had been willing to keep Gentiles on a lower plane, he would not have been in jail. But the purpose of Paul’s call was to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles ([Rom. 1:5](#); [Gal. 1 – 2](#)), and if faith was the key to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles were on the same plane.<sup>11</sup>

By the time Ephesians was written Paul had been in prison for up to five years under Roman governors Felix, Festus and King Agrippa (see Acts 23-26). The original charge brought against Paul was unfounded, but interesting in light of the mystery of the gospel. Paul’s accusers claimed that he brought a Gentile named Trophimus into the temple area reserved for the Jews. Now he is a prisoner in Rome under the authority of Nero. He is, however, a prisoner of Christ. Such was Paul’s understanding of the sovereignty of God and of his own discipleship.<sup>12</sup>

But the focus of the passage is not on Paul’s imprisonment, but on the mystery.

It was the focus on the inclusion of the gentile and the resurrection that caused his imprisonment.

The Mystery—that Jews and Gentiles are together apart of God’s plan and purpose. As Paul begins to pray for the Ephesians, he interrupts himself to add more clarification on the “mystery” and to make clear his responsibility to proclaim the mystery.

### Four things Paul wants to clarify and elaborate on:

1. His responsibility to make the mystery known
2. When and to whom this new revelation came
3. The content of the Mystery

<sup>9</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p. 419.

<sup>10</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p. 419.

<sup>11</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne. “Paul the Prisoner (3:1)” In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> Reed Jolly, *Ephesians Study* (sbcommunity.org)

## 4. The purpose or intended effect of the mystery

Structure: Two sentences 3:1-7 (with v 1 being the start of a statement finished in 3:14) and 3:8-13. But the way verses 7-8 are constructed might make verses 2-13 one sentence.

The Mystery 3:2-13

Mystery explained 3:2-6

His responsibility to share it 3:2

When and to whom it was revealed 3:3-5

The content 3:6

2. **Paul's responsibility 3:2**

**ESV "assuming" is "if indeed"** the protasis of the first class conditional sentence. The apodosis appears in verse 13, "therefore" or "then"

Point: They had already heard. What he was telling them was nothing they did not know.

**stewardship**—here the focus is on the activity that flows from the position

**grace**

Not simply the saving grace of 2:8 or a living or empowering grace as 3:7, but a specific use that might be translated, "administration of grace." The unmerited favor of serving.

"In verse 7 it will be seen that grace is necessary not only for the revelation of the mystery, but also for enablement to make known the mystery."<sup>13</sup>

When in 3:2 Paul speaks of the stewardship of God's grace he is thinking not so much of the grace of apostleship<sup>12</sup> (which is mentioned in v.7 and developed in vv. 8–12) as of the grace of God<sup>13</sup> embodied and proclaimed in the gospel.<sup>14</sup> To make this gospel known is Paul's special privilege. Obviously, the two are closely related, but as in Galatians 1 he deals first with the revelation of the gospel (vv. 11–12) and then his commission to preach it (vv. 15–17), so here in Ephesians 3 Paul focuses first on God's revelation to him of the mystery regarding the Gentiles part in salvation (vv. 2–7) before spelling out the means by which this goal is achieved,<sup>15</sup> namely, by his enlightening them about this mystery (vv. 8–12). Divine grace was given not simply for Paul's personal enhancement. Instead, it was for the sake of the Gentiles, as the following words *for you* show.<sup>14</sup>

**by revelation**—not of his own invention

To disclose something previously hidden, but not by diligent searching but by God

**make known**=to reveal 1:19

**mystery**—must be revealed by God, cannot be unraveling or understanding by human ingenuity or study.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p. 424.

<sup>12</sup> As Schlier, 148, interprets it. Cf. H. Merklein, *Das kirchliche Amt*, 174; and S. Kim, *Origin*, 21–22.

<sup>13</sup> Syntactically, it was τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ ('the grace of God') rather than τὴν οἰκονομίαν ('the stewardship') that was given to Paul. C. C. Caragounis, *Mysterion*, 98, claims that οἰκονομία ('the stewardship') is in close conjunction with χάρις ('the grace') and that both were given to the apostle.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce, 311; and Best, 313. Note Stott, 115–16, who refers to the two closely related privileges given to Paul. (The grace of God embodied in the gospel is called 'the good news of God's grace' in Acts 20:24.) On this view τῆς χάριτος is an objective genitive (so most commentators) or a genitive of content (J. Reumann, 'OIKONOMIA — Terms', 165).

<sup>15</sup> C. C. Caragounis, *Mysterion*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 228.

≠ mysterious but a reveal secret  
—this is also different then the “mystery religions” that had

### 3. When and to whom the mystery was revealed 3:3-5

3:3 “mystery” – something known only by revelation by God

In [Colossians 1:26](#) the mystery is the word of God, though the next verse shows the focus there too is on the gospel for the Gentiles. Then in [Colossians 2:2 – 3](#) the mystery is reduced to Christ himself, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (cf. *mysterion* in [Eph. 1:9](#), which focused on all things being brought together in Christ). We may conclude that *mystery* refers to the revelation that all things will be brought together in Christ, and specifically that Jews and Gentiles are brought together. “In Christ” is key in understanding the mystery, for that phrase points to a double union — union with Christ and union of Jews and Gentiles in him.<sup>15</sup>

as I wrote in brief—2:11-22, particularly 15, 16, but some believe it goes back to 1:9-10.

To whom is the mystery revealed?

- v. 3 Paul
- v. 5 Apostles and prophets
- v. 9 All people
- v. 10 rulers and authorities in heavenly placed

So this is different than the “mystery religions” that had “higher knowledge” for the initiated.

3:4

3:5

When was the mystery revealed?

**sons of men**—never used in the plural (as here) for prophets or an elect group, but used of people as a whole

**has now been revealed**—not know in previous generations

Not in past generations, but now by the Spirit through the apostles and prophets.

In the OT there are many passages that talk about Gentiles being blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) and of Gentiles being included with Israel (Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 1 Kings 8:41-43). It is even interesting to see that there are many passages that talk about Gentiles being blessed with Israel—but they appear to be in the future kingdom (Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:10; 49:6; 60:1-3; 61:5-6; Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 8:20-23; 14:16-19; see Acts 3:18-20).

But in all these, Israel and the Gentiles remain distinct.

So what is the “mystery?”

There is no passage in the OT that explains that Gentile and Jews would be one body.

The OT reveals that God’s program included Gentiles (the nations), but not this part of the program—the removal of barriers and joining into one group.

<sup>15</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne. “Paul the Steward of Grace and Servant of the Gospel (3:2 - 7)” In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 160.

**I Corinthians 12:13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (ESV)

- 1) Jews and Gentiles are not distinguished from one another
- 2) both enter into the body the same way

Does this mean that there is no distinction between Israel and the Church?

See 3:6

Though Paul states that it has “now” been revealed, it took time for the early church to understand and apply it (see Acts 9, 11, 15).

**Apostles**—official delegate of Christ commissioned to proclaim authoritatively

“is an official delegate of Jesus Christ (see 1:1; 2:20; cf. also 4:11), commissioned for the special tasks of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and of establishing and building up the church.”<sup>16</sup>

**Prophets**

“is one who is endowed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy for the purpose of edification, comfort, encouragement (1 Cor 14:3, 31), and the enablement to understand and communicate the mysteries and revelation of God to the Church (12:10; 13:2; 14:22-25, 30-31) and his prophecy may include a predictive element (1 Thess 3:4; 4:6, 14-18; Gal 5:21).”<sup>17</sup>

See 2:20 and 4:11 –both offices are tied together (same order) to foundational gifts and truth.

#### 4. Content of the mystery 3:6 that—is exegetical or appositional

Content of the Mystery: The “co” or “fellow” prefix is to emphasis union  
Summary of 2:11-22

συγκληρονόμος a co-inheritor, *inheriting together with* 2:14, 19, 20, 21  
not the same as Romans 8:17  
see Galatians 3:26-29

σύσωμος of the same body, *belonging to the same body* 2:15, 16, 21, 22  
συμμέτοχος partaking with, a joint partaker, *sharing with someone, sharing with them, casting one’s lot with them*, partners, participants 2:15, 19, 21, 22

Does this mean that there is no distinction between Israel and the Church?

**Acts 3:19-21** Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (ESV)

There are still promises to National Israel (including, but not limited to the land promises) that have yet to be fulfilled.

Also, the point of 2:11-22 and 3:6 is not that the church replaces Israel, but that a new distinct body of believers, both Jews and Gentiles, form the new body.

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<sup>16</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p. 441.

<sup>17</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) pp. 441-442.

Gentiles are fellow heirs, that is the mystery.

Therefore, though “one body,” there are still special blessings for Israel, “national Israel” through which the nations are blessed.

### Continuity with Distinctions

“In conclusion, the mystery is not that Gentiles would be saved because the OT gives evidence for their salvation, but rather that believing Jews and Gentiles are together in Christ. This concept was revolutionary for Jews and Gentiles alike. The only way this information can be obtained is through the gospel, the good news concerning the effect of Christ’s death on all human beings.”<sup>18</sup>

## 5. (Hinge) Summary: Paul a servant of God’s grace 3:7

Grace—living, empowering grace, that is supplied by God to the believer to live each day.

“In conclusion, Paul was made a minister of the gospel and was able to carry out this awesome responsibility by the gracious gift of unmerited favor of enablement that was given to him. That enablement corresponded to the activity that was given to him. That enablement corresponded to the activity of God’s dynamic ability to convey the mystery. **God does not give responsibility without the provision of his power to carry it out.** In the end God is to be praised, for humans can neither initiate nor accomplish the work in their own power.”<sup>19</sup>

## B. The Proclamation the Mystery 3:8-13

### The Gracious Ministry to proclaim the mystery

#### 1. Paul’s role 3:8-9

Paul does not feel worthy of his appointment to proclaim the gospel, not of deserving the gospel, for that, no one deserves.

#### Role

- Preach to the Gentiles
  - The inexhaustible resource in Christ (Messiah)
- Proclaim to All
  - The plan of God’s unification
- Purpose for the Church

Paul’s role is also our job description

**Acts 1:8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (ESV)

**Matthew 28:19–20** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

#### 2. God’s goal, our purpose 3:10

##### 3:10 Purpose

What an amazing responsibility!

<sup>18</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p. 448.

<sup>19</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p. 451.

**Key**

**through the church**—intermediate agency by which the information is given

“God’s wisdom should be displayed by what the church collectively does, rather than via its mere existence.”<sup>20</sup>

Caution:

because these terms are used in 6:12 with “evil” don’t assume that is true here—  
Context!

**Rulers**—leader, ruler, primacy in power

**Authorities**—freedom to act

Gods intention was that his many-splendoured wisdom might now be made known through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This verse indicates the purpose<sup>90</sup> of Pauls preaching (v.8) and making plain (v.9), which together spell out the content of his missionary task.<sup>91</sup> Grace was given to him to announce the unsearchable riches of Christ (v.8) and to enlighten all as to how Gods previously hidden plan was being put into effect (v.9); the goal of these activities was that the wisdom of God should be made known. V.10 thus winds up the preceding paragraph and indicates an important purpose, if not the grand design, of Gods salvation-historical plan (cf. RSV).<sup>21</sup>

The *rulers and authorities* before whom this object-lesson of divine wisdom is displayed<sup>102</sup> are *in the heavenly realms* (see on 1:3).<sup>103</sup> **These authorities probably include the whole host of heavenly beings, good and bad alike,**<sup>104</sup> although the apostles particular concern is obviously with hostile forces.<sup>105</sup> The fact that evil powers are present in the heavenly realm indicates that heaven, like earth, must participate in Paul’s two-age eschatological framework. It, too, is involved in this present evil age, and the powers which reside there have already been defeated through Christ’s death and now await their final overthrow. Although Paul does not make explicit the nature of the testimony given to the rulers, it has been inferred that the church provides the angelic powers [with] a tangible reminder that their authority has been decisively broken and that all things are to be subject to Christ.<sup>106</sup> The powers cannot hinder the advance of the gospel to Gentiles or their incorporation, along with Jews, into the body of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p. 460 quoting Wallace.

<sup>90</sup> It begins with a *iva*-clause (‘in order that, so that’).

<sup>91</sup> So C. C. Caragounis, *Mysterion*, 108, and Gnlika, 174, among others. This interpretation is preferable to (1) linking the clause with the preceding words of v. 9 (‘God, who is the creator all things’), and understanding it as signifying that God created everything *for the purpose of* showing his wisdom to the angelic hosts through the church. This unnecessarily limits Paul’s reference and does not fit the rest of the sentence with its emphasis on his preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ and bringing to light God’s administration of the mystery. Further, this interpretation is not in line with the flow of the paragraph as a whole (vv. 2–13). It is also to be preferred to (2) tying the clause closely with the reference in v. 9 to the hidden mystery. So GNB, ‘God ...kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, *in order that* at the present time’. Cf. NEB and NIV, which begins a new sentence with v. 10: *His intent was that now*.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 244-45.

<sup>102</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, 64.

<sup>103</sup> Note also W. H. Harris, ‘“The Heavens”’, 78–79.

<sup>104</sup> Note the Old Testament and apocalyptic background to the presence of hostile beings in heaven (cf. Job 1:6; Dan. 10:13, 21; *I Enoch* 61:10). According to 1 Pet. 1:12 the foretelling and accomplishment of Christian salvation are said to be ‘things into which angels long to look’, to which Bruce, 321, adds: ‘there is no reason why even the angels of the presence should not learn lessons about the ways of God from the working out of his saving purpose’.

<sup>105</sup> Note the many references throughout Ephesians to the evil ‘powers’, and the detailed treatment by Arnold, *passim*.

<sup>106</sup> A. T. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 155.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 246-47.

**Ephesians 3:10** assigns a lofty and cosmic role to the church. It is the channel by which God’s wisdom is demonstrated “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.” As before, “heavenly realms” points not so much to a place as to a spiritual reality, the reality beyond what we see. This description of the church’s role has no equivalent elsewhere in Paul or in the New Testament. Several options are possible:

- (1) The church makes known God’s wisdom to good angels (see **1 Peter 1:12**).
- (2) The church makes known God’s wisdom to evil powers in order to bring about their conversion, to announce their defeat, or to cause them to marvel.
- (3) The church makes known God’s wisdom to human institutions and structures to transform their actions.
- (4) Some combination of the above.

The focus in Ephesians on “the rulers and authorities” has to do with evil powers, not good angels or human institutions. This verse should thus be understood in the context of the **display of God’s glory even to those who oppose him**. In **1:19 – 22** and **Colossians 2:15**, Paul announces the defeat of the powers in Christological terms, based on the cross and resurrection. Here he does not need to repeat this announcement. Rather, **he focuses on the majesty of God demonstrated in the unity of Jews and Gentiles**. The church’s very existence and conduct are making known how great God’s plan of salvation is — both to people and to the powers. This gives an unparalleled importance to the church.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, these words of v.10 in the context of Ephesians would have been of **great comfort** to the readers. Troubled by the powers, these Christians have been reminded that **the presence of the church, the body of Christ, means that the authority of the rulers has been broken**, that they cannot hinder the progress of the gospel, and that all things are to be subject to Christ. Such assurances would surely encourage them as they engage in a spiritual warfare and await the final day.<sup>109 24</sup>

### 3. Our benefits 3:11-12

Because we have benefited from God’s plan—we can have access to Him

Don’t take this for granted!

### 4. Paul’s perspective 3:13

In light of the grace and mission God has given Paul—even his difficulties are seen as beneficial

## Review

So what?

What God what’s to accomplish through the church is universal and cosmic in nature  
When God gives a task/mission He provides the enablement

<sup>23</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne. “The Purpose and Significance of the Gospel (3:8 - 13)” In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) pp.163-164.

<sup>109</sup> Arnold, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 248.