

Exegetical Notes – Ephesians 3:1-21

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Ephesians 3:1-21

Verse 1

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

- What reason? Because God, in His great love, has made Jews and Gentiles one through their faith in Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 2:11-22). Paul, who is enslaved to Jesus Christ, was sent by God to bring this news to Gentiles, people who are not Jewish by birth. The great division between Jews and non-Jews is ended.
- At the time he wrote this, Paul may have been under house arrest in Rome because of the opposition he faced from Jews because of the message he preached about God's acceptance of Gentiles.

Verses 2-6

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

- "Surely you have heard" ... Since this letter was written to the Ephesians first and Paul had spent 3 years pastoring that church, his assumption was that all of them would know him and his ministry. However, when the book became encyclical and traveled to other churches, some of those who read the letter might not have known Paul as well as did the Ephesians. So, he needed to explain who he was and what he did to those who might read this letter but not know him well.

- “The administration of God’s grace that was given to me”... (see Ephesians 1:3-12). God has made a way for non-Jews to become part of His kingdom. God gave Paul the job of explaining His plan to non-Jews and to Jews, but primarily to non-Jews. But Paul’s job went beyond that of explanation. He was given responsibility for bringing non-Jews into the kingdom of God, also.
- “mystery”... Paul refers to this plan of God as “mystery” not because it was hidden but because it was not understood. In Genesis 12:1-3, God explained that Israel would be a people who would bring blessing to all people. In that place, God revealed His plan. The peoples of the world would be blessed by Israel because the plan of God’s salvation for all people would come through them. The plan was not hidden. It reached its fullest expression in Jesus Christ. God’s plan was not hidden. It was, however, misunderstood. The Jews believed that only they were the children of God and that their relationship to God was based on works, keeping the Old Testament law, not by grace.
- God chose to make this misunderstanding of His plan clear through the Apostle Paul. Paul once misunderstood the plan of God and persecuted the Church, but God revealed His purpose to Paul.
- Paul already wrote to his readers about this plan. In the first two chapters of Ephesians, he explained that we are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He told his readers that if they read what he wrote, they, too, will understand God’s plan.
- In the past, people did not understand God’s plan. But now, through Paul and the other Apostles and teachers, the plan of God’s salvation was being made clear.
- The plan of God is that Jews and non-Jews alike can be included in the Kingdom of God by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Jesus are one people, and, together, they share in the promise of Christ -- eternal life. The Jews and the non-Jews share this hope together in Jesus Christ.

Verses 7-13

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this

mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

- Paul told his readers that he was called as an Apostle, one who is sent, to share this message with the non-Jews. Though unworthy of this distinction, God, none-the-less, called him to this ministry. It was his purpose in life to fulfill God's calling on him. So he preached this message of grace to all and made clear the things not understood in previous generations.
- He told all people that now, God had revealed his plan. The purpose of the Church was to make disciples of all people, Jew and non-Jew alike, telling them that they could all come to God through faith in Jesus Christ.
- The plan of God had been unfolding in the movement of historical events. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, had been foretold by the prophets of God. Their message was clearly written in the Old Testament. But, this was not seen by God's people. It was then "hidden" from them while being done before them openly. God knew what He was doing. He was telling them what He was doing. But they did not hear His message or see the unfolding of His plan. It was not done in secret. But God's people did not see His plan unfolding.
- This message, the revelation of God's plan and purpose, caused many people to persecute Paul. The rule of Satan in this world is so powerful that many people who would be considered leaders among God's people are corrupted by him. Paul did not want his readers to be discouraged because of what he suffered. His sufferings were for them and would bring them glory.

Verses 14-19

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family^[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of

Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- “for this reason”... So that his readers would not be discouraged by what he suffered Paul prayed for them. He asked that they would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in their inner being and that Christ would live in their hearts. He prayed that they would be able to understand how great God’s love for us is and that they would be filled with the knowledge of this great love which can never be fully understood. He wanted them to know how greatly God loved them.

Verses 20-21

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

- Paul concluded the first section of Ephesians with a great doxology. In the next chapters, he turned his attention to the practical application of the great doctrines he discussed in chapters 1-3, but before he turns to practical matters he praised God for all that God has done.
- God does more for us than we know.
- He is working in power within us.
- We cannot fully understand what God is doing for us in His power that is working within us, but we give Him praise throughout the Church because we know He is at work.

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