

## Ephesians Chapter 3

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There's an old expression about what to do when you're not sure what to next: Pray over it, define your issue and make the best decision one can given the information they have. When I started this ministry, I defined it as what to do after one believes Jesus is God. There's a term for that called "sanctification". It just refers to growth as a believer between when we first got saved until when we enter heaven. Of course I'd argue every pastor should help people grow in their faith. I figured my role is to encourage people to study the bible and think about how the Word of God applies to their life! I open with that, as text here includes Paul's praying for believers to grow in their faith. In other words, his message isn't, "OK, you are saved, have a nice life and I'll see you in heaven!" As most of us know, we're saved for a purpose: To use our lives to glorify God! How we do that depends on our spiritual gifts, what God has called us to do and using the situations in front of us to make a difference for Him!

In effect Chapter 3's a prayer for believers to draw us closer to God. It is wrapped around a speech that Paul gave as he explains God's purposes for the Christian church. The key point is that a great mystery (something unrevealed up to the time of the Christian church) is: The existence of the Christian church and that God unites believers in the "church age" unto a single entity. No it doesn't mean multitudes of people will be molded into one being in heaven. We'll have our own personalities in new bodies which don't wear out. The key point of the Christian church unity is we're "elevated in status" among all other entities that will exist in heaven, and we get to rule with Jesus for eternity. I'm not positive what all that entails but I'm positive beyond any doubt it's worth whatever suffering we must endure in this lifetime! Most of the Old Testament prophets suffered based on that hope. History records all of the apostles did die based on the hope for a great eternal life. Bottom line is as tough as it is to live the Christian life, I am positive it is worth the time and trouble!

Which leads me back to Chapter 3. In effect I've been talking about this chapter since the first sentence of this lesson. Both Paul and I are concerned with wanting Christians to grow in their faith. Paul spent three years teaching there and he figured some people who will read Ephesians knew him personally as well as many who became believers who never met Paul face to face. Paul obviously cares about those who are part of the church to grow in their knowledge of what it means to be a Christian and be a good witness to others because we don't know who will be saved, so we preach (in effect) to all people!

With all of that out of my system, let's talk about Chapter 3 and see if we can learn a few things to help us grow as believers as that's Paul's goal here. He opens by stating the fact he is a "prisoner for what he was called to do". Remember Paul was in prison in Rome. In effect he didn't care about that. He only saw himself as a prisoner to whatever was God's will for his life. (A clue for each of us!) From Verse 2 to Verse 13 is an interruption to his prayer, as Paul gives a speech about what being a Christian means! In effect he starts on the "revealed mystery" speech: It was God's intent to form a group of people from every background, race, and religion to form the church. Realize the Old Testament has clues that non-Jewish people are welcome. Consider Genesis 12:3 when God told Abraham he'd be the father of many nations. Consider 2nd Kings 17:29: it states His House, ("The temple") will be for all nations. I'm just saying there are clues in the Old Testament that it was never God's intent for salvation to be for Jewish people only. It just became "clear" during this age of the church when people from all backgrounds are now believers!

Paul's point of being called is that message of "one church" is what he was called to preach. I realize it is not for every believer to be a "professional pastor". On the other hand, I'd argue it the duty for every

Christian to preach the Gospel when the opportunity presents itself. Plus, Jesus commands us to show love to one another (i.e., be helpful when the situation presents itself), and caring about other believers is a big issue! Just saying Paul was a "prisoner" of what God calls Him to do, so each of us should also consider ourselves prisoners (required to do what God calls us to do)! We learn what it is God wants of us by studying His word and praying for guidance!

Paul then goes on for a number of verses about what he's called to do: Preach Christianity to those who are from non-Jewish background even though he still is trying to convert Jewish people, he states what it means to be a Christian and the mystery of the church being a "revealed fact"! It ends by asking them (and us) to not lose heart! It comes back to my point that living the Christian life is worth the hardships of this world on the hope that our eternal reward far outweighs whatever rewards we'll might get in this lifetime! Paul spent most of his time preaching to those who believed in a system of multiple gods, yet Christianity grew into the millions in a relatively short time span! I'm just saying what God called Paul to do paid off! That doesn't mean we're in trouble if we don't lead lots of people to Jesus. The key is to be loyal to what God has called each of us to do. If you're not sure what God has called you to do, what I am positive of, is God can't resist a prayer of surrender to His will!

I'm being brief on that section because I assume most of us Christians are aware that the God calls each of us to be a witness for Him. Verse 12 reminds us that we are given the boldness to approach God for the purpose of doing His will. It always amazes me how much power we have as believers. We fail to realize how much power we have because we spend most of our time doing our will (versus His will). I am just saying if God wants us to accomplish anything He makes it possible although it usually takes a lot of time and trouble to get His will done!

Which leads us back to Paul's prayer for us. He not only wants us to realize how much power we have as believers but to realize the extent of that power! He reminds that the Holy Spirit's willing to work in us to make that difference. In Verse 18 Paul describes the breadth, length, height and depth of what He wants to accomplish in us. That's four dimensions. In effect Paul is saying it's impossible for us to get all the things God wants to accomplish through the church. So if it's beyond our comprehension, why's Paul telling us about it? The idea is to stretch our imagination of what God wants to accomplish in our lives! I'm not saying we must quit our job to be a missionary somewhere. Obviously, some people are called to go all over the world, while most of us are called to preach and "live Christ" where we are! I am just trying to encourage each of us to realize the immeasurable scope of what God desires we do in this lifetime let alone the eternal one!

I opened this lesson by stating that my purpose is to help each of us grow in faith. My desire is that we all take a little time to ask God, "I want to make myself available to You. What is Your desire for me at this moment in my life?" Grant it, the most likely answer is to keep doing what we're doing but if we're willing to be used by God, it never ceases to amaze me how He is willing to work through believers for His eternal glory.

Remember Chapters 1-3 are in effect a message to the church about what it means to be a Christian. In the next three chapters we'll get more into specifics of what God calls us to do. That's why at the end of Chapter 3 is a small ending to the prayer glorifying God for what He's doing through us!