

**THE CHURCH ON OFFENSE IN  
CONFLICTED DAYS  
FALL/WINTER 2020/2021  
“TEARING DOWN WALLS AND MAKING PEACE”  
DECEMBER 23, 2020  
EPHESIANS 3:1-13 and other selected support Scriptures**

*I. PAUL'S PREPARATION OF THE EPHESIANS*

- A. He held back nothing that was PROFITABLE v. 20*
- B. He testified that the gospel was about REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD and FAITH TOWARD THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. That means that they would have to change their mind about who the Sovereign One was and put their trust in the Son of the Sovereign One, the Lord Jesus Christ v. 27*
- C. He testified of the GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD v. 24*
- D. The main focus of his preaching was PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM OF GOD. v.25*
- E. He declared to them the WHOLE COUNSEL (WILL, PURPOSE, INTENT, DESIRE) OF GOD.*

*He trusted God with them, encouraging them to guard themselves against the FALSE TEACHERS and FALSE TEACHING that was going to come.*

*II. PAUL'S DISPENSATION OF THE REVELATION OF GOD*

- A. Paul, the prisoner of Christ, a Jewish Pharisee dedicated to Gentile conversion to Christian Eph 3:1*
- B. Functioning as a steward in the dispensation of God given to him vv. 2-7*
  - 1. Remember our study of dispensations?*
  - 2. Paul's dispensation was of the grace of God in particular toward the Gentiles who he demonstrated in 2:11-12 were completely alienated from God but were now brought near by the blood of Christ (2:13). This is God's grace or favor extended to the Gentiles!*
  - 3. Paul did not just make up this ministry or think how great it would be. NOTE: Remember he is Jewish and the natural inclination of the Jew and the Gentile was hostile to one another. To be around Gentiles was a defilement that lasted all day or until a ceremonial washing could be done. This defilement kept one from going to the temple and the synagogue. Now he is*

*dedicated to bringing the gospel to them and spending time with them to make disciples of them. That is grace changing a man from the inside out.*

- 4. That is why Paul let's them know that this ministry of God's grace toward them was not natural but supernatural having been a **revelation** to him by God. We know from other passages that this revelation was from Jesus Christ Himself. v 3*
- 5. He says this revelation is about "the mystery". v 3 He further explains in v 5 why it is a mystery. It is something revealed now that had not been revealed to the sons of men as it has now been revealed by the Holy Spirit to all the God-chosen leadership of the church, the holy apostles and prophets.*
- 6. SIDE NOTE: End of verse 3 and all of verse 4 show us that the letter we are reading and studying now is not Paul's only letter of which the Ephesians were aware. There was at least one other letter in which Paul had written about the mystery. In it he must have explained some about the mystery already. In it they would recognize Paul's knowledge of the mystery of Christ by which he may mean how he came to know this mystery or perhaps how Christ's death and resurrection would be applied to all men and not just the children of Abraham.*
- 7. In v 7 Paul explains the content of the mystery plainly: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. Fellow heirs with whom? First of all, with Christ and secondly, with the children of Israel! Therein was going to come an offense to the Jew. Why should the hated Gentiles get the same kingdom as those who have endured the mockery of generations for being Jewish? Why should the unclean, idolatrous Gentiles be a part of their kingdom, their Messiah?*
- 8. Can you see how this might have been offensive to all those covenant practicing Jews who had practiced all the Jewish rituals, guarded their diet, made themselves peculiar to the world, practiced circumcision etc who had done these things in hope of eternal life to see now that the Gentiles were going to get the same eternal life without doing any of them. For them, that would be too much grace and made Paul a blasphemer, speaking against the law and the traditions of the elders! God would never do what Paul was teaching!*

9. *This ministry was given to Paul as a gift of the grace of God by the effective working of the power of God which he had explained earlier in chapter 1 had raised Christ from the dead. That power was now at work in him, preserving him, giving him not only understanding of this mystery but boldness, confidence and power to preach it in the face of challenging adversity from principalities and powers but also from the Jews who had opposed the gospel every place he went.*
10. *Paul knew that he was not viewed on an equal par with the apostles who had actually seen Jesus before and after his resurrection. Paul had however seen him after his resurrection and this gave him great authority, power and boldness as an apostle. Christ had saved him from a life dedicated to destroying the church and then given him a ministry that would further divide him from the purest Jews who had already rejected Christ and the Jewish believers who understood their faith in Christ to be an extension of the law. Such extension gave them even greater zeal for keeping the law. Now for Paul to preach that for the Gentiles there was no need to keep any of that law to receive the same benefits of those who did was highly offensive. But to Paul this ministry was a badge of the honor of God's grace. In this we can see that his life was filled with paradoxes of faith. He sees himself as "less than the least of all the saints" because of what he had done. In other places he claims to be the chief among sinners for persecuting the church. But in each of these characterizations he uses the occasion to boast in the grace of God that had not only shown him mercy but put him in a powerful position of ministering the grace of God to sinning Jews and Gentiles. His focus became increasingly moved toward the Gentiles almost exclusively. It is Paul who teaches that the gospel is to the Jews first but also to the Greeks.*
11. *Verses 8-12 are a single sentence that can be broken down in this way. Paul's declarations (preaching) targeted at but not solely to the Gentiles*
  - a. *Shows the Gentiles the unsearchable (unable to get them all) riches of Christ. There was no Christ in their theology or writings, sagas, legends, myths etc. They had heroes and any courageous person could become one but no hero would come that would not only save the people from immediate danger but himself would live forever to lead an eternal kingdom.*

*Paul would have to demonstrate from the Jewish Scriptures the whole of the history of salvation and the redeemer who would make that possible.*

- b. Declares to both Jew and Gentile that God had in His mind in ages past that the Jew and Gentile would share (fellowship) in this mystery through Jesus Christ. The Jewish people understood it was their inheritance but there was nothing in their Scriptures that made the Gentiles joint-heirs with them through their messiah of the eternal kingdom. Only God had known this and He had not told it. Of course, the Gentiles, who had been left under the care of the divine council, with council members who later rebelled, had no hope of a redeemer and had created their own myths about life after death. They had no knowledge of the one true God so they were without knowledge of their alienation from Him and their inability to be justified before Him. They were without hope and without God. In His absence, they had created their own myths, legends and tales to give them some sense of destiny and hope. They were unaware of the God who had created all the worlds through Jesus Christ was the world of nature which they worshipped. Though they lived in that world of the natural and gave it great honor they were without knowledge of its creator. Paul's declaration made them to know it.*
- c. Proclaims a gospel (good news) that would make even the rebellious principalities and powers marvel at the wisdom of God was being made known by the church. This was wisdom of which the principalities and powers were unaware. They have no messiah, no savior, no plan of redemption; once they have rebelled they are stuck in it, they have no repentance, no change of mind. God has not granted that to them. Once they have sinned and chosen to oppose God that is what they will always do. So to see God take ruined humans and turn them into the children of God is beyond their realm of knowledge. To see God continue to fill believing ones with His Holy Spirit and do miraculous things through them is a complete marvel to them. To learn that these same believing ones will one day replace the rebellious divine council members who thought of themselves as immortal and secure in their challenge to God's sovereignty is beyond their capacity to grasp. So when the church meets and follows the path God has laid out for it in its*

*order the angels marvel. When believers walk in the Spirit, or walk in the light as Christ does, they are amazed! They see humans who have been granted the gift of grace, repentance, faith, renewal and sanctification they are awed. These are all things they cannot do! But, of course, when they see believers fight among themselves, grieve the Spirit, express bitterness and pride, walk in the flesh and in general disobey Christ, they are only to pleased to encourage it or even initiate it just to see the church fall, stumble and dishonor Christ. It is hard for them to imagine that after those actions God would receive them. Seeing the church repent and be restored is a mind-boggler. The church is revealing the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers.*

- d. Reveals that this mystery was already in the mind of God when the angels were singing in the days of the creation of the world. They were without that knowledge since God had not declared it to them. He did not give a full disclosure to any of the fathers though He alluded to it on many occasions. This purpose was eternal in nature and accomplished in time by Christ Jesus our Lord through whom we have boldness to come to God openly and through whom we have access to God. We did not have that before Christ. We came through animal sacrifices, rituals, sacred places, sacred times etc. But those did nothing if they were not done by faith.*
- 12. Paul closes out this powerful section on the mystery of God never before known by encouraging them to not be discouraged by his tribulations for them; it is their glory. Troubles could easily be seen as the disapproval of God. It was not. It was proof of God's approval of the message Paul preached as it was being opposed by the principalities and powers as well as unbelievers.*