

030 - The Prisoner of Christ for Us - Ephesians 3:1-2 - 2015-02-01

Call to Worship: Jeremiah 33:11b

Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever!

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 33:1-9

Sermon: "The Prisoner of Christ for Us" Ephesians 3:1-2

Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

## INTRODUCTION

First part of Ephesians: all glory to God for our salvation, because it is all of His grace

Second part of Ephesians: we are one new man in Christ

Paul is praying for us, but as he begins to tell us what he is praying for us, he pauses and goes into something else, telling giving us some background, or backstory. He is talking about the blessings of the grace of God having come to us, but he sees the need to remind us or inform us of HOW the blessings of the grace of God came to us.

So we begin to see in this text that

**The blessings of the grace of God came to us gentiles by the stewardship of the man who was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for us.**

## TEXT

Ephesians 3:1-3 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- (2) if indeed you have heard of the ~~dispensation~~ stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already

## BODY

**The blessings of the grace of God came to us gentiles by the stewardship of the man who was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for us.**

First, understand the interesting form here.

“For this reason” or “For this cause”

I have, in the past, understood Paul to mean, “therefore,” as if he is referring to what has already been said, as if it were, “For the reason I have just stated.” But in further study I have realized I was careless in thinking that.

In the Greek, this is a certain two-word phrase; when Paul uses it in His letters, he is not referring to something already said, but something he is about to say. He uses this phrase when he is explaining the reason why he did something or why he is doing something, which reason is what he intends to have happen. When he tells the reason, it starts with the word “that.”

See how Paul uses the same words in a familiar passage:

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete: that you should set in order the things that are lacking

But here in Ephesians 3:1, Paul wrote, “For this reason, I . . .” then he wrote a little more about himself, that he was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for us Gentiles, then he went on and wrote about that, and didn’t finish what he started to say.

Then, when he finished with all of that, he started over, as we see in Ephesians 3:14:

verse 14: “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father”

verse 16: “that He would grant you . . .”

So, please leave that here for now, and we’ll take it back up when we get to it again in verse 14.

verse 2: “if indeed you have heard” ESV: “assuming that you have heard” NIV: “surely you have heard”

-the author identifies himself as Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of us Gentiles

-but as the Holy Spirit inspires him to write, it seems good to Paul not to assume that everyone knows about how the Lord has worked in him and through him, and not to assume that everyone understands that he is in prison because of taking the gospel to the gentiles

- so Paul tells some of his story, explaining how the Lord Jesus has appointed Paul to do what he is doing
- this goes through verse 13

So, as we read verses 1 to 13, we are hearing about how the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ worked through Paul for the sake of us Gentiles.

Second, we may go on to expound verses 1-2

- I. Paul was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for our sake
  - A. It seems Paul was in prison, and we take it he was in prison in Rome
    1. Remember what we learned in the closing chapters of Acts
  - B. He is a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar, but he knows he is a prisoner not of Caesar, but of Christ
    1. Peter had been imprisoned in Jerusalem, but the Lord Jesus sent an angel to open the doors and lead him out
    2. Paul had been in prison before, in Philippi, and the Lord Jesus sent an earthquake to open the doors of the prison
    3. So Paul knows that if He is in prison, ultimately it is not because the Jews accused him or because the Romans arrested him, but because the Lord Jesus Christ has put him there for God's own purpose
  - C. He is a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ for the good of us Gentiles
    1. Normally a man is a prisoner for the bad things he has done for himself
    2. But Paul was a prisoner for the good things he was doing for the Gentiles
      - a) he was imprisoned because he had done those good things
      - b) he was imprisoned so he could do even more of them

*Philippians 1:12-14 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, (13) so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; (14) and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

    3. APPLICATION
      - a) understand that acceptance and applause are not always the marks of the best of Christ's servants
      - b) see that the Lord Jesus Christ bestows His highest honors by allowing His servants to share in His suffering
      - c) if you have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ, consider carefully before you do

- II. Paul was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for our sake because the stewardship of the grace of God was given to Paul for us
  - A. God established a stewardship
    - 1. Greek word *oikonomia*
      - a) *oikos* “house” + *nomos* “law”
      - b) being the steward of a house
    - 2. meaning administration or stewardship or dispensation
      - a) the owner of the house has many servants to take care of
        - (1) food
        - (2) clothing
      - b) the owner of the house puts his wealth in the hands of a steward, an administrator, a dispenser
      - c) from that wealth, the steward dispenses to the servants what they need
    - 3. this was the arrangement between Potiphar and Joseph
      - a) it was a stewardship of the wealth of Potiphar; Joseph was the steward
      - b) it was a dispensation of the wealth of Potiphar; Joseph was the dispenser
      - c) it was an administration of the wealth of Potiphar; Joseph was the administrator
  - B. Whereas a normal stewardship was of the wealth of a rich man’s household; Paul’s stewardship was of the grace of God
    - 1. in verse 2, Paul says it was a stewardship of God’s grace
    - 2. in verse 3, Paul explains what he means by “God’s grace”
      - a) remember that the base meaning of grace is “favor”; looking favorably on someone
      - b) when you talk about God’s grace toward us sinners, it necessarily means, “undeserved favor” or “unmerited favor”; God looking favorably on us who deserve only His wrath
        - (1) remember the one Lord’s Day sermon a few months ago, where I labored to convince all listening that when the bible says, “For by grace are ye saved” the meaning of grace there is “undeserved, unmerited favor”
        - (2) why are you saved, while others are not saved? It is because of God’s grace; God favoring you when you do not deserve it
      - c) but the bible also talks about God’s grace as the blessings He bestows on those he favors
        - (1) If I favor you, I might not do anything for you
          - (a) out of sloth
          - (b) out of weakness

(2) But if God favors you, He will do many wonderful things for you; He will bless you richly; these blessings are called “grace” or “graces” in the bible and in theology

d) so in this case; when Paul here says, “God’s grace,” he means one of the blessings He bestows on those He favors: knowledge of a mystery

(1) something previously unknown

(2) now it has been made known to Paul by revelation from Jesus Christ

(3) he already has written about it briefly in this letter (chapter 2)

e) Let’s take a peak to see what the mystery was, that constituted a blessing of God’s grace (verses 6-7)

(1) Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ

(2) and this is not through circumcision and law-keeping but through the gospel

(3) expound this concept

C. The stewardship of God’s grace was given to Paul

1. He was a steward:

*1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards [oikonomos] of the mysteries of God.*

2. He did not take on this stewardship himself; he was commissioned to it by God.

*Colossians 1:24-26 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. (25) I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- (26) the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.*

D. The stewardship of God’s grace was given to Paul for us Gentiles, for our benefit

*Galatians 2:7-9 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed [entrusted] to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (8) (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), (9) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*

### III. APPLICATION

- A. Praise God for His grace!
- B. See our knowledge of the gospel as a tremendous blessing of God's grace toward us
- C. Read Paul's letters, and the account of his travels and sermons
- D. Never tire of hearing "Paul said" or "Paul wrote"

### CONCLUSION

Paul was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for our sake because the stewardship of the grace of God was given to Paul for us.

**The blessings of the grace of God came to us gentiles by the stewardship of the man who was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for us.**

### **For this reason**

ESV, NIV, NASB: for this reason KJV: for this cause

Trapp:

that you may be a habitation of God, through the Spirit

Poole:

that ye may be further confirmed in the faith of Christ, and more and more built up in him as an habitation of God

Hodge:

because you Gentiles are fellow citizens of the saints, and specially because you Ephesians are included in the temple of God

RWP:

referring to the preceding argument about God's elective grace

JRY:

So, this section, from here to verse 13, will be "backstory"

### **the prisoner of Christ Jesus**

Hodge:

does not mean "prisoner on account of Christ." It means Christ's prisoner.

### **dispensation of the grace of God**

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards [*oikonomos*] of the mysteries of God.

Colossians 1:25-26 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- (26) the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

Galatians 2:7-9 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (8) (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), (9) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Gill:

the doctrine of grace, the Gospel, the subject matter of which is the grace of God; it is a declaration of the free grace of God in the salvation of men; and it is the means of conveying the grace of God into their hearts. Now the apostle had a dispensation to preach this Gospel committed to him; he acted by authority, and as a steward of the mysteries of God; and which he faithfully dispensed to the family of Christ, who appointed him to this service:

Poole:

by dispensation we must understand his commission or ordination of God to that work, via. to publish that grace whereof the ministers of the gospel are the dispensers,

Ellicott:

the revelation of salvation to the Gentiles was the "dispensation," that is (much as in Eph\_1:10), the peculiar office in the ministration of the grace of God to the world, assigned to St. Paul

JFB:

"The office of dispensing, as a steward, the grace of God which was (not 'is') given me to you-ward," namely, to dispense to you.

**was given to me for you**

Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles--

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,



Revelation 2:8-11 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: (9) "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (10) Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (11) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

It takes this form:

For this reason I work hard at my job: that my boss may have a good opinion of Christians and our gospel.

For this reason I do the laundry: that the Lord Jesus may be honored in how I love my husband and children.

for this reason Greek *houtou* G5127 *charin* G5484  
therefore Greek *oun* G3767