

SEEING THINGS CLEARLY: Ephesians 3:1-13

Reading: Ephesians 3:1-13.

There is a change of tone here and Paul becomes more personal in how he speaks. This passage is like a digression and he returns to his theme in v14. It is occasioned by the reference to the Gentiles in v1 which has followed naturally from the matters he was addressing in 2:11-22. What he does here is to establish that his ministry to the Gentiles, which has given rise to some controversy, is valid and legitimate, and is not denied by that fact that he has been imprisoned on account of it.

1. Suffering negates nothing.

Paul acknowledges in v13 that there is a danger that the believers will be discouraged because of what has happened to Paul in that he has been imprisoned. People might say that Paul is in the difficulties that he is because he took the word to the Gentiles which was against the will of God and that is why he is in the difficulty that he is. We can all be guilty of quickly assuming, because something has not gone well for someone, including ourselves, that they, or we, are outside the will of God. We then look around for explanations or evidences of their disobedience. Paul was actually in the centre of the will of God but still had to endure these sufferings. He is the prisoner of Christ (v1 and 4:1).

God's servants do not usually have comfortable rides. We have only to think of the Old Testament to see this confirmed. Micaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel all experienced difficulties. The list of people in Hebrews 11 all suffered hardship. Often it is that those who see the most are made to suffer the most. They will be misunderstood, suffer from people's jealousy and insults. Lots of the saints have, like the apostle Paul, experienced troubles with their health.

It is the lie of health and wealth teachers to give people false promises that the Christian life is all about success. We must not follow their bad example by being judgmental about Christians when they are in difficulty.

2. High calling.

Paul, as an apostle, has a special calling. This is the stewardship he has (v2) where the Lord has revealed things to him (v3). He has been given grace to preach to the Gentiles (v2), including working signs and wonders, and grace to understand the relationship of

the Gentiles with the Jews. He has been shown very clearly that Gentiles are fellow heirs (v6) and part of the same body as Jewish believers. Paul has a special calling to reach the Gentiles (See Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17-18; and Galatians 2:7-9). The truth was always there in the Old Testament that the Lord would reach out to the Gentiles (See Isaiah 49:6) but this is now clearly to be seen through the ministry of the apostles, especially Paul.

The apostles and prophets were unique callings at the foundation of the church. It was a wrong turning when people felt that there should be apostles and prophets today to awaken and lead the church.

3. Nothing outside of Christ.

Verse 8 tells us about the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is no limit to what we have and can find in the Lord. His riches are never exhausted. Every doctrine, including how it relates to us and benefits us personally, comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Doctrines like justification, sanctification, adoption, and glorification all work to us through the connection with the Lord Jesus. The reality of what Christ accomplished through the church is made known to angels (v10). It glorifies Christ and what He has accomplished, showing the outcome of what is an eternal purpose which has been worked out through Him (v11). It is to be a source of marveling by all. The wisdom it reveals is many-faceted. It shows the planning of God, His power, His love, His help and His calling of people from all over the world, of all backgrounds and conditions. The church is His handiwork.

There are implications that follow from His riches. We are able to have boldness. We are a saved people, beloved of Him, and adopted. We are able to come to Him and are welcomed by Him. We can pray boldly and pour out our hearts to Him. We can bring to Him all our sadnesses, sorrows and disappointments. But we are able to pray with conviction. We know that we are able to ask because our Father loves us.

The access we have to Him is again something we are confident of. We know that we belong to Him. We might feel guilt, weakness and shame, but we are still invited near to Him. We do not have to wait until we are perfect otherwise we will never come at all. Christ's riches have gained us this access. They also give us help in our prayers and ensure that there is help that can be sent to us.

The apostle Paul helped the people he was writing to see clearly, just as he was able to see clearly, the purposes of God for the Gentiles. We should try to see as best we can so that we can enjoy our privileges in Christ.