

Ephesians 3:1-6

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, this letter was likely not written specifically to the Ephesians who would have known Paul personally since he founded the church, but it was a letter that was intended to be circulated amongst the Gentile churches in Asia Minor. Thus, there are some believers who may not have actually met Paul but knew that he was called specifically to pass on to the Gentiles the substance of the revelation that he had received. God had entrusted Paul with an amazing truth that for centuries had been hidden from the eyes of others; but with this revelation came great responsibility. Paul was given a stewardship that compelled him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles regardless of the consequences, which at this point in his life meant being imprisoned in Rome.

This speaks powerfully to the way Paul had separated himself from the things of this world and had identified himself in who he was in God and in the purposes for

which God had chosen him. And although Paul writes this letter while literally chained to a guard, what was going on in the physical world was of little consequence and did not control either his attitude or his actions. Rather, he was focused on the spiritual and completing the work that God had set before him. The things of this world had lost their power and control over his life.

Do you identify yourself based on who you are in God? Do you filter everything in this life through the unique way that God wants to express Himself through you to others? Are you still controlled by what you consider to be the “good” things and the “bad” things that happen in your life?

I believe that at this stage of his life Paul had come to a place of rest. He knew that he was in Rome and was a prisoner because that was His Father’s will; and he was ok with it. Instead of moaning about his circumstances he seems to express a sense of privilege. It’s as if he knows that his imprisonment was just another tool by which God was going to express his supernatural power through him to others. It was just another tool that would convince the Gentiles that it is possible to live detached from this world. They may lock him up for life or even kill him, but it does not matter for his real life belongs to God.

Let’s look at verse **13**: “Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.” Paul does not want these believers to become distressed by focusing on the horror of his circumstances. Rather, he wants them to see that like him, regardless of their circumstances, they can live in the Spirit of God with all the power and might that has been bestowed upon them in Christ. He wants them to be convinced that they too can be at rest regardless of

where God has them or what God is doing with them. He wants the **8** lists of **5**'s found in **1:3-2:22** to become their living reality. Therefore, he can honestly say that his suffering is for their glory.

Bringing it close to home, this is not unlike the way that God has, for your benefit, required a lot from me in terms of suffering and living separated from this world. The things He has asked of me and the way He has instructed me to live are simply not normal; they are difficult. In addition, I have suffered a fair share of persecution, slander, and intentionally malicious defamation for the message that God has given me to teach. In the past I seriously struggled with the “why” and I was not very happy with what God was doing with me. But over time He helped me see that my suffering was more than necessary in order that you and others might see and become convinced that it is possible to live in the Spirit separated from the world, and to know His peace in the midst of ridiculous circumstances.

He wanted you to know that He will provide strength when you are weak, comfort when you are in despair, companionship in the midst of isolation, light in the midst of darkness, provision in emptiness, and even joy when there is absolutely no practical reason to take delight in anything. He wanted you to become convinced that the power which He has given you in Christ is really accessible. He wanted you to see these truths at work in someone you know, someone you could talk to, and someone with which you can daily interact. He wanted His words of life to be demonstrated so you know that His truth is far more than just words on a page but His truth is alive with power.

Now trust me I am not saying that I have always done it “right” and been this

great example, because God knows I have not. But even in that you have had an opportunity to learn that it is not about doing it “right” for God already made complete provision for your failures. Therefore, regardless of whether or not you do it “right,” you are accepted. Even your failure is just another opportunity to learn why you must trust yourself to Jesus.

So in all of this I have come to learn that my suffering has been necessary and has been for your glory so you can actually start to believe and bet your life on the truths that we studied in the **8** lists of **5’s** and thereby actually experience God by choosing to walk by faith in the Spirit of God.

Paul also makes it clear that he did not make up the concept that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel; rather, he came to understand this truth by revelation which was given by the Spirit. Also, take note of the fact that he did not say that God gave him knowledge of something new, but God gave light to his eyes to see what was already written but which had not been understood.

When you consider this, it kind of makes sense why Paul prayed in ***Ephesians 1:17-18***, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,” since that is exactly what happened to him. Paul believed that he received this revelation not because of anything he did but merely because God chose to open his eyes and reveal it to him (as well as to the apostles and prophets); and he clearly believed that it was possible for any believer to likewise receive such insight and wisdom into the Word of God, which

is why he prayed in this manner.

In other words, Paul did not believe that he was some “exalted one” that had a special “in” with God; rather, he believed that what happened with him is normative and could happen to any believer. He believed that receiving insight into the Word of God is just one of the amazing treasures which come with being a son of God.

Now this mystery of the Gentiles and the Jews becoming one in faith was revealed in the Old Testament but no one seemed to grasp even the idea because it was so far outside of their worldview that it never even dawned on them as they read and interpreted the scriptures.

Imagine, centuries had gone by where the Jews were identified uniquely as God’s chosen people amongst all the nations of the earth and this reality was so embedded in their cultural dna that they had no capacity to see things in any other way. After all, it was the Jews to which God revealed His glory. He made covenants with them and gave His law to them. They had the privilege of worshipping Him and receiving His wonderful promises. Their ancestors were great people of God, and Christ himself was a Jew as far as His human nature was concerned (***Romans 9:4-5***). So you can imagine that their identity as a unique people belonging to God was cemented into their personal, cultural, and national dna. Everything they knew reinforced the notion that they belonged to God and the Gentiles simply had no part!

It is really not unlike this whole concept of living from your *New Creation* as you

walk by faith in the Spirit of God. Once God opens your eyes to this truth, you see that it is clearly written and disclosed all over the Bible, but for the most part it has been a mystery that has been hidden right in plain view. Throughout the ages there have been those who have understood this truth but it has largely stayed “hidden” because of our own jaded worldview.

You see it is entirely foreign to us to give up total control of our lives to some invisible God especially considering the things He asks of us. Can you imagine that He actually tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and not worry about all the other details of our life (our food, our clothing, and our provision)? It kind of makes our bodies cringe to think about living this way. He even tells us that the only way to please Him is to believe Him, to bet our lives on the truth and give Him access to every part of our soul. That’s it. He promises to do the rest.

Even for us who have been taught these truths it is still so hard to understand that Jesus wants to live in and through us and be for us all that the Father requires. Yet, this is what true Christianity is about. The Father has given believers a *New Creation* which has been fashioned after His image (we are His workmanship), and Jesus, in the Spirit, dwells in us and if given access to our soul He will fulfill the Father’s will in and through our lives. Sadly, this truth has been misunderstood and most believers are still busy either trying to please God by what they can do or avoiding God because they don’t think they can be what He wants and they are sick of failing all the time.

Further, believers’ still seem to be convinced that this physical world is their primary reality and we have an extremely hard time disconnecting—believing that

our true life is hidden with Christ in God. Thus, we are obsessed with the things of this world and the affairs of our life. We get so wrapped up trying to control the outcomes of our life and it is all futile. We belong to God and, as heavenly men and women, He controls and manage the outcomes of our life. Besides, no matter how hard we squeeze, manipulate, and work to make things in our life go the way we want, He is the one who gets the ultimate say. But again, we live in a strong delusion and our worldview is centered upon our attempts to be like god.

For instance, we believe that it is up to us to do it “right.” We have such a distorted notion of obedience and honoring God. Few of us live as if we are 100% dependent upon God for all things—even in our ability to love and obey Him. We don’t rest in the fact that **only** God is good therefore only what He does in and through our lives is what matters to Him.

The point is that our worldview of Christianity has completely impacted our ability to behold the truth and live in the truth; therefore, generations have gone by living in the “religion” of Christianity trying to be “good” Christians without every truly knowing its power or living in its Peace. But for some reason God decided to give me revelation, to open my eyes, so that I could see this truth which again is nothing new but is found all over the Bible from beginning to end. Believe me, I take no credit for understanding this stuff; I was as much a part of the “religion” of Christianity as anyone. But it was the Spirit of God who brought to me a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of my heart enlightened.

This is the dynamic which Paul was addressing. Generation after generation had

gone by with very few ever understanding that the Jews were to be the light to the Gentiles and that God's desire was not that the Gentiles were excluded from His plan but that the Jews would be the lamp through which His light and glory would be revealed to the nations. This truth was in the Word, but they were blind to it. They did not understand God's methodology. They confused God having set them apart to be light with the notion that they were to keep the light exclusively to themselves. But it was never God's plan that His family would be comprised of just the Jews; it has always been His plan, from before time, to pour forth His grace on the Gentiles as well the Jews.

Ephesians 3:7-13

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

In **1:1** we were told that Paul was chosen by God to be an apostle and here he tells us that he was also made by God into a minister, which just means one who would serve others. Do you realize how much comfort this little statement should bring us? The word “made” is in the passive tense which means that we don’t have to try and “be” anything for God, “do” anything for God, or “become” anything for God. He will do with us as He desires if we trust ourselves to Him. He will exert His power and His might and make us into what He desires according to His good purposes.

Further, it does not matter who we are in terms of worldly stature or what natural gifts and talents we possess. Even Paul, who considered himself to be the least of all the saints, was given this marvelous gift just because it brought great pleasure to God. This is a beautiful expression of the greatness of His power toward us. And best yet, He does it all; we just are recipients of His marvelous grace. This is another reason why His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

As we studied in **John 15**, our job is to abide in Christ, trust ourselves to Him in the deepest recesses of our souls, let go of our control and let Him be God (literally clinging to Him for everything), and His job will be everything else. He will make you into a minister to uniquely express His Agape love to others.

Why do you think Paul said he was the least of all the saints? In the Greek Paul combined words to capture this idea that he was literally “less than the least.” Perhaps he struggled with forgiving himself for having hunted down and killed believers and therefore considered himself unworthy to receive anything from God. And while that might be what he is hinting at here, it is likely that he is using

a superlative to overemphasize that the privilege that he had been given to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ to the Gentiles had nothing—absolutely nothing—to do with him, but it was all the working of God’s grace in His life.

In this statement, Paul provides for us an example of the humility that is to mark our lives. Oh, without a doubt, we have been privileged in Christ! From before time, He chose us to be His children. He predestined the affairs of our lives to ensure that we would have our day of presentation before all of creation—our coming out as sons of God. He even selected us from the millions upon millions and again predestined the affairs of our life to ensure that we would know the truth about our need to live from our *New Creation* and walk by faith in the Spirit of God. However, He did these things not because we deserved it any more than the next guy. It had nothing to do with our being somehow more worthy of this great privilege; it was just because that is what He wanted for our lives because He loves us and it brought Him great pleasure to open our eyes to see.

This truth should cause us to daily bow our hearts before God and live with an attitude of thanksgiving and a spirit of humility. For like Paul, we get to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and bring to light for everyone what is the plan or the mystery hidden for so many ages, and that is that only God is good; thus, the only thing that matters is what He does in and through our lives as we trust ourselves to Him. What a privilege we have been given.

Think about that phrase, “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” As we discussed in Chapter 1, we have only begun to scratch the surface of not just understanding but experiencing the power of God in our lives. His love for us is so vast and

limitless in its expression that we will never exhaust the ways in which He desires to blow our minds and express Himself in our lives.

Verse 11 is a bit odd. It is a strange concept to think that our lives are on display and made a spectacle to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (this includes both the good angels and the fallen angels). Paul preaching the good news to the Gentiles accomplished the revealing of God's mysterious plan to all of humanity. But interestingly, his preaching also crossed the boundaries so to speak between the physical and spiritual world and penetrated deep within the heavenly realms so that the heavenly hosts might also come to know the wisdom of God in all its rich variety through you and me and all those who comprise His church.

Remember, the way God works with humanity is largely a mystery to the angelic hosts. **1 Peter 1:12** says that they long to look into and understand these mysteries; but instead of getting direct revelation from God like we do, they have to wait and see how His plan is played out in our lives. They get to see the way in which Jew and Gentile live as one in the body of Christ and actually love each other, which based on the history of these two groups, and the hostility that has been perpetuated by demonic forces, is nothing short of miraculous.

Once again, the Spirit communicates these truths to us so we can comprehend who we are in God. He wants us to know just how privileged we are. He wants us to let these truths penetrate our "inner-man" so we will choose to live as sons of God and not as slaves beholden to the ruler of this world. God wants us to know that His grace and power toward us in Christ is something that He has not chosen to bestow upon others, but upon us. This is amazing when you consider the glory

and power which He has bestowed upon angelic beings; yet, their glory and power is nothing compared to what He has unleashed towards us.

Imagine; according to **verse 12**, we get to boldly and confidently come before the throne of God, though faith, any time that we want. Once again, this is not a privilege granted to others. Even in the Jewish system, only the high priest could go into the presence of God and that was just once a year. Surprisingly even the angelic beings have limited access. Based on what we understand in **Job 1:6** and **2:1**, there are appointed days or times when angelic beings can present themselves before God, but they can in no way walk up to Him whenever they want, call Him daddy, and enjoy His presence. But this is something that has been afforded to you and me according to the eternal purpose that the Father carried out through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. I want you to understand however that the throne of the Father is only open and accessible to all us because in our *New Creation* we are holy as He is holy. Through Christ He made us new and made us in His image (**Ephesians 4:29**).

I pray that the Lord will give you revelation to this truth and open the eyes of your heart so you can get beyond just an intellectual understanding of these phenomenal truths and actually, like Paul, begin to live by faith in the reality that as a son of God your spiritual life is your life! This world and what it has to offer, in comparison, is nothing (we will go deep into this truth in Chapter 4). It is empty and provides no life. It is temporary and will come to a sudden end. So don't hold on to it and for goodness sake stop trying to identify yourself by what you do here. All that matters is who you are in God and what He desires for your life. So let go and let Him be your God for in so doing you will become fully convinced of God's

love for you and you will become immovable in your faith. This is the idea expressed in Paul's prayer in verses **14-19**.

Ephesians 3:14-19

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This prayer is amazing; Paul can sure cram so many ideas and thoughts into one short phrase. But before we unpack this prayer, I want you to observe a couple of high level aspects of this prayer.

- 1) Paul references the Father, the Spirit and then Christ to ensure that we understand that the entire godhead (the trinity) is at work in our lives to ground us in the truth of His love for us.
- 2) Paul's prayer is interestingly not about himself or for himself, but it is for us. Here he is in prison probably dying to get out and get a real meal, sleep in a

real bed, get cleaned up, and just have back his freedom instead of having this Roman guard attached to him 24/7, but instead he thinks about us and prays for us. To me this is the unspoken finale or the fruit of being filled with the fullness of God—considering others more important than ourselves (*Philippians 2:1-4*). Paul prays that we would be filled with the fullness of God knowing that we will then no longer be fixated with our lives and our troubles but we will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and God's agape love will freely flow from our lives to others.

- 3) Paul's petitions are not just a random collection of thoughts, but they are intentional and progressive in nature—they are like stepping stones which reveal the whole idea of God in us with the result being that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. This is so powerful especially when you consider that Christ in His bodily form was filled with the fullness of God.

Now, when Paul considers all that God has done for us and all that He has bestowed upon us in Christ, when he even stops to think for a moment about the fact that we are sons of God, he drops to his knees in humility before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named for he is overwhelmed by the reality of it all.

I think Paul makes this statement about the names of humanity because he once again wants to impress deep in our "inner-man" how special we are. You see everyone, without exception, derives their existence from God and culturally (during the 1st century) a person's name spoke of their character and even their destiny. Therefore, Paul is saying that the lives of everyone is in the Father's hand but you, yes you, are different from everyone else for you, amongst all the families

on the earth, can be strengthened with power according to the riches of His glory.

As we talked about in **1:7**, this “power” which strengthens us does not come from the riches of His glory but according to the riches of His glory. This means that in the same way that God’s glory is never diminished, is always over the top amazing, and revealed in so many ways, there is an endless supply of power available to us and it is beyond what we can fathom. He gives us this power in abundance and in so many different ways that it is mind-numbing. Like God’s love, the extent of His power toward us is unsearchable.

Notice that we are strengthened with power by the Spirit in the “inner-man” so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. This speaks, surprise – surprise, to this whole idea of our living from the *New Creation*. I believe this reference to our “inner-man” is synonymous with our mind or our soul—the place that is being renewed and being transformed by the Spirit so that we can know what the Father desires for our lives (**2 Corinthians 4:16; Romans 12:1-2**). As we are strengthened with the power to believe in all that God has spoken about us, the result will be that Jesus will take up more and more room in our hearts.

This idea of Christ dwelling in our hearts is a powerful metaphor which helps us think about the many rooms and closets in our soul where we have literally closed the doors and locked out God as well as others. Again envision a long hallway with many, many doors some of which are open and many of which are closed. Jesus roams the hallway and wants to enter every room and fellowship with us. But as long as we refuse to trust ourselves to Him and refuse to let Him into these places, we are in effect playing god of our own lives and we keep Him out. We foolishly

act as if we are capable of being our own protector, defender, and provider; but that is simply not the case. In reality we are horrible gods. We don't have the power the foresight or the even the ability to ever truly control the outcomes of our lives. It's all some sick delusion that the enemy has tricked us into believing.

But as we let the truths found in the **8** lists of **5**'s penetrate our "inner-man" and we choose by the power of the Spirit to bet our lives on these truths, we will open up those doors to Jesus and let Him come in and disclose to us the depth of His love and bring healing even to the deepest and most horrific of wounds.

I know it is scary and so hard to open up those doors and risk being hurt all over again (especially since most of us have worked so hard to pretend that those doors don't even exist in our souls). But this is why the Spirit has been communicating to us over and over again the truth about who we are in Christ. He wants us to know that we don't have to live entrapped by our pain or controlled by all the dysfunctional ways in which we have tried to play god. He wants us to know that even in the most horrific tragedies, which He allowed in our lives, we were at all times being loved by God. Everything has been necessary so that we could come to Him and find our life in Him. And with every door that by faith is opened, Jesus enters that room, cleans out the junk and the gunk, and expands His residence to include that room. Thus, He dwells more and more in our hearts.

As a result, we become rooted and grounded in His love. These words have deep meaning. Being rooted implies that **as we** believe, and let Jesus into yet another room, we will experience Him so fully that our "inner-man" will be enmeshed in the reality of God's love such that like a deep rooted tree we will not

be moved or ever again believe the enemy's lies that we can be like god. His love will become the grounding or literally the foundation of our lives. Everything we are and all that we will ever do (every choice that we will make in the "inner-man") will be built on the truth of the surpassing greatness of God's love for us.

Wow! What a powerful fruit of our believing and choosing to live by faith. Now, I say it is a fruit because both "rooted" and "grounded" are in the perfect passive tense. This means that God is the one who will perfectly establish us in His love **as we** trust ourselves to Him. It's as if with every door we open up and leave open, He will cause us to understand and rest in His love.

God roots us and grounds us in His love so that along with all the saints we will have the strength to comprehend, know, and experience what is the breadth and length and height and depth of His love which surpasses knowledge. You see God's love is something that can only be spiritually discerned, for it surpasses knowledge, yet at the same time it can be known or fully experienced. But it is experienced together, with all the saints. This speaks, once again, to our need to live connected with other believers. As we fellowship with each other in the Spirit, we will learn more and more about His love as it is uniquely expressed through the lives of others. You see, we all really need each other in order to fully know the love of God.

I want to make a quick comment about the way that Paul added a dimension to our lives. You see we don't live in just a 3 dimensional world (breadth, length, and height), but there is a spiritual dimension which encompasses all of humanity. That is why he includes "depth" in describing the magnitude of God's love. It is in

this spiritual dimension that our real life is found and which I believe is described quite accurately in the **8** lists of **5**'s found in the first 2 chapters.

And finally, all of this is to result in our being filled with the fullness of God. In the same way that Jesus was filled with the fullness of the godhead (**Colossians 1:19-20**) God intends for us to be filled. And keep in mind, it pleased God to fill Jesus in this way while He was in bodily form (**Colossians 2:9**). So it is possible; this is not hyperbole. He wants to occupy every room in your soul. He wants to have such total control over your life that you get off the throne and let Him be God so He can lead you in love.

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I am in awe! Everything we have studied so far in Chapters 1-3 is beyond anything we could have ever asked for or even thought about. He just gives and gives and it is always in super-abundance. The emphasis of this passage is on what God is able to **“do.”** In other words, all that we have studied is not just an exercise in religious ideology and thought, but it is truly what He wants to do. And what is amazing is that He does these amazing things through the power that is at work

within us—through us—His life in ours. He has chosen to express Himself in this age not by externally revealing Himself through signs and wonders but by showing the world who He is through how He lives and expresses Himself in us. This is His marvelous plan hidden throughout the ages! Glory to God! We are privileged beyond words.

Let's Pray