

Chuck Smith:

Let's turn to the third chapter of Ephesians.

For this cause [Paul said] I, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles (Eph 3:1),

It is interesting that Paul was actually a prisoner of Rome, but as far as he was concerned, he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ, that is the one he was really bound to. "A prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." The reason why Paul was persecuted and the reason why Paul was in prison is because he was insisting that the Gentiles could be saved by their believing in Jesus Christ, and this upset the Jews, who felt that the Gentiles could only be saved by becoming Jews.

Thus, a Gentile could not be saved, only Jews could be saved and a Gentile had to become a Jew in order to be saved. So Paul's insistence that God is now offering salvation to the Gentiles so incurred the wrath of the Jews that they persecuted him or stirred up persecution everywhere he went. So that the imprisonments were the result of this basic teaching of Paul that you Gentiles can have salvation. So, "a prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles."

Paul said, "If I didn't preach this then the persecution would cease. They wouldn't have anything against me anymore." But Paul stood by that message of God's grace that had been given to him.

If you have heard [he said] of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to me for you (Eph 3:2):

Now, there are those who see seven dispensations. They see the dispensation of innocence, when God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden and God relating to man there in the garden in man's innocence. Then they see the second dispensation, (I forget what they call it), but it is from the time of Adam's sin unto the time of Noah, in which they see the third dispensation of the government of God which lasted until the time of the law, which they see the fourth dispensation of the law. And the fifth dispensation of Jesus here; the sixth dispensation, the dispensation of grace; the seventh dispensation, the millennial reign.

Paul is talking about the dispensation of grace, man has divided it up into those categories. I don't know that God has. I think that man does a lot of things that God doesn't necessarily endorse, even theologians.

We are living in an age in which God relates to we Gentiles by His grace. It is a dispensation of grace given to us.

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I already had written about in few words (Eph 3:3);

Now, in chapter 1 Paul speaks of this mystery of His will, that in the dispensation of the fullness of time He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on the earth, even in Him. This mystery that God has chosen that all things should be bound up in Jesus Christ; things which are in heaven, things which are on the earth. God has brought all things in subjection unto Him, will put all things in subjection.

Paul said, I wrote a little bit about this mystery already,

Whereby, when you read, you may have an understanding of my knowledge in the mystery of Christ,) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph 3:4-5);

That is, this open door for the Gentiles to receive salvation is something that the Old Testament prophets did not foresee. This age of the church is something that was not seen by the Old Testament prophets. They felt that the coming of Christ would bring the immediate kingdom of God. They figured that the Messiah would usher in the kingdom age immediately and the Old Testament prophets did not really see this age of grace, when God would be drawing from among the Gentiles the body of Christ.

They really didn't understand all that they saw or all that God revealed to them. They really wrote of things that they did not completely understand. But they wrote as the Holy Spirit inspired them. And thus, they themselves did not know the things that they were writing about or what their full significance was.

Isaiah speaks of the coming Messiah, how that He will sit upon the throne of David and order it and establish it in righteousness and in judgment from henceforth even forever, the zeal of the Lord of Host shall perform this. And yet, Isaiah said that God's righteous servant would be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him. But He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to our own way, and God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. And how He would be numbered with the transgressors in His death. And so he wrote of these things not really understanding the apparent inconsistency of the things that he wrote.

Daniel, in prophesying the day that the Messiah would come, declared, and the Messiah will be cut off, and receive nothing for Himself, and the Jews will be dispersed.

Yet, there did remain that mental attitude that the Messiah is going to set up His kingdom, and it was very prevalent even among the disciples. They were constantly looking for the immediacy of the kingdom of God. When Jesus, after His resurrection, gave the promise of the Holy Spirit to come upon them in a few days, they said, "Lord, will this be the time when You restore the kingdom to Israel? Is this it, Lord?" They were constantly looking for the kingdom to be established immediately. They did not know that there was going to be this period of the dispensation of grace, where God would be reaching out to the Gentiles to draw out from the Gentiles the body of Christ, the church of Jesus Christ. Draw out, actually, from the world, because it was to include both Jews and Gentiles and make them one. The wall that had existed between them is going to be broken down and they are all going to become one body in Christ.

When Paul speaks of it as a mystery, he means not something that is like we think of mysteries today, difficult to solve. It is something that had not been revealed in the past, but God is now revealing and making known. So it is a new revelation from God. This place of the Gentiles in the body of Christ and how that God was going to offer freely unto the Gentiles the glorious promises of eternal life and of salvation and of a place in the kingdom of God.

Paul said, "I want to write this to you so that you will understand my understanding of the mystery which in other ages was not made known, but it is now revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and to the prophets. This is the mystery:"

That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ by the gospel (Eph 3:6):

The glorious mystery of God now revealed. You Gentiles can have salvation, can have the promise of eternal life, can have the hope of the kingdom of God. You become a partaker in the grace and in the goodness of God. "Whereof [Paul said] I was made a minister, according the gift of the grace of God that was given to me by the effectual working of his power."

So God laid upon me the ministry of sharing this glorious mystery--God's grace to the Gentiles.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:7-8);

"What a privilege," Paul said, "is given unto me the less of the least of all saints." Paul's opinion of himself, this is the opinion of a man who has truly been called of God and really had a confirmation with Jesus Christ.

When I see the way some people strut as they preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, my conclusion is that they really haven't had a personal confrontation with Him. If I have the attitude, "Lord, You are so lucky that You have me proclaiming Your truths. You don't know how fortunate You are, God. I could have been famous and I could have been great. I gave up fame and fortune. I am worth a lot to You, Lord." Those testimonies of what people have given up for Jesus Christ really don't move me. What I could have been doesn't really touch me.

Paul's attitude toward himself, "Wow, God has given me this glorious ministry, the lessor than the least of all of the saints. The privilege given that I should be able to share the unsearchable riches of Christ, impart them unto the Gentiles."

Paul felt that because of his previous persecution of the church, his endeavor to waste it, that anything that God did for him was through grace and he was really always, I think, sort of haunted by the fact that he was so

blind at one time that he was trying to destroy the church. He makes mention of this, "for I wasted the church of God." Here his attitude, less than the least of all of the saints. But God has chosen

that all men may see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ (Eph 3:9):

Now, you notice that all that God has done for us is by Jesus Christ as we have been going through these first two chapters on into the third chapter. Anything and everything that God has done for you He has done in and through and by Jesus Christ. These glorious mysteries hid from the Old Testament prophets now revealed through the prophets and the apostles in the New Testament, these marvelous riches of Christ that are available to all men.

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10),

You remember Peter writing of these things said, "Which things the angels even desire to look into." (I Peter 1:12). You see, angels are not omniscient as is God. They do not know the full purposes or the plan of God. I am sure that they have interesting sessions and discussions as they see the purposes of God being unfolded. Now, the angels did have a better grasp of prophecy than did man. When God would reveal the things through the prophets, they did have a grasp of these things. But not a full understanding. It took the working out of the plan for them to come into a full understanding.

Peter in writing of these things said, "We have the more sure word of prophecy" (II Peter 1:19). "He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3), but we have the more sure word of prophecy and so forth, which things the angels desired to look into. Paul said, "That the principalities and powers, which are the angels, that they might know by what is happening in the church, the manifold wisdom of God."

I would imagine that it is a very shocking and awesome thing to the angels that God decided to come and indwell man. That God would actually come and dwell within man. This is that glorious mystery that God actually will indwell you by His Spirit through Jesus Christ.

My body can become the temple of the Holy Spirit, that Christ dwelling in me is my hope of glory. This marvelous mystery. The angels said, "Wow, can you believe that?" It is revealed, God didn't reveal it to them, except, as it took place within the church.

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph 3:11):

That was God's plan from the beginning.

In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him (Eph 3:12).

In chapter 1 it says we have been accepted in the beloved. God accepts me. Now it says we have access unto God. That was, of course, something that was withheld even from the Jew. They did not have access to God. They came to God through the priest. He would enter into the presence of God for them. When God gave the law to Moses, He said, "Cordon off the mount. Don't let man come close, lest he be destroyed." Moses went up and communed with God. When the people saw the awesome phenomena of the presence of God, they fled, and they said to Moses, "You go up and talk to Him and you come down and tell us what He said, but we don't want to get near. That is awesome the fire rolling around the ground, the thunder and all of these things. And you go up and we will listen to you, and we will take what you tell us that God says, but we don't want to approach that."

And as God established the law, then it was the high priest who went into the Holy of Holies before God for the people and that was only once in a year, one day in a year. But now we have access to God. There is no veil any longer to hold you out.

It was extremely significant that at the crucifixion of Jesus the veil was rent or torn from top to the bottom and God was just now saying through Jesus Christ you can all come. You have access to God. In Hebrews it says, "that we may come boldly before the throne of grace to make our petitions known." Through Jesus Christ we were once alienated from God and could not approach Him, and now have been brought close, been brought nigh, access to God. And then here again, boldness and access, as in Hebrews, "come boldly to the throne of grace."

That timidity that some people display, "Oh, I really don't think that I am worthy to come to God. I will just go to one of the saints and ask him to go to God for me," is unscriptural and it's wrong. When God opens the door and says, "Come on in," it is wrong for you to hold back. We come boldly. We have access, boldness and access, confidence by the faith of Him.

Wherefore [Paul said] I desire that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory (Eph 3:13).

Paul had gone through so much to bring them this message. The prisoner, beaten, scourged, buffeted, stoned. "Don't faint at my tribulations, because it is all for your glory."

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 3:14),

So Paul's prayer for them, the attitude in prayer, physical, of bowing his knee, but there are many attitudes for prayer physically. It isn't really the physical position that counts when I come to God; it is the position of my heart. "He that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

So the people who have a hang up, "you're not really praying unless you are on your knees," is not really a scriptural hang up, it is just their own hang up. The scripture talks about standing, lifting holy hands in prayer. David lying with his face in the dirt crying unto God. Many places they are lying prostrate before the Lord. So sitting, lying, kneeling, standing, that is not what counts, but what is the position of your heart as you come to God.

"I bow my knees unto the Father." Prayer is unto the Father, our Father, which art in heaven. Whatsoever things you ask the Father, that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you [Paul's prayer for them], according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:15-16);

How we need strength in our inner man. Satan is constantly setting before us temptations. He is a powerful foe. I do not have the strength within myself to stand against him, I need God's strength by His Spirit in my inner man if I am to stand before the power of the enemy. Paul prays that you might be strengthened in the inner man by His Spirit.

Secondly,

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Eph 3:17);

The word dwell in the Greek is to settle down and to make himself at home, that Christ might really be at home, be comfortable, be at ease. There are places where you go and you feel out of place the moment you are there. You feel uncomfortable, you wish you had not come, you are not in harmony with what is going on. Then there are other places where you go and you feel so comfortable, so at ease, so relaxed.

Now, "that Christ might be at home in your hearts" means that your heart might be so in tune and all with Him that as He dwells within your heart there is no strain, there is no embarrassment for Him.

You remember how that Ezekiel, that interesting prophet, how God dealt with him in many strange ways, was taken by the Spirit to Jerusalem. There was this wall there and God said, "Dig a hole through the wall," and he dug a hole through the wall and crawled in. And he looked and here was all kinds of pornography all over the walls. Ezekiel said, "That is horrible, filthy pornography. What's that all about?" God said, "I have allowed you to go within the minds of the leaders of Israel. These are the things that they are thinking, these are the things they are seeing."

When Christ dwells within your heart and looks on the walls, is He at home, is He comfortable with what He sees? Or when He knocks on the door, do we say, "Wait a minute," and we go around and try to cover everything, or turn things around backwards?

"That Christ may be at home in your hearts by faith;"

that you might be rooted and grounded in love (Eph 3:17),

Oh that we would experience more of that love of God and the love of Jesus Christ and that it might really flow forth from our lives. Rooted and grounded in love.

That you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and the length, and the depth, and the height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge (Eph 3:18-19),

Here is an interesting request, because how can you know something that passes knowledge? The word know is ginosko, which is know by experience.

Now his prayer: "God loves you so much, I pray that you might know the depths of Gods love for you, the length of God's love, the height of God's love. If you could only fathom the depths, if you could only explore the heights, if you could only see the length, to the length to which God was willing to go to save you. The depths to which Jesus was willing to come in order to redeem you. The heights to which God intends to bring you. That He might seat you together with Christ in heavenly places and make you a joint heir with Christ of His eternal kingdom. Oh the heights of the glory that God has for you. If you could only know," Paul said, "comprehend that which is beyond knowledge. Hey, you cannot know it, it is beyond knowledge."

The next request,

that you might be filled with the fullness of God (Eph 3:19).

Now, again, that is something that in the physical is impossible. That I could be filled with the fullness of God. The heavens of heavens cannot contain God. How much less me? That I might be filled with the fullness of God. Now, realizing that he has asked some pretty tough things, he says,

Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Eph 3:20),

How many times I think that we limit God by our own limitations. We carry our own limitations over into the spiritual realm. We are prone to place things in categories: that is very easy, that is simple, no problem, oh that is pretty tough, that one is difficult. Hey, that is impossible. We are prone to carry these over to God, and it reflects even many times in our attitude of prayer, "Lord, this is a simple thing. You can handle this one. Lord, this is pretty tough. I really don't know. Forget it, Lord. It is impossible." We are prone to carry over unto God those human feelings that we have concerning situations. How many times God has done things that I thought were totally impossible, things that I had given up on. People that I had said, "Hey, no way." Then what does God do? Turns around and saves them. I can't believe it.

Jonathan, waking up early in the morning, his mind playing with an interesting thought. "I wonder if God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel today. If God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel today, He doesn't need a whole army. If God wants to do it, He could deliver them into the hands of one man just as easy as He could the whole army. I wonder if He wants to deliver them today?" This crazy thought running through his brain, he can't get it out of his head. And so he wakes up his armor bearer and he says, "I'm having a crazy thought. You know, I was thinking, if God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel He doesn't need the whole army, after all He is God. He could deliver the Philistines to Israel to just one man, just as easily as a whole army. Let's go over and see if God wants to deliver the Philistines this morning." I love it, let's see what God might want to do, let's venture out in faith. Who knows what God might want to do? He doesn't need a whole army. We measure things by our abilities. "Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think."

We oftentimes are intimidated by certain diseases, by certain illnesses, because they have been diagnosed by man as incurable. Thus, we have a different prayer for Leukemia than we do earaches, or headaches. "Lord, he has got a headache, relieve him, Lord, help him to really be able to function today. Thank you, Lord." No problem. If God doesn't come through, take an aspirin.

"Leukemia, No! Oh, God, help! God, oh Lord God of heaven." Man leukemia, you have got to really pray for that. You have... it takes really getting worked up into that one. That's tough. Hey, it is no more difficult for God to heal leukemia than it is a common cold. God doesn't have these categories of difficult or easy or impossible. They don't exist with God. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly, and we need to remember this when we pray. We need in prayer to be freed from our human limitations and this idea of difficulty.

"Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." God can provide a million dollars for you just as easy as He can provide five cents. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above

all that you ask or think. Why do we limit Him? "Lord, I need a nickel." So I start looking around the ground. It shouldn't be too hard to find a nickel. Flip the coin boxes in the telephones.

Paul as he prays, prays with that awareness, that confidence that God is able. We need to have that confidence when we pray.

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end (Eph 3:21).

This beautiful little benediction that he tacks onto his prayer. Glory in the church, by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, and so shall it be. So shall it be.

World without end, we will bring glory and praise unto God because of His grace towards us through Jesus Christ. In heaven we will be much the same things we are doing on the earth, as we are just giving thanks unto God for His mercy and grace to us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So many people are looking for heaven to bring so many radical changes in their lives. But you see, God wants to make those radical changes right now so that heaven will not be a shocking kind of a transition for you. God is working in us now. Those eternal things as He is preparing us for the eternal kingdom. They are not going to be as radical a change as you think. God wants it to be a smooth transition. It would be glorious to be in heaven for an hour or two before you realized you were there. To walk so close to the Lord, to live in such communion with Him, to walk so in His presence and in His love and all. Hey, wait a minute. Something is different here. Where am I? Wow!

Oh, God help us to so walk with Jesus in close communion.