

# (Through the Bible) Ephesians 3

by Chuck Smith

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*Paul's sermon emphasizes the mystery of the Gentiles' salvation, the dispensation of grace, and the believer's access to God through Jesus Christ.*

**Duration:** 39:46

**Scripture:** Ephesians 3:10

**Topics:** "Walking With Jesus", "Gods Eternal Plan"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of walking closely with Jesus in communion and love. He highlights that the transition to heaven will not be a radical change, but rather a smooth and glorious experience. The speaker also discusses the dispensation of grace given to Gentiles and the mystery of God's will to gather all things in Christ. He cautions against prideful attitudes in proclaiming the gospel and mentions the disciples' expectation of an immediate restoration of the kingdom of God.

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## Transcript

Let's turn to the third chapter of the book of Ephesians. For this cause, Paul said, I the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles. 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's 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 imprisoned 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 grace, of the grace of God which is given to me for you. 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's relating to man there in the garden in man's innocence. And 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, this dispensation of grace, the seventh dispensation, the millennial reign. And so 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.

But we are living in an age in which God relates to we Gentiles by his grace. And so it is a dispensation of grace given to us. How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery, as I already have written about in a few words now in chapter one, Paul speaks of this mystery of his will that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on the earth, even in him.

So this mystery that God has chosen that all things should be bound up in Jesus Christ, things which are in heaven, things which are in earth. God has brought all things in subjection unto him will put all things in subjection. So Paul said, I wrote a little bit about this mystery already, which in other ages was not made known or 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.

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.

And they, they, 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. Now 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 in order and establish it in righteousness and in judgment from henceforth, even forever, the zeal of the Lord of hosts 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. We hid as it were our faces from him, but he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our pieces upon him with his strides. We are healed.

All we like chief have gone astray. We've turned everyone to our own way and God laid on him the iniquities 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.

And 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. And they were constantly looking for the immediacy of the kingdom of God.

And 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? And they were constantly looking for the kingdom to be established immediately. And 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 existed between them is going to be broken down and they are all going to become one body in Christ.

So 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. And 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 an eternal life and of salvation and of a place in the kingdom of God. So Paul said, I want to write this to you so that you'll 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, 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. Where of Paul said, I was made a minister according to the gift of 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 and to make all men see or unto me. Paul said, 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. What a privilege Paul said is given unto me the less, the less of the least of all things, Paul's opinion of himself.

This is the opinion of a man who has truly been called of God and really had a confrontation 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're so lucky that you have me proclaiming your truth.

You don't know how fortunate you are. God, I could have been famous and I could have been great. You know, I gave up fame and fortune.

I'm 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 towards himself, wow, God has given me this glorious ministry, the lesser than the least of all 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.

And he makes mention of this, you know, for I wasted, he said, 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 God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. Now you notice that all that God has done for us is by Jesus Christ.

As we've been going through these first two chapters on into the third chapter, anything and everything that God has done for you, it is 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 under the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God.

You remember Peter writing of these things, said which things the angels even desired to look into. You see, angels are not omniscient as is God. They do not know the full purposes or the plan of God.

And I'm 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, says we have the more sure word of prophecy. You know, he showed himself alive by many invaluable proofs, but we have the more sure word of prophecy and so forth.

Which things the angels desired to look into here, 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 was 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. And 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 ministry, the angels said, wow, can you believe that? You know, and 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.

That was God's plan from the beginning in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. In chapter one, Paul said, we have been accepted in the beloved. God accepts me.

Now he says we have access unto God. Now 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. And Moses went up and communed with God. And when the people saw the awesome phenomena of the presence of God, they fled and they said to Moses, look, 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's awesome. The fire rolling around the ground, the thunder and, and all of these things. And you go up and you will listen to you.

We'll take what you tell us that God says, you know, but you know, 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 only once in the year, the one day in the 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 the top to the bottom. And God was just now saying, look through Jesus Christ, you can all come.

You have access to God in Hebrews. It said that we may come boldly before the throne of grace to make our petitions known through Jesus Christ. We who were once alienated from God could not approach him have now been brought close.

Then brought near access to God. And then here again, boldness in access as in Hebrews come boldly to the throne of grace, that timidity that some people display. Oh, I really don't think I'm worthy to come to God.

I'll 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's wrong for you to hold back. We come boldly.

We have access, boldness in access, confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore, Paul said, I desire that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which is for your glory. Paul had gone through so much to bring them this message, the prisoner beaten, scourged, buffeted, stoned, but don't faint at my tribulations because it's all for your glory.

For this cause, Paul said, I bow my knees unto the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul's prayer for them, the attitude and 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's 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.

So the people who have a hang up, you're not really praying unless you're on your knees. It's not really a scriptural hang up. Uh, it's just that 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're lying prostrate before the Lord.

So sitting, lying, kneeling, standing, that's not what counts. What's 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 and 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, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with

might by his spirit in the inner man, how we need strength in our inner man.

Satan is constantly setting before us temptations. He is a powerful fool. I do not have the strength within myself to stand against him.

I need God's strength by his strength. 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.

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're not in harmony with what's going on.

And then there are other places where you go and you just feel so comfortable, so at ease, so relaxed. Now, that Christ might be at home in your hearts means that the heart, 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. And there was this wall there and God says, now 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. And Ezekiel said, oh, that's horrible, filthy pornography. What's that all about? And 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 that they are seeing. Now, when Christ dwells within your heart and looks on the walls, you see, 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 and cover everything in or turn things around backwards.

That Christ may be at home in your hearts by faith. And that you might be rooted and grounded in love. Oh, that we would experience more that love of God and the love of Jesus Christ.

And that it might really flow forth more from our lives, rooted and grounded. And that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the depth and the height. And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge.

Now here's an interesting request because how can you know something that passes knowledge? And 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 God's love for you.

The lengths of God's love, the heights of God's love. You'd only fathom the depths if you could only explore the heights. You'd only see the lengths.

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's beyond knowledge. And then the next request that you might be filled with the fullness of God.

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's asked some pretty tough things, he says, now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

How many times I think that we limit God by our own limitations and we carry our own limitations over into the spiritual realm. We are prone to place things in categories. That's very easy.

Oh, that's simple. No problem. Oh, that's pretty tough.

That one's difficult. Hey, that's impossible. And we're prone to carry these over to God.

And it reflects even many times in our attitude of prayer. Lord, this simple thing. You can handle this one.

Lord, this is pretty tough. I really don't know. Forget it, Lord.

It's impossible. You know, and we're 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 in which I have said, no way. What's God do? Turn around and saves them.

Oh, I can't believe it, you know. 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.

And 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, didn't have that 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's God.

He could deliver the Philistines to Israel to just one man. Just as easily as the 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 exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think.

We oftentimes are intimidated by certain diseases, by certain illnesses, because they have been diagnosed by man as incurable. And thus we have a different prayer for leukemia than we do earaches or headaches. Lord, he's got a headache.

Relieve him, Lord. You know, helping to really be able to function today. Thank you, Lord.

No problem. You know, God doesn't come through taking aspirin. Leukemia.

No. Oh, God, help God. Oh, Lord God of heaven.

Man, leukemia, you got to really pray for that. You have to, you know, takes really getting worked up into that one. That's tough.

Hey, it is no more difficult for God to heal of leukemia than it is a common cold. You see, God doesn't have these categories of difficult or easier or impossible. They don't exist with God.

He is able to do exceeding 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 you ask or think. God can provide a million dollars for you just as easily as he can provide five cents. He's able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think.

Why do you limit him? Lord, I need a nickel. And so I start looking around the ground. Shouldn't be too hard to find a nickel.

Flip the coin boxes in the telephones, you know. And so 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. 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.

Hey, in heaven, we'll be doing much the same things we're doing here on the earth as we're 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're not going to be as radical a change as you think. And God wants it to be a smooth transition.

You know, it'd 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. And so you say, hey, wait a minute, something's different here.

Where am I? Wow. Oh, God, help us to so walk with Jesus in close communion.

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