

“Glory in the Church by Christ”**Lesson Scope:** [Ephesians 3](#)

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus:

The first two chapters of Ephesians unfolded the mystery of God’s eternal plan for the church. This plan included the union of Jews and Gentiles in one body, “to the praise of the glory of his grace.” Both God’s plan and the praise from it transcend time. The church was “chosen . . . in him before the foundation of the world” and in the world to come will be an eternal exhibit of “the exceeding riches of his grace.” Chapter 3 moves us from the marvel of the mystery to the church’s calling “to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery.” This mission can be accomplished only as Christ is able to “dwell in [our] hearts by faith.” The church fulfills God’s eternal purpose in time and eternity. She displays “the manifold wisdom of God” to all men and to “principalities and powers in heavenly places.”

There are three wonders in this third chapter of Ephesians that are too wonderful for man to explain: the wonder of the dispensation of grace, the wonder of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the wonder of the love of Christ. We do well to leave them as unexplainable wonders that belong to God’s perfect Ways. The apostle Paul is likely referring to his vision (described in 2 Corinthians 12:1-5) when he speaks of God revealing His mystery to him (verses 3-4).

Although Paul’s vision is a fact, we caution against lifting out visions as God’s primary method of revelation to mankind. God uses His Word and the instruction of parents, teachers, and ministers as primary methods of revelation today.

Use question 2 to give a balanced perspective to this sensitive portion of Christian experience.

Lesson Aim:

To show how the church fulfills her divinely appointed mission.

Theme Verse:

1 Peter 2:9. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Lesson Text:

The Mystery of the Gospel

Ephesians 3:1-6^(KJV) For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, ² If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: ³ How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, ⁴ Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ⁵ 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; ⁶ That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

The Preaching of the Gospel

Ephesians 3:7-13^(KJV) Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. ⁸ 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; ⁹ And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: ¹⁰ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: ¹² In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. ¹³ Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

The Comprehension of the Gospel

Ephesians 3:14-21^(KJV) For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹ And to know the love

of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.²⁰ Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,²¹ Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Questions for Study

The Mystery of the Gospel

1. What does the dispensation of grace offer to mankind that the Old Testament could not offer?
2. How did God divinely reveal the mystery of the Gospel to Paul? How does He reveal it today?

The Preaching of the Gospel

3. What attitudes are important for those who minister the Gospel to others?
4. Give some examples of when the power of the Gospel was stronger than principalities and powers in the spirit world.
5. How can prayer enhance the preaching of the Gospel?

The Comprehension of the Gospel

6. How is the church a testimony that glorifies God today?
7. What teachings are necessary beyond conversion to help new churches become established as a “pillar and ground of the truth”?

Analysing the Passage:

Note the parenthesis of thought included in three sentences from verse 2 to verse 13. Paul’s main thought seems to be picked up in verse 14, where he said, “For this because I bow my knees.” The parenthesis in verse 2 through verse 13 deals with the revelation of the mystery of the Gospel (verses 2-6) and Paul’s call and commitment to preach the Gospel (verses 7-13). The mystery of the Gospel (verses 3-4) is the truth revealed in the New Testament which had previously been concealed. The dispensation of . . . grace is a necessary part of God’s great plan of salvation. Though it comes into light and reality in the New Testament era, it is essential for the redemption of the saints of all the ages of time. The dispensation of grace becomes a reality through the dispensing of the Gospel story of salvation.

The word fellowship in verse 9 is frequently translated communion and relates to the bonding of believers into one body regardless of race or ethnic background.

Heavenly places (3:10) means “above the sky” implying that which is beyond mortal. “Principalities and powers in heavenly places” refer to spirit beings, particularly angelic beings, either good or evil.

Principles and Applications:

The Mystery of the Gospel

1. The mission of the church is to proclaim salvation through God’s grace (3:1-2). The dispensation of grace is God’s provision that can change the eternal destiny of a man’s soul. The apostle Paul says, “[Have you] heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward”? Those who have tasted of the grace of God can share the wonderful news with others.

2. The mission of the church is given by divine revelation (3 :1 -5). God used divine revelation to clearly show the apostle Paul that Jesus is the promised Messiah. God forbid that we should offer any hope for sinful man that is less than that which was divinely revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The story of the perfect Lamb of God, who died that we might live, can drive the sinner to his knees in tears and repentance. No pep talk of self-imposed reform can produce tears and repentance; such only produces a brazen hardening of the heart.

3. The church is called to proclaim the Gospel to all people (3:5-6). Part of the mystery of the new dispensation of grace is that God has opened an avenue so that men from any nation and blood can be “of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ.”

The Preaching of the Gospel

4. The mission of the church is to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). Unsearchable has the thought of being untraceable, not able to be followed. The Gospel message and God’s marvellous plan are never fully comprehended in this life. Both the preacher and the listeners marvel at what God has done and what He will do for His redeemed in eternity.

5. The mission of the church is to proclaim God’s wisdom to the observing world and to the spirit world (3:9-10). Job is an example of one whose life was a testimony in the spirit world. The church is a powerful resource

in delivering men from the clutches of evil and darkness today. We are seen and recognized as a Christian people when we move among society in our separated attire. Many would-be oppressors of Christians were stopped by the testimony of a praying Christian or a Christian woman's veiled head.

6. Through prayer the church has power with God to carry out her mission (3:11-13). God gives the church direction when His people pray collectively or alone. We boldly lay open to God our purposes and the tribulations that we may encounter in our labours, so that He may open the way as He chooses.

The Comprehension of the Gospel

7. The mission of the church unites her people as one family in Christ (3:14-16). Mission work as a labour of love draws together those who are involved in the work. There is a reason why we are careful not to join hands with various multid denominational efforts. If we give active support to liberal church efforts, whether we give money or service, we will quickly develop a oneness with them that will wean us of our appreciation for our own conservative church.

8. The mission of the church includes nurturing spiritual growth and stability in her members (3:17-19). It is important that all converts become "rooted and grounded in love" and that they "comprehend with all saints . . . the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of Christian life.

9. The mission of the church is to glorify God in time and in eternity (3:20-21). God's power working in our lives gives a testimony to all the world. Every church united in its teaching and practice is a testimony around the World. God is glorified When His church continues to be faithful from generation to generation. And that glory will continue "throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Important Teachings

1 The mission of the church is to proclaim salvation through God's grace (3:1-2).

2. The mission of the church is given by divine revelation (3:1-5).

3. The church is called to proclaim the Gospel to all people (3:5-6).

4. The mission of the church is to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8).

5. The mission of the church is to proclaim God's wisdom to the observing World and to the spirit World (3:9-10).
6. Through prayer the church has power with God to carry out her mission (3:11-13).
7. The mission of the church unites her people as one family in Christ (3:14-16).
8. The mission of the church includes nurturing spiritual growth and stability in her members (3:17-19).
9. The mission of the church is to glorify God in time and in eternity (3:20-21).

Answers to Questions

1. What does the dispensation of grace offer to mankind that the Old Testament could not offer? We are offered forgiveness of sins and cleansing through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We are offered a portion of inheritance through Christ into the kingdom of God.
2. How did God divinely reveal the mystery of the Gospel to Paul? How does He reveal it today? God revealed it to Paul through His Spirit. Paul later compared what he had received with the teaching of the other apostles. We understand the mystery of the Gospel by studying the teachings of Scripture, by hearing the teaching of our brethren, and by the Spirit of God in our hearts.
3. What attitudes are important for those who minister the Gospel to others? There must first be a thankful attitude to God for what His grace has worked in our own lives. Like Paul, we should consider ourselves less than the least of all saints; the haughty spirit will have much difficulty winning any converts to Christ.
4. Give some examples of when the power of the Gospel was stronger than principalities and powers in the spirit world. The demoniac was converted and became a new man when Jesus touched his life. Paul cast out the spirit of divination in a certain damsel which cried after them constantly. Prayer and support can help the weak Christian to overcome fear and superstition today.
5. How can prayer enhance the preaching of the Gospel? As the laborers communicate in prayer all of their burdens and purposes, God will lead them to souls that need the Gospel, and He will give them the right words to speak. When we pray for the mission workers on our mission fields,

God hears and strengthens their hearts. We should also tell them that we pray for them; that can be a great encouragement.

6. How is the church a testimony that glorifies God today? A life above reproach is an irrefutable Witness of the power of Christ. The church is a testimony that glorifies God when the church represents the true teachings of Jesus Christ and is a fulfillment of Christ's desire that His disciples should carry the Gospel story into all the world. The consistency of the doctrines and practices of the church, no matter where in the World it is found, is a testimony that glorifies God.

7. What teachings are necessary beyond conversion to help new churches become established as a "pillar and ground of the truth"? Faith and love are building blocks that help to establish a body of believers in Christian unity. We teach and instruct the cardinal doctrines of non-resistance and separation to produce a people separate from the World. The ordinances of the church need to be taught and consistently practiced.

Summarizing the Lesson:

Even as the stars shine in a dark sky to give glory to a sovereign Creator, so we are to shine as lights in this dark World, shedding forth not our own light, but the grace of God, which has worked in our lives. Even as the stars exceed our comprehension in number, size, and distance, so the vastness of God's grace exceeds our comprehension in its availability to any number of persons and in any country of this world! May the glory go alone to our great and sovereign God.

Research Guide:

In *Doctrines of the Bible*, read "Mission of the Church" on pages 327-328.