

The Mystery Revealed, Part 1

Ephesians 3:1-4

1912

The Unity of the Body, Part 4

Ephesians Chapter 3 is the area of our study this morning. We are considering this great Epistle, the first half of which deals with the theology of the church, the theology of the body of Christ, the church as one body in Christ. And we're learning and relearning and refreshing ourselves and remembering what we've learned in the past truths concerning the unity of the church.

All of this is under the figure of a mystery. A sacred secret and so we could entitle Chapter 3, verses 1-13 the revealing of the mystery. Everybody loves a secret. You're not any different than I am. We all love a secret, some real great juicy thing that nobody's ever known before, always tempts us. And by the way, the whole New Testament is full of those things. In fact, the church age is called the mystery form of the kingdom. So that there are many mysteries in the church. Many things which God has revealed. Many sacred secrets never known in history until today and we know them. In fact, we are in part the mystery.

God has given us tremendous insight in the New Testament into divine truth that never was none even by the saintliest of the saints of the Old Testament age. Now remember what we told you in our first message as we began to study Ephesians. We told you at that time that the pattern of God's revelation is unique. In other words, God reveals things very uniquely. For example, first of all, there are some things that God never reveals any time to anybody. These are the permanent sacred secrets. They fall into the classification of Deuteronomy 29:29 which says, "The secret things belong to the Lord."

In other words, there are some things that nobody has known, does know, or will know in this life. They are either too complex, too fearful, too private, or some other reason for which God has chosen to keep them secret. But secondly, there are some secrets which He has revealed only to special people in times past. The Old Testament says He reveals His secrets to the prophets and to His people Israel. There were those saints of the Old Testament age to whom God did reveal certain sacred secrets. Certain great divine realities, life changing, eternal things.

Thirdly, there are some sacred secrets which God never revealed to anybody in the past not even His very special people, not even the prophets, but has now revealed them to us in this church age. Those are the secrets the New Testament calls mysteries, mysteries. Mysteries are truths never before revealed, finally revealed in the New Testament. And literally, they fill the New Testament from one end of it to the other. There are just sacred secrets revealed that have never been known before about Christ, about the church, about the Spirit of God. Great divine truths that no one whoever lived has ever known. In fact, in 1 Peter 1 it says, "the prophets searched the things that they themselves wrote to try to uncover the secrets that were there." The things they couldn't

understand and didn't know.

So a mystery is a secret of God hidden from the foundation of the world and finally revealed in the church age. Now one of those mysteries, and there are many of them, one of them is the mystery that the church would be made up of Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, Greek and Barbarian, and that everybody all inclusive would be one in Jesus Christ. That was a mystery.

Now in the Old Testament the Jews understood that the Gentiles would be saved. They understood Gentile salvation. They understood that the Gentiles would participate in the kingdom. They understood that God had plans of grace toward them, but they never understood that Jew and Gentile would literally be one. That there would be no difference. That the middle wall of partition would be eliminated. That there would be no distinction between the two. That they would be equal before God. They did not understand that. They understood that there was a Messiah coming, for example. They did not understand the mystery of their incarnation that God was in Christ. They didn't fully understand that. That's another mystery they didn't understand. They didn't understand that the Messiah would literally indwell the believer.

Christ in you the mystery. So there were many things. They knew the Messiah would come. They knew the Messiah would be specially anointed of God. They knew that God's salvation would incorporate Gentiles, but they didn't understand the fullness of that truth. And we are looking at Ephesians which deals primarily with the mystery of the body, Jew and Gentile, one in Christ. It's an important message. It's important for us to understand that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ. It's important for us to understand that everybody who's a Christian is equal to everybody else who's a Christian.

The apostle Paul says in Galatians 3:28, "there is neither Jew nor Greek"... "there's neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek, Barbarian, bond, free, male, female, we're all one in Christ." The unity of the church, listen beloved, is one of the most cardinal messages of the entire New Testament. And how it must grieve the heart of God. How it must grieve the Son and grieve the Spirit that the church is fragmented and divisive and argumentative and fighting and warring and hassling. And how it must grieve him that we separate ourselves in our own minds into cliques and groups and segments that accept and reject certain others. How it must grieve the Spirit of God that we do not each man esteem others better than themselves. Each man looking on the things of others rather than the things of him self.

How it must grieve the Spirit of God that we do not have the mind of Christ who thought it not something to hold onto to be exalted, but gave it up to become a servant to those who were in need. You see it grieves God that we don't keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace as Paul says in the 4th Chapter of Ephesians and the 3rd verse. Because God has gone to a great, great endeavor to get the message of unity across and it's such a tough thing to make it a reality. Now the book of Ephesians is written to explain to us the body of Christ, how that we're all one in Jesus Christ and Paul belabors, belabors, belabors the point so that we might understand it.

Listen, we are all one and it doesn't just mean that we all belong to the same church. It doesn't mean that at all. You can't say well, I'm certainly not fighting anything in the church. I'm sitting around doing nothing to disturb things. I'm not hassling the unity. Well, as well as a negative, there's a positive element. You could not be destroying unity, but you could also not be contributing to it. And I would venture to say that most Christians are in that category. They're not really fighting the unity of the

church, they're just not helping it. You say, well, what do I do? I'll carry a little poster. I'll wear a sandwich board that says I'm for unity. I'll sign the petition. What do you mean?

Well, here's the point. The way to stimulate unity in the church is by a faithful ministry of your gifts to the other members. The way to stimulate unity in the church is by getting involved so that what you are in the Spirit of God and what you are by the saving grace of Jesus Christ can make a contribution to what somebody else needs. You see the unity of the church is not kept by being silent about things you disagree with. The unity of the church is not kept by not making trouble, it's kept by making a concerted effort to build the body of Christ into oneness. And that's the thing that the apostle Paul is after.

So we must be committed to unity because Paul was so committed to it. The book of Ephesians is all about the body, Jew and Gentile, one in Jesus Christ. The first three chapters, the position of the believer in the body. Chapters 4-6, the practice of the believer in the body. Now as we've already begun to study the theology of it in the first three chapters, and by the way, this is theology. It really is, this is just good basic theology, study. I know it's not real entertaining. It's just diligent study that we're asking for, but you know, it's so necessary. I really believe that.

I heard a minister say the other day on the radio, he said there's a movement in Christianity that I'm really sick of. He said, it's this Bible study movement. This is right. Bible study, Bible study, Bible study, Bible study, Bible study and they're never going to do anything. Now listen, I'd hate to see what you'd do if you did it without the Scriptures. I'd hate to see what you'd do if you did it without the authority of the word of God. If you did it without the principles of the word of God. If you did it without the direction of the word of God and if you did it without a mind that was renewed because you had diligently studied the word of God.

The word of God is the basis. Now I really believe this. And you say well, you go to that MacArthur and he gives you all that theology stuff and it doesn't tell very interesting stories. Well, I've got some interesting stories, see me later, I'll tell them to you. Some of them are about you. But you know something, I believe that what'll happen now if you'll commit yourself to study the word of God with us, if you'll just absorb it from the pages of the word of God, if you'll commit yourself to that, do you know what will happen? The Spirit of God will use this information to renew your mind and all of a sudden you'll wake up one day and realize your life is different because you've been reprogrammed. You're like a computer, GIGO, garbage in, garbage out.

Whatever stuff is in the computer is what's coming out when you punch the buttons and it's true in your life. And you know what? As you just sit yourself down and you absorb the principles of theology, the great divine truths in the word of God, they begin to capture your thinking. And then when you start to sin, they act as a barrier. And then when you start to do something they act...that is right, they act as a motivator. See? It's these principles that God is putting into your thinking that are going to make a difference in your life. And if all we ever did was exhort you to do things in your life without giving you principles that reprogrammed your thinking, you'd be totally dependent on me to tell you what to do.

But if you learn the principles of the word of God, they program your mind so that you don't need me, you can do it on your own. And that's the idea. The idea is to take Christians in the nest, feed them until they get big enough to fly all alone. So having justified the theology I'm going to give you this morning, I'm now going to proceed to do that. Now remember, we're studying the mystery of the

body. In Chapter 1, we studied the origin of the body formed in eternity. In Chapter 1, also we studied the resources of the body all that we have in Christ.

In Chapter 2, we studied the entrance to the body, how that we are made alive in Jesus Christ and we enter His body. We studied also in Chapter 2 the unity of the body. How that we are one household and one family and one temple and one habitation of the Spirit and one new man, whether we're Jew or Gentile. We've been learning all about this incredible mystery that we're one in Jesus Christ. That all the barriers are down. All the things that separate us are down. Everything is down and we're all one.

Now Paul is about to pray in Chapter 3. And you know what his prayer's about? He's going to pray, oh God I pray that they'll understand this stuff. Such great truth, so life changing, so revolutionary in the world. If it could just have all these Christians in perfect harmony and they'd rub out all their old animosities and all their old hatreds and all their prejudices and all their separatistic feelings. Lord, it would be so great and so he wants to pray for them. He wants to bow his knee and really pray that they'll understand it. But before he gets into his prayer, he stops and says I don't think I better pray yet. I think maybe you don't quite understand it, so I'm going to give a few more verses so you'll understand it before I pray for you.

And that's what we have in Chapter 3. Paul launches into a prayer and just gets started and stops and go back to cover more of the truth of the mystery of the body. And in this chapter he gives us real details so that we ought to have a great understanding of it by the time we get down to verse 13. Now for our study we're going to look at verses 1-14 as a unit. And we're not going to get all through them today. In fact, we'll probably just cover down through verse 4. And the next few weeks we'll get the rest of it all put together. But I want you to look at this passage as Paul talks about the mystery of the church. And I want you to see the prisoner of the mystery, the planning of the mystery, the preaching of the mystery, the purposes of the mystery and the privileges of the mystery.

And we're going to see those five points in time to come. For this morning we're going to look just at the first, the prisoner of the mystery, because it's such a tremendous point as we look at the first four verses. Let's read verse 1 as a start. "For this cause," what cause Paul? The fact that verse 15 says you are one new man. That verse 16 says of Chapter 2, you are one body. That verse 17 says you who are far off are now made near. That verse 18 says we both have access by one Spirit. That verse 19 says we are fellow citizens and of the household of God. That 20 says we are built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles. That 21 says we are a building that grows to a holy temple of the Lord. That 22 says we are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

In other words, he says the fact that we are one building, built on one foundation, one household, one kingdom, one Spirit in us, one body, one new man. In other words, because of our unity, that's what he's saying. For the reason of our unity I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles. You say now wait a minute. What? What, what, what? Well, there's no verb there. There's no verb in the first verse. What Paul? For this cause you what?

Well, the sentence is continued in verse 14. Huh? Yes, the verb of verse 1 is in verse 14. "For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles," then he goes to verse 14. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen, the implied verb is I pray for you. You say well, what's going on here? What's all the verses in the middle? Oh, that's a parenthesis. You say a parenthesis? Yes, he starts out to pray and he says, for you Gentiles, oh wait

a minute. I can't pray yet. I want to bow my knee, verse 14, talking about prayer. I want to bow my knee and he picks up the same phrase for this cause to let you know that's where he connects up again. I want to pray for you, but I'm not sure I can pray for you yet, because I'm not sure you understand this.

You see his prayer's going to be Oh, God I pray those people will work this truth out. I pray that this truth will change their life. But he stops and says I'm not sure you understand the truth yet. So verses 2-13 is a parenthesis. And in that parenthesis, he goes back over this whole mystery again. You say but he just did it Chapter 2. That's right, and now he's going to do it again in Chapter 3. You say well, why does he repeat himself? Because that's the way you learn. Isaiah said you learn line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little there a little. That's the way...that's the way I learned. I learned great truths that way. I learned the truth I will not talk in class, because I repeated it over and over again, 500 times on a page of paper. You may have learned the same truth the same way.

We learn by repetition, repetition, repetition. Somebody said to me recently, people say funny things to me. You'd think they wouldn't say this, but he said...this fellow says to me, "I don't listen to your tapes because you repeat yourself too much." You know, and a few weeks ago, a lady came to me in the front of the congregation and she says, "I'm just visiting from the east," and she said, "I just thought that the Lord wanted me to tell you something." And I said, "well, that's wonderful. What did the Lord want you to tell me." And she said, "The Lord just really spoke to my heart that I should tell you that there's a great truth about preaching, stand up, speak up, and shut up." I said, "well, thank you very much." She said, "You know," she said, "you just go on and on and on about the same stuff." I said, "well, I appreciate very much what you said." And she said, "and then I'd like to give you one of my poems." My first reaction was to say good, I'll make a glider out of it, you know, but I didn't say that. I felt...I felt maybe the Lord was giving me an opportunity to give her a little of her own medicine. Anyway, I resisted that and graciously took the poem and even read it. It wasn't a very good poem.

Anyway, the apostle Paul wanted to pray for this people, but he didn't want to pray for them yet, because he was going to pray for an application and he wasn't sure they had enough information to make an application. Do you understand that? You see, it's a basic point in spiritual life. You can't apply what you don't comprehend. That's why Romans 12:2 says, "That your mind has to be renewed." You've got to know it and then live it and so he's going to go over it again so that we'll understand it and that's why I'm saying to you people that if you'll come and be exposed to the principles, then the activities will take care of themselves.

Now let's see what he says here in verse 1. He introduces for us the prisoner of the mystery. Going to talk about the mystery and he introduces himself as the key to it, the prisoner. "For this cause, I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." Now he introduces himself. Now watch this, this is so beautiful. "I, Paul," you know, you can't be a Christian very long without falling in love with Paul right? I mean, let's face it, we're indebted to at least 13 books of the New Testament ascribed to him. He wrote at least 13 of the New Testament books. There are 27, he wrote 13 of them. And some people think he wrote the book of Hebrews, that would be 14. But here is a man who has made an incredible contribution and he is the one that God has used more than anybody else to delineate the mysteries. To open up the mysteries. He is the apostle of the mystery. Here he calls himself the prisoner of Jesus Christ. This is a fantastic thing because when Paul wrote Ephesians he was in prison.

Now it was a modified prison in a sense, because it was a prison in his own house, but he had rented a house in Rome, he was a prisoner there and he was chained to a Roman soldier. No less a prisoner than if he'd been a jail, except he was able to be in a different location. He was still chained to a Roman soldier. He was a prisoner. And I want you to notice something very interesting. The man was a prisoner, now this fabulous, he was a prisoner because of this very truth. He was a prisoner because of the very mystery he was preaching. You know what got him into prison? The fact that he preached the Jews and Gentiles were one in Christ. That's what made him a prisoner. He was literally the prisoner of this mystery. By the time he wrote Ephesians, do you know how long he had been a prisoner? Five years. Five years, two of it in Caesarea, then a transportation part where he was going to Rome, the rest of it in Rome. He's been a prisoner for about five years.

And you know what got him into all this mess? Let me tell you the story? Paul used to be named Saul. Saul was born in Tarsus. Saul was a very educated man. He studied under the Rabbi Gamaliel who was maybe the most eminent teacher of his time and he knew Judaism upside down, inside out, backwards, and forwards. He was one committed, devout, pro Jewish, Zionist, nationalistic, legalist. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees and he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel. This guy was a zealous Jew. And he saw Christianity coming along and he thought Christianity was a threat to truth. That Jesus Christ was a phony. And he decided that it was going to be his calling to make sure he put an end to Christianity. He started to breathe threatening and slaughter against Christianity. He was there when Stephen was stoned and they laid their coats when they threw the rocks and crushed Stephen's body. They put the coats at the feet of a man named Saul of Tarsus.

He persecuted Christians. He slaughtered Christians. This was his life. So he was really pro the party line. Then all of a sudden an amazing thing happened. He got converted on the Damascus Road and he was put into the ministry. He got right up out of that situation, began to preach Jesus Christ as the Messiah. He began to preach that everybody could get saved, Jew and Gentile, whoever wanted to. He began to preach that the law had been set aside in Jesus Christ in terms of it's ceremonial areas. He began to preach that it was a new day. That Jew and Gentile were one and that circumcision didn't matter any more. That the only thing that matter was that your heart was right. And he began to preach that you didn't have to keep all the ceremonies of Moses anymore, but that you were free in Christ and you'd been liberated from the yoke of bondage and you should never get tied up with all that stuff again. It was all over. The era of the Judaistic ceremonies was gone.

And he began to preach that. And you know what happened? Lots of Jewish people got really upset, really upset. And then he started out as a pastor. And you know where he pastored in the beginning of his ministry? He pastored in a city called Antioch. And he was one of five wonderful men who pastored there and it was church made up of Jew and Gentile. And the people down in Jerusalem who were Christians even always kind of wondered about the guy. That he would be a pastor of a church that had Gentiles in it. Kind of like being in the south and being pastor of a church that had black people in it. They just didn't see that as the way it ought to be. And it was even worse then than we would think of in that situation today, because they didn't even believe that a Gentile could get saved unless he became a proselyte to Judaism, got circumcised and kept all the ceremonial law of Moses.

And here was the apostle Paul who was up there and he'd become a pastor of a church that was mixed of Jew and Gentile. And then you know what happened? The Lord called him out of the thing.

The Holy Spirit came and said you and Barnabas, you come out and leave the work to the rest of the guys that are here. I want you to go to the Gentile world and I want you to found churches everywhere you go. And he went and founded churches all over the Gentile world. And in every city where he founded a church, they were made up of Jew and Gentile, one in Christ. And he kept preaching it and then he wrote a book about it, Ephesians. And he wrote another book about, Colossians, and another book about it, Galatians. And then another book about it 1 Corinthians, and in all those books he kept saying they're one, they're one, they're one. Then he wrote a book called Romans in that he says it doesn't matter if you're a Jew and it doesn't matter if you're a Gentile. Christ is the only way of salvation.

And you know what? He got a reputation. He got a reputation about being somebody who was undermining and somebody who was letting Gentiles in scott free without having them circumcised first. And so boy he was really sitting on a powder keg. Well, he realized that if he was going to have anything to say to the people in Jerusalem, he was going to have to do something to make them like him, turn the tide a little. So what he did was all the time he was preaching in the Gentile world on his last missions tour, he was taking offerings not for himself. But he was collecting money from every congregation. Romans 15 describes it. Romans 15 tells about it, verses 25 and following. He was collecting all this money, and the purpose of it, this is what Romans says, "I now go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily and their debtors they are for if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things."

In other words, the Gentiles have benefited by the salvation that came through Israel and so the Gentiles want to return to the physical needs of Jerusalem. So he said, I've collected this. I've got all this together and I'm going to come and I'm going to bring it. Verse 31, "I want to be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted by the saints. I want to come unto with joy."

In other words, he says I want to bring this money and I want to come and solidify the unity of the church. I know there's this dichotomy, there's this bitterness between Jew and Gentile. Jerusalem is holding on to an only Jewish church and the rest of the world is Jewish and Gentile churches and I want them to understand the love of the Gentiles and the oneness, so I'm bringing this money. He also, incidentally brought Gentile believers with him too. So he arrives. He's got all this money for the poor saints given by the love of the Gentiles. And he's got the Gentile saints with him to show them how God has saved them.

What happened is recorded in the 21st Chapter of Acts. Turn in your Bible and let's look and see what happened. Acts Chapter 21 tells us what happened. He arrived. He's got this money. He wants to solidify the Jew and the Gentile as one. He thinks maybe this love gift will help. And when he came with all the money, verse 17 of Acts 21 says, "And they came to Jerusalem and the brethren received us gladly." Apparently they said this wonderful Paul, the leaders of the church, this is no doubt the elders, they understood the truths, took the money, was great. "He went into James, the elders were present. And when he greeted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord."

He was telling them, hey Gentiles are getting saved. Gentiles all over the place are getting to be a part of the church. It's fantastic, and they all agreed. All the elders said that's wonderful and James

the brother of our Lord said that's wonderful. That's just wonderful. But the middle of verse 20, "You see brother," they said to Paul, "how many thousands of Jews there are who believe they're Christians in the church, but they are still all zealous of," what, "of the law." They're still legalists. They're still pro-Moses, pro-circumcision. They've never been able to make the break. "And they have been informed about you," verse 21, "that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses saying they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." They say you're going around preaching you don't need to circumcise and you don't need to keep the ceremonial law of Moses. Even if you're a Jew, you don't need to keep it anymore.

Well, you know something they were right. That was really true. You didn't need to keep the law. You didn't need to be circumcised to be saved. Paul did preach that. And so the elders say to him, you know, they're not going to welcome you in this town, because you're really adversary. We've got a good idea. Verse 23, there's four guys here, four of these Jewish men who are believers, but they're still doing the Jewish things. They've taken a vow, a seven day vow. You go to the temple and went through a whole process shaving your head and bowing to God and consecrating to God and all this kind of thing. And so they say, why don't you do it with them? Why don't you do a real Jewish thing? You know, I mean, do a real Jewish thing. And everybody will say oh, maybe he's not so anti-Jewish. Go to the temple, do this whole thing with them. So he did.

He went in there, verse 26, "purify himself with them, entered the temple," went through the whole deal, seven days later, verse 27. It was a long process. Whatever it was they did, maybe a Nazirite kind of a vow. Well, when it was almost ended, the Jews of Asia, when they saw him in the temple stirred up the people and they laid hands on him. The Jews who had come from Asia who were upset about what he'd done over there in Asia, among the Gentiles. They cried out "men of Israel, help. This is a man that teaches all men everywhere against the people and the law and this place, the temple. And he brought Greeks into the temple and polluted the holy place."

Listen, Paul didn't do that. He didn't bring a Greek in there. You couldn't bring a Greek, remember, pass the court of the Gentiles. Or it was a desecration and they'd kill them on the spot. He hadn't done that. But verse 29, "They had seen him with Trophimus an Ephesian." One of the guys he brought back with the offering. So they made up a lie that he brought him into the temple. So you see, they got really mad. They laid hands on him. The people came together. There was a mob riot. They drew him out of the temple, slammed the door shut. They were about to kill him. And verse 31, the chief captain of the band of Jerusalem was in an uproar came, settled the thing for a little bit, at least give the guy a chance to defend himself.

Now you see what got him into trouble? What got him into trouble was preaching the mystery that Jew and Gentile are what? Are one. That's what got him into trouble. And that the designations of Israel, uniqueness of Israel, special place of Israel, custom ceremonies, laws, and all those external things, not the internal law of God, all the external customs and things, they were done away with. It was a new age, a new thing. The church, Jew and Gentile are one in Christ. That's what got him into trouble and he became a prisoner.

Well, he had to give a speech of his defense. In Chapter 22, you know what he did? This is incredible. Here's his speech. Verse 17, Chapter 22, this is the end of it. "And it came to pass that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance and I saw him saying unto me make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me." Now he's just given them his story about the Damascus Road. See

they're saying to him, Paul why are you going around preaching this? Why are you preaching against the law and the people and the testimony and the temple?

And he says, first of all, well, you know, I was real pro-law and pro-temple and pro all this stuff and I was on my way to Damascus and all of a sudden, I hit the dirt and came up and I'd been put in the ministry and God told me what to preach and I'm just preaching what God told me. And then he says in verse 17, "And then I came to Jerusalem and I was in a trance and the Lord came again to me. And He says you better get out of here in a hurry for they're not going to listen to what you hear." And I said Lord, "they know that I am prisoned and beat in every synagogue. Those that believed on thee. And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was standing by and consenting to his death and kept the raiment of them that slew him. They know my love Judaism. They know what I used to stand for. They knew I used to hold those things." And he said unto me, "depart for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles." And boy I'm telling you when he said that the lid blew off the teapot.

What he was saying was the reason I'm preaching this message is because God told me to take it to the Gentiles and God told me you wouldn't accept me. And now that he's dragged God in it they are really furious. Now he tells them, well, this message is from God. Oh man...a riot, verse 22. "They listen to him until this word and then they lifted up their voices and said away with such a fellow from the earth, it's not fit that he should live." And they got so panicky, they cried out and cast their clothes off and threw dust in the air. Now that's panicky. They started ripping their clothes off and throwing dirt.

Boy they were in a frenzy. What do you mean God told you to do this? God is Jewish. God would never tell you to do that. See they...he...they were incensed. Well, the result of this was he spent five years until the time of the writing Ephesians, five years he's still a prisoner. By this time he's in Rome and he's waiting for his prosecutors to come with their malicious charges against him. But you see the reason the guy was a prisoner was because of the very mystery of Jew and Gentile, one in Christ. That's the thing they couldn't accept. And in Rome, you say what did that have to do with Rome? They kept him as a prisoner in Rome waiting for the prosecutors from Jerusalem to come. He was a prisoner of the mystery. The very thing that he preached made him captive. Now listen to me, this man believed in the unity of the church. He believed it because Christ told him to preach it.

And even if it cost him his life, he would preach it. And even if he was a prisoner for five years, he would preach it. Nothing could take it away. And if you didn't understand it, he'd repeat it. So you understood it. And he would pray that you would understand it. You see? In Chapter 2, he gives you the mystery. In Chapter 3, he starts to pray for you that you'll understand it, but before he prays for you, he says I better give it again, it's so important. And he's willing even to become a prisoner for the rest of his life if need be in order to get this truth across. Beloved, I would say this to you. If this man is this concerned that we understand this truth, then we ought to be equally as concerned that we live up to it.

What a passionate man he was. Prisoner of Jesus Christ. Look what he says in Ephesians 3:1, "For you Gentiles," it's for you that I've done this. It's like Jesus on the cross. He didn't die for Himself. He didn't need it. Paul didn't get into trouble for himself. He didn't need that kind of trouble. But he did it for the Gentiles. You know something interesting about this? What's interesting is what it doesn't say. It doesn't say I Paul the prisoner of Rome. Paul never thought of himself as a prisoner of Rome. He always thought of himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Rome couldn't lay a hand on him. He was a

prisoner who belonged to Jesus Christ. He was one who wasn't Caesar's captive. He was Christ's captive.

Beloved, let me hasten to add a thought here. Perspective is everything in life. It's how you view it that matters, the point of view. When something comes into your life, how you view it is the issue. Like somebody has well sad, it isn't the circumstance, it's how you react to it. That's true. The apostle Paul is a prisoner, but instead of being melancholy, instead of being disheartened, instead of being discouraged, he just said I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ. This is just another step in my service to Jesus Christ. He was the initiator of the jail ministries.

He knew Christ wanted him there. He took it as that from Christ. Listen, he had served Christ with a clear conscience. He had preached the mystery that God had given him to preach. He couldn't do a thing about the reaction. If he was a prisoner, then he was a prisoner because he'd been faithful to Christ, therefore Christ had them there. He was a prisoner of Jesus Christ, not of Rome. And by the way, if Christ didn't want them there, Rome couldn't have held him. Perspective, that's why you should count it all joy when you fall into diverse trial. The trying of your faith works it's patience and patience will have a perfect work.

That's why you should count it a joy when you're persecuted because when you're persecuted for righteousness sake, the grace and glory of God rests on you. He says, hey it's my point of view. Being a prisoner's great. You know what's happened in Philippians 1? He says, since I've been a prisoner, it's wonderful. Everybody's gotten more bold, because they realize that even if you become a prisoner, you can still preach to all the people around the prison.

And since I've been a prisoner, he says, I've been leading Caesar's household to Christ. You know, since he was a prisoner, it made everybody more bold Philippians 1 says. And he said, it's all for you Gentiles. What a man. It's all for you. He said, "If I be offered on the sacrifice of your faith, I rejoice." Philippians 2. Colossians 1 he says, look, he says, "I fill up in my body the afflictions of Christ for you." In 2 Corinthians he says, "I bear in my body everyday the dying of Jesus Christ for you." I mean, I go through all this stuff for you Gentile to get the gospel to you to get you saved and it's all right because it's what Christ wants me to do and I am His prisoner.

These are not the chains of Rome, these are the chains of Christ. There's only one way to look at the ministry beloved, that's it. There's only one way to look at it. The apostle Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Christ. He didn't do anything to deserve the ministry. He didn't get himself into this thing. God got him into it and what happened to him happened to him because of Christ. You know in my own life, not to the degree that Paul, but Paul knew it, but to a lesser degree there are things that come into my life that are causes of grief and sadness and pain and anxiety, disappointment, discouragement, heartache, some suffering. And you know, you can get all woeful. Oh woe is me. You can sort of slink into the corner make everybody feel real sorry for you. Try to intimidate people into sympathy. Or you can just say well, I'm the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. If I'm free, I'm free. And if I'm a prisoner, I'm a prisoner

If there's goodness and grace and wonder and happiness and joy that's good. And if there's sorrow and sadness and disappointment and mistreatment and all of that, that's okay too, because I'm His prisoner and these are His chains and wherever they are that's okay, because that's the place He put me. That's the only way to look at the ministry. It's all in your point of view. It's all in your point of view. Paul says I'm not the prisoner of Rome. I'm the prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at verse 2 quickly. He says, "If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me towards you," now this is really where the sentence begins, the parenthesis. "If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me towards you how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery." Stop right there. He says, you know, I just want you people to know that this isn't my idea. This is God's. You see, you've already heard. And by the way, if you have already heard is a statement that says you have. It is a first class condition in the Greek, which means I am sure you've already heard of the dispensation of the grace of God given to me that by the revelation of God the mystery as made known.

In other words, you know you've already heard that I'm doing what I'm doing because God called me to do it. This is a dispensation of the grace of God. What he's trying to say is look if you're upset about this thing, don't tell me. Call up heaven. This is not my information. I'm simply passing it on. I'm just a steward. The word dispensation is a great word. The dispensation of the grace of God. It was...he was given a stewardship by God's grace. Listen, anybody in the ministry is there by grace. God doesn't look around and say oh well, let's see. Who has the best qualifications? Oh there he is, Saul of Tarsus. He has the best qualifications to be my minister. Huh? Impossible. He's a persecutor of Christians. It was by grace. God didn't look around and say oh let's see who has the best...John MacArthur, he has the best qualifications, I'll put him in the ministry. No, no God picks out His vessel and then makes that vessel into what He wants it to be.

It's all of grace. It's all a dispensation of God's grace. So Paul says, "I'm sure you have heard," first class condition, "of this special dispensation of the grace of God regarding my preaching to you the ministry." Now let me talk about dispensation, oikonomia. The word means stewardship. And a steward in a house was somebody who managed the house. In other words, he didn't own anything. He wasn't the house owner. He was the manager. He took everything that the house owner owned and he managed it. He managed the food so that there was enough to feed people, not too much, not too little so they have enough to work hard, but not so much they'd be glutinous. He took care of the crops. He took care of getting the workers in the right place. He literally ran the place. That's a steward. He doesn't own anything. He manages it for God.

And God graciously has given to Paul the right to manage. You know, that was a tough thing for Paul to handle really. In 1 Corinthians 9, he says, "don't glory about me." Don't pat me on the back. Don't commend me. Don't give me honorary degrees. Put my name on statues. Don't hail me as a great wondrous thing. Just do one thing. Would you pray for me? He said, I am not commended in the ministry because I did anything. He said I didn't do anything to deserve this. In fact, I was just going along doing my thing killing Christians and then God put me in the ministry and he said you're my minister like it or not buddy. And if you mess up, you're in a lot of trouble. "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." So he says don't...don't commend me, just pray for me. I didn't ask for this and now if I mess it up, I'm in a lot of trouble.

You know, that's the only way to approach the ministry. I look at the ministry and I say I don't Lord why I'm in here. And this not an easy thing. You stuck me in here and now I'm in a lot of trouble if I goof up. And you even said in James 3:1, "Stop being so many teachers for theirs is the greater condemnation." I didn't ask for this. But God has given it graciously out of his wondrous love. Paul said, "I was a made a minister." Verse 15 and 16 of Romans 15, he says, "I have written the more boldly because of the grace that is given to me of God that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles." It's all of God's grace.

1 Corinthians Chapter 3, verse 10, "According to the grace of God was given to me that I have laid a foundation." Galatians Chapter 2, verse 9 it says, "They gave to me the right hand of fellowship when they perceived the grace that was given to me." In 1 Timothy Chapter 1, "I thank Christ Jesus who put me in the ministry who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy and the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant and with faith and love." In other words, always it was a grace thing. God gave this to me. I didn't earn it. I didn't ask for it. And then it became a point of serious responsibility, a stewardship, a trust.

God has given to me a stewardship. God has given to me people. God has given to me the words of the pages of Scripture. And I have to take care of the people and feed them the word and that's my trust. And Paul had one too. The word dispensation means a management, a stewardship. Now by the way, we need to say more about it. We talk a lot about dispensations in the Bible and they're very important. God has used different men and different methods in different ages to manage His kingdom.

For example, originally God managed His kingdom through Adam. Right? He was righteous. Then when he sinned, God began to manage His kingdom in another way through great men here and there, patriarchs. Later, God managed His kingdom through Israel, the priests and the prophets and the kings. And then He managed His kingdom on earth through His son who was here. And now He manages His kingdom through the Spirit of God and the church. And some day He'll manage it when Jesus sits on the throne in Israel and the thousand year millennium and rules. And eternity will be managed uniquely. There are different stewardships, different ways God manages and these are what we call dispensations because that's the biblical word.

And by the way, nobody who studies the Bible can avoid the fact that that's true. Even Saint Augustine said, "distinguish the ages and the Scriptures harmonized." There's no other way. God has had different men, with different methods and different ages to administer for him. And here Paul says "And I am one of them unique to this age has God committed unto me a stewardship of His grace which is the stewardship of these mysteries which are received from the revelation of God to pass to you." And he's saying I must discharge this ministry with responsibility.

Paul always saw himself as a steward. In 1 Corinthians 4 he said, "Let a man so account of us as stewards of the mysteries of God." When it's all said and done, let them say of him, he was a faithful steward. Above all things, stewards are to be faithful he says in verse 2. "Let it be said of me I was a faithful steward." Listen, you know something? You are stewards here. God has committed unto you your mind, your heart, your physical skills. Your spiritual gifts, preaching, teaching, helps, administration, exhortation, the gift of giving, the gift of showing mercy. These are all spiritual gifts and every Christian has them and they are your stewardship. Are you a faithful person in distributing that stewardship to the rest of the family of God? Or do you live in isolation. Are you using your ministries? Are you using your gifts, your abilities? Are you responsible in the areas of fellowship, to care and to pray and to edify and exhort and to challenge each other and to reprove each other and to restore each other? Are you fulfilling these things? This is your stewardship. And that's why in 1 Peter Chapter 4 and verse 10, Peter says "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." God graciously has given you gifts. He wants them managed properly for the benefit of the unity of the body.

So Paul says you've heard about it. You've heard that this is a stewardship from God that's given me

for your sake and it came by revelation, verse 3. "He made known unto me this mystery." And then he adds this little footnote, "As I wrote before in a few words," and he's referring to Chapter 1, verses 9-12 where he introduced the mystery. "By which when you read, you may understand my knowledge and the mystery of Christ." Listen, he says, when you read that, Chapter 1, verses 9-12, and when you read this that I'm about to say you'll understand that my knowledge of this mystery is from God.

Paul says, I understand this. I've received it from God to pass it to you. "It was by revelation He made known unto me the mystery of Christ." Now I want to just pull one thought out and then I'll draw to a conclusion. You see Paul is pouring his heart out with this truth. He's saying this is so true people that the church is one, Jew and Gentile are one. Listen, it's so...God gave this message. This is not some human thing. This is God's message to us. God revealed it to me and I'm so concerned about it I introduced it in Chapter 1. I saw...I talked about it in Chapter 2 and now I'm giving you the details in Chapter 3 and then I'm going to pray that you'll understand it. And it's so important to me that I've spent my life communicating it. Even though it's meant riots here and riots there and prisons here and prisons there and beatings here and beatings there. This mystery is essential.

And I want you to know and understand my knowledge of it. And I want you to understand it, so that it can make a difference in your life. The word knowledge in verse 4, is the word sunesis. It's a wonderful word. He says, my purpose is to pass on my knowledge. And the word sunesis means mental comprehension, mental comprehension. And beloved, that always comes before spiritual application. You can't apply what you don't know. You've got to have a renewed mind. Incidentally, the opposite is asunesis, which means stupidity or foolishness and it is used in Romans 1:21, for example, "The foolish heart was darkened." The opposite of knowledge is ignorance, foolishness, stupidity. And Paul is saying, I understand this in my mind. You see, and when I understand it in my mind, my knowledge of this mystery is what affects my life. Where do you get your passion Paul? Where do you get your zeal to preach? Why are you so committed that you'd even die for this thing? Because I understand what it means in my mind. And that's the point I made at the very beginning, beloved. It is when we comprehend with our mind these great truths that they will affect the way we live and we can't just exhort people to live a certain way unless we give them things to understand.

And so we meet the prisoner of the mystery. A man who so believed in the unity of the church that he literally gave his life for it. First to understand it, then to pass on that understanding, and then to pray that we would implement that understanding. My challenge to you is his. Learn this truth. The church is one in Christ and then when you've learned it, we'll pray God that you'll understand it well enough to make it a part of your life. Let's pray.

Father, we realize that You want Your church united. Jesus prayed that we would be one. You designed that we be one. The Spirit has provided a bond of unity. Father, I pray that we would understand this great reality that all men are one in Christ, all who believe and that we would reach out to each other as Jack sang this morning to touch each other. That we would look humbly at each other as better than ourselves. That we would think it not something to hold on to to be exalted, but that we would become humble servants. That we would do everything we can to keep the bond of peace, the unity of the Spirit. Father, help us to be one here at Grace. Not just one because we don't disagree, but one because we reach out to each other to meet every need, because we love each other. We care for each other. We exhort each other. We encourage each other. We teach each other. We even rebuke and reprove each other if need be and then restore each other. Because we minister our gifts of helps and the gifts of giving and showing mercy and counseling and teaching and

preaching, caring. Make us one. Father even as Jesus prayed. Thank You for the example of this man who had this as such a passion in His heart. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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