

CHAPTER 3

This chapter consists of two parts.

I. Of the account which Paul gives the Ephesians concerning himself, as he was appointed by God to be the apostle of the Gentiles (v. 1-13).

II. Of his devout and affectionate prayer to God for the Ephesians (v. 14-21). We may observe it to have been very much the practice of this apostle to intermix, with his instructions and counsels, intercessions and prayers to God for those to whom he wrote, as knowing that all his instructions and teachings would be useless and vain, except God did co-operate with them, and render them effectual. This is an example that all the ministers of Christ should copy after, praying earnestly that the efficacious operations of the divine Spirit may attend their ministrations, and crown them with success.

~~408~~ EPHESIANS 3:1-13

PAUL'S APPOINTMENT AS AN APOSTLE

Here we have the account which Paul gives the Ephesians concerning himself, as he was appointed by God the apostle of the Gentiles.

I. We may observe that he acquaints them with the tribulations and sufferings which he endured in the discharge of that office, v. 1. The first clause refers to the preceding chapter, and may be understood either of these two ways:

1. *“For this cause,* for having preached the doctrine contained in the foregoing chapter, and for asserting that the great privileges of the gospel belong not only to the Jews, but to believing Gentiles also, though they are not circumcised, *for this I am now a prisoner, but a prisoner of Jesus Christ, as I suffer in his cause and for his sake, and continue his faithful servant and the object of his special protection and care, while I am thus suffering for him.”* Observe, Christ's servants, if they come to be prisoners, are his prisoners; and he despises not his prisoners. He thinks never the

worse of them for the bad character which the world gives them or the evil treatment that they met with in it. Paul adhered to Christ, and Christ owned him, when he was in prison. *For you, Gentiles*; the Jews persecuted and imprisoned him because he was the apostle of the Gentiles, and preached the gospel to them. We may learn hence that the faithful ministers of Christ are to dispense his sacred truths, however disagreeable they may be to some, and whatever they themselves may suffer for doing so. Or,

2. The words may be thus understood: "*For this cause, since you are no more strangers and foreigners* (as ⁴⁰²⁹Ephesians 2:19), but are united to Christ, and admitted into communion with his church, *I Paul, who am the prisoner of Jesus Christ*, pray that you may be enabled to act as becomes persons thus favoured by God, and made partakers of such privileges." To this purport you find him expressing himself in v. 14, where, after the digression contained in the several verses intervening, he proceeds with what he began in the first verse. Observe, Those who have received grace and signal favours from God stand in need of prayer, that they may improve and advance, and continue to act as becomes them. And, seeing Paul while he was a prisoner employed himself in such prayers to God in behalf of the Ephesians, we should learn that no particular sufferings of our own should make us so solicitous about ourselves as to neglect the cases of others in our supplications and addresses to God. He speaks again of his sufferings: *Wherefore I desire that you faint not at my tribulation for you, which is your glory*, v. 13. While he was in prison, he suffered much there; and, though it was upon their account that he suffered, yet he would not have them discouraged nor dismayed at this, seeing God had done such great things for them by his ministry. What a tender concern was here for these Ephesians! The apostle seems to have been more solicitous lest they should be discouraged and faint upon his tribulations than about what he himself endured; and, to prevent this, he tells them that his sufferings were their glory, and would be so far from being a real discouragement, if they duly considered the matter, that they ministered cause to them for glorying and for rejoicing, as this discovered the great esteem and regard which God bore to them, in that he not only sent his apostles to preach the gospel to them, but even to suffer for them, and to confirm the truths they delivered by the persecutions they underwent. Observe, Not only the faithful ministers of Christ themselves, but their

people too, have some special cause for joy and glorying, when they suffer for the sake of dispensing the gospel.

II. The apostle informs them of God's appointing him to the office, and eminently fitting and qualifying him for it, by a special revelation that he made unto him.

1. God appointed him to the office: *If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-ward*, v. 2. They could not have heard of this, and therefore he does not design to speak doubtfully of this matter. *Eige* is sometimes an affirmative particle, and we may read it, *Since you have heard*, etc. He styles the gospel *the grace of God* here (as in other places) because it is the gift of divine grace to sinful men; and all the gracious overtures that it makes, and the joyful tidings that it contains, proceed from the rich grace of God; and it is also the great instrument in the hands of the Spirit by which God works grace in the souls of men. He speaks of the dispensation of this grace given to him; he means as he was authorized and commissioned by God to dispense the doctrine of the gospel, which commission and authority were given to him chiefly for he service of the Gentiles: *to you-ward*. And again, speaking of the gospel, he says, *Whereof I was made a minister*, etc. v. 7 Here he again asserts his authority. He *was MADE a minister* he did not make himself such; he took not to himself that honour and he was made such *according to the gift of the grace of God unto him*. God supplied and furnished him for his work; and in the performance of it suitably assisted him with all needful gifts and graces, both ordinary and extraordinary, and that *by the effectual working of his power*, in himself more especially, and also in great numbers of those to whom he preached, by which means his labours among them were successful. Observe, What God calls men to he fits them for, and does it with an almighty power. An effectual working of divine power attends the gifts of divine grace.

2. As God appointed him to the office, so he eminently qualified him for it, by a special revelation that he made unto him. He makes mention both of the mystery that was revealed and of the revelation of it.

(1.) The mystery revealed is *that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the gospel* (v. 6); that is, that they should be joint-heirs with the believing Jews of the heavenly inheritance; and that they should be members of the same

mystical body, be received into the church of Christ, and be interested in the gospel-promises, as well as the Jews, and particularly in that great promise of the Spirit. And this *in Christ*, being united to Christ, *in whom all the promises are yea and amen; and by the gospel*, that is, in the times of the gospel, as some understand it; or, *by the gospel* preached to them, which is the great instrument and means by which God works faith in Christ, as others. This was the great truth revealed to the apostles, namely, that God would call the Gentiles to salvation by faith in Christ, and that without the works of the law.

(2.) Of the revelation of this truth he speaks, v. 35. Here we may observe that the coalition of Jews and Gentiles in the gospel church was a mystery, a great mystery, what was designed in the counsel of God before all worlds, but what could not be fully understood for many ages, till the accomplishment expounded the prophecies of it. It is called a mystery because the several circumstances and peculiarities of it (such as the time and manner and means by which it should be effected) were concealed and kept secret in God's own breast, till he an immediate *revelation he made them known* to his servant. See ~~Acts~~ Acts 26:16-18. And it is called the mystery of Christ because it was revealed by him (~~Galatians~~ Galatians 1:12), and because it relates so very much to him. Of this the apostle has given some hints *afore*, or a little before; that is, in the preceding chapters. *Whereby, when you read*; or, as those words may be read, *unto which attending* (and it is not enough for us barely to read the scriptures, unless we attend to them, and seriously consider and lay to heart what we read), *you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*; so as to perceive how God had fitted and qualified him to be an apostle to the Gentiles, which might be to them an evident token of his divine authority. *This mystery*, he says, *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* (v. 5); that is, "It was not so fully and clearly discovered in the ages before Christ as it is now revealed unto the prophets of this age, the prophets of the New Testament, who are immediately inspired and taught by the Spirit." Let us observe, that the conversion of the Gentile world to the faith of Christ was an adorable mystery, and we ought to bless God for it. Who would have imagined that those who had been so long in the dark, and at so great a distance, would be enlightened with the marvellous light, and be made nigh? Let us learn hence not to despair of the worst, of the worst of persons, and the worst of nations. Nothing is too hard for divine grace to

do: none so unworthy but God may please to confer great grace upon them. And how much are we ourselves interested in this affair; not only as we live in a time in which the mystery is revealed, but particularly as we are a part of the nations which in times past were foreigners and strangers, and lived in gross idolatry; but are now enlightened with the everlasting gospel, and partake of its promises!

III. The apostle informs them how he was employed in this office, and that with respect to the Gentiles, and to all men.

1. With respect to the Gentiles, he *preached* to them *the unsearchable riches of Christ*, v. 8. Observe, in this verse, how humbly he speaks of himself, and how highly he speaks of Jesus Christ.

(1.) How humbly he speaks of himself: *I am less than the least of all saints*. St. Paul, who was the chief of the apostles, calls himself *less than the least of all saints*: he means on account of his having been formerly a persecutor of the followers of Christ. He was, in his own esteem, as little as could be. What can be less than the least? To speak himself as little as could be, he speaks himself less than could be. Observe, Those whom God advances to honourable employments he humbles and makes low in their own eyes; and, where God gives grace to be humble, there he gives all other grace. You may also observe in what a different manner the apostle speaks of himself and of his office. While he magnifies his office, he debases himself. Observe, A faithful minister of Christ may be very humble, and think very meanly of himself, even when he thinks and speaks very highly and honourably of his sacred function.

(2.) How highly he speaks of Jesus Christ: *The unsearchable riches of Christ*. There is a mighty treasury of mercy, grace, and love, laid up in Christ Jesus, and that both for Jews and Gentiles. Or, the riches of the gospel are here spoken of as the riches of Christ: the riches which Christ purchased for, and bestows upon, all believers. And they are unsearchable riches, which we cannot find the bottom of, which human sagacity could never have discovered, and men could no otherwise attain to the knowledge of them but by revelation. Now it was the apostle's business and employment to *preach* these *unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles*: and it was a favour he greatly valued, and looked upon it as an unspeakable honour to him: “*Unto me is this grace given; this special favour God has granted to such an unworthy creature as I am.*” And it is an

unspeakable favour to the Gentile world that to them *the unsearchable riches of Christ* are preached. Though many remain poor, and are not enriched with these riches, yet it is a favour to have them preached among us, to have an offer of them made to us; and, if we are not enriched with them, it is our own fault.

2. With respect to all men, v. 9. His business and employment were to *make all men see* (to publish and make known to the whole world) *what is the fellowship of the mystery* (that the Gentiles who have hitherto been strangers to the church, shall be admitted into communion with it) *which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God* (kept secret in his purpose), *who created all things by Jesus Christ*: as ~~John~~ John 1:3, *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made*; and therefore no wonder that he saves the Gentiles as well as the Jews; for he is the common Creator of them both: and we may conclude that he is able to perform the work of their redemption, seeing he was able to accomplish the great work of creation. It is true that both the first creation, when God made all things out of nothing, and the new creation, whereby sinners are made new creatures by converting grace, are of God by Jesus Christ. The apostle adds, *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God*, v. 10. This was one thing, among others, which God had in his eye in revealing this mystery, that the good angels, who have a pre-eminence in governing the kingdoms and principalities of the world, and who are endued with great power to execute the will of God on this earth (though their ordinary residence is in heaven) may be informed, from what passes in the church and is done in and by it, *of the manifold wisdom of God*; that is, of the great variety with which God wisely dispenses things, or of his wisdom manifested in the many ways and methods he takes in ordering his church in the several ages of it, and especially in receiving the Gentiles into it. The holy angels, who look into the mystery of our redemption by Christ, could not but take notice of this branch of that mystery, that among the Gentiles is preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. And this is *according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*, v. 11. Some translate the words *kata prothesin ton aionon* thus *According to the fore-disposing of the ages which he made*, etc. So Dr. Whitby, etc. “In the first of the ages,” says this author, “his wisdom seeing fit to give the promise of a Saviour to a fallen Adam: in the second age to typify and represent him

to the Jews in sacred persons, rites, and sacrifices: and in the age of the Messiah, or the last age, to reveal him to the Jews, and preach him to the Gentiles.” Others understand it, according to our translation, of the eternal purpose which God purposed to execute in and through Jesus Christ, the whole of what he has done in the great affair of man's redemption being in pursuance of his eternal decree about that matter. The apostle, having mentioned our Lord Jesus Christ, subjoins concerning him, *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him* (v. 12); that is, “By (or through) whom we have liberty to open our minds freely to God, as to a Father, and a well-grounded persuasion of audience and of acceptance with him; and this by means of the faith we have in him, as our great Mediator and Advocate.” We may come with humble boldness to hear from God, knowing that the terror of the curse is done away; and we may expect to hear from him good words and comfortable. We may have access with confidence to speak to God, knowing that we have such a Mediator between God and us, and such an Advocate with the Father.

⌄ EPHESIANS 3:14-21

THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER

We now come to the second part of this chapter, which contains Paul's devout and affectionate prayer to God for his beloved Ephesians. *For this cause*. This may be referred either to the immediately foregoing verse, *That you faint not*, etc., or, rather, the apostle is here resuming what he began at the first verse, from which he digressed in those which are interposed. Observe,

I. To whom he praysto God, as *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, of which see ⌄ Ephesians 1:3.

II. His outward posture in prayer, which was humble and reverent: *I bow my knees*. Note, When we draw nigh to God, we should reverence him in our hearts, and express our reverence in the most suitable and becoming behaviour and gesture. Here, having mentioned Christ, he cannot pass without an honourable encomium of his love, v. 15. The universal church has a dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ: *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named*. The Jews were wont to boast of Abraham

as their father, but now Jews and Gentiles are both denominated from Christ (so some); while others understand it of the saints in heaven, who wear the crown of glory, and of saints on earth who are going on in the work of grace here. Both the one and the other make but one family, one household; and from him they are *named* CHRISTIANS, as they really are such, acknowledging their dependence upon, and their relation to, Christ.

III. What the apostle asks of God for these his friendsspiritual blessings, which are the best blessings, and the most earnestly to be sought and prayed for by every one of us, both for ourselves and for our friends.

1. Spiritual strength for the work and duty to which they were called, and in which they were employed: *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his grace, to be strengthened, etc. The inner man* is the heart or soul. To be *strengthened with might* is to be mightily strengthened, much more than they were at present; to be endued with a high degree of grace, and spiritual abilities for discharging duty, resisting temptations, enduring persecutions, etc. And the apostle prays that this may be *according to the riches of his glory*, or according to his glorious richesanswerable to that great abundance of grace, mercy, and power, which resides in God, and is his glory: and this by his Spirit, who is the immediate worker of grace in the souls of God's people. Observe from these things, That strength from the Spirit of God in the inner man is the best and most desirable strength, strength in the soul, the strength of faith and other graces, strength to serve God and to do our duty, and to persevere in our Christian course with vigour and with cheerfulness. And let us further observe that *as the work of grace is first begun so it is continued and carried on, by the blessed Spirit of God.*

2. The indwelling of Christ in their hearts, v. 17. Christ is said to dwell in his people, as he is always present with them by his gracious influences and operations. Observe, It is a desirable thing to have Christ dwell in our hearts; and if the law of Christ be written there, and the love of Christ be shed abroad there, then Christ dwells there. Christ is an inhabitant in the soul of every good Christian. Where his spirit dwells, there he swells; and he dwells in the heart by faith, by means of the continual exercise of faith upon him. Faith opens the door of the soul, to receive Christ; faith admits him, and submits to him. By faith we are united to Christ, and have an interest in him.

3. The fixing of pious and devout affections in the soul: *That you being rooted and grounded in love*, stedfastly fixed in your love to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to all the saints, the beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many have some love to God and to his servants, but it is a flash, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, it makes a great noise, but is gone presently. We should earnestly desire that good affections may be fixed in us, that we may be *rooted and grounded in love*. Some understand it of their being settled and established in the sense of God's love to them, which would inspire them with greater ardours of holy love to him, and to one another. And how very desirable is it to have a settled fixed sense of the love of God and Christ to our souls, so as to be able to say with the apostle at all times, *He has loved me!* Now the best way to attain this is to be careful that we maintain a constant love to God in our souls; this will be the evidence of the love of God to us. *We love him, because he first loved us.* In order to this he prays,

4. For their experimental acquaintance with the love of Jesus Christ. The more intimate acquaintance we have with Christ's love to us, the more our love will be drawn out to him, and to those who are his, for his sake: *That you may be able to comprehend with all saints*, etc. (v. 18, 19); that is, more clearly to understand, and firmly to believe, the wonderful love of Christ to his, which the saints do understand and believe in some measure, and shall understand more hereafter. Christians should not aim to comprehend above all saints; but be content that God deals with them as he uses to do with those who love and fear his name: we should desire to comprehend *with all saints*, to have so much knowledge as the saints are allowed to have in this world. We should be ambitious of coming up with *the first three*; but not of going beyond what is the measure of the stature of other saints. It is observable how magnificently the apostle speaks of the love of Christ. The dimensions of redeeming love are admirable: *The breadth, and length, and depth, and height*. By enumerating these dimensions, the apostle designs to signify the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, the unsearchable riches of his love, which is *higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea*, <SID> Job 11:8, 9. Some describe the particulars thus: By the breadth of it we may understand the extent of it to all ages, nations, and ranks of men; by the length of it, its continuance from everlasting to everlasting; by the depth of it, its stooping to the lowest condition, with a design to relieve and save those who have sunk into the depths of sin and misery; by its

height, its entitling and raising us up to the heavenly happiness and glory. We should desire to comprehend this love: it is the character of all the saints that they do so; for they all have a complacency and a confidence in the love of Christ: *And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge*, v. 19. If it passeth knowledge, how can we know it? We must pray and endeavour to know something, and should still covet and strive to know more and more of it, though, after the best endeavours, none can fully comprehend it: in its full extent it surpasses knowledge. Though the love of Christ may be better perceived and known by Christians than it generally is, yet it cannot be fully understood on this side heaven.

5. He prays that they may *be filled with all the fulness of God*. It is a high expression: we should not dare to use it if we did not find it in the scriptures. It is like those other expressions, of being *partakers of a divine nature*, and of being *perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect*. We are not to understand it of his fulness as God in himself, but of his fulness as a God in covenant with us, as a God to his people: such a fulness as God is ready to bestow, who is willing to fill them all to the utmost of their capacity, and that with all those gifts and graces which he sees they need. Those who receive grace for grace from Christ's fulness may be said to be *filled with the fulness of God*, according to their capacity, all which is in order to their arriving at the highest degree of the knowledge and enjoyment of God, and an entire conformity to him.

The apostle closes the chapter with a doxology, v. 20, 21. It is proper to conclude our prayers with praises. Our blessed Saviour has taught us to do so. Take notice how he describes God, and how he ascribes glory to him. He describes him as a God that *is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*. There is an inexhaustible fulness of grace and mercy in God, which the prayers of all the saints can never draw dry. Whatever we may ask, or think to ask, still God is still able to do more, abundantly more, exceedingly abundantly more. Open thy mouth ever so wide, still he hath wherewithal to fill it. Note, In our applications to God we should encourage our faith by a consideration of his all-sufficiency and almighty power. *According to the power which worketh in us*. As if he had said, We have already had a proof of this power of God, in what he hath wrought in us and done for us, having quickened us by his grace, and converted us to himself. The power that still worketh for the saints is according to that power that hath wrought in them. Wherever God gives of his fulness he gives to experience his power. Having thus described God,

he ascribes glory to him. When we come to ask for grace from God, we ought to give glory to God. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus. In ascribing glory to God, we ascribe all excellences and perfections to him, glory being the effulgency and result of them all. Observe, The seat of God's praises is in the church. That little rent of praise which God receives from this world is from the church, a sacred society constituted for the glory of God, every particular member of which, both Jew and Gentile, concurs in this work of praising God. The Mediator of these praises is Jesus Christ. All God's gifts come from his to us through the hand of Christ; and all our praises pass from us to him through the same hand. And God should and will be praised thus *throughout all ages, world without end*; for he will ever have a church to praise him, and he will ever have his tribute of praise from his church. *Amen*. So be it; and so it will certainly be.