

# Love Letters

## Lesson 7: Ephesians 3

If you're an avid reader or moviegoer, you probably appreciate a mystery: a good "whodunit." Ephesians 3 is devoted completely to the word *mystery*, but not the kind you might imagine. In the biblical sense, the word *mystery* is not a reference to something that is perplexing or puzzling. Paul devotes 21 verses to the Greek word *musterion*, referring to something which was previously unknown but has been divinely revealed through the Holy Spirit. In this case the mystery is that Gentiles are fellow-partakers, fellow-heirs with the Jews of the promises of God. In Colossians 1:26, Paul speaks of it as "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."

How is it possible to not only understand but also possess the reality of this marvelous truth? The key that unlocks the mystery is found in Paul's prayer here in chapter 3: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (verses 17–19 NKJV). To this end we can add a hearty "Amen" as we ponder the fact that in everything life presents us, God promises we will be able to rise up and become more than conquerors through Him.

### Day One: God's Sacred Secret

By the time Paul sat down to write his epistle to the Ephesians, he'd been a Christian for nearly 30 years. He had worked tirelessly to establish churches throughout the Mediterranean, spanning three missionary journeys. If anyone had a working knowledge of their salvation and their mission, it was Paul; yet he wrote as being nothing apart from Christ.

Most often it is in looking back that we gain perspective. Living "in the moment" can be distracting, causing us to dismiss the lesson or purpose God has for us. But in quiet reflection we see things clearly, often for the first time. Paul now has a message he wants to convey to believers about heavenly things that can only be spiritually discerned. He is relying on the Holy Spirit to drive home transforming truths to these believers. Ask God today to pull back the veil and allow you to comprehend His divine mystery involving the church and your part in it!

*We have not merely been saved that we might escape hell; we have been saved in order that God might present a people which will astonish the whole world.*

(Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones)

*Selah ~*

Take a moment to go back and reread Lesson 6: Ephesians 1–2, for your review. In your own words, briefly recap from these chapters what you have learned so far about . . .

- a. *Your adoption as a child of God*
  
- b. *Your spiritual inheritance*
  
- c. *Your God-ordained purpose in life*
  
- d. *Your place in God's holy temple*
  
- e. *Your understanding of what it means to be God's dwelling*

*Memory verse:* Ephesians 3:16 NIV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*

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## Day Two: The Mystery of Christ Revealed

Paul's preface "for this reason" in verse 1, refers back to everything he earlier stated in 2:11–22, that we were once aliens, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God, but now have been brought near by the blood of Christ, who is our peace and the Cornerstone of our faith. This indeed is God's plan for the ages!

1. Paul is a self-professed prisoner but not of Rome; by whose will is he captive (verse 1)?

In verses 2–13, Paul launches into a parenthetical statement that prefaces his prayer for all believers begun in verse 1 and picked up again in verse 14 ("For this reason . . ."). For just a moment he digresses from his point about prayer in order to explain the fullness of God's mystery. (It would be helpful for you to read verses 2–13 in more than one translation to grasp the meaning of Paul's words.)

The *dispensation* or *administration* (NIV) of God's grace (verse 2) refers to the unique stewardship and authority that Paul was given to explain God's marvelous truth.

2. For whose benefit was the mystery made known to Paul (verses 2–4)? (Paul is not referring to a different letter in verse 3, but rather his earlier comments in this one.)
  - a. What is Paul's point in disclosing the mystery to his readers (verse 4)?
3. To whom besides Paul did God reveal this mystery? How? (See verse 5.)

The unity of the believers Paul speaks about in these verses takes place through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. How does Paul state his responsibility and enabling of this God-given trust in verse 7?

### *Selah* ~

Paul became a minister or servant—*diakonos*—one under orders from his master. He knew he was called, appointed, and enabled by God to carry out his mission. Take a moment to look up Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 1:1, and 2 Timothy 1:8. Think about it: as God's chosen minister of the gospel, how did Paul see himself? What bearing would his perspective of his calling have on his motive for service?

- Personally speaking, can *you* identify with Paul's self-described titles as relating to *your* own service? Please explain.

### Day Three:                      The Purpose of the Mystery

Paul recognized that he did not deserve, nor did he possess, the qualifications for the mission God called him to fulfill. He didn't have the proper resume or criteria; his only part was his obedience to God's call.

1. How did Paul describe himself? His purpose? (Verses 8–9)

Think about it: Paul was asked to do more than explain the mystery; he had to play his own part in reaching across the aisle to demonstrate to both Jew and Gentile that they were now part of one body in Christ! Until this point in time, God had kept both the mystery—reaching back to the time of creation—and the implementation of it to Himself (verse 9).

2. To whom did God wish to reveal His plan of the ages through believers (verse 10)?

Why at this particular time was the mystery revealed? Only God knows—He decided that the time was right for people on earth and rulers and authorities in heaven to know His wisdom. But even the very principalities and powers who had tried to thwart God's plan of redemption greatly underestimated the manifold wisdom of the Creator! The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ upon the cross made possible the forgiveness of sins, crushing the power of Satan, and releasing all who were once held captive at his will but who now are set free! God chose the church as His perpetual witness to the spiritual realm of His magnificent power and grace in His eternal purpose.

3. Aren't you astonished at the fact that God has chosen you to "show off" His glorious plan to the heavenly realm? Please share your thoughts.

4. As the result of what Jesus Christ did on your behalf, you can now come directly to the throne of God (verse 12). What call to action do the following verses reveal?

- a. Hebrews 4:16

- b. Hebrews 10:19–23

With the focus on prayer, Paul encourages all believers not to lose hope or give up in the face of his suffering (verse 13) because it helped to further God's plan for the church. Paul hoped that through his trial those who read his letter would come to know and experience the salvation of God for themselves.

*Selah ~*

Think of some of the ways the church—the body of Christ—lets the world see God’s plan of salvation accomplished and in action then—and now?

## Day Four: The Appreciation of the Mystery

Paul now resumes his prayer for the realization of God’s power in the believers’ lives that he began in verse 1. In contrast to the custom of standing to pray, Paul states his posture in prayer as one of kneeling to the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 14). Put yourself in his sandals; pondering the reality of God’s mystery, as well as the responsibility of his own appointment, and the potential for all believers, his appropriate response was to kneel in humble adoration.

In verse 15, Paul speaks of God as the Creator of everything: *from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named*. He is the Father of everything visible and invisible and He is in complete control of all He has made. It is with these words Paul frames his prayer that follows.

Look closely at verses 16–19 as one flowing sentence in as many different translations as you can.

1. Where is the emphasis placed in the following?
  - a. Verse 16b
  - b. Verse 17a

Paul is not speaking here of saving faith; rather the faith that it takes to make Christ feel at home in your heart—making room for Him to abide and feel welcomed.

2. What is the foundation for realizing God’s power in your life? See verse 17b.  
What comes to mind when you think of your faith being *rooted* and *grounded in love*?

It takes the church—together in its unity and diversity—to know in a personal, intellectual, and emotional way the love of Christ, which is beyond our human capacity to comprehend!

3. An experiential knowledge of the love of Christ leads us to what end (verse 19)?

“The fullness of God” means simply that we are abundantly satisfied with Him: realizing Him through our prayers, being strengthened with His might, and making Him feel at home in our hearts. This leads Paul to an outburst of praise to God—a *doxology*.

4. Look closely at verses 20–21 before answering the following:
  - a. What do these verses tell you about God’s sovereignty in your life?
  - b. What do you learn about God’s power in your trial?

c. What is the purpose behind His power?

d. How will you praise Him today?

Day Five:

*In Touch with Jesus ~*

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

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2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

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3. *LIVE*: Determine to take the next step of obedience: what will it be?

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