

“Calling, Duty, and the Mission of the Church”

Ephesians 3:1-13

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Ephesians 3:1-13

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. 8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what [is] the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly [places], 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Chapter 3

3:1-2

There is a famous story of the days when Sir Christopher Wren was building St. Paul’s Cathedral. On one occasion he was making a tour of the work in progress. He came upon a man at work and asked him: “What are you doing?” The man said: “I am cutting this stone to a certain size and shape.” He came to a second man and asked him what he was doing. The man said: “I am earning so much money at my work.” He came to a third man at work and asked him what he was doing. The man paused for a moment, straightened himself and answered: “I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul’s Cathedral.”

God has a purpose and a calling for every believer in this life. Firstly, He desires to create a new man who will stand righteous before God his Creator...today and for eternity. This is called “positional sanctification.” Secondly, in order for that to truly happen, He seeks to make that new man into a mature person. One who will grow and mature throughout his days in a community of believers who will love Him, be loved and “seek first the kingdom of God.” This is “practical sanctification.” Chapter 3 deals with both of these issues; the first half dealing with the positional and the second half dealing with the practical.

Paul was a man who lived to serve Christ no matter the cost. We have no record of him climbing the corporate ladder of career, seeking a comfortable bank account, not even a house and family. While it would be



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presumptuous to hold Paul's life up as the quintessential example in all of its detail, we *can* gather that he took this Christian thing seriously. He clearly was a Christ servant.

Paul lived and breathed Christ and the kingdom. He was even willing to go to prison for the sake of Christ, for he did so on numerous occasions! Unlike many of us, such a 'willingness' was not merely big talk...as he was at the time of this writing actually in prison in Rome.

Anyone can say Jesus is first with them, but their lives speak the truth, and it does so louder than any words they might speak. Many of us will do whatever is necessary to block out that message. Often we will even seek a church that will avoid such perceived "pressure." Paul however, was a 'prisoner of Christ.' Meaning he understood clearly that anything and everything that happened in his life was sovereignly in God's control. What are you a prisoner of today? Because we're all a prisoner of something. We're all bound to something whether we acknowledge that fact or not.

Paul claimed that he had a special stewardship...a 'responsibility' to deliver and oversee God's grace to the world. After all, he didn't just do this "ministry thing" in his spare time or on the weekends. Everything that occurred in his life...every decision he made, revolved around one crucial point: "*how does this fit into Christ and the advancement of the kingdom?*"

Paul is here in this chapter really driving home the issue of the salvation of the Gentiles. Why? Well certainly a relationship with God as a non-Jew was a new and controversial revelation for everyone in that day, but there seemed to be even more than that here. It seemed Paul wanted to be sure that the salvation they *had* been given was not casually taken for granted, and possibly lost in the volume of cultural clamor. Perhaps we need to focus on Ephesians a little more since we tend to be victims of that same noise!

3:3-6

This "mystery" of God's salvation of all of us, was something that actually had to be communicated by God. Man never would have found it on his own. Heaven knows we looked! Some of us are *still* looking! Word of this redemption came to us as more than just an email. It actually had to be "demonstrated" for us to wholly realize it with all of its wonderful intrinsic ramifications and yes, it's innate costs.

For Paul, this 'mystery' came by 'revelation.' In other words, quite simply, "God told Him." Now over the years I have been in God's ministry, I have heard a lot of people claim that God told them something. But when we are effectively talking about a phone call from God, I think one should be incredibly cautious! God throughout scripture always took quick notice when someone said "*God told me...*" Because if He didn't, we're a liar. Liars about God! Not a good place to find yourself. Clearly there is never a good time to lie about anyone, but *that* lie can prove to be quite expensive! It often was for those in scripture who thought they could pull it off. Therefore we should never be cavalier about such a claim. If God *did* supernaturally communicate a great truth to someone, it *would* and *will be* manifested...*proven*, over the days, weeks and months that follow. Paul has had around 2000 years of scrutiny concerning **his** claims!

It's interesting that mankind has always been far more willing to **tell** people what God said to them personally than actually **live out** what He theoretically told them... not to mention all the stuff He *already told all of us!* Even Jesus Himself expressly lived out the things that the Father was telling Him, not just claiming to be a guru and 'sage of wisdom' for people to come and get some truth like a fortune telling machine.

3:7-9

Paul wanted to make it clear that he was not a “self-appointed” minister. This certainly wasn’t a *climb the ladder* “career move” for Paul! He didn’t slip on down to Dallas seminary and get a doctorate. And He wasn’t one of thousands of ‘arm-chair’ pastors out there either. We must always be on guard against seeking for ourselves a ministry calling above that which God has so designed and prepared us for. Paul has been already on this subject: remember back in the last chapter he said “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*” (Ephesians 2:10)

If you are a follower of Christ, you must know that you are therefore a ‘priest’ according to scripture and you have a ministry to fulfill. 1 Corinthians 15:10 says “*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God [which was] with me.*”

Paul reminds us that he worked for the kingdom ...*and he worked hard*, but it was God and His grace that empowered him for the task that he was called to do. Unless God is behind what you are doing, then what you **are** doing is empty and you will eventually weary of it and quit. Ps 127:1 says “*Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted.*” This is how so many people can go through the motions of faith or take a leadership ministry stance for literally years and then ultimately walk away. It is because they were operating under their own power and calling, and not under that of the Holy Spirit. They were never...*as Paul put it*, “compelled.” You can’t just walk away from “compelled.” Paul was “endued by God’s grace” for the task that God...*before the foundations of the earth were laid*, had literally appointed him to. It always has to begin and end with God!

Toscanini was one of the greatest orchestral conductors in the world. Once when he was talking to an orchestra when he was preparing to play one of Beethoven’s symphonies with them he said: “*Gentlemen, I am nothing... you are nothing... Beethoven is everything.*” If ever we are privileged to preach or to teach the message of the love of God or to do anything for Jesus Christ, we must always remember that our greatness lies not in ourselves but in our task and in our message. (Barclay)

Paul says he was called to preach “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Some versions rightfully use the term “unfathomable.” Think of that term! Paul would preach the “unfathomable riches of Christ.” In some way or another, that is all of our callings as ministers of the kingdom. We’re not called to preach politics, social issues, or morality. For Jesus is the answer to all these things anyway, so let us just preach Jesus and His incredible blessings!

Sidenote: Please note the word “fellowship” that is found here in verse 9. Fellowship is not something you can do alone! Our “mission” must be, *by intrinsic design*, lived out in community. When we spiritually isolate ourselves, we fail to see the magnitude and the truth of the ‘mystery’ of our salvation which innately involves body and life and community.

3:10-12

Verse 10 in the NLT says: “*God’s purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*” This “fellowship of the mystery” spoken of in verse 9, is the **mission of the church**. The church is God’s chosen instrument to make known the grace of God in Christ.

The point that Paul is trying to drive home...*as he spoke concerning in the latter half of chapter 2*, is to raise our understanding of the place of the church in God’s eternal purpose, so that we will give it the proper priority in our living. God has chosen us to be the agents of His eternal purpose through the vehicle of the local church.

If we choose to “opt out” of that calling, we will fail to see that purpose realized. Both in the world, and certainly in us.

There are those that claim they are part of the “universal church” and therein they are fulfilling the meaning of this text. But those in the “born again” universal church...by scriptural mandate, is still to be a part of a local body...with a pastor, elders, deacons, and flock...all serving one another with their Holy Spirit endowed gifts. This is explicit scriptural decree. It was and is all part of God’s “eternal purpose which is accomplished in Christ” and as Paul has repeatedly pointed out in this letter...we that are His, **are in Christ**. “In Him” we have the boldness we need to do what He has called us to, and we have the access to God and the Spirit to make things happen. The “universal church” is manifested in the world by individual local churches, each of which is to be a part of the greater body of Christ. The church is to function under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, operating under His sovereign rule. Jesus Christ is the Founder and Lord of His church and has guaranteed its existence, its growth, and its effect until He returns.

As believers, it is important that we find our place in that body, perform our tasks, and under God, by his grace, fulfill his purpose for us. It is here...in the church...the living body of Christ, that the wisdom of God is made known to the world...both to the righteous and holy, as well as to the demonic and the lost world.

The apostle has been speaking of a mystery—a mystery long hid, and now at length disclosed—a mystery connected with the enlargement and glory of the church. That mystery...played out upon the cross, is now held in our trust. That “mystery” is that we are all saved by God’s grace and our faith in Him to deliver such. And the church...every living member of it, is given the calling, the mandate and the empowerment to deliver that message.

3:13

Because of all of this, because of this great truth that was in Paul’s possession, He was at peace...even in prison. Because, ya know, this fact...this reality of calling, makes everything worth it all. God’s got our back. Church...do we have His?