

Ephesians 3:1-13

Week 5 - Stewarding The Mystery Of God's Plan

? Previously, we talked about Ephesians 2:11-22, where Paul wrote about the unity of the church. Summarize that study. What were some of the key takeaways, challenges, and questions?

Section One: Prisoner of Conscience

Ephesians 3:1-6 (NIV)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

? Paul refers to himself as an administer of God's grace. Other translations use the word "steward." What do you think he means by this?

? Does it seem like Paul is bragging about his administration of God's grace? What do you know about his conversion to follow Christ that might make him speak this way?

? What exactly is the mystery that has been 'made known'? What makes it a mystery?

? How do we as modern Christians sometimes act like the opportunity to have a relationship with God is closed off to certain types of people?

This is the first time in this letter Paul mentions being imprisoned. (See Acts 28:16-30 for reference.) We know that this letter was written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Ephesus is in modern-day Turkey, and Rome is in Italy; the Ephesians may have been a little alarmed at Paul's imprisonment, hearing about it from so far away!

Section Two: Less Than The Least

Ephesians 3:7-13 (NIV)

⁷I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

? What are the different ways Paul describes his apostleship? Paul calls himself the "least," so what do you think made him uniquely suited for this position as a steward of the gospel?

? How is Paul's stewardship of the Gospel a good model for all Christians today – not just those in paid ministry? Do you see yourself as a steward of the gospel? (Break into smaller groups?)

? How might you reword verse 10 for a modern audience? What exactly does God desire for the church?

? The church has an important role in both the spiritual and earthly realm. How does that make you feel?

? Paul inserts this strange statement, "do not be discouraged over my state." Why would he say that to people who care for him? How might this be relevant to what Paul has been talking about?

? How can we, like Paul, stay focused on God's big picture even when we suffer?

For Discussion and Accountability

? Are you being a good steward of God's gifts, especially the gospel? Who specifically is the gospel encouraging you to move towards? Does your life display God's glory to His creation?

Next time, Paul is going to continue his train of thought with a prayer. This week think about what typically drives you to pray for, and/or what you ask God to do in the lives of others.