

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 3:6-13

Session 24: The Revelation of God's Great Plan (His Manifold Wisdom)

As we begin, I want us to pick back up on something in vs. 6.

Ephesians 3:6 That **the Gentiles should be fellowheirs**, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

“Fellowheirs” is talking about an inheritance that every member of the body of Christ gets as an “heir of God.”

Romans 8:16 **The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:**¹⁷ **And if children, then heirs;** heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

This issue of being “fellowheirs” is for all who are “children of God.” It doesn’t matter if you are Jew or Gentile. If you are a child of God, you are a “fellowheir.” It also does not matter if you lived for Christ or not, as this is about an inheritance because of justification, not sanctification. If you are saved, you are a child of God and if you are a child of God you are an heir of God.

Ephesians 3:6 is not talking about being a joint-heir with Christ, which has a behavioral condition attached to it, which means that inheritance is about your sanctification, not your justification, making this a different inheritance. This is why the issue of being “children of God” is brought up in Romans 8, to make that distinction.

If both of these heirships were the same, then the condition would pertain to your salvation, not your suffering.

So, to be an heir of God, or a “fellowheir,” you only need to be justified unto eternal life; saved. But among those who are justified, there will be some who will follow Paul’s doctrine and live out of their sanctification by obeying the doctrine that pertains to their everyday lives, living out of the mystery and their new identity in Christ, and those will be “joint-heirs with Christ” who receive the reward of the inheritance.

Do you see the distinction? One inheritance is in connection with your justification and the other is in connection with your sanctification. This is why, when we read Paul’s epistles, we really need to pay attention and rightly divide (so to speak) between those two operations.

Ephesians 3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, **and** partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

What does it mean for a Gentile to be a “partaker of His promise in Christ by the gospel?” What is “the promise?” The cross reference for this is back in Ephesians 1:13-14, which has to do with us being “sealed by the holy Spirit of promise” both individually and corporately as a body, until “the redemption of the purchased possession,” which is the entire body of Christ (purchased possession) being caught up at the Blessed Hope (the completed redemption). See Romans 8:23.

Look at these verses together.

Ephesians 3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, **and** **partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:**

Ephesians 1:13 In whom ye also *trusted*, **after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**: in whom also after that ye believed, **ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise**,¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

We are given the Spirit individually, and that is how we are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” And, we are sealed corporately as an entire body until the “redemption of the purchased possession” (the entire body of Christ), which event takes place at the Blessed Hope. The redemption of our body does not take place individually at different times, like, when we die. It takes place collectively. That is the promise to which Paul alludes to in verse 6.

So, let’s put it together. According to Ephesians 3:6, we Gentiles are now fellowheirs with Jewish saints who believed the gospel of grace from Paul. We are members with them of the same body, and we Gentiles are also partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel – that we are given the Spirit upon our faith in Christ and sealed by the Spirit until every member of the body of Christ has been saved and has received the redemption of their body – which takes place at the Blessed Hope. That is the “promise” and you should rehearse it until you know it by heart.

Later in this session, I will give this to you in an outline form which is easy to digest.

Ephesians 3:7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Verse 7 ends the first sentence of chapter 3. Paul says that it was God who made him a minister and revealed the mystery to him. Paul refers to this ministry which God has called him to as “the gift of the grace of God.” We will see more about this as we continue our study in verse 8.

Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;⁹ And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world

hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: ¹⁰ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: ¹² In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. ¹³ Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

As we begin to work our way through the passage, there are three questions we will answer about vs. 8.

Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am **less than the least of all saints**, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

1. Why does Paul say he is “less than the least of all saints?”

Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is **this grace** given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

2. What was “this grace” which was given to Paul?

Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**;

3. What are the “unsearchable riches of Christ” which Paul was to preach among the Gentiles?

We are going to answer the second question first. What is the “grace given unto Paul” mentioned in verse 8? We have already partially answered this from our study in vs. 7.

Ephesians 3:7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to **the gift of the grace of God given unto** me by the effectual working of his power.

Here, Paul is saying that the revelation of this aspect of the mystery (that the Gentiles are fellowheirs, of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ by the gospel) is a gift of the grace given unto him. And here is the outline that I promised in the previous session.

Fellowheirs: the believing Gentiles are not second class citizens, but are on equal footing with Jewish believers – something that was not true for proselytes back in Israel’s program.

Of the Same Body: that both Jew and Gentile believers in Paul’s gospel were part of the same body; the body of Christ.

Partakers of the Promise: the promise cannot just be that of eternal life because that was true even back in Israel’s program. The promise goes back to Ephesians 1:13-14 where God sealed

each individual member by His Spirit in the body of Christ until the entire body of Christ is formed and completely redeemed, which will take place at the Blessed Hope.

Now, connect this with verse 8.

Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, **is this grace given**, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

“This grace” has several aspects to it:

- It is the knowledge of the mystery (3:3-4 cp. 3:7)
- It is Paul being made an apostle, a minister, and steward of the mystery (3:7 cp. 3:8)
- It is the working of God’s power within Paul to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:7 cp. 3:8)

All of these are referred to as a “grace.”

Now, let’s look at the first question, why did Paul consider himself to be the less than the least of all saints?

Ephesians 3:8 **Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints**, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Paul is saying that he is the least deserving of the saints for “this grace” to be given. Why would he say this? Before his conversion to Christ, Paul persecuted the church of the little flock and led the rebellion against Israel’s true Messiah. When he participated in the stoning of Stephen, he committed the unpardonable sin; which was blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Therefore, in Israel’s program, Saul of Tarsus had no hope of eternal life. He could not have been saved under the prophetic program as it would have contradicted what Jesus said in Matthew 12:31-32.

Matthew 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.³² And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.

But because God suspended the prophetic program, God could show Paul grace and give him eternal life in connection with the new program, the mystery.

Paul was the “chief” (leader) of saved sinners in the DoGG, the “first” in the body of Christ, a “pattern” for those who would come “hereafter”.

1 Timothy 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;¹³ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.

¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; **of whom I am chief.** ¹⁶ Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that **in me first** Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for **a pattern** to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Paul is saying that in the DoGG, he is the leader of saved sinners, he was the first saved sinner, and he is the pattern for how saved sinners should believe and behave.

And now, let's talk about the "unsearchable riches of Christ."

What are the riches of Christ and why are they said to be unsearchable?

The riches begin with eternal life and go on to include all that is ours in Christ, such as the components of our justification and sanctification. They would include the spiritual blessings that we already possess in Christ and the mercies of God. We are not taking the time here to list these and expound upon them, but this would be a great exercise for any saint to engage in as it would cause their love for God to abound and their appreciation for what God has done to increase.

In short, the riches of Christ refer to everything that is ours in Christ. They are called riches because they are of greater value than anything else we could possess.

The riches of Christ are said to be "unsearchable" because the mystery was unknown in the time past of Israel's program and therefore was not able to be "searched" in the Scriptures prior to Paul.

Ephesians 3:9 And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

The mystery which was "hid in God" has now been revealed and made manifest. Therefore, God wants everyone to see (understand) the Fellowship: that in this DoGG, saved Jews and saved Gentiles are fellow citizens (Ephesians 2:19) and fellow heirs (Ephesians 3:6) of the mystery (the formation of the body of Christ in this DoGG).

And where do we find a good scriptural definition of the mystery? In Romans 16.

Romans 16:25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to **my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,** ²⁶ **But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:** ²⁷ To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

In other words, we do not follow Christ as He was revealed in the OT (which includes the four gospel accounts). We are to follow what God has revealed from heaven to us through Paul in his epistles from Romans to Philemon.

Ephesians 3:10 To the intent **that now** unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

The “that now” refers to the time starting with Paul’s salvation and continuing up to this present time.

Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; ⁹ And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: ¹⁰ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

So, get what Paul is saying here: Paul says in vs. 8 that he should 1) preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 2) make all men understand the fellowship of the mystery (which was hid in God from the beginning of the world), and 3) with the intent of now (in this DoGG) making God’s manifold wisdom known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, whether they be good or evil, as neither group knew about the mystery before it was revealed to Paul.

The manifold wisdom of God is now revealed. What is that manifold wisdom? God’s manifold wisdom is His plan to defeat Satan and form the mystery. Now, in this DoGG, that plan has been/is being revealed to principalities and powers in heavenly places.

And what does God’s great plan consist of? God’s plan is to redeem two groups of people by the cross; one group will inherit the kingdom of the earth while the other will reign with Christ in the heavenly places.

Christ redeemed both groups from the power of sin, from Satan and from death. Both groups will have eternal life. Both groups will have God’s Spirit within them. But the mystery which was kept secret concerned the heavenly aspect of the plan.

Ephesians 3:11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

It was God the Father’s plan for Christ to die on the cross for the sins of the world for both groups; those who would inherit the earth and those who will inhabit the heavens. Therefore, God’s eternal purpose in Christ was to have two habitations for Christ in one kingdom; one in heaven and the other on earth.

Ephesians 3:12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

We have “boldness” and “access with confidence” to God the Father, by the “faith of him,” which is the faithful performance of Jesus Christ. The “boldness” spoken of here is the courage which we will need as messengers of the grace of God. In chapter six, Paul asks them to pray for him regarding this boldness.

Ephesians 6:19 **And for me**, that utterance may be given unto me, **that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,**

So, because of the “faith of Christ” we not only can have boldness, but we can also have “access with confidence.”

In other words, we have access to God because of the finished work of Christ on our behalf. I do not take the word “faith” in this instance to be “belief,” even I do think that Jesus trusted (had faith) that the Father would accept his sacrifice for sin and raise Him from the dead.

But in this case, I see faith as meaning: OED: faith - **I.1.a. (c1300—)** The quality of fulfilling one's trust or promise; **faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty; trustworthiness.**

We have boldness and access to God because of the faithfulness or fidelity of Christ's work on the cross, which made it possible for us to be in Christ and obtain all the blessings of it.

This definition of “faith” is the same in Galatians 2.

Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by **the faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be **justified by the faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Again, this is about the fidelity of Christ's perfect life and perfect sacrifice on the cross. Because of the “faith of Christ” we can put our “faith in Christ.” Because of the “faith of Christ” we have come to God boldly and have access with confidence.

So the mystery of Christ is that Gentiles now have an opportunity of salvation apart from Israel. Why will this DoGG end? Romans 11:22 says this dispensation will be “cut off” because of unbelief! It does not end with revival, it ends in apostasy when no one wants to trust Christ as Savior.

After the blessed hope, which is a result of the “fulness of the Gentiles” having come in, God will resume and complete his dealings with Israel, just as Romans 11:26-27 says.

God will keep his promise with the nation of Israel, which means that replacement or covenant theology is wrong. The body of Christ has not replaced Israel.

Remember what is going on here in Ephesians 3; God is speaking through Paul about what He is doing from heaven: God is forming the body of Christ during the DoGG with a view to that body occupying the heavenly places throughout the ages to come.

Ephesians 3:13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Ephesians is a prison epistle. Paul does not want believers to be discouraged by his being in prison and by the things which he suffers, which, as Paul says, “is for [their] glory.”

Christ suffered for the gospel. Paul suffered to make the gospel known. Paul told the Philippians:

Philippians 1:12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things *which happened* unto me have fallen out rather unto **the furtherance of the gospel**; ¹³ So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other *places*;

Paul understood that suffering was necessary for the furtherance of the gospel. Because he was in prison, Christ was manifest in the palace and other places which it would not have been without Paul’s imprisonment. Therefore, Paul could rejoice in his sufferings because they were allowing the gospel to be heard in places it would not have been without it.

GOD HAS ONE KINGDOM IN TWO DISTINCT PROGRAMS

Kingdom of God

EARTHLY

Kingdom of Heaven

Peter, James & John

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Jesus is the Christ

The Kingdom at hand

The Israel of God

Believing Remnant & Gentile Proselytes

PROPHECY

Galatians 6:16

Matthew 3:1-2

Acts 2:36-39, 3:21

IN CHRIST

HEAVENLY

Kingdom of God

Paul, apostles & prophets

The Gospel of Christ

Faith in Christ

Death, Burial & Resurrection

The Body of Christ

Jew and Gentile

MYSTERY

Romans 16:25-26

1 Corinthians 12:27, 15:1-4

Ephesians 3:5

IN CHRIST

WHICH HE WILL BRING TOGETHER INTO ONE IN
THE DISPENSATION OF THE FULNESS OF TIMES