

**Eph 3:1–12 (ESV)** For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—<sup>(2)</sup> assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, <sup>(3)</sup> how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. <sup>(4)</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>(5)</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>(6)</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>(7)</sup> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>(8)</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>(9)</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, <sup>(10)</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>(11)</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>(12)</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

### 1. Last week we saw Paul explaining what he called the “Mystery”

- A. Something that is now known but was not known before
  - 1). We saw the mystery is how the Jew and Gentile would come together – be united
    - a). It was known from the OT that God would work with the Gentiles
    - b). But the how was unknown
      - 1a). Jew and Gentile would both be made right with God through faith in Christ  
And not by the works of the law
- B. Paul said this message came to him through revelation from God

**Transition:** That’s the message – we are saved by faith in what Christ has done

- A. This week I want to look at the messenger – the one who was proclaiming that message

### 2. Every believer should want to be effective for our Lord

- A. I pray nobody here is just drifting as a believer – just living for the temporal  
Without ever thinking about the eternal – thinking about their calling as a heavenly ambassador
- B. In this passage we can learn from Paul  
He said to “Imitate him like he is imitating Christ” = that is an invitation to examine his life

**Point:** This week I want to examine that life – looking for characteristics of an effective servant

- A. What we should strive to be like as we live in this godless world – what we should care about
  - 1). This is especially important as we see the church being tossed to and from with false doctrines
- B. This leads us to the first thought on being an effective minister of God’s grace
  - 1). When I say minister I’m not just talking about the full time Pastor  
We have all been called to minister to those around us

**1 Pe 2:9 (ESV)** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

- a). That is for all who have been chosen by God – the elect
  - 1a). We are all ministers to shine out the light of Christ in the darkness – to be effective

**Transition:** Brings us to the first thought on what we can learn from Paul

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## I. THE EFFECTIVE SERVANT UNDERSTANDS THE MESSAGE OF GRACE

### 1. Paul was a steward of this message – so are we

- A. We are all called to the Great Commission of Matthew 28 – no one escapes that
  - 1). To take the message out to the lost world around us  
So that those who are following Satan will turn and become disciples of Christ

### 2. This is the stewardship that every preacher has

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- A. To proclaim Christ's truth – accurately – passionately - logically
- 1). He is to warn – rebuke – comfort – encourage and evangelize
- Thought:** But not all are called to stand in a pulpit  
But we saw in Peter - All are called to proclaim the message when God opens opportunities
- A. This means we must KNOW the message – what is the Gospel?
- 1). This is why the Christian is commanded to study  
**2 Ti 2:15 (ESV)** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, *rightly handling the word of truth.*
- B. This begins with the Pastor setting the example
- 1). Which takes much work – to understand enough to teach with clarity
  - 2). This takes understanding doctrine – those truths that define what we believe  
Those truths that define how we are saved  
Those truths that are outlined in Scripture – the Bible is a doctrinal book  
**John R. W. Stott:** The Christian preacher is to be neither a speculator who invents new doctrines which please him, nor an editor who excises old doctrines which displease him, but a steward, God's steward, dispensing faithfully to God's household the truths committed to him in the Scriptures, nothing more, nothing less and nothing else.
- a). Without doctrine we end up with the foolishness of what we've seen on Wednesday night
  - b). Messages that aren't scriptural that lead to behavior that isn't God glorifying
- 3). We see things like a girl standing before the students in Bethel's School of Supernatural ministry
- a). Relating how she was in the hospital with a man who was dying  
Being concerned about his soul she prayed  
Jesus told her "If you forgive him of his sins he will be forgiven"  
She forgave him – even though the sins weren't against her  
Then rejoiced knowing he was OK for eternity
  - b). He wasn't OK – he was still lost – man has no power to forgive a persons sin before God
    - 1a). And Jesus would never say that to anybody – contradicting Scripture
  - c). Because they think doctrine is not necessary – they are open to this nonsense  
The body was cheering her on instead of stopping her – saying that is wrong!
  - d). Not sure she was to blame – she was just following the example of her leaders
    - 1a). Those who don't honor God's word as the final authority for all things  
Therefore that word is not keeping them in check
- C. If you have a Pastor who feels that doctrine or theology is unimportant – run as fast as you can
- 1). Our whole message is built upon doctrine – it is the banks that keep our messages accurate
  - 2). If you're listening and want to be a teacher – study theology – be ready  
**Vance Havner:** If a preacher is not doctrinally ready to preach, he is not ready.
- a). Doctrine allows you to preach from your heart safely – go off your notes without damage  
Theology you will be the banks of the river your thoughts can flow in accurately
  - b). If you don't know doctrine – those thoughts are all over the place causing great damage  
**D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:** Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.
- Point:** Paul was entrusted with this message – the good news of Jesus Christ
- A. Everything he taught was built off a solid foundation of theology
- 1). It is my job to get into this pulpit and lay that same foundation
  - 2). It is your job to think it through – do your homework – be a good Berean

Study to show yourself approved so you will run the race with excellence

a). Because you will never be effective if you don't know this message

**Transition:** The first thing I see – the effective servant KNOWS the message of Christ

A. They put in the effort to understand it so they can use it in this lost world

**1 Pe 3:15 (ESV)** in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

1). Always be prepared = means we are willing and ready to confess Christ

B. Let's be honest - I know it's not easy to tell others about Christ

1). You're afraid they'll think your obnoxious – what if I lose my friends

2). But if we can remember how good this news is – it will help – it did Paul

**Ro 1:16 (ESV)** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

C. So the effective servant knows the message and is willing to proclaim it

## II. THE EFFECTIVE SERVANT IS THRILLED BY GRACE

**Eph 3:7–8 (ESV)** Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>(8)</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given...

### 1. Paul understood who he was before the Lord saved him

**1 Ti 1:14–15 (ESV)** and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>(15)</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

**1 Co 15:9–10 (ESV)** For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>(10)</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am...

A. To understand grace is essential – it is the inspiration for service and obedience

1). Grace gets ahold of the heart and compels a person to serve the Lord that saved them

2). Grace makes bowing to Christ reasonable - logical

**Rom 12:1 (NIV)** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

a). Eleven chapters of stunning grace – finally in view of that

The reasonable thing is to surrender

B. That means - The greatest thing I can do for you is to show you grace – what God has done

1). Then the calls that are necessary to obey are logical in light of that

If there is no understanding of grace first that call becomes legalistic

a). You serve to keep God happy with you – accepting you – loving you

b). Grace tells us God loves us because of what Christ did

It rescues us from trying to earn what we have already been freely given

### 2. If you don't understand the greatness of grace – here is a solution

A. Go back and remember your old life of sin – who you were when you were saved

1). Think about the hostility you had towards God – pushing him away

Suppressing his truth with manmade lies

a). But God continued to pursue you – continued to love you – drawing you to himself

B. Then think of who you are since you've been saved

1). How many times you've wandered off – your heart has grown cold – rebellion – self-will

a). Yet God has been patient – he keeps sustaining you

He keeps chasing you down – finding that lost sheep that has wandered off

- C. When we think correctly about who we were – who we are
- 1). When we cast down any lies that gain praise for ourselves – credit  
“Well I always really sought for God – eventually I found him” – WRONG!
    - a). Romans 3 – No man seeks for God
    - b). God found you – chose you - drew you
  - 2). You didn’t want God in your life – “Wrong. I was always religious”
    - a). Religion doesn’t prove you were spiritual – it is man’s greatest invention to push God away  
To ease your conscience about God while still sitting on the throne of your life
    - b). Religion is man doing works and expecting God to bless them  
Religion is little man making God a debtor when they earn heaven
    - c). But nobody truly seeks God on their own  
You are controlled by the sinful nature – you don’t want to bow to the true God
      - 1a). You want to do things on your own terms – religion – and have God bow to you  
You want God to owe you – you want to be able to say I did this so you must do that
  - 3). But when you can say with Paul – I was the least of all saints – the chief of sinners
    - a). I didn’t deserve anything but hell
    - b). Then grace will be magnified in your life

**Thought:** Then grace will empower you to serve God and serve others – the least of these

**Mt 25:40 (ESV)** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

- A. It enables us to see ourselves in the correct light – I’m no better than those other people
  - 1). The only thing that changed me is grace! God did something!
    - a). I was dead in sin and loving it! I wanted nothing to do with Him  
God invaded my life – God changed my heart – God changed my nature
      - 1a). If not for the grace of God there go I
- B. Therefore who am I to look down on another?
  - 1). Who knows what I would be right now if God hadn’t intercepted me!
    - a). Who knows what I would be right now if somebody didn’t tell me about Jesus?

**Transition:** So you see who you were – still to some extent still are – a debtor of grace

- A. That enables you to look upon others with compassion – instead of disgust
- B. But don’t stay there – just looking at self – “The chief of sinners”
  - 1). If you’re saved by grace your also empowered by grace

### 3. Empowered by grace

- A. Paul who knew he was the chief of sinners – was also busy in his kings work  
**1 Co 15:9–10 (ESV)** For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>(10)</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.
  - 1). He knew who he was – the chief of sinners - that humbled him – made him so grateful
  - 2). But that didn’t paralyze me – that is who I WAS – but grace has changed me
    - a). That grace that saved me has moved me into action – has empowered me

**Point:** As we learn to depend upon God to empower us by grace for all things

- A. He will provide the strength that is necessary for us to serve effectively
- B. How do I receive grace to serve – I step out in faith depending upon God to enable me

**Transition:** What have we seen?

- A. To be effective for God we must know the message of God's grace
  - 1). Which should lead to the next – if we truly understand it
- B. We will be enthralled by grace – humbled by grace and empowered by grace to serve God
- C. The next shows the work we are called to as ambassadors
  - 1). What do I do with this incredible message that has saved me

### III. PAUL PROCLAIMED THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF GRACE

**Eph 3:8–9 (ESV)** To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>(9)</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,

#### 1. The grace that saved him called him into service for others

- A. Way it always works – grace draws you to God then moves you into service for God  
**Tt 2:14 (ESV)** who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.
- B. We are not saved just to know we are going to enjoy heaven
  - 1). We are saved to be used to help others see how they can enjoy heaven
- C. Listen to Paul's words – the goal of his life  
**Eph 3:9 (ESV)** and to bring to light *for everyone* what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,
  - 1). I am so far from that – but I want to grow in my perspective on life
    - a). I don't want to spend my time only on the temporal  
while the lost all around me are heading into an eternity horrifying beyond description
      - 1a). I have the message that can change that

**Question:** But where do I start with this?

- A. I think it starts with you and your Bible with God in study and prayer
  - 1). Asking him to open your eyes to the unsearchable riches of God's grace in Christ
  - 2). Returning again and again until you can't keep your mouth shut
    - a). Until the good news is burning so hotly within you – you're like Jeremiah  
Who had to say something – he couldn't keep it in
- B. It continues with an accurate view of the future of those who are lost
  - 1). 30 years ago I was talking with a brother who asked me  
“Why don't people evangelize any longer?”
    - a). We concluded – it is because the church has stopped talking about hell
    - b). We have lost the horror of an eternity without Christ
      - 1a). Therefore we are not driven to tell people about God's rescue plan
      - 2a). We forget the power of the Gospel  
If that message could save us it could save others
- C. I've said this many times – start with something easy – tracts in your wallet - purse
  - 1). Get into the mindset of leaving those with your tip – that gets you thinking evangelistically
    - a). It causes you to start looking for opportunities

**Transition:** What have we seen so far?

- A. Paul understood the message of grace

- B. Because he understood it – he was stunned by grace
- C. Because he understood who he was when God called him - he was humbled by grace
- D. He didn't stop there – the same grace that saved him called him to service and empowered that service
- E. Because he knew how grace had changed his eternity – he desired to reach everybody with that message
- F. Now he turns to where grace should be on display in its greatest form

## IV. GRACE IS TO BE SHOWCASED IN THE CHURCH

**Eph 3:10–11 (ESV)** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>(11)</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,

### 1. The church is designed to show the wisdom of God to all of creation

- A. Both the good and the evil heavenly beings
 

“It seems to me that the angels look on at grace and marvel while demonic forces look on in fear and tremble. The evil forces have already been defeated at the cross, and they await their final subjugation. The existence of the church is announcing that their rule is coming to an end once and for all.”
- B. Peter tells us something interesting
 

**1 Pe 1:12 (ESV)** It was revealed to them (the OT prophets) that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

  - 1). The angels are fascinated by the church – seeing what God is doing amongst us
  - 2). Seeing people who would never naturally get along – Jew and Gentile - united
  - 3). Seeing grace extended to rebels like us – they sinned once – and their eternity was settled
 

“I wonder if they sit around talking. I wonder what it is that he sees in them that he loves so much. Angels sinned once and it was over. They sin again and again, even after being saved and he just keeps loving. Holding them. Blessing them.”

**Thought:** The church is preaching a cosmic sermon to the heavenly beings

- A. This is why we should take things like worshipping seriously
  - 1). We are to display to the watching angels the worth of God as we love him and worship him
- B. As they watch they learn - the plan of God becomes clearer
  - 1). They see the new people group created in Christ = the Christian
  - 2). They see us all working in unity over the common cause of promoting God's cause on earth
  - 3). They see God's grace on display

**Transition:** Paul now moves from the corporate church to the individual

- A. He sums up the incredible results of embracing the message of grace

## V. GRACE GIVES US BOLD ACCESS TO GOD

**Eph 3:12 (ESV)** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

### 1. Here is the beauty of this mystery Paul is defining

- A. Christ has gained access to God for us
  - 1). This is such a settled issue we can be bold when entering his presence
 

Why? Because we come clothed in Christ's righteousness!  
Because our record of sin has been wiped away

### 2. This is a radical truth – put yourself in their place

- A. They viewed the presence of God through the Temple – the holy of holies
  - 1). With its thick heavy curtain erected to keep man out of his holy presence

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- 2). One time a year – one man – the high priest would enter after all the ceremonial cleansings
    - a). Bells on the robe they could hear as he walked around  
And a rope tied around his ankle leading outside
    - b). They would be outside listening – if the bells stopped for too long  
They would pull him out by that rope because they couldn't go in
    - c). It was a frightening thing to get into the presence of God
  - B. Now the NT comes along and says – through Christ we can run boldly into God's presence
    - 1). Why? Because his anger against our sin was exhausted on Christ = Propitiation
    - 2). Therefore every thought towards us is now one of love = Justification (Not guilty)
      - a). Doctrine tells us about all this
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## CONCLUSION

1. **Grace has saved us – has called us all into service of some sort**
    - A. Paul's life gives evidence of this – a man of like passions – enraptured by grace
  2. **We get a snapshot from his life what an effective servant looks like**
    - A. They understand the message of grace = they take the time to study
    - B. Because they study grace they are thrilled by grace = it becomes amazing to them
    - C. Because they are thrilled by grace they proclaim that message to others
      - 1). Knowing the same grace that saved them can save others
    - D. They understand the importance of the church
      - 1). Because that is where God's grace is on display
      - 2). They are not hit and miss believers – you never know when they'll show up
        - a). They are committed to the church – are serious about it
    - E. They take advantage of grace by drawing near to God
      - 1). They see what grace has done for a sinner like them
        - a). They care about intimacy with God
- Point:** This leads to a life that makes a difference for the kingdom

