

CHAPTER 3:14-21

In the previous verses, Paul talked about the mystery of the gospel, not that the gospel message is a *mystery*, the message that there is a victor who has defeated sin, Satan, and death, that's not the mystery. Paul talks about mystery a lot in his letters. But he never considers mystery as something to make us throw up our hands and say "Well, guess I can't understand it...best not to try." Quite the contrary, Paul uses the word mystery to tell us that the plans of God are unknown to us *until* He makes them known.

1 Corinthians 2:6–10 (6) Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **(7)** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **(8)** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **(9)** But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— **(10)** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **(ESV)**

Ephesians 1:9–10 (9) making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ **(10)** as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. **(ESV)**

And, according to Paul, God has now made the mystery known. And, according to Paul, that revelation has implications.

Romans 1:18–23 (18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. **(19)** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. **(20)** For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. **(21)** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **(22)** Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **(23)** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. **(ESV)**

Humanity is *without excuse*. No longer can we claim ignorance. No longer can we say, "but I didn't know!" Everyone knows. Everyone is guilty. Everyone has been caught red handed.

Why?

Because God has revealed Himself to us.

So, how does that truth affect Paul as he writes to the new believers in the church at Ephesus? Look at the encouragement with which he writes to them. Look at the wisdom he is imparting to them. Look at how he explains, even though he knows that he'll find himself on the wrong side of the religious authorities in that area, he says "see here...the mystery that has now been revealed is consistent with the plan that God has had from the beginning – that even Gentiles are heirs of the promises. It has never been about who your earthly family is, what you accomplish, how well you follow the law...no...by *grace* you have been saved, through *faith*, and this is not even of yourself, it is all a *gift*, not by works, so no one can boast."

And now that Paul has "imparted wisdom" regarding this mystery, he puts meat on it and shows what that truth means for how we ought to live.

1. Paul starts this section with “for this reason...” You can likely guess the question.
 - a. What is the reason that Paul is referring to?
 - b. What does he do because of that?
 - c. What does that show you about how Paul sees God? Himself?
 - d. When you ponder the mystery of the gospel, or even the gospel itself, is your reaction like that of Paul?
2. Paul’s use of the phrase “bow my knees” is important
 - a. What picture does that phrase conjure up in your mind?
 - b. When someone bows, there is an object to which they are bowing, to whom is Paul bowing?
 - c. Why do you suppose Paul uses the word Father (πατέρα - patera) instead of God (θεός - Theos) here?
 - d. People in our culture bow for various reasons. Read the following passages to get an idea of what bowing meant to the culture in which Paul was writing. How is that different from our culture?
 - i. Isaiah 45:18-23
 - ii. Romans 14:10-12
 - iii. Philippians 2:8-11
 - iv. Romans 11:1-6
3. In verse 15, Paul again uses the concept of *family*.
 - a. Paul says “every family.” Is he really talking about every family? What does he mean by “every”? (Think about the context of how Paul has used that image before, and how he describes that family in the following verses.) Sometimes, words like “every” don’t mean what we think they mean – the context defines the meaning.
 - i. “every family...in heaven” refers to whom?
 - ii. “every family...on earth” refers to whom?
 - b. What is the name that God gives to these families? (hint...read Acts 11:22-26)
 - c. How does knowing that you are in the family of God (if you are found *in Christ*) make you feel? How does it make you feel for those who are not in the family of God?
4. When Paul says that he is “bowing his knees”, he is telling his readers that he is worshipping and praying. In verses 16-21, Paul tells us his prayer. In verse 16, he tells those for whom he is praying why he can even pray to God
 - a. Paul starts with “according to...” This shows that Paul is appealing to a specific characteristic of God as he prays. What characteristic is Paul appealing to?
 - b. What does the word *riches* tell us about God’s glory?
 - c. What is Paul’s request in verse 16?
 - d. Who grants?
 - e. What kind of strength is Paul requesting?
 - f. How does God strengthen?
 - g. Where does Paul request that God strengthen them?
 - h. What is the importance of being strengthened there? Why not somewhere else?
 - i. Romans 5:1-5
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 15:58
 - iii. 1 Peter 5:8-11
 - iv. 2 Peter 1:5-11
5. In verse 17, Paul writes that his desire for them would result in something specific
 - a. What is Paul’s desire for them?
 - b. What does this tell you about where we, as Christians, receive our strength to “soldier on”?

- c. How does Christ dwell in our hearts?
 - d. Paul prays that God would continue to grant faith to the church. Why would Paul pray that?
 - e. What does that tell you about the importance of faith...
 - i. ...as we struggle?
 - ii. ...as we face trials?
 - iii. ...as we rejoice?
 - iv. ...as we mourn?
 - v. What happens when we think we can strengthen our faith without relying on Christ who dwells in the hearts of His people?
 - f. What is the Christian life rooted in (1 John 4:19)?
 - g. Why must we keep that in the front and center of our lives?
6. In verse 18, Paul tells us something that is the result of being rooted in love
- a. What is the result of being rooted and grounded in love?
 - b. Paul prays for strength so that the people can do something...what is the something that strength required for?
 - c. Why would we need strength for that?
 - d. Paul mentions four things we are to comprehend – breadth, length, height, and depth in reference to something. What are those things in reference to?
 - i. Notice that Paul does not define the measurements of this area...why do you suppose he doesn't?
 - ii. When you think about incomprehensible measurements like how much the biggest stars weigh, or how vast the universe is, or how many atoms make up even a very tiny thing, does your brain start to grow weary? Imagine working in that world every day...you'd likely need mental strength to continue, right?
 - iii. So, do you see why Paul is praying for spiritual strength over physical strength?
7. Verse 19 is a great continuation of verse 18.
- a. In verse 18, Paul says we need strength so that we can at least somewhat comprehend the incomprehensible
 - b. In verse 19, Paul goes even further – he says that with this spiritual strength, we can know that which surpasses knowledge! What is unknowable?
 - c. Why would Paul say that this “surpasses knowledge?”
 - d. What does “know” mean in this context? Is it simply head knowledge or is it something more?
 - i. Think of someone who is very close to you, someone you love and trust – a friend, a spouse, a family member. In what ways do you *know* them? Do you know *things about* them? Do you *know* them?
 - ii. You can know about someone without knowing them. I know a lot of things about a lot of people I don't know. But, you cannot know someone without knowing things about them. And the more you know someone, the more you will know about them.
 - iii. This extends to love – if you truly love someone, you will not only know things about them, you will not only know them, but you will, more and more, also begin to love the things they love.
 - iv. This whole passage is in the context of love, starting with family and ending with the love that Jesus shows us and the love we show Jesus. This *knowledge* is far more than factual, it is experiential (Psalm 34:8-10) - we can't love a Jesus we don't know.
 - e. As we fall more and more in love with Jesus, what does that result in?
 - f. How will that affect your life?

8. In verses 20-21, Paul breaks out in praise even as he finishes his prayer
 - a. What is God capable of, according to Paul?
 - b. Why do you suppose Paul would express this to the people he is praying for?
 - c. What power is at work within us? (Romans 8:9-11)
 - d. Who gets glory?
 - i. Isaiah 42:6-9
 - ii. Isaiah 48:9-11
 - iii. John 5:41-44
 - iv. John 17:1-5
 - v. When people say that Jesus never claimed to be God, what do these verses say to that idea?
9. In verse 21, Paul writes about two places where God gets glory
 - a. What is the first one?
 - b. What does that tell you about how our lives should be?
 - c. Is your life glorifying to God? All of us have them, so what areas of your life need to change that would bring glory to God?
 - d. We have already seen how Jesus glorifies God
 - e. So, how long does Paul say this glory lasts?
 - f. What does that tell you about your life “now”?
 - g. What can you look forward to in your “forever”?
 - h. To whom is this glory limited?

The Christian life is both easy and hard – it is easy in that we do not have to work to attain a goal that is impossible for us to attain. The impossible goal has already been attained for us who are *in Christ* by the very God who set the requirement at perfection. You don’t have to be perfect, and even if God gave extra or even partial credit, you still couldn’t earn enough credit to pass.

But there is also where the Christian life gets hard. The work is sometimes hard, exhausting, tiring, frustrating. It sounds simple, and it can be - when it’s joyous, it always seems easier. But that’s to be expected.

Paul knew this too, because he lived it:

Romans 8:35–39 (35) *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (36) As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” (37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ESV)*

Which is why he prays for strength – for himself and for the church. Not physical strength, but spiritual strength, to persevere in this dark and cursed world. To face evil and wicked men with the armor of God. To go prepared into a world that will hate you because it hates your Jesus.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13) – I can face all obstacles; I can endure all trials and hardships.

Because I know that Jesus will never let me down or let me go.