

Ephesians

Lesson 5

Ephesians 3

Leader Guide

Leader Guide Bible Studies
Leaderguidebiblestudies.com

David R. Steele

This lesson is a free download from Leader Guide Bible Studies and is not for resale.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®
Copyright © 1973 1978 1984 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Lesson 5

Ephesians 3

God's Mystery and Power

Prayers

Introduction

Read Ephesians 3:1-13

Eph 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Eph 3:2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,

Eph 3:3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

Eph 3:4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

Eph 3:5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

Eph 3:6 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.

Eph 3:7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

Eph 3:8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Eph 3:9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Eph 3:10 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,

Eph 3:11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Eph 3:13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Discuss

1. In verses 3:1-13, Paul discusses the purpose of his calling as an apostle, but he does not refer to himself as an apostle. Why do you think Paul refers to himself in the following terms?
 - 1) Prisoner, verse 1
 - 2) Slave (servant), verse 7
 - 3) The least of God's people, verse 8

Paul refers to himself in these terms without hyperbole. He was actually a prisoner in a Roman prison as he wrote his letter to the Ephesians, but he wasn't referring to being in prison. Paul considered himself a prisoner of Christ and bound to do his will. In the same way, he considered himself to be a slave of Christ who was only free to do what he was commanded to do by his master- to go and preach the gospel to the world. Paul could not forget his beginnings as a trained Pharisee, chief persecutor of the church, and murderer of Christians. Even though forgiven and reborn in Christ, he looked at the past with such regret that he considered himself the least of God's people.

2. In modern terms, we might think Paul had a poor self-image by referring to himself as a prisoner, slave (servant), and the least of God's people. How do you think he felt about his calling?

Paul did not have an inferiority complex or poor self-image. He had the glorious self-image of a person made righteous through faith in Christ. Paul found his identity in service to Christ and was empowered by God to proclaim the gospel of Christ. Just like Paul, God rescues us from sin, gives us faith, makes us righteous in Christ, and gives us purpose.

3. In verses 1-6, Paul refers to the mystery of Christ. Paul is not referring to a mystery as unknowing, secretive, or inexplicable. The mystery of Christ was kept hidden until God chose to reveal Christ. What is the mystery of Christ Paul referring to in verses 1-6?

The mystery Paul refers to is stated in verse 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." The mystery was when and how God would fulfill his promises to Abraham to bless all nations on earth and make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. These promises were fulfilled in Christ, who was sent to save the world and draw all people to God.

4. What do you think about your relationship with Christ? In verse 8, Paul describes our relationship as having unsearchable, boundless, or unfathomable riches. Oh, if we could live every moment celebrating this joyous truth with thanksgiving and praise! What are some of the riches you found in Christ?

I grew up in a church but did not know anything about salvation through Christ. When I was 24, God brought a pastor into my life who took me through the Bible, and I understood for the first time that I was a sinner in need of a savior. Christ was my Savior; he died for my sins! I have been directed by the godly counsel of pastors where ever I have lived.

In many ways, my life has been one big do-over. God has redirected me after failure and rebuilt loving relationships after brokenness. I have been blessed with unmerited abundance. I see God's guidance in every aspect of my life - spiritual, professional, relational, and physical health. When I think of being in Christ and transformed by the Holy Spirit, I am too often grieved by my sinfulness and sometimes wonder if the Holy Spirit has been at work. But, when I look at my whole life, I am not the person I was as a young man; the Holy Spirit has transformed my thinking and values.

5. What is God's purpose he accomplished through Christ Jesus? (Verses 10-12).

God established the church to reveal his plan of salvation through Christ to the world. Through Christ, all who believe can approach him with freedom and confidence – that he loves us as his children, forgives, guides, blesses, and plans for us to be with him through eternity.

6. In verse 12, Paul says we may approach God with freedom and confidence. In the Old Testament, people were not allowed to approach God – because they died if they encountered his holiness. What changed?

God's unapproachable holiness did not change, neither did our sinfulness. What changed was Christ's sacrificial death for our sins. Our sins are forgiven and forgotten as believers in Christ and we share in Christ's righteousness. We can approach God with the freedom and confidence Paul refers to. Our ability to approach God was symbolically illustrated at Christ's crucifixion when the curtain separating the Holy place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two. It was as if God was saying you can enter my holiness now.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Eph 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

Eph 3:15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Eph 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Eph 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

Eph 3:18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

Eph 3:19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Eph 3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Amen.

Discuss

7. Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians in verses 3:14-21 builds on his first prayer in verses 1:15-23. In verses 1:15-23, Paul prayed for the Spirit of wisdom, hope, and power so that the Ephesians would know God better and the riches of their inheritance in Christ. What does Paul pray for in his second prayer?

- a. Verse 16 **Strength through God's Spirit**
- b. Verse 17 **Indwelling Christ, established in love**
- c. Verse 18 **power to grasp the breadth of Christ's love**
- d. Verse 19 to **live with the fullness of God**

8. The focus of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is for them to know the depth of Christ's love. When we think of his love for us, we probably think of the great works of this ministry. Complete the following on what Christ's love has done for you:

- 1) Christ **died for me.**

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

- 2) Christ **died for my sins**

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

- 3) Christ **intercedes for me**

Christ Jesus, who died —more than that, who was raised to life —is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)

4) Christ **gives eternal life**

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. (John 3:36)

5) Christ **is always with me**

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

9. Nothing in our faith is more important than loving Christ in response to the sacrificial love he showed us. Paul summarized the importance of love by saying, "if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). But how do you show your love for Christ who has ascended into heaven? Let's look at several scriptural truths about loving Christ.

- a. What is the relationship between love, obedience, and joy in Christ?

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (John 15:9-12)

Love, obedience, and joy in Christ are inseparable. If we love Christ, we obey him; when we obey him, we know him better and find joy. The more we know him, the more we love him. When we sin and don't obey him, we are deeply troubled, but our joy can be restored through repentance. Christ assures us he will forgive all our sins.

- b. Paul describes obedience to Christ as coming from faith (Romans 1:5). Discuss our motive for obedience in light of Jesus' parable on God's kingdom.

Mt 13:44 **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.**

Mt 13:45 **"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.**

Mt 13:46 **When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.**

Obedience to Christ comes from a desire for obedience rather than a fear of punishment. We obey Christ's command to love and worship God with our whole heart out of deep gratitude for the love he shows us. We love our neighbors and are quick to forgive and help them because of the love and forgiveness Christ showed us. Like the man and the merchant in the parables, we find our joy and true riches when seeking God's kingdom.

- c. Discuss the role of good works in loving Christ.

Jn 15:16 **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit —fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.**

Jn 15:17 **This is my command: Love each other.**

Mt 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

Mt 25:32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Mt 25:33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Mt 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Mt 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

Mt 25:36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Mt 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

Mt 25:38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

Mt 25:39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Mt 25:40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Acts of service and love toward others are the fruit of our faith. God prepared good works for us to do before the world's creation; they are not assignments or projects. As Jesus illustrated in the parable of the sheep and goats, good works naturally flow out of our faith and love for Christ and others.

10. What do you think Paul meant by knowing Christ's love surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:19)? See Jesus' prayer for his disciples and discuss the power of Christ's love, a love surpassing knowledge.

Jn 17:15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Jn 17:16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

Jn 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Jn 17:18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

Jn 17:19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

The knowledge of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge is experiencing the love of Christ through discipleship action. God protects, directs, and empowers us to advance his kingdom.

11. The fullness of God Paul refers to in Ephesians 3:19 is the Holy Spirit. God places his Spirit in us through baptism so that we live a life of abiding in Christ because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives all believers the knowledge of God's salvation through Jesus Christ and spiritual gifts and enables their faith to be fruitful. Some Christians experience gifts of the Spirit in abundance, others less so. Some Christians may wonder if they discern the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life. Andrew Murray, in his wonderful book, *Abide in Christ*, wrote that the first lessons we learn about the Holy Spirit are that God gives us what we do not comprehend, we submit to what we do not understand, we accept what appears to be a mystery, we believe in the impossible, and we walk in a way we do not know. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us faith and guides our ways. Let us look at a few of the blessings we receive through God's Spirit.

1) **The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual rebirth and renewal.**

He [God our Savior] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5-6)

2) The Holy Spirit **lives in us.**

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

3) The Holy Spirit **gives spiritual gifts.**

God also testified to it [His plan of great salvation through Christ] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Hebrews 2:4)

4) The Holy Spirit **empowers and fills us with hope, joy and peace.**

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:19-20)

5) The Holy Spirit **helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us.**

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26-27)

6) The Holy Spirit **keeps us in Christ for eternal life.**

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

12. How have you seen God's immeasurable power at work in your life or others?

Allow time for discussion.

One of the most extraordinary examples of God's power was His establishing a church in Houston, Texas. When I first moved to Houston, there wasn't a church in the denomination I left in Arlington. About a dozen families met in Houston and wanted to build a church. They contacted the national church office and told them about their need for a pastor. The national office sent a pastor and a church planter and purchased a building in Houston. The church planter and pastor held a prayer meeting every Wednesday, and after the prayers, we made phone calls to everyone who moved into the zip code of our church building. We invited them to our church opening in six weeks. The grand opening arrived, and our parking lot was full, to my amazement. Our little church had grown to more

than two hundred. It was a church of total strangers, and what a wonderful celebration of new-found unity in Christ.

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,
Oh, the depth of the riches of your wisdom and knowledge!
How unsearchable are your judgments!
Forgive us our many sins and lead us not into temptation.
You have planned our days and ways; you direct our paths through your Spirit.
You have called us from darkness to redeem us through you Son.
We can never repay you, but we offer our love and devotion.
To you be the glory forever! Amen.