

Ephesians, Chapter Three, Lesson Two

SPIRITUAL SERVICE Ephesians 3:7-13

STIMULATE

** In our time together last week in chapter three of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we saw Paul's amazing example of "Spiritual Stewardship". We noted three things in Paul's life that were worthy of our imitation. Do you recall what they were?

- 1) Selflessness - "Pray for others" (V.1 and V.14)
- 2) Use my stewardship for the benefit of others - "Be spent for others" (V.2)
- 3) Be willing to help others understand the mysteries of Christ - "Be willing to teach others" (V.6)

** It was our common goal to grow in just one of these three areas of our life and stewardship before God over this past week. How did you do as a result of pondering these marvelous truths each day?

It was impossible for me to separate them from one another! Paul's pattern was a constant reminder for me to remain focused upon the needs of others, rather than for my own personal needs. That, in and of itself, proved to provide many opportunities for my spiritual growth.

MOTIVATE

** In our passage for today we are going to observe the "Spiritual Service" of the apostle Paul and see how our loving God has brought balance to his life and to ours. What does the word "balance" bring to mind as you consider your own "Spiritual Service"? How should you view yourself and your ministry before a Holy God? For the answers, please join me now in Ephesians 3:7-13 as we learn how God has brought balance to our service for Him.

Read Passage (V.7-10) (V.11-13)

Opening Prayer

Spiritual Service

INVESTIGATE

V. 7 ** What did we note last week about the characteristics of verses 2-13?

Together, they form an elaborate parenthetical thought that focuses upon the mystery of Christ, which is at the heart of Paul's ministry.

** Ok, Paul begins our study for today by saying "of which I was made a minister" - to what is he referring?

"the gospel" - V.6

** Did he apply for this job or study his whole life to become a pastor?

No - He was "made" a minister. Even though Paul was a learned man, his personal studies were not designed to make him a proclaimer of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God had to do that!

cf. Galatians 1:15-16

** When Paul said he was "made a minister", what does he mean? What is a minister?

Minister translates the familiar term "diakonos". It is used 29 times in the New Testament - 3 times for deacon, 7 times for minister and 19 times for the term "servant". Paul is letting us know that his "Spiritual Service" did not originate with himself, but it came from God just as ours does!

** Paul is now going to paint an expanding portrait of his service to God for us. Let's try to pick up each piece of the painting and apply it to our own lives. How does he expand his thought that he was made a minister?

It was according to the gift of God's grace which was given to him.
cf. Ephesians 2:8-10, 1Corinthians 15:10

** Alright then, he was made a minister, by God's grace, what comes next?

It was according to the working of His power.

** Does anyone fully understand that statement?

I don't think so - 1Corinthians 2:9

God's limitless, inexhaustible power has made us into His servants. That goes way beyond our ability to understand, but not beyond our ability to believe and obey!

** Can you think of Paul's own words in another epistle that demonstrates his utter dependency on that power?

Philippians 4:13 - "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me".

V. 8 ** Do you think that Paul had a pretty high view of himself? After all, he was an apostle, God's man for the job. Did he think he was hot stuff?

No - just the opposite. Let's look at a chronological progression of Paul's self image.

54 A.D. - 1Corinthians 15:9 "least of the apostles"

60 A.D. - Ephesians 3:8 "least of all saints"

65 A.D. - 1Timothy 1:15 "foremost of all sinners"

** What caused this progression?

The longer Paul walked with God, the more he could see the difference between God's perfect righteousness and his own wretched sin. cf. Romans 7:24

** Does this attitude, which the world would call a poor self-esteem, limit an individual's Spiritual Service?

No - it is essential, it is the qualifier!

Moses - Exodus 4:1, 10

Gideon - Judges 6:15-16

Isaiah - Isaiah 6:5-8

This is true humility before a Holy God, not just self pity that says, "I'm no good".

** What privilege was given to "the least of all saints"?

"to preach...the unfathomable riches of Christ"

** What does Paul mean by "unfathomable"?

It cannot be traced out - it is incomprehensible! It is lacking in nothing!
cf. 2Peter 1:3 "everything pertaining to life and godliness".

V. 9 ** What second element does Paul add to the description of his "Spiritual Service"?

"to bring to light the administration of the mystery"

** Do you remember from last week the meaning of the word translated here as "administration"?

It was "oikonomia" or stewardship, meaning the management of a household, business, or other concern on behalf of someone else. Here Paul is referring to his job of teaching us our part in the stewardship of the mystery. That is, how we as Jew and Gentile believers are made into one new man in the church age and how we are to use our gifts in "Spiritual Service" toward one another.

** Just so we do not miss it, where has this mystery been kept?

For ages it "has been hidden in God".

** Why is that important?

Because of His sovereignty! It is His mystery, His gospel, His salvation, His heaven, His timing and His choice, all by His grace!

V.10 ** Why is God now revealing these mysteries?

To make known the wisdom of God through the agency of His church! God is putting His infinite wisdom on display for all creation to see and to respond in worship.

** To whom is God making known His wisdom?

"the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places"... angelic beings, to the praise and adoration of God. The church, you and I as individual members of the body of Christ, are used to bring praise from angels to God! cf. 1Peter 1:10-12, Luke 15:10

V.11 ** How long has God had this plan?

Eternally, this plan was "in accordance with the eternal purpose" of God. cf. 2Timothy 1:8-9

** How was God going to carry out His purpose?

In the Person of His Son, Christ Jesus our Lord!

Even when the going got unmeasureably difficult, Jesus Christ was committed to the purpose of His sovereign Father. cf. John 12:27-28

We need to recognize and follow that humble example in our own daily walk with the Lord.

** Before we leave this verse, what is important about the title that Paul attaches to Jesus Christ?

Paul reminds us that our "Spiritual Service" is to the One that we are to worship as "Lord". He is the Master, we are the servants!

V.12 ** Well, God's plan is amazing - even unfathomable, but if we are just wretched, lowly sinners; in whose flesh no good thing dwells, do you suppose we should be ashamed, fearful or timid before God, even hesitant to approach Him because of His holiness?

Absolutely not! By His grace alone, we have been given a bold and confident access to Him.
cf. Hebrews 4:16 - "Let us therefore draw near with confidence (lit. access in confidence) to the throne of grace..."

** How did we personally gain this boldness and confidence?

"through faith in Him" - When we entered into our personal relationship with Jesus Christ by grace through faith, we gained His boldness and confidence.

** When we consider the despair of our sinful state and the glorious truth that God saved us, and uses us to bring praise and glory to Himself - now how do you view the word "balance" as you view your "Spiritual Service" to the Lord?

He has taken the heavy weight of my sin and countered it with the blood of Christ to bring me back to a point of service for His Name sake.

V.13 ** Now that Paul's readers, including us, understand how God has perfectly balanced the scales of justice and their own lives as well, what does He ask them to do?

Actually he asked them not to do something, "I ask you not to lose heart".

cf. 2Corinthians 4:1 - we do not lose heart

Galatians 6:9 - let us not lose heart in doing good

2Thessalonians 3:13 - do not grow weary of doing good

1Corinthians 15:58 - be steadfast, immovable

** When you consider the context of this letter, what details about Paul's life could cause the Ephesians to lose heart?

He was in prison, suffering for Jesus Christ, because He had preached the gospel to them. His tribulations were indeed on their behalf!

** What does Paul mean by saying that his tribulations are the Ephesians' glory?

William Hendrikson - "It was an honor for the Ephesians that God considered them worthy of the suffering endured by Paul 'on their behalf'".

** What was Paul's view of his suffering here on earth?

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18)

We would do well to follow that godly example!

EXTRICATE

** What points of identification did you experience with Paul as you studied this passage?

- 1) "made a servant"
- 2) "least of all saints"
- 3) "part of God's eternal purpose"
- 4) "our boldness and confidence".

DELINEATE

** What kinds of things could cause us to lose heart? What takes the wind out of the sail of a Christian?

- 1) personal failure 2) impatience 3) worldly affection
- 4) lack of prayer 5) lack of time in the Word of God.

EVALUATE

** If we desire to have an effectual "Spiritual Service" like the apostle Paul, what should we do when one of those things tries to make us ineffective in the cause of Christ?

DO NOT LOSE HEART! But instead; pray, call a brother or sister, read the Word, review a Bible study that has encouraged your heart.

ACTIVATE

** We need to devote ourselves to a bold and confident "Spiritual Service" that has been balanced by the blood of Christ unto the glory of God, realizing that our obedience causes the angels to praise His name!

Closing prayer