

## Ephesians, Chapter Three, Lesson One

SPIRITUAL STEWARDSHIP Ephesians 3:1-6

### STIMULATE

\*\* Hopefully you have enjoyed seeing yourself as an important part of God's building! How has knowing that you have been "Built Together in Christ" into a dwelling place for God in the Person of the Holy Spirit benefited your daily walk over this past week?

It causes us to have a much broader view of our life and responsibilities. I am not in this for myself, but for the good of my brothers and sisters and for the glory of God! It has caused me to be more aware of His wonderful presence in my life.

### MOTIVATE

\*\* Today, as we begin our look at the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, let me ask you a question. How do you feel about living in this day and age? What advantages can you think of for living in the church age?

- 1) We have the Holy Spirit living in us!
- 2) We have the completed, written Word of God!
- 3) We have the wisdom of godly men, who wrote the Bible for us to apply to our lives!
- 4) We are able to understand things that were formerly not known to man!

\*\* In this wonderful chapter the apostle Paul is going to show us our responsibilities in Christ from three different perspectives. Over the next three weeks he will show us our:

*SPIRITUAL STEWARDSHIP* - Ephesians 3:1-6

*SPIRITUAL SERVICE* - Ephesians 3:7-13

*SPIRITUAL STRENGTH* - Ephesians 3:14-21

Please join me now in chapter three as we learn together from Paul about our "Spiritual Stewardship".

Read Passage (V. 1-3) (V. 4-6)

Opening prayer

### *Spiritual Stewardship*

### INVESTIGATE

**V. 1** \*\* As the apostle begins this chapter he says, "For this reason" - he is going to do something. What do you suppose he is going to do?

He is going to pray for the Ephesians! cf. V.14

From verses 2 to 13, Paul interrupts himself with an elaborate parenthetical thought, which we will look at together today and next week as well. You can see him regain his original thought at the beginning of verse 14.

\*\* Since Paul is going to be praying for the Ephesians, what reason is he referring to, which proves to be the motivation for his prayers?

The many unifying truths that have been bestowed upon both Jew and Gentile as blessings from God, which Paul just spoke of in chapter two.

For example:

2:15 - They both become one new man in Christ

2:16 - All believers are in one body

2:17 - Both groups share peace with God

2:19 - Equally citizens of God's kingdom

2:19 - Equally members of God's family

2:22 - Together they form the dwelling place of God in the Spirit

Paul is moved to prayer as he writes this epistle, but before he actually prays (as we will see in two weeks) he wants us to learn more about God's great mystery and how that mystery should effect us.

\*\* Now, keeping in mind that Paul's heart is overflowing with love and compassion so as to pray for the Gentile believers - what is so unusual about that in light of his own present circumstances?

Paul was in prison because of preaching to the Gentiles, the very ones for which he is now moved to pray.

\*\* What kind of heart attitude does this require?

A completely selfless existence! cf. Philippians 2:3-5

\*\* Taking our time, let's try to answer the question, "By whom was Paul imprisoned?"

The nation of Rome! cf. Acts 21:31-32, 23:10, 24:1, 24:22-23, 25:10-11 (His first imprisonment, from which he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon)

\*\* However, of whom did Paul consider himself to be a prisoner?

He called himself, "the prisoner of Christ Jesus".

\*\* Why was that?

Because of the reason for his imprisonment - he said it was for "the cause of Christ" in his letter to the Philippians. cf. Philippians 1:12-14

**V. 2** \*\* Is Paul wondering if the Ephesians had heard of the ministry given to him by the Lord?

No - we understand that the phrase "if indeed you have heard" is a Greek first-class conditional clause which indicates that the condition is assumed to be true. Paul could have said, "Since you have heard". The Ephesians, and all of those in Asia-minor had heard of this most amazing ministry!

\*\* To what stewardship is Paul referring?

The "oikonomia" of God's grace! The term meant the management of a household, business, or other concern on behalf of someone else. It is the same word translated "administration" in verse nine.

**\*\* What was Paul managing by the grace of God?**

"the mystery of Christ" cf. V.4

"through the gospel" cf. V.6

**\*\* Do you think that Paul took his stewardship from God very seriously?**

Absolutely! cf. 1Corinthians 9:16-17, Romans 15:15-16 and 1Timothy 1:12-14

Every Christian, like Paul has received a stewardship of all that has been given to them by the grace of God for the purpose of "managing" it on behalf of the One who saved us. We are stewards of our calling, spiritual gifts, opportunities, skills, knowledge, and every other blessing that we have from the Lord.

**\*\* Was the stewardship of God's grace given to Paul for his own benefit?**

No, it was given to Paul "for you". The Gentiles, right down to us today, were the benefactors of Paul's faithful stewardship of the gospel of Christ.

We have already seen two marvelous examples from the heart of Paul. **First**, his selflessness in being willing to pray for the very ones that were the cause of his being imprisoned and **second**, the fact that he would use his salvation/stewardship for the benefit of others. Let's move on to the **third** powerful example from Paul's "Spiritual Stewardship", that being his desire to help others understand the mystery of Christ.

**V. 3 \*\* What was Paul's source of information? Did he have to exchange views with other theologians or spend time studying commentators of his day?**

No - Paul received his information "by revelation"! He was blessed to receive it directly from God Himself. cf. Galatians 1:11-12

**\*\* What was the content of this revelation?**

It was "the mystery", which he will go on to specifically describe to us in verse six.

**\*\* We'll look at that in a moment, but for now, is this the first time he has mentioned this mystery to the Ephesians?**

No - Twice before in this letter Paul has referred to it "in brief".  
cf. Ephesians 1:9-10 and Ephesians 2:11-16

The phrase "as I wrote before in brief" could be translated, "as I briefly indicated above" or "as I already briefly wrote you" (Amplified N.T.).

Paul will refer to this mystery three more times in this epistle as it is at the heart of everything he has to say about salvation through faith in Christ (Ephesians 3:4, 3:9, 6:19).

**V. 4 \*\* Take a moment and review again verse four, what is Paul's main concern in this verse?**

He wants his reader to understand his insight into the mystery of Christ. Remember this is a circular letter to many churches in Asia-minor and to us!

\*\* We know that Jew and Gentile being one in Christ was part of the mystery, but to what further description of that mystery is Paul now referring by mentioning his "insight"?

The mystery of Christ "in you", which he mentions to the Colossians. cf. Colossians 1:25-27

**V. 5** \*\* Were Old Testament saints aware of these mysteries?

No - "in other generations was not made known to the sons of men". cf. 1Peter 1:10-11

\*\* Did the Holy Spirit ever hint regarding the unity of Jew and Gentile through faith in Christ?

Yes -

**Genesis 12:3** - All families...will be blessed

**Genesis 22:18** - All nations...will be blessed

**Isaiah 11:10** - Nations resort to Christ

**Isaiah 49:6** - Salvation to the end of the earth

The Old Testament believer did not generally understand or accept the application of this marvelous truth.

\*\* What agents does the Holy Spirit now use in our text to make known this mystery?

The apostles and prophets.

\*\* What did we learn last week at the end of chapter two that established this reality?

The church itself was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" - that is their inspired writing of God's revelation. cf. Ephesians 2:20

**V. 6** \*\* As Paul now explains "the mystery of Christ", he will break it down into three specific components. What are they?

**1) The Gentiles are fellow heirs**

cf. Galatians 3:26-29

**2) The Gentiles are fellow members of the body of Christ**

cf. 1Corinthians 12:12-13, 20, 26-27

**3) The Gentiles are fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus**

cf. Ephesians 2:12, Galatians 3:13-14

\*\* How did all of these wonderful blessings come about?

"...through the gospel...", Paul is overwhelmed by the far reaching impact of God's gracious gospel!

## **EXTRICATE**

\*\* Next week we will see Paul's and our "Spiritual Service" as it relates to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but for today let's look back over the passage and review the three examples from the life of the apostle which are worthy of our emulation.

As we fulfill our own "Spiritual Stewardship" before a Holy God, what three things should be the defining characteristics of our walk?

**1) Selflessness** - Like Paul who is driven to prayer on behalf of the very ones for which he was presently imprisoned. (V.1 and V.14)

**2) Use my salvation/stewardship for the benefit of others.** (V.2)

**3) Be willing to help others understand the mysteries of Christ,** which to the unsaved today remains a mystery.

### **DELINEATE**

\*\* We are so fortunate to be living in a time and age when the Holy Spirit takes up residency in the heart of every believer, when we have God's revealed word and we are able to understand the deeper truths of Scripture regarding the Person of Jesus Christ!

Are you living each day showing your thankfulness for God's sovereign timing in your life?

### **EVALUATE**

\*\* How can we manifest that thankfulness each day?

By following Paul's godly examples, we can:

- 1) Pray for others
- 2) Be spent for others
- 3) Be willing to teach others

### **ACTIVATE**

\*\* While it would be wonderful to apply all three examples to our lives, let me ask you to choose just one from our list and commit to the Lord your desire to grow in that area this week.

Closing prayer