

We Are Confident

Eph. 3:1-13

If you check commentaries, you will find out that this passage of scripture is often overlooked ...

In today's text Paul states three things that are absolutely true for the Christian ...

... Paul is being very honest about these three truths because he wants us to be confident in faith in Christ and not lose heart during the difficult seasons.

There is Hardness in Life

There is Wonder in God's Grace

There is Unrealized Power in the Church

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles--² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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,⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. (Eph. 3:1-13)

1. There is Hardness in Life

You can see in the very first verse that Paul is writing from prison ...

... and as Paul is writing he suddenly stops ...

... notice the dash in verse 1 after the word Gentile?

While writing Paul is suddenly thinks of something And we know what that something is because of the first word in verse 13.

... "SO" ... this is the Greek conjunction "dia" which is often translated "therefore."

... Paul has this thought after writing verse 1 then he writes verses 2-12 and says SO, or THEREFORE, or IN LIGHT OF WHAT I JUST WROTE...

Here is what is happening.

Paul is in prison writing to the church in Ephesus when he suddenly remembers that his imprisonment is a discouragement to them ...

... not only because they love him but also because of the possibility that they could end up in the same predicament.

... so, he breaks off from what he is writing, and he addresses this discouragement.

Whether you realize it or not this is important.

There is no book more realistic and honest about the reality of discouragement and suffering

... no book is as honest about the hardness of life than the **Word of God.**

Paul doesn't tell his friends to "shake it off" or "suck it up" ... Paul encourages them.

Now one of the reasons the Bible is so honest about suffering is because God knows that suffering ... the hard moments, experiences, things in life ...

... can shake your faith.

Example: *In Matthew 11 we find out that John the Baptist had been arrested.*

*... by the way **John the Baptist** was the cousin of Jesus ...*

... John the Baptist, baptized Jesus

... John the Baptist was the one who paved the way for Jesus to start his ministry

But John the Baptist, the hero, the champion, is in prison ...

... and he sends a messenger to Jesus to ask Jesus this question, "Are you really the messiah, or should we look for somebody else?"

Why is John asking this question ... because he's suffering ... he's discouraged, and his confidence has been undermined and shaken by this suffering.

Another example: In the book of King's, the **Prophet Elijah** calls fire from heaven one day and the next day he's asking God to kill him ...

... why, the suffering, the hardships in life, can shake your faith.

Another example: In the book of Job, **Job's wife** tells him to curse God and die ...

I believe Job's wife was a good woman ... but she was hurting ... the hardness of life was pressing down on her

... she had lost her children and it looked like she was going to lose her husband as well.

... her confidence in God's goodness was shaken.

In the same way Paul is concerned that friends in Ephesus might feel the same way and experience the same uncertainty.

So, Paul tells them something to encourage them in their faith ... **and this is point 2.**

2. There is Wonder in Grace

You'll notice that Paul uses a particular word four times in verses 3-9 and then again in 5:36 and 6:19 ...

... it's the word **mystery**.

... Paul uses this word more than 15 times in his letters.

Now this word *musterion* ... means something different than what we think.

When we think of "mystery" we think of something that is hidden that with enough wisdom and insight we can discover it.

When I was a boy, I loved to read Hardee Boy Mysteries; Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators ... Encyclopedia Brown ...

... and the fun of the books was trying to figure out the mystery ... and if you couldn't the book would reveal the mystery at the end

... and when you read the solution to the mystery ... you'd say, "Oh, I see" "I should have figured it out" ... "it was so obvious."

That's what we think a mystery is ... Paul means something quite different.

When Paul uses the word "*musterion*" he means something hidden that you and I could never know or discover unless God reveals it.

This mystery of the gospel/grace/Christ/faith ... we would never be able to discover on our own because it is too counter-intuitive!

... you and I could never discover it through mere logic and reason.

This **mystery of grace** is an astonishing counter-intuitive divine revelation.

This **mystery of the gospel** goes against anything that we would have ever guessed.

Let me explain:

Consider the 10 Commandments ... the golden rule ... doing good to others ...

These things are never called a mystery ... EVER!

Why? Because they make sense to us.

We understand why we shouldn't steal ... even if we do steal ... at least we understand why people shouldn't steal from us ...

... even though we may lie ... we don't think people to lie to us.

It makes sense.

Now the gospel is not "if you obey the 10 commandments and keep the golden rule then God will love you, he will hear your prayers, and one day he will take you to heaven to be with Him.

... that makes sense to us Doing good to earn God's favor is logical, it seems reasonable to the carnal mind

... So clearly this is not the mystery of the gospel

... This is why every other religion is telling you do to all these things to appease some god.

... They are man-made religions born within the logic and reason of the human mind.

This is not a mystery; this is not the gospel.

The gospel is the OPPOSITE of this.

The gospel is that the Son of God came to earth and triumphed through weakness and suffering

... Jesus won by losing

... He gained everything by losing everything

... Thereby defeating our sin and guilt, by taking our sin and guilt upon himself

Sinners, without in ability or work on their part become part of God's family.

AND ... when you become a Christian, you are in that moment simultaneously a sinner and righteous saint...

In verse 8 Paul calls himself the "very least" that means sinner, wicked ... but he says he is the least of all the saints..." that means righteous.

When you become a Christian, you are simultaneously a sinner ... and yet loved, affirmed, pardoned, accepted, delighted in by a Holy God ... **that's a mystery.**

... It's a mystery because the human mind with all its logic and reason would ever think such a thing is possible ... it is counter-intuitive ... it goes against the natural mind

... it goes against our instincts to think that no matter how bad you are you are, or can be, you are still everlastingly saved by sheer grace and made a saint.

There is hardness in life ... It's enough to shake your faith ... but be encouraged ... not matter how weak you are ...

... not matter how much you have failed

... You are supremely loved, cherished, and treasured by God

... God the Father is not ashamed to call you His child ...

... Jesus is not ashamed to call you His brother and sister.

AND all those who have realized the fulfillment of this mystery belong to one another.

3. There is Unrealized Power in the Church

¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Paul says that he is a minister of this mystery of the gospel.

... He, the least of all, the chief of sinners, is called to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ

... Why? ... so that THROUGH the church the manifold blessings of God would be made known throughout the world.

... this is and has been the eternal purpose of God. This is what verse 11 says.

... and what is God's purpose?

Paul told us in back in the first chapter. 1:7-10.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. (Eph 1:7-10)

God's purpose is to bring together, to fix, to sum up everything in the world that is falling apart.

As you mature in life and grow older there is one thing you quickly learn about life ... everything is falling apart

- Society falls apart with wars
- Relationships fall apart for a multitude of reasons
- Plans fall apart

- Our bodies fall apart with disease and sickness

But it wasn't supposed to be this way, this is what sin and done

... but one day "God in Christ Jesus" is going to make everything right and put everything back together ...

Now, **how can the world see that God is going to make everything right??**

It's in verse 10.

"through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known"

Listen to what Paul is saying ...

... It is in the community of faith (not the individual) but in the church, where the world can most readily see ...

- ... people loving one another and being brought together regardless of differences and diversities.
- ... broken lives being restored
- ... the incredible future that God is preparing for His people

F.F. Bruce (writing of this verse) says:

"The church here in Ephesians 3:10 appear to be God's pilot plan for the reconciled universe of the future."

The church is to be NOT ... this PRESENT world ...

... the church is to be a new society **in which the world can see** what family life, business and economic practices, relationships, forgiveness (and everything else) look like under the healing kingship of Jesus Christ!

In recent statistics and surveys 81% of all Americans questioned say that you can be a good Christian and not be an active participating part of a church ...

... You need to know that the Apostle Paul has no idea what these people are talking about.

Paul is not lecturing theological students academics... Paul is pastoring hurting people

He admits there is hardness in life and that is why we need to know and remember the wonder of God's grace and the power that is inherit in being involved in God's church.

Paul says, "I am a prisoner" ... but notice he doesn't say a Prisoner of Rome or Ephesus, He says a prisoner of Christ Jesus ...

... and he adds, "*on behalf of you Gentiles.*"

Paul says to these Ephesians, "I am suffering, what I am suffering for you." ... WHAT does that mean?

Paul is teaching us three things about suffering that we need to know.

- No suffering is without meaning or purpose.
- No suffering can ultimately or eternally hurt you
- All suffering is for glory

Paul says, I'm suffering for you ...

... in prison I am able to write this letter and when you get it (verse 4) you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ

Paul says, "Yes I am in prison ... but I'm not Rome's prisoner ... I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus."

... and because I am here for Christ I am free (he says this in verse 12) because of God's grace I can boldly live with confidence and approach God.

Paul says, because my treasure is that in Jesus Christ, I have boldness and access to the Father with confidence ... and nobody can take that away from me.

... this is the treasure of my heart

... this doesn't mean that I don't weep or have pain—but it does mean that I will never be devastated by those things outside of me.

... Paul says, Christ is the treasure of my heart ... and as **MC Hammer** used to say, “You can't touch this.”

Where your treasure is, that is where your heart is.

Paul's treasure is this, “In Christ, I have boldness and access to God!”

Have you made that move?

Is that your treasure in Christ Jesus ... or is it something else?

Jesus was **shut out** (the Father forsook him) so that we could **have access** ...

... Jesus was **bound and nailed to a cross** ... so that we could **be free**

... **cast out** **So that we could approach**

Jesus suffered tremendous hardship ... for you and me

... so now all the suffering and hardship we experience powerfully identifies us with Christ.

Jesus suffered so that when we suffered, we would be like Him.

This is what Paul is saying ...

Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory. (Eph 3:13)

You see ...

- No suffering is without meaning or purpose.
- No suffering can ultimately or eternally hurt you
- All suffering is for glory

I want to say to you today ... Do not be discouraged by the suffering in you and around you, because glory is coming.

... and if you know that glory is coming, with God's help you can endure with confidence even through the valley of the shadow of death.