

Ephesians 3:1-9

Ephesians 3:1-9 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles; (2) if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, (3) how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, (4) by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), (5) which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: (6) that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, (7) of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. (8) To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, (9) and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

Questions On The Text

How did Paul describe himself?

Verses 1: Paul refers to himself as Christ's prisoner. No doubt, he considered this to be a theological truth, but it was also physically true that he was at that time in prison. He also claims that he is a prisoner for the Gentiles, Ephesus being a Gentile church. This relates to the reason he was in prison as he was arrested and imprisoned because of his stand on the essential unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians. See Acts 21:26-36; 22:21-22; 26:19-21.

What did God give Paul?

Verse 2: God gave Paul a dispensation of His grace for the Gentiles. As we saw in Ephesians 1:10, dispensation refers to the management or administration of a household, indicating that Paul had been entrusted with a stewardship.

What did God reveal to Paul?

Verses 3-5: God revealed to Paul the mystery of Christ. As mentioned in an earlier study, a mystery is a secret or something hidden. That mystery had now been revealed to Paul, and in fact, to all the apostles and prophets, by the Holy Spirit.

What is the nature of the mystery?

Verse 6: What had been previously hidden, but was now fully revealed to the apostles and prophets, is first that the gospel has made the Gentiles fellow-heirs of Christ (see Romans 9:1-8) along with Jewish believers. Second, Gentile believers are also part of the "same body" which is one word in Greek and unknown prior to Paul, so possibly a word invented by him to describe the oneness of Jewish and Gentile believers.

Third, Gentile believers are now partakers of God's promise in Christ. To better bring out the sense of the word "partakers," it might be clearer to translate the word "joint-partakers or sharers." Paul's whole point is that Gentile Christians are in no way inferior to Jewish Christians and have exactly the same standing before God.

What did Paul become a minister of?

Verse 7: Paul was a minister (literally, servant) of the gospel. This ministry / service was dependent on two things. First, God's gift of grace. And second, the operation of God's power.

How did Paul describe himself?

Verse 8: Paul said he was less than the least of the saints, an indication of his humility. Compare this with 1 Timothy 1:15 and 1 Corinthians 15:9-10.

What was the purpose of God's grace towards Paul?

Verses 8-9: God's grace was given to Paul for a two-fold purpose. First, he was commissioned to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. Second, to make everyone see the fellowship of the mystery. The word translated "fellowship" is one that we've seen before and means management or administration. Paul again emphasises the privilege of those who understand the mystery that was previously hidden in God, even from the Old Testament prophets.

Further Questions For Discussion:

Apart from the fact that he was in prison, what do you think Paul meant when he called himself Christ's prisoner?

Why did Paul need a dispensation of grace for the Gentiles?

What was the mystery that God revealed to Paul?

What two things did Paul's ministry depend on?

Why do you think Paul considered himself to be less than the least of the saints?