

# Ephesians

## Week Six: Blessed to be a Blessing The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed

### **Problem & Solution: (for leaders)**

*\*We think of salvation primarily in terms of what it gives us. We see God's grace given to us in Christ as an end, rather than means to a greater end beyond ourselves. – "God's grace that was given to me for you" (v.2) seems to rephrase the same missionary principle found in Genesis 12 that we are "blessed in order to be a blessing." Thus, we are not to think selfishly of God's grace, but rather seek to love and serve each other and share the gospel with others to greatest of ends: God's glory.*

### **Introduction:**

When have you experienced the axiom that it is more "blessed to give than receive"? Is this your typical experience? Why is your heart prone to prefer receiving over giving?

### **The Biblical Text:**

Ephesians 3:1-13\*

\*See the note in the "Going Deeper" section for a better understanding of how v.1-13 fits into chapter 3 as a whole.

### **"Grace given to me for you" (read verses 1-6):**

\*The end of verse 1 begins a digression. (Note that in verse 14 Paul will resume his prayer and flow of thought.) What seems to be the reason for the digression: what prompts it? *[His mention of his imprisonment 'for the sake of' the Gentiles seems to elicit an explanation of the reasons behind his ministry to the Gentiles.]*\*What does Paul say was true of the Gentiles before they came to know Christ and after they came to know Christ?

\*In verse 2 we read the phrase, "God's grace that was given to me for you." What does this phrase tell us about the nature of grace? about the nature of the gospel? *[Grace is meant to be shared. God blesses us in order to be a blessing to others.]*

\*In v. 3-6, Paul talks about a 'mystery.' What are the contents of this mystery? Why do you think God keeps certain aspects of his plans mysterious? *[The contents of the 'mystery' can be found throughout the passage. 3:6 offers the best summary of the mystery.]*

### **Made a minister of the gospel (read verses 7-13):**

\*What does it mean to be a servant of the gospel? (see v.7) How do v.1-13 help us answer this?

\*What role(s) did grace play in Paul's ministry? *[Grace empowered Paul for ministry. We often think of grace simply in terms of God's unmerited favor in salvation but not his empowering presence in ministry.]*

\*In verse 13, we learn that we not only share in the blessings of the gospel but as we seek to witness we also share in Christ's sufferings. How then are we to think of suffering as Christians?

### **Conclusion:**

\*Where does our desire to be a blessing come from? How do we loose that desire? *[Our desire to bless others flows from our experience of God's grace.]*

\*Paul was clearly motivated to minister out of an experience of God's grace. What are the motives (good and bad) that propel your service and obedience?

\*Paul clearly saw how he fit into the big picture of God's plan. How do you see yourself fitting in?

# G o i n g      D e e p e r

## **A Note on Context\***

\*Ephesians 3:2-13 is actually one long digression or parenthetical thought. In verse 1, Paul begins the preface to a prayer, digresses in verses 2-13, and then resumes his prayer in verse 14. What seems to prompt the digression in verse 1, is the mention of his hardships (imprisonment) for the sake of the Gentiles. What we will get in the digression, then, are the reasons why Paul is willing to sacrifice and persevere for the sake of his Gentile audience.

While the passage elaborates on Paul's mission to the Gentiles, what is not explicit, but clearly informs the text, is the Old Testament background of God's salvation plan to reach the Gentiles. God initially entrusted this mission to Israel; they were to be a witness to the nations and a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). God chose Israel as the object of his grace that they might be the vehicle of His grace and blessing to the nations—they were 'blessed in order to be a blessing' to the nations (Gen 18:18). This is the principle of missions, and in this mission Israel failed.

That Israel was somehow to be the vehicle of God's blessing to the Gentiles was clear in the Old Testament, but that it would be ultimately accomplished through the creation of a new body (the church), Paul informs us, was not revealed—the church was an undisclosed mystery in God's plan. In the church and through the church, the Gentiles would come to be heirs with Israel to the gospel of grace and all of the riches found in Christ.

Paul understands his current mission in light of this salvation history. He sees himself as the most undeserving recipient of God's grace—much like Israel. And like Israel he has been 'blessed in order to be a blessing,' 'called' in order to be a conduit of grace to the nations. But unlike Israel, he is intent on the faithful discharge of the administration of God's grace with which he's been entrusted.

## **Additional Discussion Questions:**

\*The Ephesian church was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, and Paul emphasizes that both were now joint heirs and part of one body. What sorts of issues, feelings and conflicts might have existed within the church between these two groups? [*Prejudice, division, differences in food and worship. The Jews could have felt that the Gentiles were second-class citizens in the church while Gentiles could have felt that in rejecting Christ, the Jews were now the second-class citizens.*]

\*What would have been some of the personal and cultural issues Paul would have had to wrestle with in preaching to the Gentiles? [*Jews saw Gentiles as vile and unclean in every way (how and what they ate, worshiped, dressed, and lived) and it would have taken considerable humility and sacrifice for Paul, a Jew, to minister to them.*]

\*What do you think would be the personal cost to you in reaching out to others with the gospel? [*Rejection, embarrassment, loss of popularity...*] In light of this passage what would make us willing in spite of the personal sacrifice? [*The grace of God that has been shown to us, among other things.*]

## **Cross Referencing: Our Missional God (Genesis 12)**

\*Read Genesis 12:1-3. How do you think God intended for Israel to bless other nations? What was Israel's mission?

[*More important than the answer is for the group to see this principle of 'blessed to be a blessing' as part of God's original plan for Israel, and part of a consistent theme in plan of salvation.*]

\*From what you know of the Old Testament what were some reasons that Israel failed in this mission?

[*Empty religion replacing true worship, hypocrisy, nationalism...*]