



God's Steward

Ephesians 3:1-13

Week 5 | Feb 4, 2018

Summary: Ephesians 3 begins with Paul laying out an important part of how he views himself in his relationship with Jesus. He calls himself “the prisoner of Christ Jesus” (3:1). Typically, we would think that being a prisoner of anyone would be a bad thing—in fact, in Galatians Paul asserts that it is for freedom that Christ has set us free (5:1)—yet he seems happy to call himself Christ’s prisoner here. Why? Because Paul has surrendered his life to Christ, so Jesus is the one who gets to pull all the strings and call all the shots. So even when Rome imprisons him, Paul is Christ’s prisoner first. He keeps at the forefront the fact that his life is dedicated to Christ. He is truly **God’s Prisoner**, which comes with certain responsibilities, namely, to also be **God’s Steward**. Paul is given the task, through the grace of Christ, to welcome and proclaim equal standing to the Gentiles who are willing to come to Christ. Gentiles, who were looked down upon by the Jews, are now joint-heirs with the New Israel, fellow members of the body, and sharers in the promises of Jesus (3:6). Paul further explains that this isn’t a new idea that God just came up with. Rather, it was **God’s Intent** for the church all along. When we’re taken captive by the gospel to steward this mystery, we have the honor of making the manifold wisdom of God known to the world around us.

Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 3:1-13. Why do you think Paul is so clear about his identity as Christ’s prisoner, and so comfortable with it? Is this something you could call yourself? Why or why not?
2. Verses 3-6 speak of the “mystery” that was made known to Paul. This mystery wasn’t made known to previous generations, but it has been made known now. What is this mystery? Why do you think it was kept hidden for so long? What does it mean to you to be in on it now?
3. The mystery is spelled out in verse 6. (Read it aloud.) The Gentiles were completely separate from the Jews in almost every way, but now in Christ they are heirs of God, members of one body, and sharers in the promises of Christ. Take some time to think about this reality from both sides: How do you think the Jews felt about letting such different people into their community? How do you think the Gentiles felt about being included (with major benefits) into company with God’s people? Which group do you identify with most? Why?
4. The intent of Church from the very beginning of time is found in verse 10. (Read it aloud.) How does this change or challenge your perspective on who we are and why we’re here? How strong has your participation been in this display of God’s manifold wisdom? What can we do to display it more? What hindrances or obstacles might we face?

Is it really that important that I go to Church?

Ephesians 3:10-11 is probably one of the most profound and powerful statements informing us of why the church exists:

His [God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When you read something like this it has to challenge the whole idea of why people “go to church.” We should start off by defining the word “church.” All too often we think of church as a building when in reality the original Greek work for church (ecclesia) means “assembly” or “congregation.” Go a little deeper theologically and you could define church as “those called out of darkness and into His marvelous light.” Church isn’t necessarily a place: it’s people. God’s people gathered together to worship Him.

Unfortunately people have taken that bit of information and used it to please themselves. One might say, “If church is people then I don’t really have to go to church.” With the advancement of technology people have been able to stay at home and watch church on TV, online, or catch the podcast later in the week. Church has lost its importance in our culture over the years so “going to church” has become less of a priority. Being present on a Sunday morning just isn’t that big of a deal for a lot of individuals and families who claim Jesus as Lord of their lives.

But as we see in Ephesians 3:10-11 that there is a lot more that is supposed to be happening when we gather together. When we come together it is – and always has been – God’s intent that we make known the manifold wisdom of Him to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. This means that the heavenly sphere gathers with us as we worship the God who created the entire universe and us. Not only that, we gather as His body (Ephesians 3:6). This means that each one of us brings our unique talents, gifts, and abilities as well as our unique culture and background. Each one of us adding different flair and flavor as we come together to make known the manifold wisdom of God. We, as the church, are what Pastor Bill Hybles calls “the hope of the world.” It was God’s intent all along, according to His eternal purpose that the world would know who Jesus is through His people, His church.

Do you technically have to “go to church” to be a Christian? Technically, no—in the same way that you don’t have to go to your house and be with your spouse in order to be married. But we all know that if you don’t actually go home, it won’t work very well for your relationship. When you miss church or avoid it altogether, or just attend without actually engaging, you’re robbing the church and the world of the local expression of Jesus. We miss you and you miss us.

