

Ephesians Week 4 TDs

1. Explore Eph 3:1-13.

What distinguishes 3:1-13 as a section of material?

Color/Highlight key words and phrases.

What are the major themes of 3:1-13? Are there any thematic (key words and phrases) connections with 1:3-14 and/or 1:15-23?

In a brief paragraph (or to yourself), summarize the content of 3:1-13. Title the section with a brief phrase.

Translation of 3:1

Based on 3:13 (“I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.”), what is the purpose of the material in 3:1-13? How does this relate to the statement/content in 3:1?

Clue

There is a question or issue concerning how 3:1 should be translated. Many versions translate 3:1 as if Paul leaves his train of thought after the statement, “I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles . . .” and doesn’t actually pick it back up again until 3:14. Compare these versions:

NIV: “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— . . .”

ESV: “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— . . .”

NKJV: “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— . . .”

NLT: “When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles . . .”

In Greek, the “to be” verb can be implied, however. Thus, other versions take the sentence as an affirmative statement:

NRSV: “This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— . . .”

CEV: “Christ Jesus made me his prisoner, so that I could help you Gentiles.”

NLV: I, Paul, am in prison because I am a missionary for Jesus Christ to you who are not Jews.

GWT: “This is the reason I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus for those of you who are not Jewish.”

I like the GWT (God’s Word Translation). This makes much more sense given the conclusion of the section in 3:13: “I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.” Without the affirmation that Paul *is* the prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles, there is nothing in the paragraph that could be “discouraging” to the non-Jewish recipients (read 3:2-12 carefully and you’ll see what I mean: it’s all good stuff). Taking 3:1 as an affirmation and the whole

section as an explanation or “defense” of Paul’s imprisonment (cf. Philippians 1:12-25) changes everything.

Shape and Purpose

As part of the oral culture of the time, many Bible passages have a circular shape (often called a chiasm, or chiasmic or concentric structuring). Circular structures move toward and then away from a prominent center/focal point. Balancing elements on each side of the center complement, clarify, and contrast each other. The center point often contrasts with the extremities.

Ephesians 3:1-13 has an amazing and intricate circular shape (that actually helps to interpret other sections of the book through its associations). The relationships between the parts are detailed and relatively easy to see (some are grammatical, some thematic). I’ve highlighted just a few, especially the ones in the middle, to help focus the center. The translation is my own very literal translation.

- A For this reason, I Paul am the prisoner of Christ for you Gentiles
 B Since you have surely heard about the administration of the grace of God that was given to me for you (cf. 1:10)
 C according to revelation the mystery was made know to me (cf. 1:9)
 D just as I have written briefly before/above, from the reading of which, you are able to gain an insight into my understanding in the mystery of Christ
 E which to other generations it was not made known to the sons of men
 F as now it is revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit
 G for the Gentiles to be fellow heirs and members of the same body and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (cf. 2:11-22)
 H of which I became a servant according to the gift of the grace of God given to me
 I according to the working of his power (cf. 1:19ff.)
 H’ to me the least of all saints this grace was given
 G’ to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, the fathomless wealth of Christ (cf. 2:11-22)
 F’ and to enlighten all what is the administration of the mystery
 E’ which has been hidden from the ages in God the one who created all things
 D’ in order that it might be made known now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies through the church the manifold wisdom of God
 C’ according to the plan of the ages which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1:9)
 B’ in whom we have boldness and the right to enter in confidence through faith in him (cf. 1:10)
 A’ Therefore I ask [you] not to become discouraged in my tribulation for you, which is your glory.

2. How Does 3:1-13 Fit/Function in the Book of Ephesians?

How does Eph 3:1-13 relate to what precedes and to what follows? How does it relate to Paul’s prayer and thematic outline of 1:18-19? To the transitional prayer of 3:14-21? And (to look ahead) how does it relate to 4:7-16?

How does the idea of the “grace” (as power) of God upon Paul as being “according to the working of his [God’s] power” flesh out the ideas expressed in 1:18-23 of the surpassing greatness of God’s power that God is working in and through Christ for the church? And how does it relate to 4:7-16 where Paul talks about how Christ gives or proportions grace upon everyone for the work and

building up of the church? How does this relate to God's "plan" of the "administration" (3:2, 9, 11; 1:5, 8-10) or structuring of the fullness of times?

Do you think 3:1-13 is a "digression" or "tangent" (most commentaries say so)? Or do you think it's integrally related to the content and purposes of the letter?

3. Explore Eph 3:14-21.

What are the key ideas summarized in 3:14-21? How do they relate to the previous sections? What are some specific connections with the Thanksgiving (1:15-22)?

What in the world does it mean "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"?

How does 3:14-21 prepare for the next chapter?

4. How Does 3:14-21 Fit/Function in the Book of Ephesians?

What distinguishes Eph 3:14-21 as a summary/transition?

Describe the function of 3:14-21 as a Transition between major sections of the letter.

2:20

Sample Highlighting of Chapter 3

3 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for 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**.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every **family in heaven and on earth** is named, ¹⁶ that according to the **riches** of his **glory** he may grant you to be **strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through **faith**—that you, being rooted and grounded in **love**, ¹⁸ may have **strength to comprehend with all the saints** what is **the breadth and length and height and depth**, ¹⁹ and **to know** the **love** of Christ that surpasses **knowledge**, that you may be **filled with all the fullness** of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is **able to do far more abundantly** than all that **we ask or think**, **according to the power at work** within us, ²¹ to him **be glory** in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Expert's Corner

Key Questions Review

Ephesians 3:1-13

- How does Paul's description of his ministry in 3:1-13 relate to the previous sections:
 - 1:3-14: Is Paul one of "us"? Who in Ephesians knows and passes on knowledge of "the mystery" of God?
 - 1:15-23: How does 3:1-13 relate to the listed themes?
 - 2:1-10: Did God call "you"/Paul/us for something? How is "grace" used in 2:1-10 in comparison to how it's used in 3:1-13?
 - 2:1-22: How did the Gentiles hear the gospel; how did Christ preach "peace" to them? What is Paul as "an *apostle* of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (2:20)?
- What is the origin and purpose of Paul's ministry? How does "the *prisoner* of Christ for the Gentiles" relate to "the *minister* of Christ for the Gentiles"?
- How does Paul's description of his ministry function in relation to his audience (3:13)? Why does Paul describe his ministry and try to encourage his audience in Ephesians?
- Is 3:1-13 a digression or tangent?