

# *“The Family of God”* Continues

## Study in Ephesians

Ephesians 3:1-13

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**Jeff:** Well, good morning. I’ve been saying to all my classes and Bible studies that it’s a joy to be with you. And that’s falling on hollow ears with me because I’m not really with you. As I look around I’m in an empty room. So I’m really looking forward to the time that we can be together again. I would encourage you, as one way of staying connected with the Brave Men Bible study, I would encourage you to look at the website and pray for your brothers and offer their concerns up to the Lord. And so in that sense I would encourage you to hang with each other, and better yet, stay focused with one another on the Lord Himself.

Well, I’m probably going to give something of an abbreviated study today so that you can have a smaller portion and take less time to view it, and at least get something of the whole. And then I’ll probably be dividing these talks into smaller segments so that you don’t have to sit down for an hour. But you can just watch, say, twenty minutes. And then, you know, you’ll be able to wrap up each talk. So that’s what I’m planning on doing today. So let me turn our attention now to Ephesians chapter 3. And in Ephesians chapter 3 I will read the first thirteen verses. Listen now to God’s word.

*“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, (assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you), how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly, When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed in His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 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.*

*“Of this gospel I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given to me by the working of His power. 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, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for all ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”*

Well, let’s just take a bit of that and look at it today. I want to start by reminding you of some introductory points, some things that we’ll need in order to digest what we’re taught in the book of Ephesians. For instance, one of the things that you have to realize when you look at the book of Ephesians is that it’s built grammatically in a very symmetrical way. For instance, there are indicatives and there are imperatives. Let me put that on the board. There are indicatives and imperatives.

## “*The Family of God*” Continues

Now what is an indicative and what is an imperative? Well, if I can just put it in a very simple way, an indicative states what is. It tells us what is. And an imperative gives us a command.

Now when you think about the book of Ephesians, one of the things that you realize is that in the first three chapters God, through the apostle Paul, is telling us about what He has accomplished, about what is through Jesus Christ our Savior. In other words, as he tells us about the gospel, he’s telling us what has been accomplished, what is, what has been done already for us. So the first three chapters are all indicatives.

Now the interesting thing is that there’s one imperative. It’s in chapter 2; it’s in verse 11. And that imperative is “*remember*.” So he’s not telling us to do anything except to remember what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. It’s the only imperative in the first three chapters. The first three chapters of this book are all in the indicative. They tell us what the gospel is; what God has done for us.

And then, remember that an imperative is a command. And what you find in the last three chapters of Ephesians—chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6—are imperatives. They’re full of imperatives.

Now I want you to think about this as a wonderful way of thinking about the Christian life. In other words, if you put imperatives above indicatives, what do you have? You obviously have works righteousness. If you tell someone what they must do in order to obtain what God has done for them, what you are doing is, you’re setting up for them a works gospel. But if you tell them what God has already accomplished for them in Christ followed by what they must do as a result of having been united to Christ, then you are not giving them a works-based salvation, but a grace-based salvation. In other words, it’s a salvation that is situated upon the work of Jesus Christ, and that alone.

And that’s what you have in the book of Ephesians. You have this really wonderful way of thinking about the gospel. It’s a gospel grammar, if you will. And it always ought to be the grammar that we use in order to talk about the gospel itself.

Let me put it this way, at least as it was needed for the Ephesian believers. The indicatives were the security of the believer. Any time a believer is ever troubled, what they need to remember is what God has done for them in Christ Jesus. And I think that’s the way in which Paul was hoping that the believers in Ephesus would receive this; they needed that sense of security.

Now I say that, and it’s rather important for thinking about the gospel in general. But as we head into chapter 3, we’ve already been thinking about the indicatives of the gospel. Why do I stop at this point to remind you of it? Why do I stop at this point to say, “Look; remember that indicatives are what God has accomplished. Indicatives are about what God has done for us?” Well, because in chapter 3 Paul is going to introduce to us *the ministry*, the ministry that flows forth from the gospel.

Now you need to remember this. I—well, not I—Paul is still talking about indicatives. And so this isn’t ministry, where we talk about what you do or what I do. Remember, this is not about imperatives yet. That’s not even on the table yet.

So what Paul is talking to us about is indicatives. But he’s talking to us about indicatives in the sense of what it is that we do.

## *“The Family of God”* Continues

**Transcriber’s Note:** There is feedback on the recording.

**Jeff:** I’m sorry about that. Please silence your phones so that they don’t disrupt the class anymore.

So indicatives are what God has done for us. And what we’re talking about here in this particular spot is the ministry that God has given to us and to the church. So when we think about indicatives in light of the ministry that he’s going to talk about, he’s talking about the ministry that is a gift to the church from Him. That’s the way we ought to think about the ministry. And so the very first point that I want to share with you is that *ministry is a gift to us*.

Now I want you to notice something about the structure of this text. The structure of this text is really an inclusio. Now you’ve heard me mention this before. I’ll just put it up on the board. There’s an inclusio.

Now what’s an inclusio? How do we think about that? Well, an inclusio is when you have, say, a book end on this side and a book end on this side. And those book ends are a word or a phrase or an idea that appear here and here, at the beginning and at the end.

Now I want you to see the inclusio in this particular chapter, or in this particular section of this chapter. For instance, in verse 2 it says, “*the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you.*” And then go to verse 7. And there it says, “*according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given to me by the working of His power.*”

And so there’s this idea that “*the gift of God’s grace, which was given to me for you.*” “The gift of God’s grace given to me for you.” And Paul is there talking about the ministry as a gift of God’s grace, given to us.

So I want us to think about that. I want us to think about this ministry that is a gift to us, because that’s obviously using the structure of this particular section. That’s what Paul is saying. That’s how we ought to think about it.

So let me talk to you about a couple of things that emerge from this particular section. First of all, notice what he says. He says, “this was given to me. And as it’s given to me,” it’s not something that I possess. In other words, it’s not something that is now mine, and I have dominion over it. It’s not that at all.

Notice what he says. He says, “It’s given to me, and I am a steward of it.” Now what does he mean when he describes himself as a steward? A steward is someone who is entrusted to care for someone else’s property. And for instance you might think about something as simple as a baby sitter. A baby sitter is a steward.

What I always think is funny is that you can always imagine the baby sitter who comes over to watch the child, and says to the father of this child, “I notice that you have a BMW in your garage.”

And the man says, “Yes. That’s my car and I only take it out on special occasions,” and so on.

And the baby sitter says, “Well, if I were to happen to need a car, for instance, to take the baby to the hospital, could I use the BMW?”

And, you know, the man says, “Absolutely not.” And the funny thing about it is that you’d be using an *a priori* argument, and argue from the greater to the lesser. Then it’s nonsensical what the father is saying, because if he trusts his daughter, the little baby

## *“The Family of God”* Continues

daughter to this girl, then why wouldn't he trust the BMW, because obviously the daughter is of greater value and the BMW is of lesser value. She's arguing from the greater to the lesser. "If you trust me with this little girl of yours, then certainly you would trust me with your BMW." That's the idea. And it's just a funny way of saying that that's the way God has entrusted His precious possessions to us.

And the interesting thing is that if you look at the Scriptures, one of the things that you find very clearly is that God has entrusted His word to His elders. Not only His word, but the lesser things as well—another *a priori argument*. If He has trusted His word, then for instance He has also entrusted the sacraments to His elders, to distribute and to administer, and so on. So that's the idea behind it, that we're stewards.

Now from another perspective I want you to notice this. And this jest has a way of reinforcing the idea that we're stewards, that we've been entrusted with the things of God, to care for them as elders and as ministers and as believers in this world. Notice, for instance, the passive verbs that are here.

Now a passive verb means that something is happening to the subject. So if you think about being delivered to jail, you would say, "I was hauled off to jail." Something was happening to me. I didn't go there on my own; it was happening to me.

Well, look at the way in which Paul talks about the things that have happened to him, all these passive verbs that are used. First of all, he says that "the mystery was made known to me. It was revealed to me. I didn't discover it. My eyes were opened to it; it was revealed to me."

And then notice this; this is in verse 7. He says, "*I was made a minister.*" In other words, he was made a steward. He was caused to be a steward.

So you have this idea that ministry is a gift. Ministry is a gift in the sense that God gives to the steward. He makes them to be the stewards they are. He made Paul to be the minister. But not only does he make Paul to be the minister; he actually grants the steward the authority over his possessions. And that includes the mystery that is now made known to the steward. In other words, the steward now understands the mystery.

Now when you understand it like that, the ministry takes on a greater level of importance, the ministry of the church. And notice what he says. This is the ministry of the church. It's through the church that the manifold wisdom might be made known to the world. It's through the church—the church that is the body of Christ, the church that has the ministry of Christ, the ministry that He has gifted to it.

Well, how do you view the ministry? Well, you have to view the ministry of the church as something that's really wonderful, something that's really important, important not just to us but to God Himself, because it's His gift to us.

Now you might say something like this. Well, wait a minute. Our chapter says that this is Paul. Paul is talking about the grace given to him and how he was made a steward. It doesn't say "us."

But notice what he's going to say in chapter 4 verse 7. He's going to say, "*But grace was given to each one of us.*" In other words, here he's saying in chapter 3 that he's talking about the grace given to himself, having been made a steward over God's possessions for the church. But in chapter 4 he's going to talk about what? The grace

## *“The Family of God”* Continues

given to each one of us. In other words, the gift of ministry is not just to Paul and the other apostles. But the gift of ministry is also to the church and to the members of the church.

And what he’s going to say is this. He’s going to say that there is an equipping that takes place. There are those who are gifted to handle revelation. And they equip others within the church, that those others might use their gifts in the world on behalf of Christ and His church to minister in the world, to draw others who are on the outside into the church.

Let me ask you a question, and I’m going to wrap this up. We’re at about the 20-minute mark. And again I want to keep these fairly short for you so that you can watch small segments and wrap them up. But in what sense is your ministry a gift? Well, it’s a gift from God to you. But it’s also a gift from you to others. Or you can say it like this. What you do for others is God’s gift to them.

So I want you to rethink the ministry. Certainly Paul is talking about a ministry in a very specific sense. He’s talking about the ministry that he’s been gifted with. And then in chapter 4 he’s going to be talking about the gift of ministry that is the gift of handling revelation. But he’s also going to talk about the gift of ministry that those who are under ministers receive and are able to exercise as a result.

And so you have to ask yourself. In what sense is ministry a gift? It has to be a gift from God to you. But you are a gift from God to others. And so let me encourage you to think about your ministries in that way. The Lord bless you.