



Wednesday, April 30, 2025 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

T H E B O O K O F  
**EPHESIANS**  
*How to live the Christian life*

**EPHESIANS: HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – PART 16**  
*“Grateful for the Gospel” - Ephesians 3:1-7*

*“<sup>1</sup>For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup> by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), <sup>5</sup> 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: <sup>6</sup> that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, <sup>7</sup> 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.” -Ephesians 3:1-7 (NKVJ)*

**KEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EPHESIANS**

To gain a better understanding of the Book of Ephesians, consider the following background information:

1. **Authorship: The Apostle Paul** - Traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul.
2. **Date of Writing: A.D. 60-63** - Likely written around A.D. 60-63 during Paul's Roman imprisonment.
3. **Place of writing: Rome** – Paul wrote the book/letter of Ephesians from a Roman prison
4. **Audience: Ephesian Christians at Ephesus and surrounding area** Addressed to the Christian community in Ephesus, a major city in Asia Minor. Ephesians is considered a “circular letter” meant to be circulated to church in the area of Ephesus... possibly the same 7 churches
5. **Purpose: How to live the Christian life** To strengthen the faith of believers and address issues of unity and spiritual maturity.

6. **Themes: Grace, the church, and holy living** - Key themes include grace, the church as the body of Christ, and the importance of living a holy life.
  7. **Structure: Ephesus is divided into two main sections** - Divided into two main sections: doctrinal teachings (chapters 1-3) and practical applications (chapters 4-6).
  8. **Cultural Context: Ephesus was center of commerce and religion** - Ephesus was a center of commerce and religion, known for the Temple of Artemis.
  9. **Significance: Mystery of the gospel and inclusion of Gentiles** - Emphasizes the mystery of the Gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan.
  10. **Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians' emphasis on the spiritual battle** Concludes with a call to spiritual readiness and the armor of God (chapter 6).
- 

### Application Questions

1. Some teach that it is okay to be angry at God when we suffer and that we should be honest in expressing our feelings. Why is this at odds with Scripture?
2. How can a person who grew up in a Christian home get a deeper appreciation of God's abundant grace in salvation?
3. Who is more difficult to reach with the gospel: a thorough pagan or a self-righteous churchgoer? Why?
4. Why is it important for every believer to see himself as a steward or servant of Christ? How does this attitude help us?
5. **What is the gospel?**
6. **Why are you grateful for the gospel?**
7. **What are you most grateful in the gospel?**

**The Gratitude Quiz:** This quiz appears in the excellent book, "The Grumbler's Guide to Giving Thanks," by Dustin Crowe. This short quiz below might help you test where you land on a spectrum from grateful to grumbling. As honest as you can be, circle either (A) or (B) for each question.

1. Do you more often (A) remember God's blessings in your life or (B) forget them?
2. When things don't go your way, do you typically respond (A) in gratitude or (B) by grumbling?
3. Do you see thanksgiving as (A) as essential spiritual rhythm for Christians or (B) something that's great to do when you remember it but unnecessary?
4. Would you say you tell God thanks (A) daily or (B) less than daily?
5. Is thanksgiving (A) a significant part of your prayer life or (B) a small part of it?
6. Would you describe yourself as more often (A) content or (B) discontent?
7. As you go throughout your day, do you usually (A) have eyes open to reasons for giving thanks around you or (B) not see many things to give thanks for?

8. Do you tend to rehearse (A) God's generosity and goodness or (B) what seems unfair?
9. Do you (A) often tell others reasons you're grateful or (B) rarely talk about why you're grateful?
10. When you see things others have that you don't, do you (A) rest in what God has giving you or (B) struggle with jealousy?
11. If you were to list reasons for gratitude, would it be (A) a long list and easy to come up with things to give thanks for or (B) a short list and hard to think of many things?
12. Is practicing thanksgiving (A) a regular part of your life or (B) an irregular part of your life?
13. Do you (A) have a place or way of intentionally recording reasons for gratitude or (B) not have a place or way to intentionally record reasons for gratitude?
14. When circumstances are difficult, do you (A) still find things to be thankful for or (B) stop giving thanks altogether?
15. When you think about thanksgiving, do you (A) tell God thanks or (B) feel grateful for not actually tell God thanks?

***Grading your answers:*** Be sure you have answered each question as honestly as you can. Don't worry about anyone else reading your answers or knowing your personal gratitude score. You will score your "Gratitude Quiz" yourself. Here is who...tally up how many times you circled (A). The goal isn't to condemn you, but to reveal how prone you are to thanksgiving, knowing all of us have room to grow. Here is what your score reveals...

- (1) If you circled (A) SEVEN OR FEWER TIMES, then grumbling likely feels more natural than gratitude for you. If that's you, don't be discouraged. Now that you are aware you can begin to take small steps away from grumbling and toward giving thanks
- (2) If you circled (A) MORE THAN SEVEN BUT LESS THAN FIFTEEN TIMES, then you likely practice giving thanks with some regularity, but you know your heart often strays toward ingratitude or grumbling. Perhaps a good goal would be to grow in deeper gratitude toward God
- (3) If you circled (A) FIFTEEN TIMES, then you're either an expert who has mastered gratitude or you lack self-awareness.

The Thanksgiving holiday reminds us that we often take God's gifts for granted, rather than giving thanks. God gives us many common blessings, such as...

- The gift of sight to enjoy a beautiful sunrise or sunset.
- He gives us the gift of sound, so that we can enjoy the laughter of children or conversation with friends or a favorite song.
- He gives us the gift of taste, so that we can enjoy good food.
- We enjoy many material blessings in this country—our homes, cars, and many gadgets that make life more comfortable.

- Traveling to some of the poorer areas of the world helps you to see how life *could* be, had you not been blessed to be born in America!
- So we should be thankful!

***But the greatest gift that God gives us is the gospel—the good news that Jesus Christ came into this world to save us from our sins.***

- If He has opened the eyes of your heart to trust in Jesus Christ as the One who bore your eternal punishment on the cross, then even if you are going through terrible suffering, you have reason to rejoice and be thankful!
- And if God has saved you, He also has given you some way that He wants you to serve Him.
- The fact that former selfish, rebellious sinners could be redeemed and now put into service for the King of kings should fill our hearts with joyful gratitude to Him.

This is what the apostle Paul both says and exemplifies in our text...

***We can be joyfully grateful even in our trials, if we remember God's gift of salvation and the gracious privilege of serving Him.***

These verses are a bit difficult, so track with me as I try to explain them...

- In **Ephesians 2:11-22**, Paul has outlined the unprecedented blessings that God has now poured out on the Gentiles, *<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, <sup>15</sup> having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. <sup>17</sup> And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*
- For 2,000 years from Abraham to the time of Christ, God's blessings were mostly restricted to the Jews. The Gentiles were excluded from the nation of Israel, were strangers to God's covenants of the promise, and thus they had no hope and were without God in the world (2:12)

- Then comes that glorious contrast (2:13), *“But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”* Paul shows how through the gospel, Christ now has reconciled the Jews and Gentiles to one another and He has reconciled both groups in one body to God through the cross. As a result, the Gentiles are no longer strangers and aliens, but they are fellow citizens of God’s new people, they are members of His household, and together with the Jews, they are being built into a holy temple where God now dwells (2:19-22).
- In light of these wonderful truths, Paul is about to pray for the Ephesians, that God would make these truths a reality in their experience. He will pray (in Ephesians 3:17) that Christ will dwell in their hearts by faith, in line with what he has said about them being built into the dwelling of God (2:22). In line with the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, he will pray (3:17) that they may be rooted and grounded in love.

But, before he gets to his prayer, something diverts Paul’s attention...

- Perhaps he heard his chains clank and it brought him back to his present situation, of being a prisoner.
- Paul’s persistent enemies, the Judaizers, were no doubt plaguing the Ephesian church, arguing that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses to be saved.
- One of their arguments was to discredit Paul.
- If he *really* is God’s apostle, then why is he in prison?

So Paul begins in verse 1 of Ephesians 3, *“<sup>1</sup>For this reason* [because of the reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles to one another and to God] *I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—”* but then, instead of launching into his prayer, he interrupts himself. He will come back to the prayer down in verse 14, but he goes into a digression to show the Ephesians that his imprisonment in Rome should not cause them to doubt God or to question Paul’s apostleship.

Rather than losing heart because of his sufferings, they should see that his tribulations on their behalf were actually for their glory (Ephesians 3:13). So in this digression, he reminds them again of God’s great gift of the gospel and of the gracious privilege of being able to serve and to suffer for Christ’s sake. Rather than grumbling about his imprisonment, Paul overflows with joyful gratitude to God. He not only tells us, but also shows us, how to have this same joyful gratitude in the midst of our trials.

*As a Christian what helps you to navigate trials, hardships, difficulties, struggles in your life as a believer (and still maintain your joy, a peace, hope, faith, etc.)?*

**How to have joyful gratitude in the midst of trials:**

- (1) All believers will suffer, but in our sufferings we need to maintain **God’s perspective**
- (2) We can be joyfully grateful in our trials if we remember that we are beneficiaries of God’s **gracious salvation**

**(3) We can be joyfully grateful in our trials if we remember that we have graciously been given the privilege of serving God**

## **ALL BELIEVERS WILL SUFFER, BUT IN OUR SUFFERINGS WE NEED TO MAINTAIN GOD'S PERSPECTIVE**

The teaching that God promises health and wealth to all of His children is heresy. But, although most of us don't buy into that error, we often think that if we walk obediently with the Lord, He will reward us with protection from trials

---

The prosperity gospel has become increasingly popular in church worldwide. It teaches that God wants all believers to be wealthy, healthy, and successful.

At its core, this belief system suggests that showing strong faith through positive words and generous financial giving will automatically result in earthly rewards – like having lost of money, perfect health (never getting sick), and a trouble-free life. Many people find this message very attractive because it promises that being a “good” Christian means get blessed with material riches... but there is a downside. As this teaching spreads through social media, television, and growing church movements, many Christians are starting to see why it's important to be wary of these promises. While everyone hops for good things in life, the follow 14 important warnings help believers understand how the prosperity gospel can slowly pull people away from the accurate teaching of God's Word, from an accurate understanding of the doctrine and theology taught in scripture, from what the Christian faith is truly about. Real faith isn't just about getting blessings – it's about growing closer to God through both good and hard times, finding joy beyond the material wealth, and understanding that sometimes life's biggest spiritual growth come through challenges, not just through success.

### **14 Dangers of the Prosperity Gospel Every Christian Should Know:**

1. **Misinterpretation of God's promise** – The prosperity gospel often takes Bible verses out of their proper context and meaning. Teachers might pick out verses about blessings while ignoring their real context. For example, they might take promises God made specifically to ancient Israel and claim these are guarantees of wealth for all Christians today. This wrong understanding of Scripture can hurt people's faith. When the promises riches do not come, many naïve and less mature Christians (maybe seekers) feel confused and betrayed. It's important to understand what God's promise really means, not just what we want them to mean.
2. **Distortion of God's character** – This teaching makes God seem like a heavenly ATM – put in faith and offerings, get back money and success. But the truth is, that's not how it works. This isn't who God really is. God is our loving Father who cares about much more than our bank accounts. He cares about our character, our relationships, and our



spiritual growth. Seeing God only as a source of money and success stops us from knowing Him as He truly is – loving, wise, and interested in every part of our lives.

3. **Manipulation of vulnerable people** – The prosperity gospel often targets people who are already struggling with money or health problems. Teachers might tell someone who can barely afford food that if they give their last dollar to the church, God will multiply it back to them. This manipulates people when they're most vulnerable and desperate for hope. What makes this even worse is that when the promised breakthrough doesn't come, these same people end up in an even worse situation – now broke and feeling like God has let them down. It's like telling a drowning person to let go of their life jacket and trust they'll suddenly learn to swim. This kind of manipulation can cause deep emotional and spiritual wounds that take years to heal if they ever do.
4. **Creation of false expectation** – The prosperity gospel teaches that if you have enough faith and follow certain rules, your life will be problem-free. It's like promises that if you eat the right foods, you'll never get sick – it simply isn't true. This creates unrealistic expectations about what it means to follow Jesus. When faithful believers face normal life problems – job loss, illness, nor family struggles – they might think they're doing something wrong or that God has abandoned them. Real faith doesn't promise a perfect life; it promises that God will be with us through both good times and bad. It's about having peace despite our problems, not escaping all problems.
5. **Materialistic focus** – This teaching puts too much emphasis on getting things – bigger houses, fancy cars, expensive clothes. It's like measuring someone's health but by looking at their clothes while ignoring what's happening inside their body. When churches focus too much on material success, they often miss the more important matters. People might start thinking that having nice things means they're spiritually mature, while those who have less must be doing something wrong. This completely goes against Jesus's teachings, who warned about the dangers of loving money and reminded us that our true treasures are in heaven, not in our bank accounts.
6. **Overshadows the need for repentance** – When churches focus too much on prosperity and success, they often overlook important topics like sin and the need for real-life change. It's like a doctor only telling patients about vitamins while never mentioning the serious health issues they need to address. This creates a feel-good message that doesn't lead to real spiritual growth. The Bible clearly teaches that recognizing our sins and turning away from them is crucial for our spiritual health. But prosperity teachings often avoid these “negative” topics, preferring to talk only about blessings and success. This leaves people spiritually sick while telling them they're perfectly healthy just because they're chasing material blessings.
7. **Misrepresents God's nature** – The prosperity gospel paints a picture of God that's more like a genie granting wishes than the all-wise Creator revealed in the Bible. It suggests that God's main goal is to make us rich and comfortable, which completely misses the deeper aspects of God and what He wants for our lives. God's true nature includes His wisdom in sometimes allowing difficulties that help us grow, His comfort when we're hurting, and His guidance through life's challenges. Just like a good coach pushes

athletes to grow stronger through tough training, God sometimes allows challenges in our lives to help us develop stronger faith and character.

8. **Promotes comparison and competition** – This teaching often creates an unhealthy environment where people compare their blessings with others. If someone has a bigger house or a better car, they might be seen as having strong faith. This turns churches into spiritual competition zones where people feel pressure to show off their success to prove God's favor. This competitive spirit damages real fellowship and community in churches. Instead of supporting each other through difficulties and celebrating different types of blessings, people might hide their struggles and pretend everything's perfect. It's like everyone wearing masks, afraid to show their real lives and challenges. In this sense it almost forces people to be less transparent and hide behind a false mask.
9. **Undermines true discipleship** – Following Jesus means learning to be more like Him – loving others, serving the needy, and growing in character. But the prosperity gospel replaces these important goals with the pursuit of wealth and success. It's like replacing a healthy meal with candy; it might taste good, but it doesn't provide real nourishment. True discipleship involves learning patience through hard times, developing compassion by helping others, and growing stronger in faith through challenges. When churches focus mainly on prosperity, they miss these important aspect of spiritual growth. People might gain wealth but miss out on becoming more like Jesus.
10. **Encourages a superficial faith** – The prosperity gospel often creates a shallow version of Christianity that's all about feeling good and getting blessed. It's like building a house with beautiful walls but no foundation – it looks good until the storms come. This kind of faith doesn't prepare people for real-life challenges. When faith is based mainly on receiving blessings, it often falls apart when facing serious problems. People need a deeper faith that helps them trust God even when life is hard. Real faith isn't just about receiving good things; it's about trusting God's goodness even when we don't understand our circumstances.
11. **Creates a stumbling block for non-believers** – When non-Christians see believers focused mainly on getting rich, it can give them the wrong idea about what Christianity is really about. They might think that following Jesus is just another get-rich-quick scheme, missing the true message of God's love and salvation. This focus on prosperity can also make Christianity seem hypocritical to outsiders. When they see churches preaching about money while Jesus taught about serving others and storing up treasures in heaven, they become confused and skeptic. This can become a real barrier preventing people from considering Jesus's true message.
12. **Minimizes the sacrifice of Jesus** – The prosperity gospel often reduces Jesus's death and resurrection to a means of obtaining material blessings. This misses the main point of why Jesus died – to save us from sin and restore our relationship with God. It's like focusing on the wrapping paper and missing the precious gift inside. Jesus's sacrifice on the cross was about something much bigger than making us wealthy. It was about bringing us back to God, transforming our hearts and giving us eternal life. When we



focus too much on material prosperity, we can lose sight of these amazing spiritual truths that are the real heart of Christianity.

**13. Neglect of Biblical sufferings** – The Bible clearly teaches that following Jesus might sometimes lead to difficulties and persecution. The prosperity gospel often ignores these passages or tries to explain them away. This leaves believers unprepared when they face real challenges in their faith journey. Understanding that suffering can be part of the Christian life actually helps build stronger faith. When we know that hard times don't mean God has abandoned us, we can face difficulties with hope and courage. The Bible shows us that many faithful followers of God went through tough times while staying strong in their faith

**14. Misses the true source of joy and peace** – The prosperity gospel teaches that happiness comes from having lots of money and success. But real joy and peace comes from knowing God and trusting Him, whether we have a little or a lot. It's like thinking that having expensive decorations will make a house a home, when real homes are built on love and relationships. True contentment isn't found in our circumstances but in our relationship with God. People who understand this can be happy and peaceful even during difficult times. They know that their real treasure isn't in their possessions but in knowing and trusting God.

Again, real faith isn't just about getting blessings – it's about growing closer to God through both good and hard times, finding joy beyond the material wealth, and understanding that sometimes life's biggest spiritual growth comes through challenges, not just through success. Or, when trials come, some teach that it is okay to get angry with God. The assumption behind this is, "I don't deserve this kind of treatment!"

I once saw a booklet from the ministry that was titled, "**Forgiving God**"! That's a blasphemous title, because it implies that God did something wrong! It was about a woman who had lost her four-year-old, and how she had to learn to forgive God for this tragedy! But, if Job (the most righteous man on earth) did not need to forgive God for taking *all ten* of his children in one accident, then neither do we need to forgive God, no matter how difficult our trials. He never treats us unjustly or sends trials into our lives without a loving purpose on His part. Let me say that again as an important principle and helpful perspective (even godly perspective) for Christians on suffering...

**KEY TRUTH:** *"God never treats us unjustly or sends trial into our lives as believers/Christians with a loving purpose on His part."*

### **3 Truths Concerning Paul's Suffering: (Paul's Romans imprisonment)**

**(1) Paul's suffering was not justified and didn't make sense from a human perspective**  
 - **Paul was suffering unjustly from a human perspective.** He had not done anything wrong. He was suffering because he had gone to a lot of personal bother to do something good.

He had raised a gift from the Gentile churches and had personally taken it to Jerusalem to help alleviate the suffering of the Jewish people. Behind his actions, no doubt, was his strong desire to see the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church united in love. But when he got there, some Jews saw him in the temple and started a riot by falsely accusing him of bringing some Gentiles beyond the barrier in the temple. The riot led to Paul's imprisonment, which had been going on now for about five years. During those years, Paul easily could have grown bitter towards the Jews who had falsely accused him, and even toward God, who had allowed this to happen. ***Application: Often when we go through times of suffering our go to objection is "This isn't fair!" "I don't deserve this!" "When did I ever do so wrong (so bad) to warrant this!" and it just doesn't make sense from a human perspective. How would you respond to this? While there is much sentimental truth in those statements they are fully accurate. The truth is, do we really deserve less? Why not us? We may think we are unworthy of the suffering and hardship we endure, but as Jesus said it, "It rains on the just and the unjust!" Why do we deserve less in this fallen world? And Jesus did remind us that "In this world we will have tribulation (trouble)."***

- (2) ***Paul's suffering was not punishment from God -*** Paul was not suffering because he denied the truth, but rather because he boldly proclaimed the truth. You can dodge a lot of hassles as a preacher if you tiptoe around difficult doctrines and just preach "nice" messages that make everyone feel good. But God had revealed certain truths to Paul, and he lived to please God, who examines the heart, not to please people (1 Thess. 2:4). It would have been much easier for Paul just to make peace with the Judaizers, saying, "We don't agree, but unity is more important than truth." But, instead, he always stood firmly for the truth of the gospel of grace, even if it meant hardship and persecution. When Paul says in verse 2 of our passage, "<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you..." he is not implying that some of the Ephesians had not heard. Probably Paul was using irony (H. C. G. Moule, *Ephesians Studies* [Christian Literature Crusade], p. 110). His ministry to the Gentiles had been well known for many years and was at the heart of why he was in prison. So here, he is using understatement to say, "If perhaps you have heard a few things about my ministry to the Gentiles..."! They were Christians *because of* his ministry to the Gentiles! ***Application: Often in the midst of hard times, or times of suffering or difficulty, if not verbally, we may internally think, "I must have done something for God to allow this to happen to me!" "I must have messed up and God is punishing me!" "God must be made at me!" How would you respond to this? I think it is human to think that way, but it is not accurate! God is not a capricious or impetuous God, acting impulsively or inconsistently or erratically or thoughtlessly, or brashly, or recklessly. Rather He is a loving and compassionate God, slow to anger, full of mercy and grace, longsuffering. He doesn't act that way toward us!***

(3) **Paul submitted to God's sovereignty in suffering** - Note one further thing about Paul's perspective on his sufferings: Although he did not deserve to be in prison, he was joyfully grateful because *he understood and submitted to God's sovereignty over his sufferings*. He calls himself (3:1), **"the prisoner of Christ Jesus."**

- If Paul had seen himself as the prisoner of the Jews, he would have been bitter at the Jews.
- If he had seen himself as the prisoner of the Roman government, he would have been angry about the miscarriage of justice.
- But, he saw himself as the prisoner of Christ Jesus.
- Paul knew that the Lord only acted toward him with grace and kindness.
- And so, he could rejoice even in his sufferings.

**A perspective and observation:** *There is an error today called "open theism" that teaches that God is not sovereign over the tragic things that happen. He is just as upset as you are, but He can't do anything about it. They are trying to get God off the hook for all of the evil and suffering in the world. What is wrong with his view on suffering and how might you respond to this? Fundamentally this view is unbiblical. In the Bible, God makes it clear that He is sovereign over everything, including our trials (Exod. 4:11; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6). Also, by denying God's sovereignty over our trials, the open theists take away the only source of comfort in our trials, namely, that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).*

So here is Paul, suffering for no wrong that he had done. But there is not a hint of self-pity or complaint on his part, because his focus was on Christ Jesus as his sovereign Lord, and also on helping the Ephesians understand God's purpose in Paul's imprisonment. But, there is more:

## **WE CAN BE JOYFULLY GRATEFUL IN OUR TRIALS IF WE REMEMBER THAT WE ARE BENEFICIARIES OF GOD'S GRACIOUS SALVATION**

Paul never ceased to be thankful for God's grace that had been shown to him in the gospel. Though he was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor, yet he was shown mercy, and God's grace was more than abundant for the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13-15). If you think about where you used to be as a sinner, and where you would be today if God had not broken into your life with His grace, it will cause you to overflow with gratitude. Note four things about God's grace in the gospel:

### **4 Things About God's Grace in the Gospel:**

1. **God's grace in the gospel is a precious, undeserved gift** - Paul was so moved by God's grace in saving him that he just can't stop repeating himself. In **verse 2** he writes, **"<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you..."** Then, again in **verse 7**, he says, **"<sup>7</sup> 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.”* He continues into verse 8, *“<sup>8</sup>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.”*

He just couldn't get over it! Neither should we! No one has ever come to Christ by his own intelligence, will power, or good works. If you are a Christian, it is not because you thought through all of the options and due to your superior intelligence and high moral standards, you decided to follow Jesus.

Rather, the Bible indicts us all **(READ: Romans 3:10-18)** as it is written, *“There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

If you're thinking, “Well, that may describe others, but it doesn't describe me,” then you do *not* understand God's grace in the gospel. Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). You have to feel how lost and helpless you are before you will cry out to Jesus, “Save me, Lord, or I perish!” Salvation is totally a precious, undeserved gift of God's grace.

- 2. God's grace in the gospel cannot be grasped by human reason, but God must reveal it to us -** Paul writes in **verses 3-6** of our passage, *“<sup>3</sup>How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup>by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), <sup>5</sup>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: <sup>6</sup>that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...”*

To understand Paul's flow of thought we need to understand what he means by **“mystery”**

- He uses this word 21 out of the 27 times in the New Testament, and with different shades of meaning in different contexts.
- The basic meaning is that it refers to God's revelation or disclosure of something that formerly was hidden.
- Such information cannot be attained by human reason or wisdom, but only when God reveals it by His Spirit (1 Cor. 2:7-10).
- In Ephesians, Paul first refers to the mystery in **Ephesians 1:9**, where it refers to God's revealing His eternal purpose to sum up all things in Christ.
- So the key idea in the mystery centers on God's eternal plan of bringing all things together in the person of Jesus Christ.

- When Paul says in verse 3 of our passage (Ephesians 3:3) that he *wrote before* about this in brief, he is referring back to 1:9 (see, also, Col. 1:25-27)
- But, this one supreme mystery has a number of applications (Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 110).\
- So, in our text, Paul refers to the general sense of the mystery of Christ (3:4), but then specifies the application of that mystery to the now revealed truth that *"the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"* (verse 6).
- Paul had written about that aspect of the mystery in 2:11-22. So, to sum up (O'Brien, p. 236, citing John Stott), "The mystery or open secret of Christ is 'the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ.'"
- When Paul says that this aspect of the mystery had not been made known in other generations *as* it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets, he means that God has revealed new truth with regard to the church.
- The Old Testament often spoke of God's blessing on the Gentiles, but it was always through the Jews.
- But now, (Gal. 3:14) "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

In other words, the newly revealed truth that Paul and the New Testament ("holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit") proclaim is that the Gentiles are equal with the Jews in the church. They are (v. 6) "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." The point to apply is that the truth about the centrality of Jesus Christ and the gospel is not something that anyone can arrive at by human logic, intuition, or study. It's not like math, where if you work at it, eventually you can get it. Rather, to understand God's truth, especially the truth of the gospel, He must open your eyes (see, Matt. 13:11-13). So, if you do not understand the good news about Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross, cry out to God for understanding and search the New Testament as if you were looking for buried treasure until you find Him!

3. **God's grace in the gospel comes to us by the working of His power** - Paul mentions, in verse 7 of our passage, that the gift of God's grace *"was given to me by the working of His power."* God's mighty power transformed a violent racist/terrorist like Paul into the apostle who now loved the very people he had hated, the Gentiles!

Maybe, like the Ephesians, you were into some worldly pursuits and all manner of evil. But, God's mighty power transformed these people who engaged in sexual immorality at the pagan Temple of Diana into a holy temple in the Lord (2:21). Not all conversions are as dramatic as Paul's or the Ephesians were, but all conversions require the same working of God's mighty power.



Maybe, like me, you were raised in a Christian home and were at church every time the door was open. You still need to be saved from your self-righteousness, pride, hypocrisy, lust, greed, and other sins by God's mighty power. Beware of cultural Christianity, where you assume that you're a Christian because you live in a Christian country and attend a Christian church! You are not a Christian unless you know the life-transforming power of God in your heart!

4. **God's grace in the gospel is a special privilege that we enjoy now** - To overflow with joyful gratitude, even in your trials, keep in mind that you enjoy God's revealed grace in a way that millions in history never have. Paul says that the mystery of Christ was not made known in other generations as it now is made known! But even now, there are hundreds of millions of people around the globe who live in spiritual darkness in countries where the gospel is hardly known. But, we have these transforming truths revealed to us in the New Testament as a precious treasure!

If it was revealed to you that somewhere in your back yard, a strongbox with a million dollars was buried, you'd be out there this afternoon with pick and shovel, and you wouldn't stop digging until you found it! Well, you've got something far greater than money—you've got "the unfathomable riches of Christ" (3:8), hidden in your Bible! Start digging!

So, we can be joyfully grateful even in our trials if we remember God's gift of salvation, revealed in Jesus Christ. Finally,

## **WE CAN BE JOYFULLY GRATEFUL IN OUR TRIALS IF WE REMEMBER THAT WE HAVE GRACIOUSLY BEEN GIVEN THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVING GOD**

Being an apostle was not Paul's career choice! Rather, it was given to him as a sacred stewardship of God's grace. When he says in verse 7 that he *"<sup>7</sup> 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."* The phrase, *"I became a minister"* it is a passive verb, meaning that he didn't choose it. Rather, God acted on Paul. On the day of Paul's conversion, the Lord told Paul (Acts 22:10), *"Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do."* He was drafted!

*"Minister"* (Eph. 3:7) is not a stained glass word, referring to a member of the clergy. That concept is foreign to the New Testament. Rather, it is the Greek word, *diakonos*, meaning, *servant*. It referred to one who waited tables. As such, a servant obeyed his master. He was not free to do his own thing, but he did what his master commanded.

Although none of us are apostles and although you may not be in so-called “full time ministry,” if you know Christ, you are His servant. Even if He calls you to suffer for His name’s sake, from your prison cell you can joyfully serve Him if you remember what a great privilege it is to be a steward of His amazing grace.

## CONCLUSION

Before his conversion, John Wesley, who was very religious outwardly, but lacked the inward reality of God’s grace, had a conversation with a poor porter at his college that deeply impressed him. Wesley discovered that the man had only one coat and that he had not had any food that day, but only water. And yet his heart was full of gratitude to God. Wesley said, “You thank God when you have nothing to wear, nothing to eat, and no bed to lie upon. What else do you thank him for?”

“I thank him,” answered the porter, “that He has given me my life and being, and a heart to love Him, and a desire to serve Him.” (In *The Inextinguishable Blaze*, by A. Skevington Wood [Eerdmans, 1968], p. 100.) That porter knew the reality of God’s saving grace. Like him, we can be joyfully thankful even in our trials if we remember God’s gift of salvation and the gracious privilege of serving Him.

It’s so easy to “be deceived” in thinking that we should accredit God’s blessings to other sources. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,”* therefore God is the primary one who deserves our thankfulness.

Above all God’s gifts is the gospel of Jesus Christ, for *“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”* The gospel gives us endless and countless blessings. Here are at least 3 reasons Christians can be thankful for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **3 Reasons Christians Should be Grateful for the Gospel:**

1. **The Gospel is the supreme demonstration of God’s love for us** - God doesn’t just say, “I love you.” God doesn’t give us abstract examples. God always reveals his messages through words and deeds. The gospel, Jesus death and resurrection, is the greatest sacrifice, meeting our greatest need, expressing God’s love in the greatest way possible. *“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8) *“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.”* (1 John 4:9)
2. **The Gospel frees us to love God and receive love from God, uniting us to Him in a personal relationship** - Sin is the opposite of loving God, it is the opposite of receiving love from God, and it is the opposite of unity with God in a personal relationship. Sin



corrupts all that is good that God had originally given us. God made us to be in communion with him, but sin destroyed that relationship. Thank God for the gospel! Through the death of Jesus, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, all of our sins are forgiven. Through the resurrection of Jesus, we are not only forgiven but we are transformed into a new creation, with new desires, with the power to obey God rather than sin through the power of his Holy Spirit. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." (Romans 8:8-11)

3. **The Gospel unites Christians forever in the family of God** - Nothing reminds us of our love for our families like the holiday seasons. And nothing reminds us of the pain involved in those relationships as well like the holidays as well. While it's not fun to talk about, because of sin there is always going to be disunity amongst our human relationships. Sin divides even when our best intentions are to be unified and at peace with one another. The gospel is our only hope for unity amongst those we love. Until we are united in Christ, there can't be true unity with other people. God not only brings us peace now in our earthly relationships when our relationship with him is our top priority, the gospel also gives us the great joy of spending eternity with those we love who have received the saving grace of God expressed through the gospel of Christ. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1 John 3:1) I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28) Everything good in our lives is from God, therefore we can thank God this Thanksgiving for everything we have. But the gospel is God's greatest gift to us. It's God's greatest expression of his love for us, it save us from our sins, unites us with him, and it brings us unity amongst others who have received the gospel as well. Let us be thankful for all that God has given us, but let us be thankful most of all for the gift of the gospel, for it gives us a relationship with God himself. . . and nothing is better than that.

***"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!"  
– Psalm 107:1***