

## EPHESIANS 3:1-7

### INTRODUCTION

As we move into the third chapter of this marvellous letter Paul begins to talk about himself. It is worth asking why does he do this, after all it seems if you read any of Paul's letters that he is reluctant to talk about himself. Well Paul is writing to Gentiles as the Apostle of the Gentiles. He has just been telling the Christians at Ephesus what has happened to them once they were spiritually dead but now they are alive in Christ.

Once they were separated from God and his people but now they are reconciled to God and now they are fellow citizens with God's people. In fact they are more than that for they are now the very temple of God in which God Himself dwells by His Spirit. The reason why Paul has been explaining to the church at Ephesus what has happened to them is because Paul was praying for them that they might understand clearly what God has done.

Paul is now on the point of telling them more about what he prays for them and as he opens this chapter it seems that it is his intention to tell them right away. If we compare verse 1 and verse 14 it seems clear that what Paul intended to say was for this reason ..... (v. 1 & 14). But what Paul in his thinking was intending to say is changed as he thinks about the word Gentile it seems that that word triggered of in his mind a completely different train of thought that he just had to pursue before coming back to what he originally had intended to say. The Holy Spirit was leading him; it seems that as Paul mentioned the word Gentile he is once again overcome that he a Jew and a hostile Jew at that should be commissioned by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

Perhaps in Paul's thinking he thought these Christians are wondering how this happened that Paul a Jew became an apostle to the Gentiles perhaps he thought he better tell them more about what this means. In order to do that it was necessary for Paul to tell them a little about himself and in doing so Paul gives us all a glimpse into the sort of man Paul was. From these verses we learn a little about his character and his heart and we learn more about his message that he preached to the Gentiles.

So before we turn back to what Paul intended to say we are going for the next two sermons to look at these verses that reveal to us something about the apostle Paul?

### 1. WHAT SORT OF MAN WAS PAUL?

a) He was a man who believed in the sovereignty and providence of God (v 1) – Paul was a prisoner in Rome because of the gospel and while in prison he writes this letter to the Ephesian church but for Paul imprisonment was the result of the providence of God being worked out in his life. He considers himself as a prisoner not of Nero but of Jesus Christ and he considers the purpose behind his imprisonment was for the sake of the Gentiles. You see Paul has grown to love the Gentiles when he was once in Jerusalem he had spent most of his time with a Gentile name Trophimus who was actually from Ephesus.

The two it seems were so often together that when Paul visited the temple, many people assumed that Paul must have taken this Gentile into the forbidden inner courts of the temple with him (Acts 21:29). This resulted in a riot, which in turn led to Paul being arrested. This was the beginning of a whole train of events, which eventually brought Paul to be a prisoner in Rome. It was because of the Gentiles and his determination to associate with them and to win them for Christ that led to Paul's eventual imprisonment.

Now it would have been so easy for Paul to have become bitter after all what had happened to Paul was so unfair he had not committed any crime, he did not do any wrong yet now he is in prison in Rome. But for Paul all that had happened to him was God's plan it was God's sovereign will, which was worked out in the providence of God. Paul from his prison cell could see the

invisible hand of God at work, Paul had told the Ephesian believers that God works all things after the counsel of his own will (1:11) well Paul really did believe what he preached. You see for Paul the doctrine of the sovereignty of God was not an abstract concept but a truth to be lived by. Paul was in prison because that was God's will for him and God was behind all the events that took him there yet God was not involved in any of the sins that others committed in the process of Paul being taken to prison.

Therefore for Paul he really was a prisoner for Jesus Christ. He would remain in prison as long as the Lord wanted him there, as long as Paul was serving God's purpose in prison Paul would remain. At least one of God's purposes of Paul being in prison in Rome as far as we can understand these things is so that Paul could write this letter to the Ephesians.

Imagine if Paul had not of been in prison he would have been busy preaching and teaching and proclaiming Christ and we would not have this outstanding letter which not only was a great help to the church at Ephesus in Paul's time but has been used of God down through the history of the church to teach and strengthen the church. I would not preaching from this book if it had not of been in God's sovereign will to have Paul imprisoned in Rome.

O how much poorer the church would be without the great truths that are expounded in this lovely letter.

Of course what was true of Paul is true of us all. Your circumstances whether they are good or bad at present are ordained by God and in his sovereign will he brings his purposes about. In his providence he works in the events of life to accomplish his divine purpose for you personally and for the church collectively. So the fact that we live in the Dales and go to this church is God's sovereign will for us.

Yes of course we made various decisions along the way that eventually brought us here but God was the secret hand at work behind every decision and behind every circumstance so that you are here this evening. If you suffer from disability or poor health or mental illness then that is God's will for you and he wants to fulfil his purposes for you and for the church through your particular circumstances.

What we must learn is to accept God's providences in our life and to yield ourselves to him so that he will teach us the lessons we need to learn and so that we will accomplish all that God has planned for us. We ought not to become bitter when things don't go our way, or when suddenly our lives take a turn for the worst. We must all everyday walk humbly before God knowing that he is sovereign and is in control of all that happens in our world including all that happens to us whether those circumstances are good or bad. Let us trust him like Paul did and let us learn to live life with a thankful heart in complete dependence upon God for all of our lives, circumstances and blessings.

**b) He was a man with a clear commission (v 2).** – Paul assumes that these Ephesian Gentiles knew that Paul had preached in Ephesus but he was keen to make them aware that his whole calling from God was to preach to the Gentiles. Evangelising Gentiles was not a chance thing that he did in Ephesus but God himself planned it, wherever Paul went he did seek out Jews but his primary concern was to go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel to them.

He was chosen and commissioned by God at his conversion to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and Paul was simply being obedient to that call when he preached in Ephesus. Paul says that the administration of God's grace was given to him for the Gentiles. The word translated 'administration' in the NIV is the word translated 'good pleasure' (1:9).

Sometimes it is translated 'plan' but the meaning behind the word has to do with management of a household from which the idea of management in general came and then later the word came to

mean administration in general. It means to put a purpose into effect. Here it means that it was God's plan and purpose to entrust to Paul the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. It was a duty that had been entrusted to Paul and Paul could not but carry it out. Paul did not decide one day to do this but God commissioned him and sent him to the Gentiles with the glorious gospel of God's grace.

What was true of Paul in a unique way is surely true of Christians in a general way. If you are a Christian then God has come to you in grace and opened your eyes to the truth of the gospel. You have come to see your sin and necessity of Christ's death for you therefore you have been commissioned by God to share this gospel with others. The gospel is not given to us to keep it to ourselves, it is not for our enjoyment only no the gospel has been revealed to us so that others might benefit as well.

The great commission in Matthew 28 is not just for the disciples but it is for all of us, we are all to go into the world with this wonderful gospel message. Our world might be here in the Dales but it is our task to share the gospel of grace with as many as possible. Paul says the gospel was given to him for the Gentiles; well the gospel was given to us for all those that we are called to work among, that is, the people of the Yorkshire Dales. I know that there are many people in Leyburn and the Dales who have no idea why we went to so much bother to establish another church. They couldn't really care less whether we were here or not but if only they could understand that we are here for their benefit that they might hear the gospel, that they might come to know the grace of God for themselves.

It is important that we do have a clear sense of purpose for when the work is small and often discouraging the only thing that will keep us here is our commission to preach the gospel to those in Leyburn and further a field. That is what we must do no matter how discouraging and difficult that task might be, it was not easy for Paul to do that it got him into big trouble, it eventually led him to prison but what kept Paul going was his commission that the gospel was revealed to him so that the Gentiles would also benefit.

**c) A man with a clear message (vs. 3-7)** – There was nothing man made about Paul's message for we read that God himself had revealed it to him. But God had also given him an inspired understanding of it as should have been clear to the Ephesian believers from what he has already written in this letter (chapter 1 & 2). No revelation concerning the Gentiles as clear as this had ever been written before.

But God through his Holy Spirit had revealed these truths to the apostles of which Paul was one and to other people who were receiving direct revelation from God at this time namely the prophets who were given truth and understanding from God until the Scriptures were completed. No one receives direct revelation from God today; I have to say that as there are many people who claim to be doing so today.

Paul and the other apostles wrote down the truths that God had revealed to them and he gave them understanding of these great truths for the church of future generations. Paul says that what was revealed to him was a 'mystery' in fact he uses this word twice in these verses. Now when we speak of a mystery today we use the word to speak of an unexplained event, we say it's a mystery to me. But we must never use the bible word in the way that we use it in English.

Paul's message was not something that was unexplainable, something that we simply can't understand but a mystery in the bible refers to something, which has been hidden, but it now revealed. It refers to something once concealed but now it is open to view. What was once hidden and covered has now been revealed and uncovered. The emphasis in the word is not so much on the concealment as the revealing.

The mystery that Paul is talking about is something that was concealed but now God has revealed it to Paul and the apostles. What is it that Paul is talking about? He is talking about what he has already written at the end of the previous chapter that both believing Jews and believing Gentiles would become one body in Christ (v 6). It has now been revealed that the believing Gentiles are on the same footing as the believing Jews they are accepted in the same way and they receive the same inheritance and blessings.

Nobody in the Old Testament thought that the coming of the Messiah would remove the barrier between Jew and Gentile that all who came to him believing would become one of God's people and would be on equal footing with one another. The Gentiles are fellow heirs (v 6) they are part of the same body (v 6) they were full members of Israel and they are partakers of God's Old Testament promises in Christ through the gospel (v 6).

This mystery, which has been revealed, is that every individual believer in Jesus whether from a Jewish background or a Gentile background is accepted by God and receives equal status from God. This is the mystery that God revealed to Paul and he was given a clear understanding concerning this truth and therefore he preached it with directness and power (v 7). Now this truth has been revealed to us as well, for it has been recorded for us in the Scriptures and when we came to know God through Christ then the truth of his word has slowly been revealed to us. We need to constantly proclaim the oneness that we have in Christ. When we proclaim the gospel we are to proclaim it to all people Jew and Gentile and we must proclaim that all that come to Christ come to him on equal terms and all who are accepted by him become equal in Christ Jesus.

The church of Jesus Christ is one in reality, that oneness is not always displayed as it should be but we should be willing to accept all who are true believers no matter what their nationality their background or their theological persuasion.

We must work at unity within our own church and among true bible believing churches. When true unity is displayed and when in reality it is worked out then God's glory is displayed for then people will say as no doubt they said in Paul's day how can those people be united look at them they are so different, how is it possible? It is possible because of Jesus Christ for in him we all are heirs together, we all belong to the one body and we all share together in the promise in Jesus Christ.

Amen