

## the whole Gospel for the Nations

### Ephesians 3:7-21 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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, <sup>9</sup>and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, <sup>10</sup>so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. <sup>13</sup>So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

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

<sup>20</sup>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, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

### Introduction

Paul has explained, when Christ broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by dying on the cross at the hands of the people he was there to set free, we—both Jews and Gentiles—have “been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). There it is. No other event in history has been as life-changing and freeing as the fall of the wall of our sin; though we were corrupt and unrighteous, and in every way against God and without any love for God<sup>1</sup>, we have been made alive together with Christ.<sup>2</sup> This morning, we will focus primarily on Eph. 3:8-10 within the context of vv. 7-21 in order to define the world Christian/missionary role of the church to preach the gospel, to live out the gospel, and to counter

---

<sup>1</sup> See Eph. 2:1-3. Salvation has been given by God through Christ to sinners. The mystery of God's grace for sinners, which was conceived before the foundation of the world, has been made known through the gospel event of the death of Christ and his resurrection by the administration of the good news revealed by God to the apostles who have both planted reproducing churches and have written about the things they have seen, heard, and learned—the New Testament. All Christians should preach the gospel to their own hearts every day; by doing that and with humility, the gospel should, like it did with Paul, ring out loudly in our hearts and minds and out of our mouths to tell it to the world, beginning down the street and proceeding across the globe.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 2:5b.

the claims of the world with the *whole* gospel for the nations; and we will look at this text in two parts: 1)

Why the Church? (“I have not come for only you . . .”), 2) Why the Church? (“For the Glory of God

Throughout All Generations”).

### Why the Church? (“I have not come for only you . . .”)

**“<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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, <sup>9</sup>and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, <sup>10</sup>so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. <sup>13</sup>So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.” (3:7-13)**

In Romans 1:5, Paul writes, “[I am called] to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” and that is the calling to preach the gospel to the *nations*<sup>3</sup> and to bring it to light so that through the church, the salvation of God might be made known. Notice that Paul says he is called “for the *sake of his name* among all the nations.” John Stott, after reading that, said, “We should be ‘jealous’ . . . for the honour of his name—troubled when it remains unknown, hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed. And all the time anxious and determined that it shall be given the honor and glory which are due to it” because the highest missionary motives of Christians should neither be “obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God . . .), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> For that reason, God is central to the future of the church—for the joy of all peoples in Christ.

Look at Eph. 3:7-10. **“<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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, <sup>9</sup>and to**

---

<sup>3</sup> See Eph. 3:8-9. Paul’s calling to preach the gospel to the *Gentiles* is a calling to make the mystery of salvation known to the *nations*; this does not exclude the need to preach Christ to the Jews as well, but it does express his specific missionary calling—a general calling that we all share (cf. Matt. 28:18-20).

<sup>4</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 53.

**bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,<sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”** “As Paul discusses his placement into the ministry, he makes mention of his feeling of unworthiness [v. 8a]. He then explains the means by which he will accomplish the task, namely, through God’s power [v. 7b].”<sup>5</sup> At this point, Paul makes it evident that the “gladness of the nations” will be a result of God’s ways having been made “known on earth, [his saving power among all nations];” *therefore*, the blessings of God given to the nations through Christ will cause the peoples, in their joy, to praise God.<sup>6</sup> Psalm 67 says:

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!

The church must remember that “if the pursuit of God’s glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man’s good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served, and God will not be duly honored.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, our passion for God’s glory in the spreading of the gospel from the church to the sick, the dirty, the poor—all lost—should be first; and that commitment to his glory should drive us to do all we can to preach the gospel to them, live it out in front of them, pray for them, and love them.

Now, look back at vv. 7-9. Paul says that he has been given the responsibility by the grace and power of God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles “to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God . . .” He says that he has been called to teach the church the whole gospel so that by it, “the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known” for the nations (v. 10). He was

---

<sup>5</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 449. Paul’s feelings of unworthiness rightly explain what he thinks about the flesh and the gospel rescue that he was given when Christ confronted him in Acts 9:1-7. He is keeping God at the center of his duty to teach the revealed mystery of Christ to the church.

<sup>6</sup> See Psalm 67.

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 18.

charged to make known the mystery of God's grace to the Gentiles—and the Gentiles to the ends of the earth. Therefore, God has rescued Paul from his own sin and has called him to preach the gospel—to plant churches that will reproduce what Paul had taught them in order to do the same thing. Now, what is the church called to do? The church is called to do three primary things all for the glory of God throughout all generations: 1) preach the gospel, 2) live out the gospel, and 3) counter the claims of the world.

### **Preach the Gospel**

The first missionary responsibility of the church is to preach the gospel—the mystery that was once hidden has been revealed to the church and explained by Paul in order that it might be made known to the world by preaching both from the pastor and from the mouths of laypeople. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes that “everyone who believes in [Christ] will not be put to shame . . . for ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Rom. 10:11, 13). But then he asks, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (vv. 14-15a). Therefore he writes, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (v. 17).

There are three dramatically important implications in this text. First, Paul writes that the message of salvation is for everyone (“for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”)<sup>8</sup>, and we know that there are people outside the doors of this church who have not heard the gospel (who have not had the Good News explained to them) and people who have not believed it. Second, Paul makes it clear that they cannot call on the name of Christ without first believing, and they cannot believe if they have never heard the truth of the gospel preached to them; and there will be no preaching to them unless we go

---

<sup>8</sup> cf. John 10:16.

to them.<sup>9</sup> Third, if faith comes from hearing and *faith* is a natural response to God’s effectual calling and grace given to sinners, then we should be confident to preach the whole gospel to them because salvation is given, accomplished, and applied by God—not us. For that reason, we should be confident (not immodest) to preach the gospel *to* them because God does not rely on the quality of the presentation<sup>10</sup>; homiletics, amusing illustrations/jokes, and rational arguments do not save sinners—God saves them, and he does it through the preaching of *his* word “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (v. 10).

### Live Out the Gospel

The second missionary responsibility of the church is to live out the gospel. Now, look at vv. 10-13. “. . . <sup>10</sup>so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. <sup>13</sup>So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.” Verse 10 “indicates the purpose of Paul’s ‘preaching’ [therefore, also our preaching] (v. 8) and ‘making plain’ (v. 9), which together spell out the content of his missionary task.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Paul was saved specifically so that he would preach the unsearchable riches of Christ (v. 8) and to teach them

---

<sup>9</sup> See Eph. 2:8. Paul writes that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). It is important to define the *role* of preaching in missions. First, salvation is given, accomplished, and applied by God through Christ *using* preaching. God has chosen to use preaching. He has done it in order to incorporate the church in the declaration of the love of Christ to the nations; therefore, our passion to preach the gospel to them, our urgency to go to them, and our love for them glorifies God. Second, this does not mean that God is not able to accomplish salvation without us. If we disobey the Great Commission, he will send someone else. We cannot frustrate God’s effectual calling. The question is: do we want to be a part of it?

<sup>10</sup> That God does not rely on the quality of the *presentation* of the Gospel does not suggest that the quality of the message is not important. In fact, the quality of the *message* is crucial (i.e. quality: content). Paul told the Galatians, “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (1:9b). The content of the gospel message is important, and that is why Paul was called to bring to light the mystery to the Gentiles (i.e. he was called to preach/teach/explain the whole gospel). The quality of the presentation is not as important: “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1-2).

<sup>11</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*. PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 244.

how “God’s previously hidden plan was being put into effect (v. 9).”<sup>12</sup> The goal of Paul’s activities was that the church would do the same thing—preach the gospel, live out the gospel, and counter the claims of the world.

For that reason, in order to preach the gospel effectively and without being largely hypocritical, we must also live out the gospel. Many non-Christians complain that too many Christians preach that Christ died on the cross to rescue sinners from eternal hell (also, that he is loving and compassionate, that he helps the weak and opposes the proud), but they live differently (e.g. they are hypercritical, hateful, self-important, arrogant, and unforgiving). As a result, both preaching the gospel and living it out are uniformly important.

How can we effectively live out the gospel without neutering what we preach? First, begin with God. His law demanded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). But we have all loved other things more, preferring other things over him and acting on those preferences. That is what sin is; therefore, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sin is not small because it is not done against a small God. Our Creator is worthy of our love. Therefore, our failure to love him with all our heart, soul, and might is not inconsequential.<sup>13</sup>

Second, with God at the center, end with your joy. Eph. 2:1 says that we “were dead in the trespasses and sins in which [we] once walked.” Therefore, in our sin we cannot possibly respond to the gospel on our own. But, Eph. 2:5 says that God has made us alive together with Christ by his grace through faith according to his purpose set forth before the foundation of the world to make us holy and blameless before him (see. 1:4). Our Creator is perfect. We are sinners against him, saved by the atoning death of Christ for our joy in order to transform our hearts to be conformed to the image of Christ—and that is why we were made.

---

<sup>12</sup> O’Brien, 245.

<sup>13</sup> Piper, *For Your Joy* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2005), 12.

In Christ, our lives should be a living testimony of the gospel news to the people that watch us—that we are sinners being renewed in Christ, that we are debtors that needed to be forgiven, that Christ has rescued us from sin and death, that our Savior is dedicated to the glory of God, that God is big and we are small, that God loves the smallest people and knows them by name, that we are both saints and sinners, that we will make mistakes but not expect others to be perfect, that our lives should be a reflection of Christ within us.<sup>14</sup> We live out the gospel by imitating what we preach.

### **Countering the Claims of the World**

The third missionary responsibility of the church is to counter the claims of the world. Satan's present and active evil working in the lives of his victims following the natural course of this *fallen* world is so effective that *all* men and women are “characterized by disobedience.”<sup>15</sup> To make matters worse, Paul tells Timothy that “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).<sup>16</sup> For that reason, we are charged to preach the gospel by countering the claims of the world.

What are a few things the world claims in popular American culture? First, the world claims that God is an idea; therefore, God is what/who God is to *me*—God is a subjective reality conformed to the experiences and nature of the body and the mind. Second and as a result, the popular culture claims that there is no concrete/universal or rational/objective basis for right and wrong (the only thing that is right is everything—the only thing that is wrong is going against the course of this world). Therefore, the popular culture has a problem with Christianity because it is the missionary responsibility of the church to counter those claims by preaching and living out the truth of the whole gospel.

---

<sup>14</sup> cf. Rom. 12:1-2, Col. 3:12-17.

<sup>15</sup> O'Brien, 158, 161; see Eph. 2:2.

### Why the Church? . . . For the Glory of God throughout all Generations

**“<sup>14</sup>For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>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, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (3:14-21)**

In closing, read vv. 14-21 with me. Christ is for the church—Christ in you, and we need to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in order to take part in making the gospel known to the world—beginning just outside the walls of this church to the ends of the earth. “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, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”