



A G E L E S S

Touching all Generations with God's Good News

ADULT Lesson - Ageless Gospel

**MISSION
GEORGIA**

Season of Prayer and Offering
for State Missions

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LESSON PREPARATION

1. Read the Bible passages to better understand Paul's conversion, his commission by God, and his understanding of the Gospel of grace.
2. Using the major points of the lesson as your guide, seek to grasp the many dimensions of the Gospel experienced by Paul as described in Ephesians 3:7-14.
3. Ask how you and your church are to experience and to make the Gospel known in the world.

INTRODUCTORY ILLUSTRATION

Who would have thought that God would use Shane as a minister of the Gospel? His family were not exactly "church people" and he himself had lived most of his life in both rebellion against and ignorance of God. It was with great skepticism that he began to attend church. However, the church he attended was made up of real disciples and he could not deny the power of God he saw working among them. Eventually, he believed in Christ and was baptized.

He began to be discipled and although there were some setbacks, he became mature in his faith. While working with the youth group as a volunteer, he began to feel that God was calling him into the ministry. He went to seminary to prepare for ministry and was called to a church to minister. The story of Shane is one who went from disgrace to grace. God's power is still at work in the Gospel, changing lives and bringing glory and honor to the Lord.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians during his imprisonment in Rome, sometime in the early A.D. sixties. (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon together make up the letters that are commonly known as the prison or captivity epistles.) A study of the book reveals that Paul was writing to the church in order to set forth God's plan for the ages, which had been revealed in Jesus Christ, and to encourage the church to live in unity and holiness.

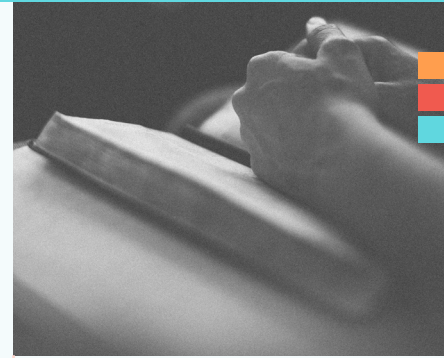
DEVELOP THE LESSON

In Ephesians 3, Paul explained how he had experienced the Gospel of God's grace and had been given stewardship of that mystery which had been made known in Christ. In verses 1-6 Paul focused on his role in making known the mystery of God. That mystery, which had finally been disclosed through Christ, is that the Gentiles and Jews are co-heirs together with Christ. In verses 7-11 he explained several dimensions of his experience of the Gospel. Let us examine those dimensions.

1. The grace of God made Paul a servant of the Gospel.

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. (Ephesians 3:7)

Paul indicated that it was the grace of God working in his life that had changed him and made him a minister of the Gospel. He used the word *charis*, translated "grace," to point out that his experience of being made a minister of the Gospel was a gracious act of God, not something he merited. The description of his call and commission as recorded in Acts 9:1-19, shows that he was hostile to God, but God apprehended him for the purpose of making him a chosen vessel who would bear the Lord's name to both Gentiles and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). Paul also stated that he was "made" a minister. The use of this word by Paul further clarifies that he did not take this responsibility on himself, but rather his ministry was by divine appointment. He described himself simply as a "minister." This word is the root from which we get the word "deacon" and refers to one who serves on the behalf of another. The apostle clearly understood his service as a minister as God's gracious work in his life.



Key Passage

Ephesians 3:7-11; 3:21

Supporting Passages

Acts 9:1-19

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Ephesians 2:4-10

Ephesians 3:1-6

Key Teaching

Paul experienced the grace of God through the Gospel and was called to reveal the Gospel to the world. Now the church, as the called out people of God, has the commission of proclaiming the Gospel to the world.

Lesson Objective

To encourage believers to experience and share the Gospel of grace which has been revealed to and through the church.

Probing Question

What are the dimensions of the Gospel of grace which Paul experienced and which the church is to experience and to reveal to the world?



Application:

Paul’s primary concern in verse 7 was to explain how his experience of the grace of God had made him what he was according to God’s good will and purpose. While in one sense Paul’s role in the spread of the Gospel was unique, his need to experience the Gospel of grace was not unique. In fact, because all people are sinners (Rom. 3:23) all stand in need of an experience of God’s grace. Have you experienced the saving grace of God in your own life? Can you say that you are what you are, doing what you are doing because of the grace of God?

2. The power of God was at work in the life of Paul.

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,
(Ephesians 3:7-8b)

Paul explained that his ministry was made possible by the working of God’s power. The word “working” is the translation of the Greek word from which we get the word energy. When used in the New Testament it almost always conveys the idea of the in-working of God’s power. The word translated “power” is the word from which we get the words “dynamic,” “dynamo,” and “dynamite.” The implication is that the strength behind the ministry of Paul is the power of God. It was this power that enabled Paul to serve effectively among the Gentiles.

The power of God at work in the life of Paul is quite impressive, especially in light of the fact that Paul considered himself, “less than the least of all the saints.” This phrase is a rare one, found only in this passage in the New Testament. The word is a superlative form to which Paul supplied a comparative ending. Probably because of his pre-Christian acts and attitudes, Paul considered himself the lesser than the least one of the children of God.

Application:

Paul explained his Christian life and ministry as the working of God’s power in his life. While you and I are tempted to say that God had a special plan for Paul, the New Testament makes it clear that God’s power for life and service is available for all believers. An examination of the book of Ephesians indicates

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that Paul prayed that believers might experience the working of God’s mighty power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:19-22). In Ephesians 3:16-21, Paul prayed that believers might experience the power of God, the God who can do immeasurably more that we can ask or think. Are you experiencing the working of God’s mighty power in your life and service? If not, would you now consecrate yourself to God and ask that His power be at work in and through your life?

3. The proclamation of the Gospel of God and the illumination of the mystery of Christ were the primary tasks given to Paul by God.

That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 3:8b-9)

Paul indicated that God determined that he would preach the good news. The word translated “preach” in verse 8 is the word *euangelizo* and usually it emphasized the content of the message that is delivered. The primary audience of Paul’s preaching was the Gentiles. The word “Gentiles” is in emphatic position in the text emphasizing that the proclamation of the good news to them was highlighted. The message of the Apostle is designated as “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” The concept of the things of God as “unsearchable” first appeared in Job 5:9. In Greek, it is a vivid word which refers to something which is too vast to be explored or measured.

The second purpose of the Apostle’s ministry is described as “to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery.” The verb translated as “to make see” is *photisai* and it connotes “turning the light on.” Therefore, it was Paul’s task as a teacher to help humankind come to see the worldwide scope of the Gospel and make clear the strategy by which God’s mystery would be made known to all people.

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Application:

Clearly the proclamation of the Gospel of God is a major task of the church in the world. Since the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16-17) and since the church has been commanded by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to the local and world communities (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15), the church should use its time, energy, talents, and resources to share the good news. In your opinion, how well is your church doing in sharing the Gospel to people in your community and to people around the world? How well are you as an individual doing in sharing the Gospel with those around you? What actions could you or your church take to improve your sharing of the Gospel?

4. The revelation of the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers is the work of the church.

*To the intent now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.
(Ephesians 3:10)*

Paul instructed the Ephesians that God intended to make known His mystery to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. He used the word *gnorizo* to describe the act of revealing or making something known. The audience for God’s revelation extended beyond humankind living on the earth and included the “principalities and powers.” These words referred to the various ranks and orders of angelic beings. These angelic beings were located “in the heavens,” where God and Christ are located with the believers. According to 1 Peter 1:12, the angelic beings long to look on or understand these matters. While the angels announced the birth of Jesus to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, the broad implications of Christ’s mission to earth were only seen in the culmination of His redemptive work.

The content of what was revealed to the principalities and powers was described as the “manifold wisdom of God.” The word used for “manifold” is used only here in the New Testament and means “many colored.” By his use of this word, Paul may have been suggesting the beauty and diversity of the wisdom of God which was demonstrated in the redemption of humankind through Jesus Christ and the strategy for the proclamation of that redemption.

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The means which God used to reveal his manifold wisdom is the church. The word "church," as used here probably does not refer to a single local body, but rather the church in its broadest sense. Vaughan gave enlightened interpretation when he wrote, "The chief point is that the very existence of the church, uniting hostile sections of mankind in one body, is an obvious proof that God is gathering up all creation in Christ. The church is viewed as the visible materialization of the purpose of God for the universe. Angelic beings behold it with wonder, and as they see the purpose of God taking shape, they gain enlarged insight into the wonderful wisdom of God."

5. The eternal purpose of God has been accomplished by Christ in the world.

*According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Ephesians 3:11) Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.
Ephesians 3:21*

In the final phrase of verse 11, Paul emphasized the fact that the redemptive plan of God and the use of the church to reveal it was not an afterthought to Him. God's purpose was not short-sighted; rather, it was a purpose which ran through the ages. Ultimately, in accordance to the timing and plan of God, that purpose was revealed in the humiliation, crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus.

Conclusion:

Paul described his experience of the Gospel as one of God's grace at work. Paul had been saved by grace and he had been given the ministry of the proclamation of the Gospel as a work of God's grace. Today God's grace is still at work when believers experience salvation and when they join God's mission of proclaiming the good news of salvation to others. Yet, it is an amazing thing to view how this broad, manifold plan of God for the ages, now revealed in Christ, meets generally with such apathy in the church today. The church is to experience God's grace and to use its time, energy, talents, resources, and enthusiasm to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.

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Gifts of Georgia Baptists through Mission Georgia and the Cooperative Program enable us to partner together in fulfilling the Great Commission.