

Ephesians: Living a Life In Christ

Ephesians 3:1-13 | An Eternal Purpose in Christ

→ *Survey: Let's understand the background and context of the passage.*

What is the purpose of being a Christian? Is it to make it to heaven? Is it to not sin? Is it to live a comfortable life on earth? Is it to love everybody? Is it something else? If you are a follower of Jesus, it's important to think through that question, as your purpose dictates every decision you make. Your purpose also determines how you navigate the circumstances you find yourself in. The book of Ephesians has shown us how God's plan is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (Eph. 1:10), and tonight's study will help us think through our own purpose as we learn about Paul and God's purpose for him.

Remember that Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus while in prison in Rome. Paul has been teaching how Jesus reconciled all people to God by the cross. And because of Jesus, God's family is now a unified community of followers, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul wants Christians to know they have been saved by grace through faith, not by any works of their own, so no one can boast. Rather it is the free gift of God in Christ Jesus that invites us to live in unity with each other. This unity leads us to do good works in Christ, as we recognize every spiritual blessing that we have received through Jesus. Ephesians 1 tells us we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and promised an inheritance of life eternal with God.

Following Jesus can be difficult, and many times this life results in suffering. But friends, do not be discouraged, for we have an eternal purpose and hope in Jesus Christ. Let's learn about God's purpose for us and the world as we explore Ephesians 3 together.

Read: Ephesians 3:1-13 (NIV)

→ *Observe: Let's take a close look at what the text is saying.*

1. What are the first 3 words of this chapter? What question should it make you ask?
2. Who is writing, and how do they describe themselves (v. 1)? Why is he a prisoner (v. 1)?
3. What did God give Paul (v. 2)? What was the purpose for this?
4. What is Paul helping them understand (v. 3-5)? What is important to know about this (v. 5)?
5. What is this mystery (v. 6)? Look closely - do you notice anything emphasized in this verse?
6. What is Paul's relationship with the gospel (v. 7)? And why was he given this grace (v. 8-9)?
7. What is God's intent now (v. 10)? Notice - by what means will God's wisdom be revealed?
8. What did God accomplish in Christ Jesus (v. 11)? How then can we approach God (v. 12)?
9. What does Paul want the Ephesians to think about his suffering (v. 12)?

→ *Interpret: Let's seek to understand the meaning of this text in its original context.*

1. Does Paul want the Ephesians to feel sorry for him? Why would Paul say he is a prisoner of Christ Jesus rather than of Rome? What does this reveal about Paul's perspective on his suffering and his relationship with God? What does he want the Gentiles in Ephesus to know?
2. Should suffering be a part of the Christian life? Why or why not? How does Paul help us understand the purpose of suffering? Why can a Christian find hope in the midst of suffering?
3. *Thought exercise...* Why might God have hidden the *fullness* of the mystery for so long (v. 6)?

→ *Apply: Let's explore where the text intersects with our lives and our world.*

1. How does Acts 9:15-16 help us understand Paul's God-given purpose? How does this help you think through the purpose God might have for you? How does this passage help you see how you're a part of a bigger story?
2. How does Paul's experience with suffering differ from how we talk about suffering? Where in your life have you/are you suffering? How would seeing yourself as a prisoner of Christ change how you navigate your circumstances? What might be the bigger purpose for your suffering?
3. As Paul was called to the Gentiles, who might God be calling you to preach the Gospel to? Who comes to mind when you think of people at SRU? What tends to hold you back? How would approaching God with freedom and confidence (v. 12) help you in those conversations?