

Ephesians

The Mystery of Gentile Inclusion

Ephesians 3:1-13

TALKINGPOINTS

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A publication of **TTC DISCIPLE**, the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
 Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Have you ever wondered how diverse the New Testamental church was? In what ways were they diverse?
 - (1) They were diverse in terms of _____ (James 2:1–7)
 - (2) They were diverse in terms of _____ (Romans 14:1-10)
 - (3) They were diverse in terms of _____ (Acts 13:1)

How have you seen each of these three forms of diversity in TCC?

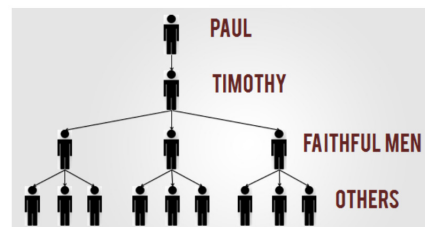
What other forms of diversity have you observed in TCC? Which ones haven't you observed?

- Pastor Doug spoke of our obligation to pass on—in fact, to multiply—the faith we've received. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-3 and discuss the significance of this diagram:

If you have received Christ, you are **somewhere** in this diagram. Updating it from its historic context, we could change the labels to:

Paul is the "spiritual great grandfather".
 Timothy is the "spiritual grandfather".
 Faithful Men are the "spiritual fathers".
 Others are the "spiritual children".

Obviously, one's **gender** is **not** the issue here, one's **generation** is what matters.



Are **you** in this diagram? If so, **where**? (**How** does one know?) If not, **how** does one **enter** it?

What will it take for you to **move upward** in this schema of spiritual multiplication?

Are you doing those things? How can we help you do them better?

Sermon Summary

Several weeks ago we began our study of Ephesians. This letter, written by Paul to the church in Ephesus (modern-day Turkey), tells us about God's rich blessings, and the resources He gives for living in light of those blessings. The book of Ephesians, as we shall see, unfolds truth about God's resources for a variety of life challenges, specifically resources for getting along with other people. In chapter 1, Paul painted a glorious picture of the ways God has blessed "us who believe." In chapter 2, he reminded the Ephesians that they were not always a part of this blessed group, but were in fact cut off from God. He then describes an amazing mystery: God makes hostile people (in this case, Gentiles and Jews) into one new unified people! Paul opens chapter 3 by reminding his Gentile Ephesian readers that it was because of his God-given ministry to them, that he was, at the time of the writing of this letter, imprisoned in Rome. Paul wasn't complaining about his imprisonment, but he did want the Ephesians to understand how deeply invested he was in their lives. But then Paul went off on a long digression (v. 2-13; sandwiched between the repeated phrase, "For this reason..." in v. 1 and 14). Paul is a master of the digression—but in his case it's not a rabbit trail, it's a treasure hunt! In his digression, Paul says that God has entrusted him with a very specific message of God's grace to the church, a message which once was a mystery. In the New Testament a mystery isn't something eerie or inscrutable, but a truth once hidden by God but now revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets to communicate to God's family. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (v. 6). **This mystery is important to four groups of people.**

I. Paul (v. 1-5) The best way to grasp its importance in Paul's life is to focus on the two descriptions he gives of himself in this section: "a prisoner" (v. 1) and "a minister" (v. 7). Paul was a prisoner because he was proclaiming the message that in Christ Jesus, Jews and Gentiles have equal status, and share equal privileges in the church. This was not a welcome message to many Jews. All of the barriers which divide people—race and ethnicity, gender, economic status—have no place in the church (Galatians 3:28). But old prejudices die hard, and sadly the church doesn't always reflect the diversity of the community in which it serves. Now there can be many non-prejudicial reasons why that may be the case—things like worship or preaching style. Those are just preferences. So a lack of diversity isn't necessarily a sign that something is wrong. But I do think diversity is something every church should strive for, because we are all one in Christ!

In the early church they struggled to harmoniously integrate Jews and Gentiles into one faith community. Let me tell you something that helped: Paul took up an offering from among his Gentile churches to help needy Jewish believers in Jerusalem. That act of generosity went a long way in easing tensions in the church. Unfortunately it didn't solve the problem with rumors that were totally untrue (Acts 21:19-22). The same grace and freedom that Paul extended to the Gentiles **not** to observe Jewish customs he extended to Jews to continue observing them. But the Jews assumed Paul had urged Jews to forsake their law. You know, when you are suspicious of someone, you can see offenses that aren't really there. You assume the worst and don't give the benefit of the doubt. But revealing this mystery about Jews and Gentiles being on equal footing in the church was so important to the Apostle Paul that he was willing to be unjustly imprisoned because of this message.

II. Gentiles (v. 6-8) In our study of Ephesians 2:11–22 we discovered that Christ's work on the cross accomplished much more than just saving individual sinners, as important as that is. It reconciled Jews and Gentiles to one other, as well as to God. This is truly life changing, eternity altering news for Gentiles (3:6). **Gentiles are now [a] fellow heirs** with the Jews (Galatians 3:29), **[b] fellow members** of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4 & 1 Corinthians 12:12-14), and **[c] fellow partakers** of God's promises (Ephesians 1-2 & 5:22-23). Prior to the cross, Gentiles **were** excluded (2:12) but now, in Christ, they share equally with the Jews. Yet God has not negated His promises to the nation of Israel, see Romans 11:1–12. One day God will restore Israel to its former glory, and the nation will experience the fulfillment of the land and kingdom promises God made to her in the Old Testament. God is not finished with Israel!

III. Angels (v. 9-10) The phrase “rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” refers to angelic beings, both holy and fallen (Ephesians 1:21 & 6:12; Colossians 1:16 & 2:15; 1 Timothy 5:21; Matthew 25:41). Angelic beings are vastly intelligent, but they are not omniscient. So they are observing what God is doing through the church and learning things that they did not know (1 Peter 1:10–12). Holy angels rejoice when people come to faith in God (Luke 15:10) and appear to be aware of what’s going on in local churches (1 Corinthians 11:10). They praise God for his manifold wisdom as they observe the outworking of God’s salvation plan through the church (v. 10). Fallen angels are also watching and learning—and finding out that neither they nor their leader, Satan, possess God’s manifold wisdom! They can read the Bible, and from the OT they knew quite a bit about God’s plan of salvation. They knew that (and approximately when) a Savior would come, they knew how He would come, where he would come from, and why He would come. But nowhere in the Old Testament would Satan find any prophecies concerning the church, “the mystery” of Jews and Gentiles united in one body! They could not see believing Jews and Gentiles being united in one body, seated with Christ in the heavenly places, completely victorious over Satan. If they had known this I’m sure Satan would have altered his plans accordingly.

IV. Christians (v. 11-13) God made Paul a steward of the truths of gospel (1 Timothy 1:11). Paul committed these truths to others, who were to commit them to others, and on and on down the line (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). When you reach the end of your life will you be able to say the same, or will you be ashamed (2 Timothy 2:15)?

Application/Challenge

- 1 Recognize that you are a steward of this message that in Christ all people—no matter their race, gender or economic status—are equal participants in the blessings of God bestowed on his church.
- 2 Because these blessings of God come to us by grace through faith, there is no place for self-righteous pride. We have no reason to look down upon others because the salvation we enjoy was received not achieved. It has come to us by grace.
- 3 In the church we are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we must treat one another that way. There is no place for partiality. Preference and prejudice must give way to love and sacrifice.
- 4 Remember, that the angels observe what is happening in the church, so when it comes to how we treat one another, let’s be examples that God and the angels would be proud of!



Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

*"Five Question Bible Study" (see page below) is a simple way to study any passage.
Let's use it to explore biblical unity . . .*

Monday—What is *the basis for* biblical unity? John 17:1-26

Tuesday—What is *our role in* biblical unity? Ephesians 4:3; Romans 12:10 & 13:8

Wednesday—What *attitude is required for* biblical unity? Philippians 2:1-8

Thursday—How *does truth relate to* biblical unity? Jude 3 & 20; 1 Timothy 6:12

Friday—What *destroys* biblical unity? 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 & 3:16-22

Saturday—Are there *any limits to* biblical unity? 1 John 2:19; 3:18-19 & 4:6

Five Question Bible Study

Bible Text: _____ Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would *this text* answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]