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Well, welcome to our Thursday night Bible class. We're on an adjunct out from the study of Revelation into Ephesians, so that we can actually come to an understanding of who Christ is, so that we can use self-evaluation to evaluate our individual lives as to our walk with the Lord, because when we get through with this, we will absolutely know all of the plans, how it was implemented, why it was implemented that way, and how do we apply all of this into our lives, so when we go back into Revelation and we get into the rapture, you then know whether or not you're going to be part of that if you're still alive, okay? And if you're dead, you're going to be, you need to also know that you're going to be part of it or not. So that's the basis of why we're into Ephesians.

Now, we have studied chapter one. We've studied chapter two. We're going to go into chapter three, and tonight, this is going to be a bit of an interactive session, but by that, I don't mean that you're going to be, you know, we're going to have a conversation back and forth, but what I do mean is you're going to interact with your Bible.

There's a lot of Bible verses that's going to come out tonight, all right? And you need to be able to do that. So we're going to consider this fascinating portion of Scripture that on its surface appears a bit benign in chapter three, but as we will see, it's loaded with important truth. The third chapter, and I'm going to read verses one through fourteen.

We're going to be very patient in working our way through this. We're only going to get through verses one through four tonight, and we're going to pick up with verse five next week, and there'll be three sessions on just this passage of Scripture from Ephesians 3, 1 to 14. So let's read this passage together.

So let's start. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you, that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery. As I wrote before in brief, this is Paul writing.

By referring to this, when you read, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel of which I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me according to the working of his power. Power is the Holy Spirit.

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery, which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things, so that the magnifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulation on your behalf, for they are your glory.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father." Now, there's a lot there, okay? The first word that jumps off the page to all of us should be mystery, okay? And we had educational sessions on the mystery when we began to look at the overview of Acts to understand Paul. When we talk about Christianity, we don't really usually talk about things that are mysterious because the Christian faith is revealed in the Word of God. We are not trying to find something that is hidden in this or something that is below the surface only assessed by some esoteric spiritual insight.

When we talk about the mystery, we're talking about something very specific. The New Testament refers to these things that are mysterious, and by that, what the New Testament always means is something that was hidden in the past and is now revealed. So, when you see the term mystery in Scripture, it's not talking about a mysterious thing.

It's talking about something that was hidden that is now being revealed. There are no mysteries as such in the New Testament that are yet to be revealed. All mysteries in the New Testament have been revealed.

They're revealed in Scripture. That's where you're going to find them because we have the final revelation of Scripture in the New Testament. So, when we talk about mystery, we're talking about something that has been hidden in the past and been revealed in the New Testament.

And Paul, of course, is referring here to this mystery in particular of the unity of the church that the Gentiles in verse 6 are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. So, the mystery that Paul is talking about is that the Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ in the church. Now, we've talked extensively about that in chapter 2. Now, we've already heard Paul make reference to the mystery back in chapter 1. If you go down to verse 9, Paul referred to the mystery of God's will.

Okay, now what's that? That is the will of God given to his son who basically inherited God's will so that he could provide us his will when he died, buried, resurrected, ascended. He provided his will because that's our will. Okay, follow the chain.

According to his kind intention which he purposed in Christ. So, this is God's will given to Christ before the foundation of the world. Let's do that.

What that's telling us is that the New Testament, there are things that have previously been hidden as to their fullness that are now being revealed to us. Now, these are referred to by our Lord all the way back in Matthew chapter 13. When he was talking to his disciples on that day in Galilee, he said to them, to you, verse 11 of Matthew chapter 13, it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

Who's them? Who's them? The Jews. Jews. The Jews.

Okay, and to the unbelieving Gentiles. Okay, so what you have here is a microcosm of the fact that basically he is already being delineating what is going to take place as the church before the church has even been created. Paul's language indicates that in verse 3, he refers in Ephesians 3 to revelation that has made known to him.

And then in verse 4, he says, so you can understand my insight into the mystery, which in verse 5, in other generations has not been made known to the sons of men. So there is a reality in the kingdom of heaven. Where's the kingdom of heaven? It's the earth.

That's life eternal. That's the reason why you get blessings, because the kingdom of heaven resides here on earth. As it's defined in the New Testament as the church, there's a reality of the revelation of things that have not been hidden, that have been hidden in the past.

In other words, none of the prophets in the Old Testament knew what this was. There was no knowledge. While they prophesied for things like the Messiah to come, and the Gentiles would be saved, and all that stuff, they had no clue how that was going to happen.

And they searched their own scriptures of what they wrote to try to determine what the mystery was, and it wasn't revealed. So there are a number of these mysteries in specific. Paul refers to the mystery of the indwelling Christ.

That is the full understanding that when the Messiah came, he would literally dwell in his people. That didn't happen in the Old Testament. Now in Colossians 2, he refers, Paul wrote Colossians.

So in Colossians 2, Paul refers to the ministry of the incarnation, excuse me, God in human flesh, again in its fullness, not revealed in the Old Testament. They only knew a Messiah was coming. They didn't know who it was.

They didn't know it was going to be the Son of God. They had no clue. In Romans 11 25, Paul refers to the mystery of Israel's unbelief.

No Old Testament reader would have assumed that Israel would have rejected their Messiah to the degree that they have done. That is not disclosed fully until you get to the New Testament. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul refers to the mystery of inequity.

That is to say there is a level of inequity that is coming to the world that has not been known in the past. Oh my gosh, what are we living in now? Here it is. In Revelation 17, there's the mystery Babylon, the final form of the world society and government that it sets itself against God and against Christ at his second coming, which will be beyond anything that the world has ever seen up to this point.

And then you have in Ephesians 5, the mystery of the church as Christ's bride. We're going to get into that when we get into the second half of Ephesians. That too is not seen in the Old Testament.

And then you have the mystery of the rapture, 1 Corinthians 15 51 and 52. So there are a number of those truths that are very familiar to us in the New Testament that were not fully revealed in the Old Testament. But the one that Paul is focusing on here is the very, very fundamental, foundational, and important one, the unity of the Jews and the Gentile in the church.

And there it is in verse 6. The Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel. That was not seen clearly in the Old Testament. Now to say that, it is not to say that it isn't there indicated that God is going to say Gentiles, because I'll show you in a moment that it is when we get into Scripture.

But there's nothing there in the Old Testament that binds, that blends, excuse me, blends the Jews and Gentiles into one spiritual organism. They're separate. We said that we've indicated on Tuesday night why they were separate.

Because in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel had to be protected for the bloodline of Christ. They had to be separate because if they got into the wrong Gentile line, Satan had already corrupted those lines, and it would infiltrate the bloodline of Christ and therefore debunk Him coming as the Son of God. So this is a more full revelation of the reality that is found in the Old Testament.

And this is essentially our unity in Christ. We are all members of one body. We all belong to each other.

We talked about that. We are one together. Our cells are even connected.

Our spirits are connected. We are one. Whatever happens to you happens to everybody in the body of Christ.

Christ is the head, and we are members of His body. So what Paul is talking about here is the unity of the church. Now, we picked that up in chapter 2, and we're going to talk about it again in chapter 3. Why? Because it's the most fundamental condition of the church.

Think about it. Who's not racist? Who doesn't like certain groups of people today? Well, if you do, that's a problem for you. We know we are one in Christ.

All true believers who are in Christ are one with Christ and therefore one with each other. That's the spiritual reality. We're spiritual beings first, living a physical experience.

The spiritual controls everything you do, regardless of whether or not you think it does. And that's the basis of righteousness and judgment. Everything that goes on in your life is based upon your spiritual nature.

It has nothing to do with your physical experience. But life in the church does not always reflect that. In fact, to be honest it rarely reflects that.

Unity is a very hard thing to experience, to get the church to experience at all. Okay, just think about children. It's hard for them to get unity.

It's hard for them to acknowledge that a person that is a different color from them is tied to them just like they're tied to their brother or sister. It's a huge issue to the Apostle Paul. But he faced the fact that discord was apparently more frequent than unity.

That's there today. What do we got? Critical race theory. We got, you know, racism.

We've got all kinds of stuff that our society has put forth to us in the physical that we adapt in the physical that affects our spiritual walk. It is a huge issue to the Apostle Paul. Now look at his letters, particularly to the Corinthians.

He talks about the divisiveness that was manifest there. To the Philippines, he calls them to unity in several other places, even in Ephesians. So experiencing unity in the church was and is still a very challenge.

Why? Because people tend to be selfish, self-centered, proud. They tend to hold grudges. They tend to envy.

They tend to be jealous. They tend to prefer themselves rather than others. So it's a challenge because we are having to overcome the flesh.

But the unity of the church is a critical issue to the Apostle Paul. And I'm going to show you that as we begin to look at these 14 verses, it's going to take us a little while. It's three sessions.

I'm going to go slowly through this because I want to be patient. I want you to understand the very important reality of this passage of Scripture. So look back at chapter 3 for a moment.

And in particular, verse number 6. This is the heart of the passage. Gentiles, meaning all non-Jews. So you were either a Jew or a Gentile, and Gentile mean everybody else.

Meaning all nations of the world, all people groups, all tribes and tongues, as Revelation identifies them, are designed by God to be members of the body of Christ, one body. That is to say, God designed salvation not only for the Jews, but the Gentiles as well. Now we know this.

We've talked about this. But this was a very difficult thing to get across to the Jews in the ministry of Apostle Paul. And we'll talk about why.

But before we do that, I want to go back and make you to understand this. In the Old Testament, the salvation of Gentiles is clearly indicated. The salvation of Gentiles is clearly indicated.

When you go back into Genesis 12, verse 3, Genesis 22, 18, Genesis 28, 14, we read there that God is going to bless the nations. Everybody preaches that those nations are basically the split up of the one nation of Israel. That's how they teach it.

That's not true. There was only one nation of Israel. And God is talking about all nations, plural.

Right off the starting line in the book of Genesis, God repeatedly says, I'm going to bless the nations of the world. He didn't segregate Jews. And then in Psalm 72, verse 17, Scripture says the Gentiles in turn will bless God.

So this is speaking of a genuine relationship with God and the Gentiles so that He blesses them and they bless Him or honor Him or worship Him. And even more specifically, in the book of Isaiah, and I'm going to read this to you because it's very specific. Isaiah chapter 49, verse 6 speaks specifically of Gentile salvation.

Listen to what it says. Speaking to Israel of His servant, the Messiah, it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved ones of Israel. It's not enough.

It's too small. For the servant of Jehovah, Jehovah, you who is the Messiah, it's too small a thing to raise up the tribes of Jacob only. The next line, I will always make you, Israel, a light to the nations.

That was their purpose. The nation of Israel, this chosen family, was to be the light to all nations. In other words, they were to allow God to go through them to the other nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

So he's talking about everybody. He's not confining this to the Jews. It would be too small a thing only to redeem the Jews.

It's going to be to the ends of the earth that my salvation goes. In chapter 54 of Isaiah, verse 1, shall for joy or bear one who you who have borne no child break forth into joyful shouting and cry out loud and who have not prevailed for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman. Oh, let's interpret this, which is an innocuous way to say there will be more Gentiles in the kingdom than even Jews.

That's what it's saying. Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch out the curtains of your dwelling, spare not, lengthen your cords, strengthen your pegs, for you will spread abroad to the right and to the left and your descendants will possess nations and will resettle desolate cities. You've got to open up the tent to encompass the world because God has salvation in mind for more than the Jews.

And then in the 16th chapter of Isaiah, it says, arise, verse 1, shine for your light has come and the glory of God has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the people's, but the Lord will raise upon you and his glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light and kings to your brightness of your rising.

So in the Old Testament, God is speaking that the Gentiles are going to play a serious part in this event, these events, this plan of his. So what we learned then is that the Messiah is going to save the Gentiles. He will come to the Gentiles, he will save the Gentiles.

And then a Moral Testament passage that relates to this in Joel chapter 2, verses 29 and 28 and 29. It will come about after this that I will pour out my spirit on all mankind. This is looking at the future time of Messiah.

I will pour out my spirit on all mankind. So what have we discovered, discovered, excuse me, that the Gentiles will be blessed by God in Genesis, in Psalm 72 that the Gentiles will bless God. In Isaiah, the Messiah will come to the Gentiles.

The Gentiles will receive the Holy Spirit because the Gentiles will be saved by the Messiah. Now let's go to Amos, ninth chapter, eleventh verse. In that day I will raise up the fallen tabernacle of David, or the house of David, and wall up its breach.

I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old. This is the Masonic Kingdom. This is the thousand-year reign.

What's going to happen? You think that, well, we've been taught, I'm not sure what you think, we've been taught that the thousand years is just going to be okay. Earth has been completely destroyed, right? Revelation, it's completely destroyed with all of the judgments. Christ has defeated the Antichrist in the Battle of Armageddon.

There's blood everywhere. There's people dead everywhere. The earth is shambled.

The rivers you can't drink. There's no food. And what does he do in this thousand years? He's got to reconstruct earth.

And he's going to do it in a matter of days, if not 24 hours. This is the Masonic Kingdom. That they may possess the remnant of Eden, and all the nations who are called by my name declares the Lord who does this.

So God is going to save the Gentiles. That's all clear in the Old Testament. He's going to bless them.

They're going to bless him. The Messiah is going to come to them. The Messiah is going to save them throughout the redemptive history, and they're going to be given the Holy Spirit.

So we're not saying the Old Testament says nothing about Gentile or global salvation. It does. We're not taught that, though.

No, I'm speaking of the Messianic Kingdom. So it doesn't talk about is what it doesn't talk about is the Jews and Gentiles in one body, one organism. It doesn't do that.

If he told the Jews that, then what do you think they would go do when he's trying to protect the bloodline? Oh, if we're going to be together anyway, let's just go do it. Right? Mindset. No longer will Israel be isolated from Gentiles.

There will be a new man, a singular identity, and that's going to be Jew and Gentile together in one body, the body of Christ. So the prophets clearly saw Gentile salvation, but what they couldn't have seen is the union of the two and the end of the theocratic kingdom of Israel as they knew it. Why? Because they had to protect the bloodline.

You can't share things to people who don't understand the spiritual nature of what they're doing. They had no clue who Messiah was. If they did, they wouldn't have rejected Messiah at the time that he walked the earth.

The prophecies we read were veiled then in some way. In other words, they were concealed. When you come into the New Testament, for example, and we're going to give an illustration of this in a minute, and you go to Galatians.

If you're in Ephesians, go back one book to Galatians chapter three and four, and we're going to give a couple of illustrations. In Galatians chapter three, verse eight, the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith. So that's the Old Testament.

Preach the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, all the nations will be blessed in you. Nations, not just Israel, nations. That's quoted right out of Genesis 12, 3 and Genesis 22, 18, telling us, yes, those scriptures foresee that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.

So here's a New Testament writer interpreting the Old Testament text about salvation of the Gentiles. In the fourth chapter of Galatians, verse 27, Paul says, we have a quote from what I read in Isaiah 54. It says, rejoice, rejoice, women who does not bear, break forth and shout.

You who are not in labor, for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband. In other words, there are more Gentile children in the Jews. So the New Testament writers make those connections.

In the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 13, a connection is made with a text in Isaiah 49. In Acts chapter 15, a connection is made with Amos. So I just want you to understand that we are not saying that there's no prophecy about Gentile conversion.

That would be ridiculous, because Israel's responsibility was to be the end of God's blessing, but the means of God's blessing to the world. They were supposed to be the ones to take all of this to the rest of the world, which they did not do. What Paul is talking about here is not Gentile salvation.

That might have been tolerable, although it was barely tolerable at that time. And if you need an illustration of that, remember Jonah. We talked about Jonah, okay, and Jonah's hatred for the Gentiles.

He was furious that God saved the Gentiles in Nineveh. In fact, he was so upset about it that he wanted to die, if you recall our conversation about that. And it was such a horrifying thing for him that God would show grace to pagan Gentiles that he wished he were dead.

Now look, if that is so disturbing to a Jew who is a prophet, who doesn't even want Gentiles to be saved, how disturbing would it be to Jews to say there are no more theocratic kingdom of Israel. Jew and Gentile are not just recipients of a mutual salvation. They are in one body.

That would be pushing it, to say the least. Why? Because the animosity between the Jew and Gentile was so profound. There was a deep hatred by the Jews of the Gentiles, and it was reciprocated on many occasions.

We talked about that in the last couple of weeks. So here comes Paul, and he's got this really difficult job. To tell the Jews that their unique identification as the people of God is set aside for a new people in which Gentiles are equal to them in the sight of God.

This is too much to handle for the Jews. But unity's tough, all right? Think about your household unity. Those of you who have a large household, think about the unity of getting all the kids to do what they're supposed to do in unison.

It's really hard. It's hard to get people to sacrifice their prejudice and their animosities, especially the culture we live in today, where everybody's siloed into some identity. We're fighting all kinds of resistance of all kinds of fronts, even in the Church of Jesus Christ, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.

But Paul has an assignment from God, and that is to declare this unity to both Jew and Gentile. So in Ephesians 3 and 1, Paul says, for this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ, for the sake of you Gentiles, and it stops. Now he starts to talk about something that's on his heart, and he says, for this reason, and then he gives an incomplete sentence.

He's talking about being a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles. And he stops in mid-sentence and digresses with a parentheal statement from verse 2 all the way to verse 13, where in verse 14 he picks up what he started with in verse 1, and he says, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father. So Paul starts out trying to pray for the people of Ephesians so that they can understand this knowledge and truth, and he wants to pray for them, but in mid-activity of the prayer, he stops, and he says, wait a second.

I can't do this yet. I have to teach them more. So in verses 2 to 13, it's parenthetical that he's teaching again, and he's reteaching exactly chapter 2. He says, for this reason, in verse 1, for this reason, I want to pray for you.

That's what he says. I want to pray for you as one who is a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. I want to pray for you.

But before we can pray for them, he stops, and he says, I have to tell you more so you'll understand. So that's the makeup of this passage. The fulfillment of the prayer depends upon your understanding the truth.

There's no sense in praying for you to live out, propagate, believe, trust, uphold truth you don't understand. You can't do that today. If you don't understand, and you don't take the knowledge, and are not able to apply it, how in the world are you going to be successful at it? You can't.

So it's a knowledge and understanding that the revelation takes place. That's why in Acts chapter 6 verse 4, those who teach the people of God are called to prayer and the ministry of the word. I come out and speak to you to give you the information, then go back to pray that you will understand it and be able to implement in your life.

That's why so many times Paul's letters, he stops to pray for the very people to whom he is giving this revelation. And he knows this is really hard. It's hard for us today.

This is hard truth, much harder than you have thought up to now. And when I'm done with you through this three part series, you'll understand why it's such hard truth. He wanted to pray for his people to implement the reality of this one body unity, but they needed more information.

Both are essential parts of the effective ministry. You pray for the people, but you have to teach them the word of God so that they can be obedient when the father prompts them in response to your prayers. Okay, that we're talking about that in our sanctification documents.

We're talking about that in obedience. We're talking about that all over the place. And it's hard.

Look at, do a self-examination. Where are you? It's hard. And his objective here is this matter of the unity of the church.

It's a mystery of the body of Christ, all of us being one in Christ. Now, this is not new. We've talked about this.

And I want you to go back to chapter two, verse 11. This is such an issue that it started back in chapter two, verse 11, and it actually runs all the way into chapter four, verse 11. Remember that formerly you, the Gentiles, because of the Ephesians were Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by the so-called circumcision.

That was a projective from the Jews who were circumcised against the Gentiles who were called uncircumcised, a demeaning way to identify them. But remember, in that condition, you were what? You were separated from God. You were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.

You had no nation. You were vagabond. You were strangers to the covenants of promise.

You were not tied to the covenants of Israel, which only had the covenants. All the Gentile nations had no covenants at all, having no hope and without God in the world. That generally would be the Gentile status.

But now in Christ Jesus, who are formerly were far off. Remember, that's the Gentiles. If you say far off, that means Gentiles have been brought near, which means that basically you're tied now to the Jews, near is Jews, by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in his flesh the enmity, which is the law of the commandments contained in ordinances, so that in himself he might make the two into one man. Verse 16. Reconciling both in one body to God.

Verse 18. You both have access to one spirit, to the father through the spirit. You Gentiles are no longer strangers and aliens.

You are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household. Verse 21. He says you're a holy temple in the Lord.

Verse 22. You're built together into a dwelling of God's spirit. So Gentile salvation wasn't the problem.

It was the dismantling of the Israel's unique identity as a theocratic kingdom that belonged in a special way to God. That was created by God to protect that bloodline. And now he has to work to put this whole universe together.

And now the Jew and the Gentile are together on an equal spiritual basis as one new man in the body of Christ. So Paul wants them and us to understand this. And it's so very important to understand it.

He starts to pray in verse 1. Then he stops from verse 2 to 13 to inform them more about this information in hopes that they understand it. So that there's enough information there that they can answer the prayer. In other words, Paul's prayer was to grant this people the ability to become one.

And to do that, that prayer could not be answered if they didn't understand that. So now as we look at these 14 verses, we're going to see something of the planning of this ministry. Okay, we're still talking about before the time.

Okay, this is still the planning of what's going to happen in this world. We're going to see something of the preaching of this mystery. We're going to see something about the purpose of this mystery and even the privilege of this mystery.

But to start with, and this is very important, we're going to look at the prisoner of the mystery, Paul. Now look at verse 1. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for the sake of you Gentiles. That's quite an amazing identification.

What does he mean by that? Well, it doesn't just mean some analogy that would describe anybody's relationship to Christ. That would be ridiculous in itself because none of us would see our relationship this way. I'm a prisoner, says Paul, and Jesus is my jailer.

Really? That's what he's saying. You don't find that analogy in the Bible. The Lord is benevolent.

He's protective. He's a supplying Lord, and we are gladly His slave. But we would never identify ourselves as a prisoner of Jesus Christ because that's involuntary.

We're not locked up by Him. We're set free by Him. So what does Paul mean here? That I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.

Well, he means this. He wound up in prison preaching this message. That's what he means.

He wound up in prison for preaching this message. The idea of unity is so hard for the Jews to accept that basically they ran Paul right into the arms of the Roman authority, and the Romans took him all the way to execution. And it wasn't about some over-defined doctrine.

It was because he preached the Jew and Gentile were one. This was completely unacceptable to them. It was them, the Jews.

Now remember, Paul was a well-known leader in Judaism before he was saved. He was commissioned by the Jewish leaders to go and arrest Christians, put them in prison, and he had papers, official papers, to even take their life. He was a murderer and a blasphemer.

He was a persecutor of Christians. Now on the Damascus Road, as we have read in Acts, the Lord stops him and saves him. But his reputation is so widespread that he is a frightening figure.

And essentially, after three years in the Mabatayan Arabia, not far away from Jerusalem to the south, the Lord spends three years teaching him and refining him before he finally goes to Jerusalem. And when he goes, and it's been three years since he persecuted anybody, some of the people in Jerusalem are terrified of him. And he has to have Barnabas go in to soften up the crowd because his reputation has been so horrendous in the past.

Well, they finally accepted him. And he gave his report, and he's given his report to the Jew leadership. And his report was all about salvation of the Gentiles.

By this time, he had even pastored a church in a Gentile city, Antioch, according to Acts chapter 11. All of his ministry journeys, there were three major journeys. All three of them were into Gentile areas to establish churches among the Gentiles that included the Jews.

He went to whatever town he went to. He started with the synagogue to see if the Jews would respond to the gospel. And then once he had made an effort to bring the Jews into the knowledge of Christ through the gospel, he would go after the Gentiles and establish a church made up of Jews and Gentiles.

That was his mode of operandi. The synagogues were hostile to him. They were Jews.

They were probably more hostile to him in many cases than Gentiles were ever hostile to him. After all these ministry journeys, and after his experience as a pastor in the church of Antioch, he finally came to the city of Jerusalem in Acts 15. And he gave a report to the church council on the conversions of these Gentiles.

Why did he go to the Gentiles? Because when he was converted on Damascus Road in Acts 9, the Lord said to him, I'm sending you to the Gentiles. He repeats that in his testimony in Acts 26. He said, look, the Lord sent me to the Gentiles.

It's not my doing, it's his. He is the apostle to the Gentiles, and his job is to tell the Gentiles and the Jews that they are one in Christ, in a new man, a new being, a new entity, a new organism, the body of Christ. Now, he defends that unity in Galatians.

He defends that unity in Ephesians. He defends that unity in the Philippians because it's so hard to sell. While he was on his tours, he collected money from the Gentile believers where he was preaching the gospel and planting churches.

And he got all the money together, according to Romans 15, and he headed back to Jerusalem with the money. Why is he doing that? Think about it. You're going to go into a hostile territory, and you're going to give them a gift that they need to try to soften the blow.

There are poor Christians in Jerusalem, and these Gentile believers wanted to show their love to the Jewish believers by giving sacrificially to help them. So Paul comes back to Jerusalem, hoping that he can mitigate some of the hostility by this offering from the Gentiles. Now, the trip back is chronicled in Acts chapter 21.

Now, I want you to turn to it. This is where you're going to have to follow me carefully through this text, Acts 21. So he's got however much money, the bags of money to take back to the Jewish believers from the Gentile believers to help tear down the wall a little bit, and they head toward Jerusalem in Acts 21.

Now, along the way, you see in verse 8, they came to Caesarea, which is on the coast of Israel. So they're getting close to Jerusalem, and they entered the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven deacons mentioned back in chapter 6, and they stayed with him. He had four virgin daughters whom the Lord used in some fashion to speak the truth.

So while they're at this house in Caesarea for a few days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judah. A prophet shows up, and coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands. Now, this is an object lesson, pretty quick, and he said, this is what the Holy Spirit says, okay? He's trying to get Paul to listen to him.

In this way, the Jews at Jerusalem were buying the man who owns this belt and delivering him into the hands of the Gentiles. What he was saying is, the Holy Spirit told me that you are going to get imprisoned. Remember that? Remember we talked about that? They begged him not to go.

Well, somewhere, the Lord gave this information to the prophet Agabus and puts on a demonstration as if to say, you better not go there. You're going to get arrested. You're going to get arrested by the Jews.

Even though you're coming to bring money from the Gentiles to reconcile, you're going to get arrested by the Jews. So in verse 12, it says, when he heard this, we all as local residents began begging him not to go to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, what are you doing? Weeping and breaking my heart? I mean, they are really worked up about this.

They didn't want to lose him, but he said, hey guys, I'm ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he wouldn't be persuaded, we fell silent. This is Agabus and the people that were trying to convince him not to go, remarking, the will of the Lord be done.

Whatever it's going to be is going to be. So he says, look, I'm going. I have been called.

I have been called as an apostle to the Gentiles to proclaim one new man, one body of Christ. And I'm not sure what the price is, but I'm willing to pay it. I'm willing to pay it.

So he proceeds to Jerusalem. Now, when he gets there, verse 17 of Acts 21, the brethren received us gladly. In other words, oh, come on in.

We want you to come. Yeah, thank you. This is referencing the leaders of the Jewish council.

And the following day, Paul went in with us to James, and all of the elders were present. James was the head of the Jerusalem church. After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one.

This is not a general report. This is specifics, the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. So he gives the report on the salvation of Gentiles and the establishing of churches.

And when they heard it, they began glorifying God. And they said to him, you see, brother, how many thousands there are among Jews of those who have believed, but they're still all zealous for the law. This is a problem.

This is the Jewish council telling Paul this is a problem. Jewish believers holding on to the Mosaic law. In verse 21, they've been told about you.

The word is out that you've been preaching to the Gentiles, that you've been preaching that Jews and Gentiles are one. And they say, verse 21, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses. Telling them not to circumcise their children nor walk according to the customs.

Lies. He never ever did that, but they accused him of it. Verse 22, what then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come and you're in trouble.

What are we going to do about this? So these are believing Jews. I mean, obviously the non-believing Jews were hostile toward him as well, trying to make Jews and Gentile one in the kingdom of God. But even the believing Jews were in on this.

We've got to do something. This is the council talking to Paul. We've got to do something to save you from this false accusation that you have no place for the customs of Moses.

Now the Jewish council says, we're going to help you. Okay, right. We have four men, in verse 23, most severe vow, verse 23, who are under a vow.

Four men want to take a Nazarite vow in number six. That's where we studied that. The Nazarite vow is a covenant or a process that you go through that takes seven days.

This was a most severe vow you could take in the Jewish faith. You shaved your head and you didn't drink any wine or strong drink, and you were saying, I'm going to take the highest level of dedication to God. And there was a certain routine and sacrifices that were to be offered when you made this vow.

So here are four men. They want to take this Nazarite vow, verse 24, and purify themselves. You need to be purified.

You need a ceremonial cleansing because you've been in the Gentile land and you're now sort of ceremonially unclean. So you go in and you do a purification ceremony and you purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, pay these four guys expenses in doing this, because there's a fee to do this in the church. So they may shave their heads, which is part of it.

And all will know there's nothing to the things which have been told about you, but that you yourself also walked orderly, keeping the law. You have to prove that those things that are being said about you are not true. So go with these four men, pay for their fees in the vow, go through the cleansing yourself, and then somebody and then everybody will know that you're still a Jew.

You haven't run rogue on the Jewish customs. So verse 26 says, Paul took the men and the next day purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the seven days of purification until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them. Seven days went by, according to verse 27.

So he went through the whole process, which showed, look, he wasn't overthrowing all the Mosaic traditions. That was not the time for that. But when seven days were almost over, verse 27 says, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him.

Okay, they took, they basically grabbed him. Laying hands in this context is basically arresting him or confining him. And that was not for ordination, that was for arrest.

The Jews wanted him arrested. The Jews arrest him just because he's in the temple. And in verse 28, crying out, man of Israel, come to our aid.

This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the law and this place, the temple. And besides, he's even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. Now, non-Jews could only go so far into the temple.

We talked about that. And they're accusing Paul of bringing Trofimus, the Ephesian, into the inner part of the temple where only Jews could go. They supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

Now, this is a fomenting a riot. And what is all of this about? It's not about some theological issue. It's about the fact that they were unwilling to acknowledge that there is a place in the kingdom of God for Gentiles.

All the city, all the city of Jerusalem is provoked. The whole of Jerusalem is in an uproar at this time. And the people rushed together and taking hold of Paul, dragged him out of the temple and immediately closed the door shut while they were seeking to kill him.

Now, I mean, this is how resistant they are to his message about Jew and Gentile being one in the church. They were trying to kill him, to silence him. They must have inflicted some severe wounds on him.

A report came up to the commander of the Roman battalion that all Jerusalem was in confusion. That's a citywide riot going on. And what is the issue? This guy is trying to bring Gentiles into the blessing of God, trying to join Gentiles with Jews as true members of God's kingdom.

That's the crime. So the commander took some soldiers at verse 32 and the centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

I don't know how far they had beaten him, but a mob is going to be very delicate. The commander came up and took hold of him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. What did Erdogan say? Just what happened to him? And he began asking who he was and what he had done.

He arrested him before he knew anything about what he had done. But this was a protective custody that we find in verse 34. Among the crowd, some were shouting one thing, some another.

And when it didn't, when it couldn't find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. When he got into the stairs, Paul was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob, for the multitude of people kept following them, shouting away with him or killing. Now you have to understand Jonah's attitude about the salvation of Nineveh, right? You're seeing it right here play out, same thing.

They want to kill this guy because he's bringing Gentiles into the kingdom of God. So when he says, back to Ephesians, when he says, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles, he's not talking about some spiritual identity. He's saying, hey guys, I'm in prison.

And by the way, when he wrote that, he was in prison as a result of what happened in Jerusalem. By then he had gone through the numerous hearings before Agrippa and Festus and Felix, and then finally was shipped to Rome. And he was in Roman custody in a Roman prison where he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon.

And why? Because he was trying to make the message of unity between the Jews and the Gentile in the kingdom acceptable to the Jews. How deep is that animosity? How deep is that hatred? Think about that today. Yes, he was a prisoner of the Roman government, but really he was a prisoner of Jewish racism.

He never thought of himself as a prisoner of Rome. He never thought of himself as a prisoner of the Jews. He was, after all, a prisoner of Jesus Christ because it was in serving Christ that he had been brought to prison.

Think about the mindset. In everything, give joy. He knew that he had to keep his mindset in the proper direction, so he turned this moment in history around to a blessing to support Jesus Christ.

Unity is a very difficult thing when there are deep-seated prejudices. They die very, very, very hard. Everything Paul did was for the Gentiles.

Go back to 2 Corinthians for a moment, chapter 4, verse 8, and look what he went through. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always caring about in the body the dying of Christ, so that the life of Christ always may be made manifest in our body. We who live in constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus Christ also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So death works in us in order for life to work in you. To get spiritual life to you, I have to face death. That was Paul.

Now, you have to ask, why did he do this? Well, let's go to verse 13. Because I believe, therefore I spoke, we also believe, therefore we speak. And furthermore, I know that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and present us with you.

The worst that could happen to me is they kill me, and Jesus raises me from the dead. And then in verse 15, all things are for your sakes. He's writing to the Gentiles in Corinth.

All things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people, more and more tribes, and tongues, and nations may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. I'm just trying to add people to the hallelujah chorus who are singing praises to the God and to Christ. And it was costly.

In Philippians 1, writing from the same imprisonment, verse 12, I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment is the cause of Christ. That's the prisoner of Christ. My imprisonment at the hands of the Romans, under the persecution or accusations of the Jews, is really an imprisonment that Christ has called me to do.

But my imprisonment has become well known to the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else. HP actually brought the Praetorian Guard to Christ. He used it as a platform to preach the gospel of Christ.

And most of the brethren trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. My imprisonment for the cause of Christ. He was a prisoner for the cause of Christ.

So when he says a prisoner of Jesus Christ, he's not talking about a spiritual reality. He's talking about an actual experience. It's all about the stewardship.

Verse 2, that God has given me by grace. It's all because of the revelation that was made known to me about the mystery. It's also that you can understand my insight into the mystery.

He's trying to teach them. It's all about that which was hidden and is now revealed. And what is that? That Gentiles are followers, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel.

Now, you know, really wouldn't think that just that kind of hatred and hostility would cause religious Jewish people to want to kill somebody because he was trying to bring Jew and Gentile into one body. Working for unity is very hard. There are all kinds of collective hostilities, hatred, envy, anger, vengeance.

It was hard for Paul. And once they arrested him, that's the rest of the book of Acts. He never is free again.

The only time he's free at all is on the boat going to Rome to be put in another prison. They wanted to kill the man. They literally drove him all the way to Rome under an adjudication of Caesar because they hated the idea of Jew and Gentile being one.

If that capacity is in the human heart, it's little wonder that unity is a challenge. It's a little wonder. But Paul said, look, I'll offer my life for this.

I'll be bound for this. We saw that in Acts 21. I'll die for this because that is my calling.

When we look at a self examination of ourselves and we go back and completely understand what chapter one was, which was the planning of everything, and chapter two was the information about the nation of Israel, about the unity of the church, the church, okay, unity of the church, the structure, and how it was broken down to the unity of us as being the body of Christ in the latter parts of chapter two, we get into chapter three and we're beginning to transition into the application because Paul is saying, I, Paul, by giving this mantle by Christ, I am going to be the apostle for the Gentiles. Now you got to think about this. They selected Paul before the foundation of the world.

They knew that they were going to take this Pharisee who was a member of the Sanhedrin. They knew that they were going to take and convert this guy because of who he was for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and the Jews. He had not only the stamina, he had the perseverance, he had the knowledge, he was taught by the best scholar in Jewish history about Jewish faith.

So he's well versed in the Jewish faith, and they planned this as part of the process of creating the church. Okay, that ends our look at verses one through four and the setting up of the rest of this by now understanding that Paul gave his life so that we could be saved. Without Paul being that apostle and going through that process, we would not be talking.

And it was done before the foundation of the world. David. So God chose Saul, Paul, because of his great standing within the Jewish community.

Whatever he said went and therefore by him being converted, surely people would sit up and pay attention. Yep. But unfortunately they didn't.

Well, they paid attention, but the Jewish community had so much hatred. What really got in the crawl of the Jewish community was Paul in his defense speech told the Jews that God told him to go do this. And when he brought God into the mix of this, they went crazy.

That was blasphemy. Yeah, God, yeah, because God was only Jewish. Right.

And that's what really frenzied them up to do this. But without that, we wouldn't have the church. The important thing to get through this is Paul, much like Christ, gave his life not for salvation, but gave his life for the church, gave his life for us so that we could have that gospel, so that we could have the information about how this world was created and the formula that God had laid out for the success of the church.

This is all theology. Everything that we're getting, chapters one, two and three, is all theology. It is how the plan was put together.

And you mentioned James being head of the synagogue? Jerusalem Church, yeah. Jerusalem Church. Was that the James that's the stepbrother of Jesus? That's absolutely correct.

Right. And he was unable to persuade everybody. He didn't have the ability.

Well, what we find, if we studied the book of James, what we find is that James did not do much in this at all. Because if he did, then the church would have a problem. Now think about that a moment.

What pastor in this day and age would stand up for the truth knowing that his church would have a problem? Not too many. Not too many. And you wonder why this country is going to hell.

Yep. Mine too. This is all got to start back with the church.

All got to go back to the church. Any other comments? Nothing? Well, if nothing more, you learn more about the life of Paul and the role he played in starting the church and the foundation that he laid for the church so that we could actually receive the message of salvation today. And he said, so with that, let's pray.

Father, thank you for this evening. Thank you for giving us the truth from your scripture, opening the hearts and the doors of our mind so that we can now understand that really what you were creating before the beginning of time was not only our calling, not only our selection, not only predestination, but you had identified the method of how we were to live as one in Christ. Even though we have the problems today as much, much differently, but also much the same as existed during Paul's time.

Father, we ask that basically you give us the knowledge and wisdom to overcome all that is blocking our abilities to understand your truth, to understand the unity of the church and the fact that we as believers are meant to be one with each other. We ask you forgiveness of our sins and we ask that you continue to bless us in this ministry and provide in the hearts of the people attending tonight the ability to now understand the sacrifice that had to be given for us to even have the ability to hear your word of salvation. I ask all these things in my mind.