# Open secrets

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

Will Fitzgerald

June 21, 2015

Ephesians 3

## Introduction

I wonder what it’s like to be the primary discoverer of some great secret of the universe. What did Einstein feel when he learned that energy and mass were equivalent? How did Galileo feel when he discovered that planets other than earth had moons? How did Marie Curie feel when she discovered radium?

I bet it felt great.

How did Paul feel when he discovered, when it was revealed to him, that the good news of “the boundless riches of Christ” was not just for Jews, but also for Gentiles? This passage tells us a bit of his story, and let us look at it together. Look for hints of Paul’s emotional state.

**3**This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner forChrist Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— **2**for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, **3**and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, **4**a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. **5**In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:**6**that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

**7**Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. **8**Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ,**9**and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; **10**so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **11**This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,**12**in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.**13**I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

This first thing I notice is that he is very aware of how *unlikely and unworthy* he was. He is aware that he is “the very least of the saints.” And, as we know, he is not exaggerating. Paul himself (in his letter to the Galatians) tells us how rapaciously he persecuted the early believers, out of a misshaped understanding of what it meant to be a follower of God. He looked on being a pious Jew as a kind of competitive sport in which he wanted to be the most zealous person he knew. And he was the kind of believer that, in order for him to feel good about himself and how religious he was, he had to viciously attack those who did not agree. And his vicious attacks were not just rhetorical. The book of Acts tells us he participated in the stoning of the first person to follow Jesus to a martyr’s death. He actively tried to destroy the church of God.

So, it is no exaggeration that he was the least of the saints. But Christ in mercy revealed himself to Paul in a blinding light and a commanding voice, and he at once began to testify that Jesus was the Son of God, to people really surprised and more than a bit skeptical of his sudden change.

The second thing I notice is how seriously Paul took this revelation. In verse two, our pew Bibles say that he was given a *commission* by God to spread this news. In other words, it wasn’t enough for him to intellectually know that God was also the God of the Gentiles though the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he was commissioned to tell the Gentiles (and the Jews) this news. I don’t know what word your translation uses instead of *commission*, other translations say *administration* or *stewardship*, *dispensation* or *responsibility*. One translation simply has *work*, and this, I think, is probably the best: It was now Paul’s job, his work, his vocation as it were, to bear witness to Jesus. It’s was the most important part of is life.

This is underlined by his noting that he is a *servant* (verse 7). But he is a servant who has been given the power to do what he is called to do. Finally, we note that he is literally a *prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of [the] Gentiles*. He was willing to fulfill his calling even to his own imprisonment.

Following up on that, a third thing I notice is how *comforting* this all is to him. He is in prison, and he knows that the Ephesians are (rightly, I think) worried about him. Once you are unjustly imprisoned, you never know how things will turn out. But he comforts the Ephesians. Because this was all foreseen by God, and is work and calling of God, he writes the Ephesians: *I pray therefore that you might not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory*. Their honor and glory was dependent on their hearing the gospel of good news for the Gentile as well as the Jew, and therefore Paul wants them not to lose heart.

I notice that Paul draws some really grand implications from this revelation. Let’s take a look at some of them:

1. We are part of the same body (v 6)
2. Everyone should be told this truth (v 9)
3. Known to rulers and authorities (v 10)
4. Part of God’s eternal purpose (v 11)
5. Gives all of us boldness and confidence (no second-class citizens) (v 12)

This leads Paul to get down on his knees (v 14). He medidates on the nature of God as our *Father*. God provides every family, that is, every family of which God is a part, with God’s name. I think this is where he is going. I am not so much *Will Fitzgerald* as *Will Fitzgerald of God*. The family ties have been extended beyond Jewish lines to all gentiles; the family of God includes us, too.

Imagine, we are quite literally now part of the family of God, not through the physical act of procreation, but through the name that God grants us.

And Paul want us to be worthy of this. He is confident that God is rich and glorious enough to do it. So he prays that we can become strong enough to bear the truth, which is only possible if the Holy Spirit makes it possible.

He prays that Christ will dwell in our hearts.

So, not only do we have the privilege of being in God’s family, but God will dwell in us. For Paul also writes the whole of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in Christ. So, if the fullness of God dwelt in Christ, and Christ can dwell in us, then the fullness of Christ can dwell in us.

It’s going to take some work.

We need to be fully rooted and grounded in God’s love.

And as we become more and more aware of how high, wide and deep God’s love is, we filled with that fulness. And that is Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, and Paul’s prayer for us.

And of course this leads to *doxology*, or to praise of God. God can do more than we can imagine (even with all of his opening of secrets to us!). We seek to praise and give glory to God, along with every generation of Christians there has been, and will be.

Glory in the church. Amen.