

# Lesson 9 | October 31, 2021

## The Great Mystery of Grace

**Study Text:** Ephesians 3:1–21

**Central Truth:** God’s grace makes it possible to know the love of Christ.

**Key Verse: Ephesians 3:19**

To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God (KJV).

May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God (NLT).

### Learning Objectives

- The student will comprehend that the gospel is for everyone.
- The student will learn what Scripture says about respecting all people.
- The student will be encouraged and challenged to share the love of God with all people.

## Introducing the Lesson

**Say:** In the previous lesson, we explored the fact that all people—Jews and Gentiles—stand in need of salvation. In this lesson we will explore our role in making this message known to those who have not heard the gospel. The role of proclamation is not reserved for church leaders, such as pastors and evangelists. Furthermore, proclamation may come at a personal cost, but **we must keep in mind the value and the glory of the gospel, now and forever.**

### Opening Activity—Favorite Mystery

*Ask: What mysteries (books or television shows) are among your favorites, either now or during your childhood?* Depending on the ages and makeup of your class, you may hear examples of television shows or books from years ago, or some that are popular today.

**Say:** Mysteries have always been a favorite form of entertainment. Most people are intrigued by something they don’t understand. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

What is a mystery? “something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain.”

**In Ephesians 3, Paul used the term “mystery” or “mysterious” to describe the things of God, which are far beyond human understanding. Yet today, even if we study God’s Word regularly, there are still concepts that we don’t understand, and those concepts keep the hungry believer returning to God’s Word again and**

again, seeking to comprehend the things of God. The mysteries of God will be a lifelong pursuit as we seek closeness with Him. In this lesson we will see the wonder that Paul expressed as he discussed the mysteries of God. May we never lose that wonder.

## **Part 1—The Mystery of Christ Revealed**

### **A Witness for Grace**

Ephesians 3:1–2

**[Eph 3:1-2 KJV] 1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, 2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:**

**Say:** At the time Paul wrote Ephesians, he was in prison. Many people in his circumstances would have been discouraged and disgruntled, and looking for someone to blame. But Paul recognized that his imprisonment was ultimately a part of his calling to reach the Gentiles. He did not blame the Gentiles for his chains, nor did he blame the Roman authorities. The chains on his arms and legs were there because God had allowed them for His purposes. Thus, in a real sense, Paul was not a prisoner of the state, but prisoner of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

**Paul explained that his specific call from God was to explain to the Gentiles the grace offered by God for salvation (Ephesians 3:1–2).** Throughout the Old Testament, the Jewish people were the focus of God's unfolding plan of redemption, with exceptions, however, as there were Gentiles who joined into the people of God. Any Gentile, then, could submit to the Jewish Law and find a place in God's family. **Paul's ministry, as he would explain to the Ephesians, was to help the Gentiles see that God loved them as much as He loved the Jews. They could experience the love of God and the gift of redemption by faith.**

**Paul not only saw the salvation of the Gentiles as an act and blessing of God's grace, but he also saw God's selection of him to be the minister to the Gentiles as an act of grace.** It is a tremendous blessing for anyone to enter into right relationship with God through Jesus and to experience the hope of everlasting life. **It is an equally tremendous blessing to be able to serve others through delivery of the gospel on behalf of the God of the universe. Serving Jesus through obedience to His call ought to be seen as a tremendous blessing. Knowing that we are honoring Him by our actions and with our lives brings a unique sense of fulfillment.**

#### ***Discuss***

? If you were asked to identify your role in sharing the gospel with others, what would it be?

? What can Christians today learn from Paul's attitude?

## Grace for All

Ephesians 3:3–6

**[Eph 3:3-6 KJV] 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:**

**Say:** The idea of mystery within the New Testament is most certainly true, but the idea of mystery was not always understood fully. Paul stated that this truth was revealed to him by God. It is widely believed that Paul was referring to his experience on the road to Damascus when he was blinded. However, his eyes were physically and spiritually opened when Ananias prayed for him (see Acts 9). At that time, God gave Paul a direct and distinct revelation through the Holy Spirit. Whatever the specifics of this revelation experience, **Paul now understood great mysteries of God’s plan, and he desired to share what he learned with others.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

**Paul began his explanation of God’s gift by calling it a “mystery” (Ephesians 3:3–4, KJV), which was a reference to something hidden or secret. Thus, a mystery such as this could not be learned by oneself. It had to be disclosed. Paul used the word mystery in other places in his letter to the Ephesians to refer to the relationship between Christians and the Church (see Ephesians 5:32). But in this case Paul was talking about the mystery of Gentiles becoming a part of God’s family.**

Paul also desired that his readers understand that he was not making up a new theology on his own. **It was God’s choice to not reveal this mystery to previous generations, but to wait until Paul’s day to reveal the mystery through the Holy Spirit. This revelation had come not only to Paul, but also to all of the apostles and prophets** (verse 5).

Paul presented his understanding of the mystery plainly. He explained that the Gentiles and Jews have equal shares in the inheritance of God (verse 6). **The Gentiles are not second-class citizens in the kingdom of God, for God sees no difference between Jews and Gentiles when they accept His grace. Every believer has all the blessings and promises associated with being children of God for they are all part of the same Body, the Church.**

Resource Packet Item 1: “Mystery” in the Bible

Distribute the information sheet. Summarize this material so students understand how the Bible uses the term “mystery.” Encourage students to read through the material later.

### ***Discuss***

? What process or people did God use to reveal the mystery of salvation to you?

? How does the message of the gospel, a mystery to many, but understood by God’s people, offer hope to the divided world we live in today?

## **Part 2—Proclaiming God’s Revealed Plan A Servant of the Gospel**

Ephesians 3:7–9

**[Eph 3:7-9 KJV] 7 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. 8 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; 9 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:**

**Say:** Once we have become aware of the mystery of God and responded in faith to the call to salvation, we have the privilege of sharing that mystery with those who do not have a relationship with Christ. This mystery, inasmuch as it is revealed to us, is not meant to be kept a secret. God desires it to be broadcast widely. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul called himself a servant of the gospel, dedicating his life to serving the Savior (Ephesians 3:7), who had brought him freedom from sin and reconciliation with the Father. **Paul knew that he could not fulfill in his own strength the task laid before him by God. And God did not leave Paul ill-equipped to do this task. Paul honored God’s purpose for his life only through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Paul also recognized that he was not worthy to preach the good news of salvation (verse 8). He contrasted his smallness with the greatness of Christ. It was his calling to tell the Ephesians that the treasures and blessings of the gospel were available to them through Jesus Christ (verse 9). One cannot help but sense the gratitude being expressed as Paul informed his readers that he had been chosen to share this great mystery, conceived at the beginning of time, with those who were outside of the kingdom of God, in Ephesus and throughout the Roman world.

### **Discuss**

? How does understanding that God will equip you to accomplish His will affect your willingness to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit?

? How do you react when you get an opportunity to share the gospel? How can you prepare yourself to better meet these opportunities?

## **The Power of the Gospel**

Ephesians 3:10-13

**[Eph 3:10-13 KJV] 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly [places] might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

**Say:** It was not only Paul's privilege to share the great mystery of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ. It is also the privilege of every believer. Paul understood that as the mystery was declared, the power resident in that message could transform the lives of people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 3:10, (KJV), **Paul used the term "manifold" to describe the wisdom of God.** This word, in its basic Greek meaning, referred to a variety of colors, such as in cloth or painting. **The word is relatively rare in its usage**, applied to the grace of God in 1 Peter 4:10. (It also is used to describe a wide array of temptations, in James 1:2 and 1 Peter 1:6.) **And so, in the setting of Ephesians 3:10, we might use the example of a field of wildflowers to help our understanding. There are a multitude of colors, but when seen from afar, they create one beautiful scene. The wisdom of God is limitless, but it has a single purpose. God's purpose is to reconcile the world to himself through His gracious gift of salvation.**

[1Pe 4:10 KJV] 10 As every man hath received the gift, [even so] minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the **manifold grace of God.**

[1Pe 1:6 KJV] 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through **manifold temptations:**

**Paul then pointed out that, by making the mystery known, God's purpose is on display to all the powers in the heavenly realm** (Ephesians 3:10–11). This is an important point. Paul was aware of the spiritual realities that surround our natural world. He was also aware of the attempts by the enemy of our souls to use spiritual forces to destroy people. **God equips and empowers the Church to stand against spiritual darkness and declare that the gospel is stronger than all spiritual powers. From**

**the beginning, God had a plan to remedy sin. No external power could ever stand against God's purposes.**

Through the course of Ephesians 3, Paul described the greatest blessing ever given to humans. The phrase used by Paul regarding boldness and confidence can be **understood to mean approaching God with freedom of speech and with no shame or fear. There is no need for fear in the hearts of those who have Christ living in them. We, the created, have access to the Creator through faith in Jesus. This is the good news that we, the Church, have the privilege to offer to humanity.**

In verse 13, Paul brought his discussion back to his present state as a “prisoner of Christ” who suffered for Christ. **He asked the Ephesians to not be discouraged just because he suffered in chains. He had spiritual victory amid his sufferings, a great reminder that those sufferings—and our sufferings, too—can have a purpose. Paul did not see himself as a victim, but as a victor. And while we may well never suffer like Paul suffered, we, too, can trust God to sustain us during the struggles of our faith.**

#### **Resource Packet Item 2: God Can Do All Things**

Distribute the work sheet, and have your students complete it. Encourage them to approach God with confidence that He can meet their needs, both large and small.

#### ***Discuss***

? How does the world attempt to stifle the gospel?

? How is God using your present circumstances to advance the gospel?

## **Part 3—Experiencing the Fullness of Christ's Love Paul's Prayer for the Church**

Ephesians 3:14–19

**[Eph 3:14-19 KJV] 14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.**

**Say:** In Ephesians 3:14, Paul echoed what he said in verse 1. He had started to address his prayer regarding the Ephesians, but stopped to explore the basis of his

hope and the hope of the Gentiles. His statement, “For this cause” (KJV) refers to what Paul had established earlier in the letter as well as the mystery revealed in chapter 3. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul indicated his humility through his statement that he knelt before the Father (Ephesians 3:14). **In New Testament times, like today, Jews generally stood when they prayed. Kneeling for prayer during biblical times was reserved for occasions when a person expressed deep passion or a deep earnestness.** Paul was not reciting a formal prayer. He was profoundly grateful to God for what He had accomplished.

**Paul desired that his readers understand the greatness of God. Every human being who has ever lived was created by the Father. He is the source of all things and every being (verse 15, NLT). Yet He has made possible the way of restoration for everyone who is willing to accept His gift of salvation.**

Paul also prayed for specific blessings for the Ephesian believers (verses 16–19). The first blessing is strength or courage that comes through the power of the Holy Spirit (verse 16). This is the same blessing Paul referred to in 1:19. The combination of Greek words indicate that Paul was praying that they would stand firm during adversity through the power of the Holy Spirit. **The consequence of this strength is that Christ “may dwell in their hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:17, KJV). The Greek word for “dwell” indicates a permanent, ongoing residence. As long as Christians place their faith in the work of Christ, there is no fear of Christ departing from them.**

The second blessing that Paul asked for was that the Ephesians **would have power to grasp, or understand, the entirety of the love of God (verses 16–19).** Paul indicated that grasping the love of God would help the Ephesians live together in harmony. Paul demonstrated by his life that there is a cost involved in being a servant of Christ. Part of that cost is to love those who are not terribly lovely. **When one embraces the greatness of God’s love toward us, it becomes easier to show unconditional love toward others.**

The third blessing Paul asked for was the fullness of God. This is made possible through knowing God fully. Considering the vastness of God, it seems impossible to fully know Him. But Paul did not wish to quantify what a person can experience. **The Christian should never be satisfied to stop growing and maturing in their experience with God. Paul desired that Christians seek all that is available as a result of the indwelling Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.**

### **Resource Packet Item 3: Praying for the Church**

Distribute the work sheet and give the students a few minutes to respond. Then ask for volunteers to share responses. Discuss what your class can do to pray for your church.

#### ***Discuss***

? How does your love for Christ impact your relationships?

? How great is your desire to experience God more fully?

## **Paul's Praise to God**

Ephesians 3:20–21

**[Eph 3:20-21 KJV] 20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21 Unto him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.**

**Say:** Paul came to the end of the theological section of his Epistle—which summarized the love of God—with a benediction. In it, Paul attempted to express the greatness of this God who has chosen to provide a means for humans to be in relationship with Him. In a sense, Paul was saying that God's greatness is so vast that no person will ever be able to understand it. This great God makes himself available to all of humanity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

**As we read Ephesians 3:20–21, we can see that Paul was captivated by the greatness of God and the extent of His love—far more than could ever be thought of through the human imagination. Absolutely nothing is outside of His reach or beyond His power. Thus, no degree of sin can prevent Him from having a relationship with a person when that person reaches out to Him for redemption.**

**Paul went on to say that there is nothing that Christians cannot see accomplished through Him if they are working in conjunction with His purposes. But Christians must always remember that what they accomplish must have His will in view, and it must not be designed to bring glory to themselves. All that is accomplished through our prayers and faithful obedience is designed to bring God glory and to honor His kingdom.**

Finally, Paul made it clear that the work of God would not be limited to the city of Ephesus or the first century Church. **God's power is available to every Christian everywhere and at all times.**

### ***Discuss***

? What aspects of God, His creation, and His redemptive work would you say captivate you the most? Explain.

? How might God's greatness compel Christians to live in obedience?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** God has called every believer to share the mystery of God to those from whom it is currently hidden, and sadly, unknown. To engage in sharing this mystery may require



believers to share in the suffering of Christ. Such suffering should be expected, and even embraced when it comes, as part of heartfelt service to God. We must recall that the mystery of God was once hidden from us, but God used others to reveal the mystery so we could understand and respond to it. In like manner, it is our responsibility to share this mystery for the sake of others. To do otherwise would be an act of supreme selfishness. God showed His great love to us by paving a path that leads to Him. It is now our precious calling to lead the lost onto the path of salvation.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Take time to develop a narrative of your spiritual journey that you can share with unbelievers.
- Watch your attitudes to be sure you show respect to all believers without prejudice.
- Pray that you can live in spiritual freedom and believe God for great things.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **Monday:**

God Reveals Deep Things.  
Job 12:13–22

**[Job 12:13-22 KJV] 13 With him [is] wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding. 14 Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. 15 Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth. 16 With him [is] strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver [are] his. 17 He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. 18 He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. 19 He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. 20 He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. 21 He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. 22 He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death.**

### **Tuesday:**

Revelation of Hidden Treasures Promised.  
Isaiah 45:1–7

**[Isa 45:1-7 KJV] 1 Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; 2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: 3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call [thee] by thy name, [am] the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy**

name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. 5 I [am] the LORD, and [there is] none else, [there is] no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that [there is] none beside me. I [am] the LORD, and [there is] none else. 7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these [things].

#### **Wednesday:**

God Reveals Mysteries.  
Daniel 2:19–25

**[Dan 2:19-25 KJV]** 19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: 21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: 22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what [is] in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. 23 I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast [now] made known unto us the king's matter. 24 Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise [men] of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise [men] of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation. 25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.

#### **Thursday:**

Proclaim Christ Boldly.  
Acts 4:24–31

**[Act 4:24-31 KJV]** 24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou [art] God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. 27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. 29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. 31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

**Friday:**

Declaring Revealed Wisdom.  
1 Corinthians 2:6–11

**[1Co 2:6-11 KJV] 6** Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: **7** But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, [even] the hidden [wisdom], which God ordained before the world unto our glory: **8** Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known [it], they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9** But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. **10** But God hath revealed [them] unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. **11** For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

**Saturday:**

Revealed Mystery Proclaimed.  
Colossians 1:24–29

**[Col 1:24-29 KJV] 24** Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: **25** Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; **26** [Even] the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: **27** To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: **28** Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: **29** Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.