

Clear About the Gospel Bible Study
Ephesians 3.1-21 - BYF - October 25, 2026
Dr. Clay Brown - MDPC Adult Discipleship Pastor

TEACHING OUTLINE

1. Start with announcements and prayer. (5 minutes)

2. Read aloud Ephesians 3.1-21. (5 minutes)

3. Discuss Paul's role in sharing the gospel to the Gentiles in Ephesians 3.1-9. (10 minutes)

- Paul starts v. 1 and then breaks off on extended parenthetical comment, resuming his statement in v. 14 (many modern translations note this with a footnote)
- Break from initial thought in v. 1 to explain his role and calling in what was first introduced in Eph 1.9-14 and now expanded here: unveiling of God's redemptive plan of love and compassion
- Key: equality of Jew and Gentile before God (v. 6) as part of the same body of faith, enjoying same promises of blessings in Jesus Christ
- Paul's distinctive call: to share and explain this expansion of the gospel with the Gentiles; see Paul's conversion in Acts 9.1-31 and preparation detailed in Gal 1.11—2.21
- Paul's humility as "least deserving of all God's people" (v. 8 NLT) goes back to what he was doing as he is struck blind on road to Damascus: going to arrest Christians there and bring them to Jerusalem for judgment as part of Jewish leadership's response to the growth of Christianity

4. Discuss Paul's description of God's purpose in sharing the gospel to the Gentiles in Ephesians 3.10-13. (10 minutes)

- Purpose of God: "to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (v. 10 NLT)
- Allusion to spiritual warfare with unseen rulers and authorities that gets repeated and then expanded upon in Eph 6.10-20; unseen cosmic world as important as natural world for Paul
- Ongoing theme in Paul's letters of God's wisdom being far different from human wisdom; for example, review 1 Corinthians 1.18-31
- Paul's suffering: writing this letter from prison; imprisoned for his faith and practice
- Now, all in Christ can come "boldly and confidently into God's presence" (3.12 NLT)

5. Discuss Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (and others who read this letter) in Ephesians 3.14-21. (15 minutes)

- Now resumes thought started in 3.1 with incredible prayer for his readers: falls to his knees in expression of worship and trust and prays to the Father with several connected requests:
 - First, unlimited resources of God will empower them with strength through the Spirit
 - Second, Christ will make his home in their hearts as they increasingly trust in him, with roots growing deep and strong
 - Third, expanded understanding of the width, length, height, and depth of God's love for them in Christ

- Finally, they may experience the love of Christ even as they're unable to understand it fully (experiential vs intellectual)
- Sums up with doxology in vv. 20-21
- Helpful to consider how vastly different this prayer is from what we ordinarily pray for others
- Klyne Snodgrass: "The exalted ecclesiology of Ephesians has important practical consequences. The church is not an optional part of Christianity. Rather, it is the place now and throughout eternity where God is given glory and honor. Just as Christ is the evidence of God's redeeming love, the church is the evidence of God's transforming and uniting power. . . In writing this commentary, one of the most difficult tasks has been in dealing with the contrast between what Ephesians describes and the reality I and most Christians experience." (*Ephesians: NIV Application Commentary*, 191)

6. Close with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Read aloud Ephesians 3.1-21. What surprised or impressed you about the passage that perhaps you did not realize before?
2. Ephesians 3.1 starts in one direction, and then goes in a different direction until verse 14. What is this different direction? Why do you think Paul goes off on a tangent here? What is his purpose?
3. Paul describes himself as the "least deserving of God's people" (v. 8 NLT) for the role he has been given. Why would he talk about himself this way? Why is Paul's call so singularly significant?
4. Sometimes in his mission, God calls people to the forefront for ministry who, from a human perspective at least, would not have been the people we thought God should have called. Yet God works through them. When have you seen this phenomenon happen? Describe how things went.
5. Paul cracks opens a theme of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 3.10-13 that he will expand upon later on the book. Do you think the spiritual conflict Paul describes is a reality today? If not, why not? If so, how have you seen it operating in the church? Your community? Your life?
6. Walk through the prayer in Ephesians 3.14-21 Paul prays for his readers. There are four interconnected requests. What are they and where do you identify them in the passage? How does Paul's prayer differ greatly from the intercessory prayers we often offer for others? How might you adapt your prayers for others to Paul's pattern?
7. The theologian Klyne Snodgrass writes about Ephesians 3:1-21: "The exalted ecclesiology of Ephesians has important practical consequences. The church is not an optional part of Christianity. Rather, it is the place now and throughout eternity where God is given glory and honor. Just as Christ is the evidence of God's redeeming love, the church is the evidence of God's transforming and uniting power. . . In writing this commentary, one of the most difficult tasks has been in dealing with the contrast between what Ephesians describes and the reality I and most Christians experience." (*Ephesians: NIV Application Commentary*, 191) How do you address this contrast between the church as it's supposed to be and the church today as it often is? Talk about it candidly and hopefully.