

# **The Epiphany of our Lord – Epistle**

## **Seeing Past The Confessor To The One Confessed**

### **Ephesians 3:1-12**

#### **The Epiphany of our Lord Analysis by James Squire**

1This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—2for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, 3and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, 4a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. 5In 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: 6that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7Of 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. 8Although 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, 9and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10so 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. 11This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

---

## DIAGNOSIS: Retreating from Paul's Message

### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Confused*

Paul's readers must not have known what to think: the one who brought the Gospel to them is now in prison precisely because of them (v. 1). This shouldn't happen; it doesn't compute for them. Having just become "fellow heirs" (v. 6), they were likely very dependent on Paul and probably couldn't see how Paul being in jail was part of God's plan. They didn't understand the mystery (v. 9). They didn't yet have the "power to comprehend ... the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (3:18-19). This must have made them question Paul's message and his authority. (God forbid that the great faith heroes in our lives become casualties in some political or ecclesiastical struggle. We wouldn't know what to think or do.)

### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Weak-Hearted*

When you don't know what to think or do because your hero is under attack, you can "lose heart" (3:13). You may begin to think that you have made a mistake. But for Paul's readers, and for us, the problem goes beyond confusion. The underlying problem is the loss of faith. The evidence indicates that we've put our money on the wrong horse. Time to cut our losses and run. If the authorities put our hero in prison, we jump ship. Maybe Paul's readers were worshipping Paul rather than Jesus anyway. No wonder their hearts were weakening. Paul himself, "the very least of all the saints" (v. 8) would scold them for pinning their hopes on him. And we are no less susceptible to placing our hopes on anyone but Christ.

### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Cut Off from God*

When we cut our losses and run, we are left without "the fullness of God" (3:19). Paul's sufferings, which were meant for

our glory (3:13), are unappreciated by us, and we are cut off from blessing because we retreated to our old habits. We want the salvation we pursued before Paul came along. Whatever form it took it undoubtedly involved trying to earn our way to heaven, which Paul would surely tell us is impossible. So it really isn't Paul we retreat from, it is Christ we retreat from. We are no longer "sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (v. 6). In fact, we really have nothing to show for ourselves when the day of reckoning comes.

## **PROGNOSIS: Finding Refuge in the Arms of Christ**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *Access to God through Jesus*

Ironically, our "fallen" preacher (Paul, in this case) becomes the one through whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ is opened up to us—like a great mystery revealed (v. 5). Paul thought he was just promoting the expansion of the Gospel to the Gentiles, but Paul was not the only one being "crucified" in that prison cell. His cellmate was Jesus Christ, the One he was confessing to the Gentiles. From Paul's prison, the cross of Jesus Christ was made real for the Gentiles. It is for us too: Christ's crucifixion is made real for us through the witness of faithful confessors like Paul. Through such confessions, all that was previously being hidden (silenced) is now revealed for all to see the glory of Christ shining through the cross. Thus God's "eternal purpose" (v. 12), to give us access to the throne of grace, is achieved. Paul himself may not have been fully aware of the cosmic significance of his actions; he was too busy pointing away from himself to Christ.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *Heart-Strengthened by Faith in Christ*

When Paul, or any other "fallen" hero, identifies the power of Christ in the midst of his own suffering, a mystery is revealed

for us publicly. Just as Christ hid his glory in his death on the cross, so Christ hides his glory in the suffering and humility of his servants. This mystery, revealed to us in Paul's words to the Ephesians, helps us to discover the heart we thought we'd lost (but which, in truth, we never really had before). It is not just that our "fallen" hero has regained our respect, but now we see the truth that our hero was trying to convey to us. "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," Paul says, and "this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ" (vv. 7-8). Paul doesn't preach this to us in relative safety; this message comes straight from the "witness chair" of his prison cell. We are not only hearing the gospel, but we are seeing that gospel received by Paul in faith. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are at work in Paul, and consequently in us hearers.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** – *Knowing the Love of Christ*

Confessional moments eventually fade. But the Gospel message endures in the lives of the Gentiles and us. What Paul knows in his prison cell, he hopes we can carry into our world, until we can "make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (v. 9). Many years after Paul's confession from prison, Christ calls us to carry the confessional torch in our own (perhaps less intimidating, but no less important) arenas. We do this joyfully in full knowledge of the love of Christ (3:19), which Paul demonstrated to us. Thanks to Paul's witness and Christ's action through him, what was previously hidden is now revealed. Now we carry that mystery into the world with us, revealing the love of Christ to those around us.