

“The Privilege Of Ministry”

Ephesians 3:1-13

Series: Ephesians [#9]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

June 3, 2007

Theme: **Every Believer Has The Privilege Of Ministry.**

Introduction

This morning we enter chapter 3 in Ephesians, where Paul continues to tell us about who and what we are in Christ. The first 13 verses are a continuation of the theme in the last part of chapter 2, about Jews and Gentiles being one in Christ. It also breaks some new ground as Paul speaks personally about his ministry. I considered breaking this section into several parts, but decided to take one look so we can see the overall picture here for ministry.

I realize that when we begin to talk about ministry, service and stewardship, warning bells go off for some people. “Ministry is work! It can be difficult, demanding, and discouraging.” A few of you might be a bit cautious, perhaps even suspicious, “I wonder what he’s trying to recruit us for today.”

Let’s set up this section. In verse 1 Paul begins another prayer for the Ephesians, but digresses at verse 2, and returns to his prayer in verse 14. Paul reminds them of what he has just said in chapter 2 about unity of Jews and Gentiles, and embellishes it. We all are:

- fellow heirs;
- fellow members of the body
- fellow partakers of the promise in C. J. thru the gospel.

He makes this practical to them by putting it in terms of his ministry with them, his “privilege of ministry” to and with them. From this we learn about our privilege of ministry, that every believer has the privilege of ministry. This is our focus this morning. We begin with some basic concepts of ministry.

Ministry — The Basic Concepts.

The first one is stewardship. Look at verse 2, “if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you.” The word *steward* means *house manager*. The original picture was of a person responsible to run a household. He would direct other servants, ensure the house and grounds were cared for, food and supplies purchased, maintain and keep records of the household budget. It was a very important position.

One of the most familiar pictures of this concept in the Bible is of Joseph in the Old Testament. He was sold into slavery by his brothers, and then purchased by the captain of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s body guard.

In Genesis 38 we are told

“So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him *overseer over his house*, and all that he owned he put in his charge. ... So he left everything he owned in Joseph’s charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.” (4, 6)

Joseph was the overseer, house manager, the *steward*.

Coming back to the New Testament, in time this word was used for other positions of management in households, businesses and governments. So it referred to a person in a position of management for another, for others. Paul speaks of himself as a steward a number of times, e.g., in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2,

“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and *stewards* of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”

Now, it was not just Paul who was a steward, or the other apostles; nor just elders, pastors, missionaries today. All believers are stewards. Every believer has a stewardship to fulfill. The apostle Peter wrote, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good *stewards* of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:10)

Secondly, there is ministry. Go to verse 7.

“of which [the gospel] 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.”

When some people hear the word “minister,” they think of ... *the Pastor*, or what the pastor does. The two words are not synonymous. Just as all believers are stewards, so all believers also are ministers. There are several different words in the New Testament that are translated “minister” or “ministry.” They all have the basic idea of serving. The word Paul uses in verse 7 is the most common one used in the New Testament, and is the one brought into English as our word *deacon*.

In Paul’s defense before King Herod Agrippa II, recorded in Acts 26, he said that on the road to Damascus Jesus spoke to him and said,

“...I have appeared to you, to appoint you a *minister* and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you.” (16)

Then Paul wrote to the church at Colossae,

“Of this church I was made a *minister* according to the *stewardship* from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God ...” (1:25)

Let's go back to 1 Peter 4:10 again, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in *serv*ing one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

These two basic concepts of *stewardship* and *ministry* make it clear that every believer has the privilege of ministry. From these two basic concepts we move on to the essential foundation of ministry.

Ministry — The Essential Foundation.

I'm not a carpenter, but I know the foundation is critical to building a house. It not only has to have enough strength, it also has to be laid out properly—the four corners need to be aligned. So it is with ministry. Paul stakes out four corners of the foundation to healthy and effective ministry.

True ministry, first, is a gift of God's grace. Look at Paul's statements:

- Verse 2, "the stewardship of *God's grace* which was given to me."
- Verse 7, "...the *gift of God's grace* which was given to me."
- Verse 8, "To me ... this *grace* was given ..."

Paul enjoyed a rich heritage, a great education, rapid advancement, and unrelenting dedication. But he knew his ministry was not based on any of that. In fact, he knew he was unworthy and unable to serve God effectively on his own. In verse 8 he refers to himself as "the very least of all saints." Listen to his words.

"For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the *grace* of God I am what I am, and His *grace* toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the *grace* of God with me."
(1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

Again,

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the *grace* of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 1:12-14)

Even now after many years of service, Paul was amazed that God gave him this *grace*, this privilege and responsibility of ministry.

If you know Jesus Christ as your savior, you are one of his ministers. You have ministry to perform for Him. As we read a few moments ago in 1 Peter, each and every believer has received grace from God for service. There is neither anything in which we can boast nor anything we can give as an excuse—because our ministry is "a gift of God's grace."

The second corner is that ministry is a gift of God's power. Look at verse 7 again, "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." Then drop down to verse 20.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

I'm sure you've seen the Energizer Bunny battery commercials. Back in the 90's, the company had a pink Energizer Bunny hot air balloon made. It's called "The Energizer Bunny Hot *Hare* Balloon." When inflated it is 166' tall; the ears themselves are 60' tall.

When you see those commercials, do you feel like the Energizer Bunny's competition? *Running out of energy*, grinding to a halt, while the he keeps going? It's easy to feel that way in ministry, especially when we compare ourselves to others. No matter who you are, how talented and energetic you are, you can always find someone who seems to, or does have more energy than you do.

This is where the good news comes in. The power you need to perform the ministry God gives you is not your own, but His! God gives the power to carry out every responsibility He gives you. There is no exception. Recall Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15,

"...by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (10)

Paul knew this truth, and that is why he told the believers at Philippi, "I can do all things through Him [God] who strengthens me" (4:13). The second corner of the foundation for your ministry is that it is *a gift of God's power*.

Moving on to the third corner: your ministry is a part of God's eternal purpose. Go to verse 11.

"This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." (11-12)

Paul has already told us about several things in this letter that are part of the "eternal purpose" of God. For example,

- 1:4, God chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world."
- 1:5, God predestined us to adoption as sons through Christ
- 1:10, God is going to sum up all things in Christ.
- 2:10, God created good works for us to walk in.

Paul's ministry "to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ" (8) was part of

God's eternal purpose.

Now this was true not only of Paul but it is true for every believer. Verse 10 states that this “manifold wisdom” of God is being made known “through the *church*.” Not just the original apostles, or pastors and missionaries today; but through *the church*—all of us, each one of us, together, and individually. You see, the spiritual abilities God has given you, the works He has prepared for you—all of it is part of God's eternal purpose. This is thrilling and humbling at the same time! Our ministry is part of God's eternal purpose.

The last corner is that your ministry is a call to hardship and suffering. Yes, “a call to hardship and suffering.” In verse 13 Paul wrote, “Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.” Remember that Paul was a prisoner when he wrote this letter. His “tribulations” were on behalf of the Ephesians, and all Gentile believers. He had been arrested in Jerusalem for proclaiming the gospel of Christ and on the false charges that he was trying to overthrow the law of Moses and that He had taken a Gentile into the Temple. He was now in Rome, awaiting the outcome of his appeal to Caesar.

His suffering was for their *glory* in the sense that it was his ministry that God used to reach the Ephesians, to call and transform them, to give them a future and a hope, to be and have an inheritance in God. This is their *glory*—their gloriously transformed new state.

Paul knew from the beginning of his faith in Christ that he would suffer. After God stopped him on his way to Damascus to persecute the church, Paul waited in blindness for a man God showed him would come to him. To that at first reluctant messenger, God said,

“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must *suffer* for My name's sake.” (Acts 9:15-16)

Some of Paul's suffering is detailed in the book of Acts. He gave a fairly detailed listing of some of it in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.

But hardship and suffering were not unique to Paul.

- In the first days of the church the apostles were jailed, flogged and ordered to stop preaching the gospel. When they were released, Luke records, “they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to *suffer shame* for His [Christ's] name” (Acts 5:41).
- Paul wrote to his protege Timothy, “*Suffer hardship* with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3).
- To the church at Philippi he said, “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to *suffer* for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (1:29-30).
- And, again to Timothy, “*all* who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus *will be persecuted*” (2 Timothy 3:12).

We are fortunate to live in a land where we are not imprisoned, beaten and executed because of our faith. Our hardship and suffering for taking a stand, for taking up our ministry, is very small in comparison to that of many believers in other times and places. It is easier to blend in rather than to stand out. A song says,

“We’ve been ridiculed by those who don’t know Him. We’ve been mocked by those who don’t believe. Still I love standing up for my Jesus because of all that He’s done for me.” Then the chorus, “That’s why I am not ashamed of the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. No, I’m not afraid to be counted because I’m willing to give my life. You see, I’m ready to be all He wants me to be, to give up the wrong for the right. No, I am not ashamed of the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹

The fourth corner of a true and solid foundation of ministry: realize that our call is a call to hardship and suffering. Now let’s move on to the benefits of ministry, the wonderful benefits God designs into our ministry.

Ministry — The Wonderful Benefits.

We start at a place that may be a bit surprising, our ministry is for the benefit of others. In verse 2 Paul writes about “the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me *for you*.” Now look at verse 4.

“By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ 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;⁶ to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (4-6)

Let’s note a few things briefly. The word *mystery* in the New Testament, you may recall, does not refer to a puzzle or a difficult problem, but to something now revealed which was not known before. Paul uses this term which the Ephesians knew in another way from the “mystery religions” that flourished then. They taught that there was special knowledge available only to the initiated few (cults today follow that lead). But in reality *all* can see and know this truth which God has now revealed. Here, it refers to the mystery that Jews and Gentiles, all people, are one body through faith in Jesus Christ.

You and I are called, gifted and empowered by God to carry out the ministries He has for us *to others*—others in the family of believers and others who are not yet in the family of believers.

Then, our ministry is also for the benefit of angels. Look at verse 10,

“...so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

Do you have a few questions about this? “*Who? What? How?*” The “*who*” — Paul is probably referring to both the angels or demons who serve God and the fallen angels who follow Satan.

Now, the “*What and Why.*” While we are not given volumes of information about angels in the Bible, God tells us they are *not* all-knowing. They do *not* know everything. And, they learn. Here Paul says they learn things from us—the church as we live and minister.

1 Peter 1:12 tells us that the things of the gospel are “things into which angels long to look.” Angels look, watch and learn about “the manifold wisdom of God” (10) through us, the church as we serve God. The angels serving God look and learn, and respond by worshiping God for His great wisdom. The fallen angels look and learn, believe and, as James 2:19 says, “shudder.” They are gripped with fright, horror at God’s manifold wisdom, at His unstoppable sovereignty.

We are living illustrations, portraits of God’s grace and wisdom as He exercises His sovereign reign in working out His purposes and plans.

Conclusion.

Paul had “*The Privilege of Ministry.*” *Every believer has the privilege of ministry.* Sometimes the church and ministry are compared to an athletic team. One big difference is that there are *no bench warmers* on God’s team. All of us are needed and placed on the field of play.

As you spend a few moments with God now, thank Him that although like Paul you feel that you are the least qualified to serve Him, God has chosen, has called, has gifted and has empowered you to serve. Look at your ministry. First, don’t think of a position or role you have or don’t have in the church as defining your ministry. God places you on the field to serve for the benefit of others in and out of His family in many ways and opportunities that are often separate from any formal position and role.

Even though you are not an evangelist, pastor or missionary, you have the privilege of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with people you know and meet. Make sure you can sing, or say, “I love standing up for my Jesus because of all that He’s done for me ... I am not ashamed of the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. No, I’m not afraid to be counted because I’m willing to give my life. You see, I’m ready to be all He wants me to be, to give up the wrong for the right. No, I am not ashamed of the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹

¹ *I Am Not Ashamed.* Dawn Thomas. © 1989 McSpadden Music, BMI (a division of McSpadden Music Group, Inc.)

© 2007. Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture, unless otherwise noted, taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission.