

Jim's Notes
October 3, 2007
The Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
Ephesians 3:1-13

Ephesians 3:1a:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

It remains, after he has stated the truth that all their hope is in Christ and thus they are all being built up together in the Spirit to be the dwelling place of God, it remains, I say, that he should teach them who he himself is and whether he himself is contributing to building them up together through the gospel and can give a reason for his own authority so that they may believe him. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.1-2)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

After a diligent search I have found nothing that answers to his prior clause . . . For he does not say, "For this reason I, Paul, have done this or that or have taught this or that." Instead, leaving the thought in suspense, he goes on to other matters, Perhaps we ought to pardon him for what he himself has admitted when he said, if unschooled in speech, at least not in knowledge," (II Corinthians 11:6) and look for order in his meaning rather than in his words. This can be rendered as follows, "I, Paul, in the chains of Jesus Christ and in chains for you Gentiles, have learned the mystery so that I may hand it on to you." (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.3.1)

Ephesians 3:1b:

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

We often read that the body is called the prison of the soul. The soul is confined as if in a cage, Paul, for example, was constrained by the ties of the body and did not return to be with Christ so that the preaching to the Gentiles might be perfectly accomplished through him. But I grant that there are some who introduce another meaning here: Paul before his birth was predestined and sanctified from his mother's womb for the purpose of preaching to the Gentiles. For this vocation he took on the bonds of flesh. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.3.1)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

This is a very emphatic statement. Not only do we not hate you; we are even imprisoned on your account! (Homily on Ephesians 6.3.1-2)

Ephesians 3:2:

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

He is hinting at what was said about him in Damascus to Ananias, when the Lord said, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15). By “dispensation of grace” he means the revelation made to him. It is as if he were saying: “I did not learn it from any human. God chose to reveal it to me for your benefit, though I am only an individual.” (Homily on Ephesians 6.3.1-2)

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Paul indicates that this mystery was made known to him through revelation. From this passage it is evident that a Christian, and a very excellent Christian at that, can be brought into being solely by grace . . . Nevertheless, the power of God dispenses grace in many ways. Others come to faith by teaching, wherein by a legitimate training process and through the commandments of the Savior a person is reborn through the Spirit and water, so as to receive the spirit of Christ, in a teaching process that is mediated from human beings and through human beings. But what happened to Paul came to him by the grace of God through revelation. Although he, in my judgment, was the only one who received this particular revelation, God is able to reveal himself in this form or in other ways to others. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.1-2)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

He indicates that he has been shown the revelation of the mystery of God, about which he says that he has written briefly, that is, precisely, according to their capacity to comprehend the wisdom of the apostle concerning the mystery of Christ. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.4)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

The words “I wrote a little before” do not mean, as some think, that he has written another letter, For it is not with respect to himself that he says “I have written” but with respect to the mystery. For he is referring to “the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I wrote to you a little while ago,” yet it is this “about which I have just now written.” For this has been his subject from the outset right up to this passage. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.1-4)

Ephesians 3:5:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

He teaches that there is a perfect harmony, a complete unity and identity, between the revelations given to him and those given to the apostles. His purpose is to avoid discord and any appearance of having received by revelation something that was not given to the apostles by the living Christ. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.5)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Tell me then, what part did the prophets nor fully grasp? How can Christ say later that Moses and the prophets wrote “these things about me” (John 5:39, 46)? . . . What he is

saying is that the expectation of Christ was not revealed to everyone. It “was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” Peter, if he had not been guided by the Spirit, would never have gone to the Gentiles (see Acts 11:17). The prophets therefore spoke but did not have complete knowledge at the time. They did not even have complete knowledge after they heard the gospel, which far exceeds human reason and common expectations. (Homily on Ephesians 6.3.3-6)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

It was made known incrementally to the prophets of old, but not fully then as it is now. For they did not see the whole picture but wrote down words about aspects of it . . . Remember that in the apostles’ day there were many who had the gift of prophecy. It is in this order that he mentions that the revelation was known to the apostles and then to the prophets. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5)

Ephesians 3:6:

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

The Gentiles are fellow heirs with Israel. Put more precisely, they are fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). It is not that some possession is divided among us but that God himself in his fullness is our inheritance and possession. Now the meaning of fellow heirs is this: Just as there are many members in one body . . . and these, though in one body, have their differences and feel their own joy and grief in turn, so those who have believed in Christ, even if they have different gifts, are bonded together in the one body of Christ. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.3.5)

Ephesians 3:7:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Everywhere Paul reminds us that we receive God's gifts not by our own merit but by grace. Grace belongs to the giver, not to the recipient. And by adding “according to the working of his power,” he also ascribes this to God, so that “if I do any work, it is God's power. For it is not my power that works in me but God's.” (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.7-8)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

The gift was not sufficient if he did not provide power along with it. And, great as the power was, human zeal was not sufficient either. For Paul brought three things to the task of proclamation: ready and boiling fervor, a soul prepared to bear anything whatever and prudent understanding. (Homily on Ephesians 6.3.7)

Ephesians 3:8a:

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Although it is a token of humility to call oneself “the least of all the saints,” one is guilty of deceit if one conceals the truth in the heart and says something else with the tongue. We must therefore look for an argument showing how Paul truly was the least of all the saints and yet did not fall from the rank of an apostle. The Lord says in the Gospel, “He who would be great among you, let him be less than all” (Matthew 20:26). . . Paul demonstrates this in his actions. . . Therefore the apostle Paul was meekest of all who sought to be weak on Christ's account . . . Because of this humility, amazing grace was given to him. In this way he became the least of all the saints in order to preach the unsearchable mysteries of God. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.3.8-9)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Those who visit a doctor do not complete their journey simply by arriving there. They must also learn the remedy and apply the medicines. We too, having reached this point, need to do the same, by learning the great humility of Paul . . . Paul demonstrates humility when he calls himself a blasphemer and a persecutor (I Timothy 1:13). He describes himself as a dreadful offender on account of his former sins, which had now been canceled. . . hence as “the least of all the saints.” He did not say “of the apostles” but of the saints who come after the apostles. (Homily on Ephesians 7.3.8-11)

Ephesians 3:8b:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Was work given before grace? Or did grace come before any works? That which is working is God's power. So grace had already been given. When it is said that Paul was made a minister according to the gift of God, we understand that the gift of being a minister was given before his working to make him a minister, and his being a minister is the gift and grace of God. (Ephesians 1.3.7-8)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Unsearchable and hidden can be given two senses. The riches were previously unable to be searched out. They are now laid open after the Lord's passion. Another sense, perhaps even better: Those things which by nature were unsearchable to humanity are the ones that have been made known by God's revelation. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.3.8-9)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

The divine apostle says not only that Christ's nature is divine but also that his riches are unsearchable. “And how does one preach if his riches are indeed unsearchable?” “I

preach this very thing,” he says, “that they are unsearchable.” (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.8)

Ephesians 3:9:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

When he speaks of making “all men see the plan” this includes both Israel and the Gentiles. Paul had doubtless received the gospel for the Gentiles. But the Jews too can see the plan if they follow and obey. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.9)

Christ is the only begotten Son of God, and through him all the rest are created. Through him the works of God are created, as God works in and through him. All ages of time are subsequent to Christ, being made by Christ . . . Therefore, even though God is acknowledged as the Creator, God is nonetheless Creator through Christ, The term “Creator” therefore does not pertain simply to God as such but pertains to Christ and through Christ to God. Christ who was eternally begotten created all things in time. God worked and created all things through Christ. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.9)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

These riches of his generosity were bidden from all past ages in God the Creator of all. Where are Marcion, Valentinus and the other heretics who say that there is one creator of the visible world and another creator of the invisible? . . . However, the phrase “mystery hidden from the ages” could also be understood to mean that the very ages of time remained ignorant of his generosity when all spiritual and rational creatures who inhabited all previous ages remained unenlightened. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.3.8-9)

Ephesians 3:10a:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

His expression “through the church” means through all the members of God and through every soul that has put on his mysteries and has hope in him. From this we understand what has been given to humanity. The powers and principalities in heaven are learning the wisdom of God through a human mediator. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.10)

Paul briefly touches on all the parts of the mystery that we have spoken of above when he speaks of the “manifold wisdom of God,” whether this be that he sent his Son or that such great majesty assumed the form of a slave (Philippians 2:6) or that greater gifts were given. The promises are so great: the forgiveness of sins, the promise of heaven, eternal life, glorification and our inheritance together with the same Christ in his resurrection after death and even his death itself. This is what makes up the manifold wisdom of God. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.10)

Ephesians 3:10b:

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

So abundant was God's wisdom that he not only gave this teacher (Paul) to the Gentiles but also caused the truth to become known to the angelic spirits in heaven, who are the principalities and powers. They are powers because they have more power among the other spirits and are principalities because they are the principal powers, . . . The goal of all this is that the preaching of the church should be profitable to the Gentiles also. They are called to forsake their allegiance to the devil's tyranny. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.10.1)

Ephesians 3:11:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

From this we see what it means to say that the mystery was concealed in God, for he adds according to the purpose of the ages. This means that, after certain ages had reached their destined end, the mystery was to appear through the presence of the Lord in whom it had been concealed. For it was proper for it to be revealed through the One in whom it was concealed. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.11)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

The saving knowledge of the mystery of God is conferred upon the human race in this way: God bestows his grace on humanity as the first-fruits of Christ's coming kingdom. When Christ appeared God revealed his mystery for the salvation of humanity. (Epistle to the Ephesians 3.12)

Ephesians 3:12:

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Nothing can give us such trust in God and purity of conscience . . . as the Word, the truth, the wisdom and the righteousness received in Christ . . . One who thinks in an orderly manner now has the Word and reason as the content of his faith, One who can comprehend wisdom has wisdom as the content of his faith. One who understands truth has truth as the content of his faith. One who lives righteously now has righteousness as the content of his faith. (Ephesians 2.3.12)

Ephesians 3:13a:

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

When some hear that Paul suffers tribulations, they may grow faint in faith. To prevent this he argues, in effect: "I pray on account of what has been revealed to me that you should not grow faint through my tribulations. These tribulations I am suffering are not due to anything I have caused but rather because you are either weak in faith or now wavering, or because you are making some unnecessary additions to the faith. That is the reason I endure these trials. I am now hoping to recall you to true discipline and observances so that you will not depart from Christ, having your hope in Christ alone. For this is your glory." (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.13)

Ephesians 3:13b:

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

One person will say that he attaches the words "which is your glory" to the tribulations . . . another to the boldness or else to the access or the faith. For boldness [or freedom of speech] is the glory to the one who possesses it , and access can be called the glory of the one who has access to God and faith the glory of the one with faith. (Epistle to the Ephesians)