

Reading Ephesians 1-2 as we have done for three months can be intense. We need a break. Ephesians 3 provides a brief break. It also provides a glimpse into the man behind the letter. As a rule, the Apostle Paul talks about himself only to establish his credentials or to give insight into the origins and implications of his remarkable public life. That's the case here, and I hope you find it as fascinating as I do.

Paul in Jail

The first thing we learn about him is in verse 1: **For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles . . .** The arresting word is **prisoner**. He was not using pious rhetoric. He was in custody, behind bars, off the street. Actually, he was in **his own rented house** somewhere in Rome. (Acts 28:30) Now, there's an idea for overcrowded prisons in this country. Put non-felons in shared homes and require them to pay room and board while they serve out their term. But I digress.

Paul could not leave his rented house. He was chained to a guard or a fixed object in the house. (Philippians 1:14) When he says he was **the prisoner of Christ Jesus**, he meant that he was a prisoner, because he had been serving Christ.

Paul's U-turn

The second thing we learn about Paul in the opening verses of Ephesians 3 is subtle. So, let me be subtle. It appeals to a streak in me that pays attention to details. I want to quote the last verse of chapter 2 and the first two verses of the chapter and I want you to hear a sudden change.

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you. Did you hear the change? Did you feel it? Paul was driving up the northbound lanes of the Ephesus by-pass to tell Ephesian believers one thing, and like a car chase in a *Fast and Furious* movie, tires squeal, the engine revs, Paul did a sudden U-turn across the median and roared down the southbound lanes to tell them something different. What's going on here?

First, this is how people talk in everyday conversation. We don't always speak in smooth, well-rounded sentences. Listen to people talk: short sentences, abrupt changes of topic, and sometimes several different words in a row. I once heard a well-spoken man say, "Well, yes, no, you see," and no one thought it was strange.

But Ephesians is a letter, not a conversation. So, why at this point is it written the way people talk? Well, we know that Paul did not always write his letters; he used a secretary who took dictation. That had to create problems. If the secretary writes down what you say, and you say, "Oh, no! I don't like that. I want to say something different," the secretary will say to you, "How am I supposed to do that? I can't erase what I have written. I don't have a block and cut feature in this parchment. If I keep crossing out what I have written, this letter is going to be a mess. You don't really want me to copy the whole thing over from the beginning, do you? Please say you don't."

So, Paul said, "Oh, all right. But I need to say something before I get back to my main

point.” And he continued on with his digression, even though it introduced an abrupt break in the flow of the letter. But the secretary was happy, and the digression doesn’t really take anything away from our enjoyment of Ephesians.

We Think about What We Love

I have good news. Paul came back to what he started to say in verse 1, but we have to wait for verse 14. What stopped him in his tracks and nearly gave his secretary heartburn was what he called in verse 2 **the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you.** We have talked about grace. It is the biblical word for God’s act of kindness on Good Friday for people who don’t deserve it. But grace, like good medicine, had to be administered to the whole world. How God would do that was the mystery.

He gave the Apostle Paul a pivotal role in doing that. The administration of God’s grace, said Paul in verse 3, was **the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly**, as I have written in Ephesians 1-2.

It feels like Paul is speaking to us in what he wrote next in verses 4-5: **In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made know to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.** He will say more about that mystery in verses 6-13, and we will look into it next Sunday. For now, I’d like to offer you a meditation on his words in verse 3: **as I have already written briefly.**

Can you imagine writing or dictating Ephesians 1-2 without notes? Ephesians 1 is a magnificent summary of the meaning of Christ. Ephesians 2 is a magnificent summary of the meaning of the Church. Both came out of his head and his heart like water out of a spigot, while he was a prisoner. Truth be told, he had been a prisoner for maybe four years. The Roman legal bureaucracy had put his life on hold for four years. A lesser man would have had a world-class pity party, cursed the despotic Romans, and wondered why such bad things always happened to him.

Paul wrote Ephesians. He dictated Ephesians out of the overflowing energy and joy of his mind, and I can tell you how he did that. “You think about what you love.” (*First Things*, “While We Are at It,” 70) I do mean think. I don’t mean what pops into your head like corn popping in a cooker. That’s mostly impulse, leftover scraps from memory, and our parrot-like repetition of the tired clichés we hear over and over in the mass media.

Real love generates real thought. When someone or some great truth captures your heart, you try to put together coherent sentences about it. You play ideas over and over in your mind, as you try to get a grip on what has you in its grip. You listen to people, who speak coherently about what you love.

The mystery made known to him by revelation had captured Paul’s love. The Church, which solved the mystery, had captured Paul’s love. The inconvenience of parchment didn’t matter. Prison was not a hurdle. Being sidelined from the daily tasks of ministry became an opportunity to think. Out came Ephesians, and Paul still speaks with more relevance than the joyless pursuit of money and power that fills our dishonest age.

Communing with Christ

Have Paul’s summary of the meaning of Christ and his summary of the meaning of the

Church captured your love? What has captured your love? Has anything captured your love, or is life just one blasted thing after another?

If you are a follower of Christ, you are part of the world's longest running story of what it means to be human. If you are not yet a follower of Christ, the story is about you too. It doesn't leave anyone out and invites people everywhere to make it their story.

Central to the story is communion with Christ, which we now celebrate.