

Book	Ephesian – Study 9
Topic	
Reference	Ephesians 3:1-12
Date	23 May 2018
Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

In Ephesians 2 Jews and gentiles are supposed to be one in Christ. The walls of hostility have been brought down. Then you have got three verses 14-22, the pray for strengthened love, to love one another as an outworking of this union. Because we are all one in Christ, how do we actually love one another. How do we experience the transforming love of Christ? So this is what is going to happen. It takes off from what we have discovered, here it sets the tone, Jews and gentiles are one and here in chapter 3 verses 14-22, it talks about love inside the body. In between you have verses 1-13 is actually a digression. It is a little bit of a detour. It is a detour to talk about Paul’s suffering and his ministry to the gentiles.

The problem with suffering:

The need to handle suffering

- a. Look at suffering in the light of Biblical truths not circumstances
- b. Look at the purpose of suffering
- c. Suffering in the light of a universal vision
- d. Suffering in the light of grace

THE PROBLEM WITH SUFFERING:

Here we actually have verses 1-13. Verse 1 is Paul starts off with prayer, verse 2-12 is his detour and verse 13 is his reason for the detour. So that they will not lose heart. So basically this section is about suffering, because Paul is suffering in prison. He doesn’t want them to lose heart. The reason for this difficult time.

*Ephesians 3:1 (ESV) For this reason I, Paul, a **prisoner of Christ Jesus** on behalf of you Gentiles*

So the whole important thing is that, here we actually have one of the key founders of the faith, is now languishing in jail and that would certainly send cold shivers down the spine of all the church people, as they encounter this and basically suffering is common. Even in those days or even now suffering is common.

THE NEED TO HANDLE SUFFERING:

So the question is how do we actually handle suffering in our lives, especially the Christian life. If you look at John the Baptist for example, he was a very strong prophet. When Jesus came he said,

John 1:35-36 (ESV) The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”

Here is someone who is confident, one look at Jesus he says behold the lamb of God and we notice in another verse in Luke. This is when John is in jail

Luke 7:18-20 (ESV) The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, 19 calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Can you see the difference? In the Book of John, Jesus walks nearby the Jordan River and he says behold the lamb of God. When you throw John in prison, he sings a different song and he is unsure. Are you the one or are we waiting for another one? That's what suffering will do to you. Suffering will make you re-evaluate your faith. That's why it is important for us to handle suffering. All of us are brought up with this American ideal from the Thomas Jefferson

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Everybody wants to be happy, so when you are thrown in prison, happiness is not there and it really shakes you up. So we need to handle suffering;

A. Look at suffering in the light of Biblical truths not circumstances:

Even if you actually take non-Christians. Friedrich Nietzsche, a very famous philosopher, he is the one that said, 'God is dead' and in fact he actually wrote this book called 'The Last Man' and he describes,

The mere pursuit of happiness defined here as that which gives pleasure, is a dull waste of human life.

Even Friedrich Nietzsche who is basically an atheist does not believe that happiness is the goal of life. He says part of life is actually suffering, joy accompany, joy does not move, you do not live for joy as it were. Nikola Tesla, inventor of alternating current. We all have electricity because of him. He suffered. He says, "I cannot do this work unless I am single". So he never married and he suffered from loneliness. He suffered all his life but found great joy in what he did. So basically what Nietzsche is saying to us is that more than happiness is meaning in life. You actually have to have meaning in life. Meaning in life actually incorporates suffering and joy. So when you actually see the masterpiece at the end, you look back at your suffering and it is worth something. Now if you live for joy alone then that is a little bit of problem because joy is always a by-product, it cannot be the total aim.

Viktor Frankl was in the German prison camp and he found that the people in prison camps who survived best are the ones who have some meaning in life. The ones who give up meaning in life, they will all die quicker basically. So if we are suffering in our lives, there are various responses that we can actually have:

1. **The stoic response.** This is the way things are, don't worry, don't think about it, just bear it. It is a very common response

2. **Idealistic response.** If your friend says that all will all get better, but this is totally unrealistic.
3. **Christian response.** Look at the suffering through the lens of Christian truth. That's how we should actually look at our suffering. So basically we need to look at via Christian truth, not at the circumstances.

I Paul prisoner of Jesus Christ,

Paul was not the prisoner of Roman Emperor; he is a prisoner of Jesus Christ. It is very odd. He is thrown in prison and he is blaming Jesus Christ. When Jesus was thrown in prison, Pilate said

(John 19:10-11 (ESV) 10 So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" 11 Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above

So Jesus as well as Paul realizes, if you are suffering, if you are in prison it is under the control of God. God has allowed it to happen, God has a purpose behind that particular imprisonment as well. So therefore the biblical truth is that, God is in control. Now if you are languishing in prison and at a very difficult spot, the worst thing in the world is to be alone. Nobody knows that you are there, nobody cares about you, here Paul is saying, I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

B. Look at the purpose of suffering:

*13 So I ask you not **to lose heart** over what I am suffering for you, **which is your glory***

Paul is suffering for the glory of the Ephesian church, on behalf of the gentiles. The trouble is when we are suffering all we can actually do is look at our pain and when we look at our pain, our vision becomes very circumscribed, it only revolves around the four walls of our suffering and what the Bible does is that when you actually look at the word of God, it allows you to breakthrough those four walls and give you the eyes of faith to see beyond the four walls which encapsulate your suffering. That's what the Bible does, that's why you go and reach out to the Bible because somehow God is going to breakthrough that four walls. So therefore we need to look at our suffering through the lens of biblical truth. Look at why Paul was suffering,

*Acts 21:27-29 (ESV) 27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is **teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place**. Moreover, he even **brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place**." 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.*

So here Paul is accused of bringing a gentile into the temple. There was a big barrier and when you cross the barrier you die. So he was accused of that.

*Acts 22:21-22 (ESV) 21 And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away **to the Gentiles**.'" 22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."*

So he is actually bringing the gospel to the gentiles and the people are very-very upset because they think that he is going to bring gentiles into the temple and he is going to destroy the Judaism faith. So that's Paul and he was actually put in prison. He was actually at Caesarea for almost two years and then he spent the next two years in Rome and that's where he actually sent the letter to the Ephesians. Paul is in prison because of the ministry to the gentiles.

*Ephesians 3:1-5 (ESV) For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on **behalf of you Gentiles**— 2 assuming that you have heard of the **stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you**, 3 how the **mystery** was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the **mystery** of Christ, 5 which 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*

So now the purpose of his suffering is because of the word 'mystery'. What does mystery mean? The dictionary meaning of 'mystery' is like Sherlock Holmes novel. It gives you certain clues and you can work it out. If you think that is what Paul means, then you are completely wrong. We have to understand the Greek word 'mysterion' means something that you can never for the life of your workout, 100%. When Paul talks about 'mysterion', it is impossible for you to now, you can never work it out and it is something that is by revelation. That's what he is in prison for and then the mystery is

*Ephesians 3:6-11 (ESV) This mystery is that the Gentiles **are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.***

This is the breakthrough that the two will become one and they are fellow heirs, Jew are not separate from gentiles. They all come into one common stream, which is basically the church. Basically, it is through the gospel.

There is a different between the Ten Commandments and the gospel. The gospel is so strange that you will never be able to work it out and the only way you can understand that is to perhaps compare it to the Ten Commandments. Even if you look at the elements of the Ten Commandments, you probably can see it in Buddhism, in Hinduism and even in Islam. Why, because the Ten Commandments is basically common sense. Most religions have that system in place. The Buddhist believe that if you covet your neighbour's wife, that desire is wrong. The Muslims believe that if you actually live a good life and you pray five times a day, in the end good works will balance out bad works and then you will be saved as it were. Hindu's believe if you do good things, it is Karma, you do bad things it is also karma but you wind up a little bit worse. All of them are exactly the same and you can actually work it out. Most religions go around this idea of us working. **What is the difference between the gospel and that?**

Gospel is so totally counterintuitive that you can actually never ever work it out. It is the word 'grace'. Here you actually have, you take the Ten Commandments and all those works and you through it all out and you say I don't have to do anything, because Christ has done everything for you. Which means it is a level playing field and nobody has ever designed or worked, I mean it is such a way-out kind of idea that you could never invented. No human being prior to Christ and no philosophy of religion has ever-ever talked about grace. All the religions are based on human

efforts. This is a mystery can only be revealed. So Martin Luther is one who coins it most amply 'Simul Justus Et Peccator', one simultaneously justified and also a sinner.

The book of Revelation talks about the eternal battle,

*Revelation 12:10-11 (ESV) Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they **have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb** and by the **word of their testimony**, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

The gospel is such a strange thing, but is so powerful. When Satan comes down, Satan is defeated by two things,

1. The blood of the lamb, that means Jesus dying.
2. The word of the testimony, which is about the blood of the lamb. It is dying in order to win, total opposite, nobody can understand that.

The gospel cannot be cooked up by man, because man will only be victorious all the time. The more you think about it, the more it is amazing.

*Philippians 1:12-13 (ESV) 12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to **advance the gospel**, 13 so that **it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard** and to all the rest that **my imprisonment is for Christ**.*

The fact that Paul was thrown into the prison, people are not discouraged. They say, this fellow dare die for God and therefore they were sitting there with the prisoners and sharing the gospel. The gospel spread throughout the entire Roman guard. So therefore we win by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony. That's how the gospel wins ahead. That's why suffering is part of it.

C. Suffering in the light of a universal vision

You must have a universal vision. The world is now falling apart; everybody is fighting everybody. Human beings are falling apart, everything we do we cannot stay together. If you look at the vision of Israel,

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 (ESV) See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? 8 And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Israel were supposed to be the showcase to the nation by the laws that God has given them, they would exemplify what God is going to be like, that was the vision.

*Ephesians 3:7-11 (ESV) Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the **unsearchable riches of Christ**, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 so that **through the church** the **manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.***

This is the vision of the church, which means when you look at the church, the many races we have, they may sit together, it brings to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery. It is foretaste of glory. Just as Israel was supposed to be foretaste of a society built and reconciled by God, they failed. Now the new society, the church, all of you are supposed to be like that, so that when the world looks at you they are going to see a paradigm of people who are reconciled and if you look further on that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places, which means there are spiritual beings, there are rulers and authorities, some evil and some good, all over the entire universe and when they actually see the church as a people which are reconciled and loving each other and being one body together, it then shows how wise, how wonderful, how magnificent, how glorious God is. So this is the vision of the church, the church is indispensable to the universe. The church is God's showcase to the universe. How it brings everything together.

Ephesians 3: 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord

Ephesians 1:9-10 (ESV) making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

So when he actually brings Jew and gentile together, man and woman together, everybody reconciled together, it is a beginning of a reconciliation of all the disaster that is in the world and all of the universe brought together.

The whole universe is looking to see all of us come together by the power of Jesus Christ. So every person is here influenced by a family, family influenced by community and we all influenced by culture. As for the church, every Christian should be influenced by the gospel, the gospel influence in a church and the church for the whole universe. This is a new culture. The culture comes inside the church. It says,

*Ephesians 3:9-10 (ESV) and to bring to light **for everyone** what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 so that **through the church** the **manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.***

Every single Christian, God's purpose is only achieved through the church. God has decided he is not going to tell the angels up there, how the world is to be reconciled outside the church. He has only chosen the church, not parachurch, not organizations, he has chosen the church of Jesus Christ and that is an awesome responsibility. As us, we actually have to show a reconciled humanity, but if the church keeps on fighting with each other than the world will look at us and they don't want to see us anymore. It is such a travesty of what God has done. He died to bring us together and still in

church we cannot sit with each other. It is a terrible betrayal of the vision, because the angels will be looking at you.

Every good deed that you do, every act of faith that you do, it actually is a testimony of the power of the spirit and the blood of Christ into your life. So therefore when we suffer, we actually should suffer not only for a purpose but we also suffer because you have a universal vision. There is a universal vision of the church.

Job 2:1 (ESV) Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord

So actually the picture is, the angels and the principalities and powers are all looking at you, to see how Job would react. That's a spiritual reality. So every circumstance is a dual track where God or Satan does his purposes, God also has his purpose. Charles Colson was with the last president Nixon. He did a lot of dirty things for him, was thrown in prison and eventually in prison when he got out he said this

"I found myself increasingly drawn to the idea that God had put me in prison for a purpose and that I should do something for those I had left behind."

He was thrown in prison which is a bad thing, because he did bad things but out of that God touched him and now he has started the largest Christian fellowship for prisoners in the United States, because he was thrown in prison.

The spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire by the time 300 AD was done by just 11 apostles and 500 other disciples, every single one of them was martyred. Every single one pays the price. It is very different from today where you have evangelist asking for money to buy jets to preach the gospel. When you actually look at this kind of Christianity and you look at the kind of Christianity that Paul tells you, this is crap. This is worse than every other religion that you have ever seen and the worse thing is that there are actually stupid Christians in the church who are willing to give money to people like this.

Some of us have a problem with bitterness. When we suffer we are actually bitter and the emotions that you have when you actually suffer reveal where your heart is. Emotions betray your ultimate treasure. If your ultimate treasure is yourself then why are you a Christian. You are a Christian so that I can do well with myself. So let's say if I don't do well, who you are going to blame, God, because I serve God, God serves me. So who is my ultimate treasurer, it is me. If your ultimate treasurer is God and then you encounter difficulties in life, your ultimate treasure is God, and when you suffer who knows that you are suffering, God, God will reward you in the God. So are you going to be bitter, you won't be bitter. Bitterness is because when you actually think you are serving God; you are serving yourself. You are serving God in order to serve yourself. So suffering will actually tell you, where your ultimate treasure is.

Elizabeth Elliott husband died being speared by the Indians in South America and she wrote,

He suffered not that we might not suffer but that when we suffer trusting in His suffering we become like Him

So when you suffer you become like him. Suffering isn't bad, because it is the end result is becoming like him then we can get rid of our self-pity, get rid of our bitterness and that actually frees us.

2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV) Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

This is a fact. We have a funny strain of Christianity that tells us if you live according to God's way, you have everything fine. That's actually a lie. Timothy tells you, if you want to live according to what God does, you will be persecuted.

D. Suffering in the light of grace

*Ephesians 3:7-8 (ESV) Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the **gift of God's grace**, which was given me by the **working of his power**. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*

So he is given such a great honor and not only honor God gives him the power to do that. He is the least of all the saints and he has given the entrusted with unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus. The greater you think Christ is and the lesser you think you are; the more power you will have to live. That's the secret of the gospel. We all were spiritually blind, when we actually come to Christ we start to see things and what the issue is, seeing how great he is and how miserable we are and the two as we grow older and older in Christ, the more you see how miserable you are and how great he is, that actually increases the love that is inside. That's the secret of the gospel.

Suffering also affects others

*Philippians 1:14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much **more bold to speak the word without fear***

So if Paul suffers the people are not discouraged, the people speak out without any fear. Difficulty will come upon every single one of us. Some of us will suffer for righteousness sake, some of us will suffer because of our own sin, some of us will suffer for no apparent reason. It is a common experience to everyone, but understand this, when you suffer, how you handle the suffering in just trusting God through your difficulties, you will be a testimony to the principalities and powers all over the universe and you are not alone, you are a sufferer in Christ Jesus and your suffering is never ever pointless, it has a purpose and the purpose is to conform you to the image of Christ. That's what life is about. Life is not running away from all the difficulties that will cost you, some of us will live our lives trying to avoid all the pitfalls in life. That shouldn't be the way we should live. We should live our lives with one purpose in mind, to honor and glorify God, because whatever you do suffering will come. It is inevitable, but do not be afraid of it but you need to see this as an opportunity to give glory to God.