

# EPHESIANS

## Chapter 3

### A Tiger in Your Tank

**G**od has always chosen people to reveal His grand plan:

1. Because ADAM sinned, we must be RECONCILED to God.
2. As an exemplar of faith ABRAHAM BELIEVED God.
3. MOSES, the exodus liberator, delivered the LAWS of God.
4. JESUS sacrificed His life to personify the LOVE of God.
5. Of all people PAUL was first to preach the GRACE of God.
6. JOHN, Jesus' exiled disciple, was shown the FUTURE by God.

Augustine wrote, "God's principles do not change, but His methods of dealing with mankind do change over the course of history. Distinguish the ages, and the Scriptures harmonize."

God lays out two major programs in the Scriptures:

(1) "PROPHECY" in God's calendar covers history up until Paul's ministry, then resumes after the "Rapture" (Acts 7:51-8:1). This "Age of Law" looked ahead to the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. The Jews had a rigid, performance-centered system consisting of the Ten Commandments, avatars known as rabbis, and rules about work, dress, food, seven feasts, animal sacrifices, circumcision, et al.

(2) "MYSTERY" (aka "Secret") extends from Paul's teaching until the Rapture. Its essence is "Christ in you, the Hope of glory" (Colossians 1:21-27). It was not foretold in the Old Testament (Genesis 12:2,3; 1 Corinthians 2:7,8). The "Age of Grace" is that long parenthesis (continuing today) between Jesus' death and second coming -- a hiatus in God's dealings with the nation of Israel.

God's eternal plan was under wraps until Paul, who had terrorized Christ's followers, unveiled and administered God's grace to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15,16). Paul's writing *fills up*, or completes, the Bible (Romans 16:25,26; Ephesians 1:9,10, 3:5; Colossians 1:25).

To discern the difference between Scriptures that apply to Prophecy (Law) and those tied to Mystery (Grace), Paul counsels:

*Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15, Amplified Version).*

*Oikonomia*, Greek for “analyzing and dividing,” means “household management.” The Bible is not a piñata. God is orderly by nature.

**DISCUSS: How could the Bible be handled wrongly?**

Let's read Ephesians 3:1-22 (p 1174, NIV).

**It's a Mystery to Me  
3:1-13**

Jesus' enemies feared that Paul's message would replace their legalistic system, so they shipped him to Rome to await trial before Caesar. There he writes this letter under house arrest (Acts 21:21, 28:16-31). Hardship for him was another chance to preach the Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:23-30). In prison he wrote seven letters which are the heart of the New Testament, and introduced Christ to his jailers and Caesar's own household (Philippians 1:12-14, 4:22).

The Jews' rejection of their Messiah is delaying the start of God's Kingdom on earth which Jesus came to establish. So, in the interim God tapped Paul to announce the Age of Grace wherein ....

(1) With God's temporarily suspended dealing with Israel due to their rejecting their Messiah, now all of Christ's followers are equal heirs of God in “*The Church, the Body of Christ*” (Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:26-29). Before the Secret was known, Gentiles could only come to God by converting to Judaism (Genesis 17:10-14).

(2) With the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost, after the Lord returned to heaven, Christ *indwells* every believer who has been “saved” by God's grace by trusting in Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Colossians 3:1-4).

(3) Prior to Christ's return after the coming, seven-year Great Tribulation, climaxing with the terrifying battle of Armageddon, Jesus will come “in the clouds” (not to earth) to “*rapture*” all believers, taking them with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

(4) Believers now have *direct access* to God, needing no human middleman, for we are *spiritually baptized by the Holy Spirit “in Christ”* (Psalm 131:1-3; Romans 8:14,15; Hebrews 10:19-22). For centuries the Jews could not touch the Ark of the Covenant, nor enter the Holy of Holies, nor even speak or spell Jehovah's name! To them, this new level of intimacy would have been disrespectful, if not blasphemous!

(5) God has created you anew, i.e., “born again” spiritually, blameless in His eyes (2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Ephesians 1:4). *All* of Christ’s presence fills you with *all* of God’s fullness, making you *complete* in Him *seated* with Christ in heaven and blessed with every spiritual blessing there (Colossians 2:9,10)!

God so loved the world that He put everybody’s sin on His Son Jesus who alone was qualified to die on the cross for you and me. Those who choose to refuse God’s generous, undeserved forgiveness will spend eternity in “the lake of fire” (Revelation 21:1-8).

God’s radical Secret was to unite Jewish and Gentile believers into one Body, the Church. It was Paul’s high honor to introduce the Mystery even to God’s angels and to Satan and his demons (Ephesians 6:12). Imagine Satan’s shock upon hearing that his most lethal weapons, sin and death, were destroyed by Jesus’ resurrection!

**DISCUSS: What does victory over sin and death mean to you?**

### **The Prayer 3:14-19**

The Bible contains some magnificent prayers (1) the Lord’s “Our Father” prayer (2) Jesus’ prayer for His followers, (3) the thief’s plea on the cross and (4) Christ’s prayer for His Father to forgive His killers (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 23:34,42,43; John 17:1-26).

Paul prayed that his readers, including us, would experience unity and, like having a tiger in your tank, have God’s high octane power to love and to face resistance, arrests, torture and martyrdom.

God’s love embraces both Jews and Gentiles in Christ and can rescue anyone from Satan’s grip. Paul prays that God’s love will so fill us with His presence that we’ll let Him fully control us (Romans 8:29; Philippians 4:7; Colossians 2:1-10).

**DISCUSS: What place does prayer have in your life?**

### **“Eat Your Heart Out, Walt!” 3:20-21**

Disney’s “Imagineering” claims, “If it can be dreamt, it can be built.” But what God can “build” for, with and through you by the power of the Holy Spirit within you, is incalculable, *unimaginable*!

God spoke the universe into being, flooded the globe, flushed Egypt’s army, defeated sin and death, unites former enemies and will take His followers to be with Him always, escaping hell’s unquenchable fires. God is omnipotent (2 Corinthians 4:1-18)!

**DISCUSS: How, if ever, have you experienced God's power?**

Isn't it amazing to know that God has had you in mind since before Creation! As a part of Christ's body, like an arm or ear, you have a specific function in demonstrating God's power at work in you.

What role does God have for you to play? Is Jesus alive in you? If not, why not invite Him in now? Put the Lion of Judah in your tank.

His Deal

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