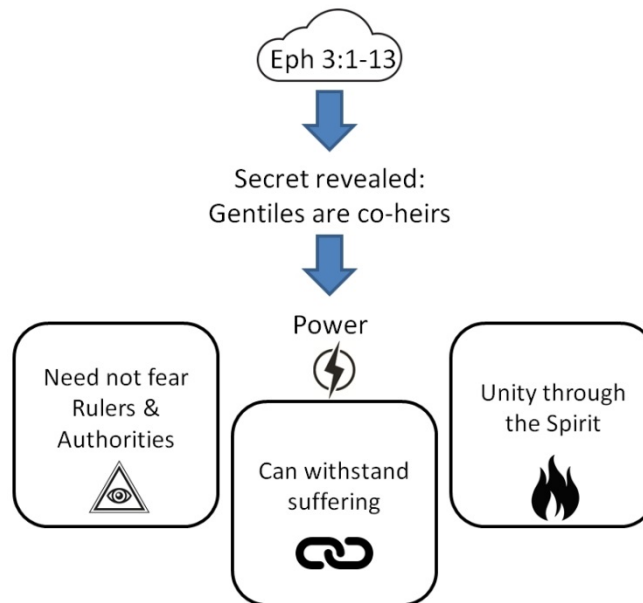


Ephesians 3

“The king said to Daniel, ‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery [*mysterion*, LXX].’” (Dan 2:47)



Questions

1. We have power by the Spirit freeing us from the “rulers and authorities”. If the gospel were that of scientific materialism it would consist of Paul telling his readers that there are no demons, no spiritual beings guiding their fates, no beings which must be feared or appeased. How is the gospel of Ephesians different?
2. Power comes up repeatedly in this passage. What does that power mean to (a) the first-century readers; (b) Paul in his current situation; (c) us. How is that power activated? (See Eph 1:18-19a; 3:14-19.)
3. When have you felt God’s power at work in you?

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Fun fact: “Some pre-Christian Jewish texts also speak of God showing the angels his power and glory through his people, and thus receiving their praise. Because these heavenly 'rulers' were viewed as angels of the different nations, the unity of the church displayed the rule of God, whose authority transcended that of the angels and all earthly boundaries.” [*IVP Bible Background Commentary* on 3:8-11]

Fun-neutral Fact: Paul begins the chapter by referring to his written testimony: “the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above” (NRSV). Here NRSV takes curious liberty: “above” does not appear in the Greek at all, which is closer to “as I have already written briefly”. In fact, some believe that Paul is referring to Colossians rather than the text earlier in Ephesians.

Leader's Intro:

- In this passage we see a reappearance of previous themes, of mystery, of the rulers and authorities, of fullness, and of power, all building in momentum and culminating in the awesome and justly famous prayer which lies at the center of Ephesians.
- In this passage Paul again addresses again the need for unity between Jews and Gentiles in the church, and speaks to the Gentile fear of the “rulers and authorities” which ruled pagan life, leading to the frequent sacrifices, the pursuit of mystery religions and use of magic (from spell books called “Ephesian books”).
- Paul further tells them how they should understand the apparently crushing setback of his imprisonment, and he does so by pulling back the curtain to place all of these in the context of God's eternal plan. The way Paul frames his imprisonment is a perfect example of the power of God spoken of in the passage.
- We have power by the Spirit freeing us from the “rulers and authorities”. If the gospel were that of scientific materialism it would consist of Paul telling his readers that there are no demons, no spiritual beings guiding their fates, beings which must be feared and appeased. In fact, we will see in Ephesians 6 that these “rulers and authorities” are angelic and demonic and are very real—and a believer's freedom from them is entailed in adoption by our heavenly Father and at the same time requires something of them, which he will explore in chapter 6. This tells us both that we need not live a life of fear, and also that these forces are real, and working in opposition to God's purposes.
- Note that this passage, along with 1 Cor 2:7-8, shows *why* the secret of the gospel was a secret until now, namely that the rulers and authorities couldn't oppose something they didn't anticipate or understand. (See Dennis' white paper, of course.) Rather than making this an explicit question, simply ask it when it comes up naturally.
- Additional background:
 - Paul calls himself a “prisoner of Christ” (3:1). “The situation which led to Paul's arrest and subsequent detention in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome arose directly out of his Gentile ministry. It was while he was in Jerusalem with representatives of his Gentile churches who were taking their churches' respective gifts to the mother church that he was charged with violating the sanctity of the temple by taking one of those representatives without forbidden bounds. This charge, and the others associated with it, still hung over him as he waited in Rome for his appeal to come up for hearing in the supreme court. If the record of Acts 21:17-36 be read against the background of Romans 15:14-32, where some of Paul's thoughts about his mission are disclosed, it can scarcely be doubted that he was indeed a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles. And if Phil 1:12-18 refers to the same imprisonment as Eph 3:1, that imprisonment was being actively overruled for the furtherance of the gospel at the heart of the Gentile world.” (Bruce, 309-310)

Mystery [mysterion]: 'The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of **mysteries**, for you were able to reveal this **mystery** [mysterion, LXX]."' (Dan 2:47)

Merriam-Webster: *Mystery*: 1a: "A religious truth that one can know only by revelation and cannot fully understand." 2a: "Something not understood or beyond understanding: enigma."

BDAG: *Mysterion*: "Secret, secret rite, secret teaching, mystery." (1): "The unmanifested or private counsel of God; God's secret."

Bruce (314): "Elsewhere Paul insists that his gospel is no innovation. It was promised in advance through the prophets in the holy scriptures (Rom 1:2); it was preached beforehand to Abraham (Gal 3:8). That faith was the principle by which God would justify men and women, Gentiles and well as Jews, was not a truth concealed in earlier generations. It is a truth attested, according to Paul, in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings... That God would bless the Gentiles, then, was not a new revelation. What then was the new revelation, the mystery hitherto concealed? It was this: that God's blessing of the Gentiles would involve the obliteration of the old line of demarcation which separated them from Jews and the incorporation of Gentile believers together with Jewish believers, without any discrimination, in the new, comprehensive community of God's chosen people. *This* had not been foreseen; this was now 'revealed in the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.'"

1 Cor 2:7-8: No, we declare God's wisdom, a **mystery** that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Eph 1:8-10: With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the **mystery** of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment [pleromatos]—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ...

(See also Mt 13:11, "...the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.")

Fullness [pleroma]:

Eph 1:22: And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the **fullness** [pleroma] of him who **fills** [pleroumenou] everything in every way

Eph 4:12: to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the **fullness** of Christ.

Unity: See Eph 4:12 (above); also Jn 17:23: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be **one** as we are **one**— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete **unity**. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Col 1:19-20: "For in him all the **fullness** of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

“The church thus appears to be God's pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future, the mystery of God's will 'to be administered in the fullness of the times,' when 'the things in heaven and the things on earth' are to be brought together in Christ (Eph 1;9-10). There is probably the further implication that the church, the product of God's reconciling work thus far, is designed by him to be his agency (existing as it does 'in Christ') for the bringing about of the ultimate reconciliation.” (Bruce, 321-322)

Power [*dynamis*]:

1 Cor 4:20: For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of **power**.

2 Cor 4:7: But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing **power** is from God and not from us.

2 Cor 12:9: But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my **power** is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s **power** may rest on me.

Col 1:29: To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so **powerfully** works in me.

Eph 6:10-12: 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty **power**. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

[*Jn 17:15*: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”]

Power for what?

Power to save: “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor 1:18)

Power against the “powers”: see Eph 6:12 above; 1 Pet 1:5

Power to serve: see Col 1:29 above; 2 Thess 1:11, “To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith...”

Power in weakness: “Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:10)

Power to endure suffering: 2 Tim 1:8

Power to know God's love: Eph 3:18

Power to be mature and unified: Eph 3:19; Eph 1:9-10

Power to raise the dead and perform other miracles: Acts 2:11, 22-24

Power to destroy “strongholds” (the lies of the world and Satan): 2 Cor 10:4

Power to turn Paul from enemy to steward of the gospel: Eph 3:17

Power in prayer: James 5:16

Power to be sanctified: 2 Pet 1:3

Rulers and Authorities [*arche* and *exousia*]:

Col 2:9-10, 15: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every **power and authority**... He disarmed the **rulers and authorities** and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.”

Eph 2:1-3: You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the **ruler of the power** of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

See *Eph 6:12*, above, as well as Rom 8:38-39.