



**OASIS: IS THIS ALL THERE IS?
DONE IN SYNC WITH
THE “EN CHRISTO” SERMON JOURNEY**
The Passage – Ephesians 3:1-21

Preface: Welcome to our LC Bible study in our new sermon series “En Christo.” These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading.

Leader Notes: The first 3 chapters of Ephesians are theologically dense but beautiful passages. You are encouraged to take your time in these studies and limit the number of questions in favor of creating thoughtful discussions while keeping the big ideas in mind.

Study’s BIG Idea: The mystery of God is continually being revealed through Christ to all people – including the “outsiders.”

Opening Question/Transition:

(During Oasis, the suggestion was raised that for groups who either know each other very well or have spent too much time in conversation before the study to skip the opening questions and “jump right in the text.” I thought it was a helpful piece of feedback to pass along.)

Ephesians 3:1-21 (NIV © 2011)

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.

⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

O – What do you see in the first 6 verses concerning the mystery being revealed and to whom is it being revealed?

I – Why do you think Paul refers to himself as the “least of these” in v. 8?

(Possibilities include: he is humbled by his God-given calling and/or desires to identify with those who do not feel “worthy” of God’s grace.)

A – This proclamation to the Gentiles (non-Jews) is God’s way of saying, “There are no outsiders.” Who do we identify as “outsiders” today and what message do they need to hear specifically?

O – Vv. 2-5 begin with Paul using the line “administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you” to proclaim God’s message of grace to the Gentiles. This begs the question, “Why now?” What reason does Paul give?

(See v. 11.)

I – Paul writes that he is the messenger to the Gentiles and they are invited to be God’s people, to share in the “full inheritance” of Israel and that this message preached to the Gentiles is Paul’s reward. What does “full inheritance” or “the king’s wealth” mean? And discuss why Paul would consider just the act of preaching this message as the reward. Can you relate?

(The “full inheritance” has no implication of actual material wealth but rather refers to the richness of this new life - “The new way of being human that has now been unveiled in and through Jesus, together with the future hope that it contains.” - N.T. Wright)

A – How would we contextualize the concept of the king’s wealth or “the full inheritance” to today’s Western society that is often characterized as having abundance and plenty?

(Note to leaders – this is a tough question and its aim is not so much in the answers but in the exercise of thinking about what life in the Kingdom is really about.)

O – In v. 10, the word for “church,” *ecclesia*, literally means “gathering.” This use is consistent in the Hebrew Old Testament as well as the Septuagint (the Latin translation of the O.T.) when discussing Israel and it always means “gathering.” The idea of seeing church as a gathering inferred it was a community and a movement.

After the edict of Constantine in 313AD, Christianity began formalizing and became the official religion of the Roman world. After it became official, it stopped being a movement – it became a location. The Romans called the gathering places *basilica* – which is Latin for “public/official meeting place.”

German cultures worked off that and used the word *kirka* or *kirche*, which literally means “house of the Lord.”

What differences can we see when “church” is defined as a place or a house as opposed to a community, a movement or a gathering?

(“You can lock the doors of a kirche, not so with ekklesia of Jesus.” - Andy Stanley. Furthermore, seeing church as a location also creates the idea of church as “an institution” or “overly-organized.” While there is a goodness in the concepts of institution and organization, it seems we lose something when the ecclesia is not seen as a gathering or a movement or a community.)

I – In v. 15, Paul uses the term the “whole family” to describe the growing gathering – *pasa* (whole) *patria* (family). Paul is using it as a play on words with *patera* (which means father).

Patria is understood as a group united by descent from a common ancestry, a family, a tribe.

Keeping in mind the earlier themes of inheritance, describe how you think a Gentile in Ephesus would have responded to this idea of being in God the Father’s whole family?

(It would seem with mixed emotions. Extremely grateful to be invited to partake in God's invitation of salvation while understandably anxious about entering into a new family.)

A – How can the gathering of church feel more like a family? And how can we be sensitive towards those who are leery of joining the family?
(The complaint around organized religion involves a few aspects. Among them is the cold and lonely feeling of and the fear of losing one's identity. Believers must be sensitive and display a Christ-like authenticity when applying the concepts of community and gathering.)

O – Vv. 14-21 contain 3 major petitions/blessings to the Ephesian audience as well as a clear articulation of the Holy Trinity. Can you identify them?
(Petitions/blessings – v. 16: “he may strengthen you”; v. 18: “may have power”; v.19: “may be filled.” The Trinity is found in v. 14-Father, v. 16-Spirit and v. 17-Christ.)

I – The Trinity becomes part of the creedal language of the ancient church and an essential aspect of Christian doctrine. Why do you think Paul drops this here to his new audience?
(Amidst the academic speculation, he may have simply wanted them to begin their Christian journey theologically informed about the true God they were worshipping.)

A – What do these petitions/blessings say to those who were formerly on “the outside” and still on “the outside”?
Some aspects of today's Church still create an outsider culture. How can proclaiming these blessings change outsiders' impressions of the Christian faith and allow for hearts to receive this unfolding mystery of the message of Christ that was given to the Gentiles in Ephesus?

Key: O – Observation. I - Interpretation. A – Application

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- b. Complement OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.