

## GOD

God wants us to Understand and Apply His Word in Our Lives (Ephesians 3:4)

We will now focus on one verse that even though it is short contains some great truths that we can apply in our lives. We will see the importance of reading God's Word, which contains all things pertaining to life and godliness. As we read His Word with a mind to learn and continually think about what we have read, our understanding will grow and that Word of God will live in us to the point that we will reap great benefits, and our lives will be a witness of the greatness of what God has made available.

### Ephesians

3:4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

The Apostle Paul was writing about the Mystery, that no matter what your previous background, once you confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead you are saved, born again as a member of the family of God, a part of the Body of Christ.

The entire chapter that contains this verse is a parenthesis expounding on this Mystery, which Paul had introduced the basics of in Chapter 2. As a figure of speech, a parenthesis is God's way to call attention to and elaborate on something that He said previously. Not only is Chapter 3 itself a parenthesis, but our focal verse within this chapter is contained within a parenthesis that includes verses 2 through 13, giving it further emphasis.

But there's more. Our verse is part of an even smaller parenthesis nestled within that one: a parenthesis within a parenthesis within a parenthesis! God wants us to know and understand what this verse is telling us.

Let's look at the context to see where this verse fits in, and then we'll consider more closely what it says. Look at the first 7 verses of Ephesians Chapter 3:

- 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,  
3:2 (If ye have heard of the dispensation (*administration*) of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:  
3:3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,  
3:4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge of the mystery of Christ)  
3:5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now (*lately*) revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit;  
3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:  
3:7 Whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working (*energizing*) of his power.

The second part of verse 3 and verse 4 make up this parenthesis nestled within a parenthesis within the parenthesis represented by Chapter 3. Let's focus on this parenthesis to understand what God wants to draw our attention to:

3:3b (as I wrote afore in few words,  
3:4 whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge of the mystery of Christ)

This parenthesis follows Paul's mention of the Mystery in the first part of verse 3, which was made known to him by revelation from God. Paul mentioned that he had already written "in few words" (briefly) about this Mystery. We can see that Paul had written some of the basics about the Mystery in Chapter 2 of Ephesians, but by the time he wrote this epistle Paul had already written truths regarding the Mystery in some of his earlier epistles. For example, you can find mention of the main points of the Mystery in Paul's epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Galatians, all written before he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians.

Ephesians Chapter 3, verse 4 sets a goal: read what Paul wrote in order to "understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ". We can apply this goal to us: we want to read, and when we read, we want to understand. Remember, we're looking at a nestled parenthesis here, so God is emphasizing this point to us.

In order to best be able to apply what this verse is saying to our lives and to reap the benefits, we need to consider what it means to read and to understand, as well as what it is that we are supposed to read.

First, let's look at the word "read". The word "read" is translated from the Greek word *anaginōskō*, which is related to the word *ginōskō* which means to know by experience. According to Bullinger's *Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, to read means "to know accurately, to distinguish, to know by reading, to learn by reading". We're not just to skim through what is written, but we should focus as we read, with the goal to learn what we read to the point that we experientially know it. One way to put it is that we are to read with a view to persuade – first to persuade ourselves, then others. This involves not just a single reading, but reading it again and again, then working it in our minds.

One question you might ask yourself is: what are we supposed to read with this goal in mind? II Peter 1:3 says that God has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, but to know what these things are we need to read God's Word, which is the Will of God in written form.

## II Timothy

3:16 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God (*God-breathed*), and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for (*which is*) instruction in righteousness.

3:17 That the man of God may be perfect (*have everything needed*), thoroughly furnished (*perfected*) unto all good works.

Reading God's Word is profitable to us. Consider I Timothy, Chapter 4:

## I Timothy

4:13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

4:15 Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all.

We are to give attention to, or to turn our thoughts and hearts to, reading God's Word. Once we read, we need to meditate upon what we read: keep it in our minds and dwell on it.

According to Romans 15:4, "whatsoever things were written afore time were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." We can learn from reading God's Word, and as we read God's Word, we get comfort and hope.

Jesus Christ understood the importance of reading God's Word. The Gospels record numerous times when Jesus confronted the religious leaders of the time, asking them things like "Have ye not read...?" and "Did you never read...?" As recorded in John 5:39, Jesus told them: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

Jesus Christ even read God's Word himself. Luke 4:16 records how, at the practical opening of his ministry as an apostle, Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.

The Apostle Paul encouraged the believers to read his epistles, as we see in Colossians, Chapter 4:

## Colossians

4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

It's even been suggested that since the Book of Ephesians was not originally addressed to believers at just one specific locality, multiple copies may have been sent out, not just to Ephesus but also to Laodicea and other places, so the epistle referred to in Colossians 4:16 could have been the same one that Paul sent to the Ephesians.

For another example of Paul's exhortation to read, look at I Thessalonians, Chapter 5.

## I Thessalonians

5:27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren (*those set-apart members of God's family who want to walk the Word*).

If you want to walk on God's Word, you need to read it.

It is also important to read God's Word ourselves so we don't get tossed around with every wind of doctrine that might blow by. When people try to tell us their doctrine, we go to the Word. A great record of this is in Acts 17:11, where it says of the Bereans: "These were

more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word in all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.” We want to know: “What Does the Word Say?”

We’ve seen the importance of reading God’s Word: not just browsing through, but paying attention with a view to learning and being persuaded in our own minds.

### Ephesians

3:4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of (*pertaining to*) Christ)

This verse tells us that the people to whom this epistle was addressed were to read what Paul wrote about the Mystery so they could understand his knowledge. What does this mean and how can it apply to us?

The word translated “understand” in this verse is the Greek word *noēō*, which has the same root as the word *nous*, meaning “mind”. It means to ponder, to dwell on to the point that we truly perceive or know.

Those to whom the Book of Ephesians was addressed were admonished to not only read but to ponder, or dwell on, what they read to the point that they fully understood it, made it their own.

What were they to understand? In verse 4 it says that they were to understand Paul’s “knowledge in the Mystery of Christ.”

The word “knowledge” in this verse is a poor translation. The Greek word translated “knowledge” in this verse is the word *sunesis*, which, in all of the six other places that it is used, is more accurately translated “understanding”. According to Bullinger’s *Lexicon*, *sunesis* literally means “intelligence, insight, understanding, acuteness; the intelligent, penetrating consideration which precedes decision and action; used of reflective thought, wisdom of productive thought”.

In Ephesians 3:4, Paul is encouraging them to read so they can fully understand his own understanding of the Mystery: his insight, including how he got this insight and his own mindful actions as he made it his own.

We know that Paul didn’t get his understanding of the Mystery from his own personal background and training:

### Acts

22:3 I (*Paul*) am verily a man *which am* a Jew (*Judean*), born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city (*Jerusalem*), at the feet of Gamaliel taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

How, then, did Paul get his understanding?

### Galatians

- 1:11 But I certify (*guarantee*) you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.
- 1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of (*pertaining to*) Jesus Christ.

II Peter 1:21 says that the prophecy didn't come by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by holy spirit. They spoke and wrote what God told them by revelation.

Paul gained his understanding of the Mystery by revelation from God. But it didn't all come at once. Paul's religious background was so totally contradictory to the great truths of the Mystery that God couldn't just "lay it all on him" when he got born again. God had to work with Paul, giving him a little at a time until finally he could put it all together and make it his own. The epistles of Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians all contain references to truths of the Mystery, but these truths are not all synthesized together into one great doctrinal whole until you come to the Book of Ephesians, where they are neatly summed up in Chapter 3, verse 6.

By examining other places in the Bible where the word *sunesis* is used, we can gain a greater appreciation for how we can read the Word of God and work it to the point that we fully understand it, making it our own. We'll only look at two of these usages, both in Colossians:

### Colossians

- 2:2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment (*full knowledge*) of the mystery of God. (*the rest of the verse is not in the texts and should be deleted*).
- 2:3 In whom (*in which – in the Mystery*) are held all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

We are to get a full understanding of the Mystery.

### Colossians

- 1:9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.
- 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing (*growing up*) in the knowledge of God.

As we study God's Word, reading it carefully and over and over again, working it in our minds to the point that we fully understand it and make it our own, we will reap great benefits in our daily lives. As we apply this understanding in our daily walk, our lives will be a witness of the greatness of what God has made available. It's been said that people will read you before they'll read the Bible. What kind of example do you want to set forth?

We'll conclude by seeing this truth in II Corinthians Chapter 3, verses 2 and 3.

II Corinthians

3:2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

3:3 *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

Let's continue to read God's Word with a view to building our own understanding and making it our own so it shows in our walk, making us great witnesses and disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Dr. Rick Batt