

The Purpose of Ephesians 3:2–13, Once More

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Abstract: Recent attempts to address the purpose of the digression in Eph 3:2–13 have failed to capitalize on the significance of this text's climax in Eph 3:13a. This essay addresses this issue via a literary analysis of the passage and the wider context of the letter. In terms of the actual digression, the statements in Eph 3:2–12 provide the basis for the exhortation towards faithful Christian service in Eph 3:13a. Furthermore, the digression builds upon the missional depiction of the Church in Eph 1:23 and 2:19–22 and also prepares the reader for the brief, yet important, references to opposition in Eph 4:14 and Eph 6:10–20. Ultimately, the digression in Eph 3:2–13 addresses Paul's description of his imprisonment in Eph 3:1 and implores the reader to participate in the Church's identity as Christ's "body" and "fullness" (Eph 1:23), despite the very real possibility of suffering for the sake of the gospel.

Key Words: *body, Christian ministry, Ephesians 3, fullness, mission, perseverance, structure, suffering, temple*

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has long held a prominent place within the Christian community. Yet this deeply profound text is not without its fair share of challenging interpretive issues.¹ Various historical questions (for example, the identity of its author, the identity of its recipients, the purpose of this letter, and the letter's setting) still loom large over this text. Yet, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is not without literary conundrums as well, particularly the function of the digression in Eph 3:2–13. While the probing studies of T. Gombis and A. Sherwood have brought some measure of clarity to this particular issue, they do not sufficiently explain the place of this passage within the overall letter.² In this essay, I will argue that Paul's digression in Eph 3:2–13 builds upon the missional emphasis

¹ The authorship of Ephesians continues to be a subject of debate within the academy. The answer to this question, however, does not significantly affect the argument of this paper. I will therefore refer to the author of Ephesians as "Paul."

² T. Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13: Pointless Digression, or the Epitome of the Triumph of God in Christ," *WTJ* 66 (2004): 313–23; A. Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*: A Discourse Analysis of Ephesians 3:1–13," *BBR* 22 (2012): 97–112.

in Eph 1–2 and encourages Christ-followers to faithfully participate in the Church's mission, even in the face of opposition from a hostile, unbelieving world.

History of Interpretation

Ephesians 3:2–13 is widely viewed as a digression with the debate centering around its precise function within the letter. For some scholars, Paul's digression comprises a random set of statements that are completely unrelated to his larger concerns in this letter. J. Kirby, for example, describes Eph 3:2–13 as a "long parenthesis" that bears no apparent connection to the rest of the letter.³ For other scholars, this digression (in various ways) is an integral part of Paul's overall argument and holds an important rhetorical function within the letter. T. Gombis's influential study on this question marks something of a watershed moment within this debate. Prior to Gombis's study, those who argued that this passage was related to the overall argument generally viewed this text as some form of apostolic defense (either of Paul or a pseudonymous author).⁴

³ J. Kirby, *Ephesians, Baptism and Pentecost: An Inquiry into the Structure and Purpose of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), 129–31. Kirby largely views Eph 3:2–13 as the work of a pseudonymous writer who has reworked (for some reason) Col 1:27 and various texts in Eph 1–2 into this "long parenthesis." Cf. H. Merklein, *Das kirchliche Amt nach dem Epheserbrief*, *SANT* 33 (Munich: Kösel, 1973), 159–61.

⁴ Generally speaking, those who view Ephesians as a pseudonymous composition argue Eph 3:2–13 was composed to remind Gentile readers of their indebtedness to the apostle Paul with a view to buttressing the (pseudonymous) author's authority and strengthening the reader's bonds to the apostolic tradition. Cf. A. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, *WBC* 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 171; R. Schnackenburg, *Brief an die Epheser*, *EKKNT* 10 (Zürich: Neukirchener, 1982), 131. Scholars who support the Pauline authorship of Ephesians generally argue this text builds upon Eph 2:11–22 by describing the history behind Paul's role as apostle to the Gentiles. E.g., C. Arnold, *Ephesians*, *ZECNT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 179–80; H. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 417; F. Thielman, *Ephesians*, *BECNT* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 187, 189–90; E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, *ICC* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 292. R. Jeal helpfully accounts for the significance of Eph 3:13 by suggesting Paul intends the digression to explain his role in the Gentile mission and avert any discouragement the original readers might experience because of his imprisonment. The argument within this article will largely build upon Jeal's conclusion regarding this text (*Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2000], 164, 174).

This approach is problematic because it does not explain Paul's external viewpoint in vv. 10–12 and it fails to account for the minimal role criticism of Paul's apostleship plays in this letter.

Gombis's article on this issue essentially argues that the digression in vv. 2–13 is a "defense of the triumph of God in Christ."⁵ According to Gombis, Paul has narrated God's victory in Christ within Eph 1:20–2:22, and this portion of the letter provides the immediate context for Eph 3:2–13.⁶ Gombis then suggests Paul's reference to his imprisonment in Eph 3:1 leads him to answer the question, "If Christ Jesus is exalted to the position of cosmic supremacy over the powers ruling the present evil age, then why is Paul in prison?" in Eph 3:2–13.⁷ According to Gombis, Paul answers this question by placing his earthly ministry (including his current imprisonment) within its cosmic context.⁸ From Gombis's perspective, Paul's defense of God's triumph over the powers consists of a two-fold argument. First, Paul depicts himself as a "recipient of divine revelation" in Eph 3:3–7.⁹ Second, Paul portrays himself as an "agent of divine triumph" as his ministry gives rise to the creation of the Church (vv. 8b–9), whose existence establishes the efficacy of God's plan and thereby vindicates him before the powers (v. 10).¹⁰

Ultimately, Gombis's analysis of Eph 3:2–13 highlights the paradoxical nature of Paul's argument in this text and clarifies how the digression builds upon Eph 1:20–2:22. His work thus provides a significant corrective to readings of this text that minimize its place within the letter, either by simply viewing it as a mere defense of Paul's apostleship or untying it from Paul's overall argument. Nonetheless, while Gombis traces the argument of Eph 3:2–13 well, he fails to account sufficiently for: (1) Paul's shift from addressing his own ministry in vv. 2–9 to discussing the Church's role in the divine plan in vv. 10–13; (2) the significance of Paul's reference to Christ's faithfulness in v. 12; and (3) the climax of Paul's argument in v. 13, particularly in terms of the meaning of the infinitive

⁵ Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 316. Cf. S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, EEC (Bellevue, WA: Lexham, 2016), 212.

⁶ Gombis is here building upon his related article, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 403–18. While Gombis's understanding of Eph 1:20–2:22 is helpful at points, his dependence upon ANE temple-building traditions is especially problematic as it leads him to conclude Eph 1:20–2:22 follows an ANE pattern of divine-warfare. Cf. Gombis, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," 407–18.

⁷ Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 316.

⁸ Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 316.

⁹ Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 318–19.

¹⁰ Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 319–23.

ἐγκακεῖν.

Aaron Sherwood has also attempted to address the purpose of Paul's digression in Eph 3:2–13. His work on this subject primarily involves a discourse analysis of the text that seeks to reveal its inner logic and clarify how it is related to the remainder of the letter. Sherwood's analysis is particularly helpful because it points to the central place of v. 13 within the argument of vv. 2–13 as the "explicit conclusion" of the entire text.¹¹ This leads Sherwood to conclude that the digression's main aim is to demonstrate that Paul's "imprisonment does not cast doubt on either God's eschatological plan or the audience's involvement in it but instead demonstrates the efficacy of God's plan and the audience's part within it."¹² For Sherwood, this particularly involves the reality that the Gentile "audience has benefitted from God's use of Paul to promote their own *doxa*."¹³

From his analysis of Eph 3:2–13, Sherwood concludes Paul's digression primarily validates his prior argument *and* provides the basis for the prayer/doxology that commences at Eph 3:14. According to Sherwood, Eph 1:3–2:22 describes God's redemptive plan and work within salvation history but does so from the viewpoint of Paul's reader.¹⁴ The digression then, according to Sherwood, focuses on Paul's role in God's plan but returns to the first person plural language that dominates Eph 2 at Eph 3:12; the digression thus wraps Paul and the reader up into God's plan and provides a dual portrait of God's work in salvation history.¹⁵ Having addressed the natural concern raised by his comments concerning his incarceration in Eph 3:1 within the digression and having shown his imprisonment actually is for the reader's *doxa*, Sherwood suggests Paul is then

¹¹ Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 100.

¹² Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 100.

¹³ Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 108. For Sherwood, the use of the noun *δόξα* in v. 13 is largely Paul's way of summarizing the positive outlook the reader should have towards Paul's apostleship that is based on his description of his ministry and involvement in God's plan within vv. 2–12.

¹⁴ Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 109.

¹⁵ Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 109. Due to his emphasis on the relative clause *ἥτις ἐστὶν δόξα ὑμῶν* in Eph 3:13b, Sherwood places great stress on the Gentile reader's accrual of benefits from Paul's participation in the divine plan. However, his analysis of the text largely bypasses the significance of the exhortation in v. 13a and does not account for the Gentile reader's own *active* participation in God's plan for cosmic reconciliation. Gombis, likewise, does not account sufficiently for the significance of these two features of the text.

legitimately able to resume his prayer in Eph 3:14.¹⁶

While Sherwood's treatment of this passage is insightful, his overall argument is problematic in three ways. First, he fails to note that this letter concerns more than just how Christ-followers *benefit* from God's plan; it also addresses (at some length) how believers *participate* in God's plan (cf. Eph 1:23; 4:11–16; 6:10–18). Second, and related to the first problem, he largely ignores Eph 3:13a in his analysis and wrongly treats the *subordinate* clause in Eph 3:13b (ἥτις ἐστὶν δόξα ὑμῶν) as the central portion of Paul's conclusion in the digression. This void in Sherwood's analysis seems to contribute to his failure to account for the importance of the Church's participation in God's plan within this letter. Third, he interprets the noun δόξα in Eph 3:13b within the honor-shame dynamic of Greco-Roman culture, rather than viewing it as a shorthand reference to eschatological salvation (cf. Rom 8:18, 21; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:18).¹⁷ Sherwood's misinterpretation of the noun δόξα in v. 13 then leads him to interpret the Gentile audience's involvement in God's plan purely in terms of the reception of the benefits of the gospel and minimize their role in the *missio dei*. Ultimately, Sherwood's overemphasis on Eph 3:13b (rather than Eph 3:13a) leads to a rather limited account of how Paul's digression resonates with the rest of the letter.

The Context of Ephesians 3:2–13

The appropriate point of departure for appreciating the context of Eph 3:2–13 is Paul's introductory *berakab* in Eph 1:3–14. This literary unit highlights various spiritual benefits Christ-followers have received as a result of their mystical union with the risen Messiah (cf. Eph 1:3) and introduces the central theme of the letter in Eph 1:10. In context, Paul's statements in v. 10 are a development of the preceding comments concerning the “mystery” (μυστήριον) that God has planned in the Messiah (v. 9).¹⁸ According to v. 10, this “mystery” involves the implementation of God's plan for “the fullness of time.” Paul highlights the purpose of this divine

¹⁶ According to Sherwood, the digression in Eph 3:2–13 is to be read with Eph 2:1–22, and both texts “exhibit the realization of God's purposes from both the audience's and Paul's perspectives, so that they compose a joint *narratio* that is doubly forceful in providing a reason for the prayer and doxology beginning with the resumptive *τούτου χάριν* in 3:14” (“Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethné*,” 109).

¹⁷ Sherwood, “Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethné*,” 106–8. Cf. T. Scaewater, “Ephesians,” in *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings*, ed. T. Scaewater (Dallas: Fontes, 2020), 345–46. See Lincoln for a helpful examination of the noun in Eph 3:13 (*Ephesians*, 191–92).

¹⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are derived from the ESV.

plan through the phrase ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ in v. 10. Through this phrase, Paul suggests the divine plan principally involves cosmic unification and the establishment of a new creation.¹⁹ The precise object of this act of new creation is then specified through the phrase τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ in v. 10. When understood within the context of this entire letter, the “things in heaven” principally refers to the forces of cosmic evil that have set themselves in rebellion against God, while the “things on earth” likely refers to divided humanity.²⁰ The divine plan established in Christ then involves restoring the fractured universe, both in terms of humanity and the presence of cosmic evil (cf. Col 1:20).

The next text that is particularly pertinent for establishing the literary context of Eph 3:2–13 is Eph 1:23. Here, Paul builds upon his reference to the “Church” in v. 22 and describes the Christian community as Christ's “body” and “the fullness of him [Christ] who fills all [τὰ πάντα] in all.” Paul's portrait of the Christian community in this text poses a number of challenging lexical, grammatical, and theological problems. The precise meaning of the noun πλήρωμα and the voice of the participle πληρουμένου in v. 23, however, are especially relevant to this present analysis. In terms of the first issue, most scholars conclude the noun πλήρωμα in Eph 1:23 carries a passive sense.²¹ Furthermore, in combination with the noun σῶμα in v. 23, the noun πλήρωμα likely portrays the Church as the earthly presence and representative of the risen Christ.²² With regard to the second question, scholars have generally interpreted the voice of the participle πληρουμένου in three ways: (1) as a passive (i.e., the risen

¹⁹ The infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι in v. 10 is derived from the verb ἀνακεφαλαιόω, which refers to an action involving distinct entities being brought together under the framework of a single entity (cf. M. Owens, *As It Was in the Beginning: An Intertextual Analysis of New Creation in Galatians, 2 Corinthians, and Ephesians* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015], 129; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 67). Several scholars have concluded this picture of cosmic unification in Eph 1:10 is related to the letter's new creation theme and have also argued the infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι in Eph 1:10 carries a recapitulatory sense. Cf. Owens, *Beginning*, 126–30; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 33–34; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 89; M. Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, AB 34a (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 91–92.

²⁰ Cf. C. Caragounis, *The Ephesian Mystery: Meaning and Content*, ConBNT 8 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977), 139–46.

²¹ E.g., G. Sellin, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, KEK 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 154–56; Best, *Ephesians*, 187–89; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 114.

²² E.g., Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 74–77; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 118–19; Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 83–85.

Christ is being filled by the Church); (2) as a true middle (i.e., the risen Christ is filling the Church and the cosmos for his own benefit); and (3) as a middle with an active sense (i.e., the risen Christ is filling the Church and the cosmos).²³ Of these three options, most scholars conclude that it is the third option that makes the most sense within the context of Eph 1:23 (cf. Eph 3:19; Col 1:19; 2:9–10).²⁴

This interpretation of Eph 1:23 has significant implications for understanding Paul's portrayal of the Christian community in Ephesians. Paul's statements in Eph 1:23 clearly bring ecclesiology and Christology together and a brief examination of his train of thought in Ephesians 1 clarifies the relationship between these two theological categories in Eph 1:23. More specifically, the phrase *τὰ πάντα* in v. 23 is likely an intratextual allusion back to Eph 1:10, where Paul presents God's ultimate goal for the cosmos ("to unite all things in him [Christ])." Yet, Paul's statements in v. 23 also expand upon his description of the exercise of divine power in the Messiah within Eph 1:20–22. When read with Eph 1:10 and Eph 1:20–22, the portrait of the Christian community in Eph 1:23 then is associated with: (1) God's plan to unite *τὰ πάντα* in Christ; and (2) the risen Christ's cosmic victory over the powers. The depiction of the risen Christ in v. 23 (the one "who fills all in all") then builds upon these two contextual features of Eph 1:10–22 by suggesting that while Christ has already conquered the powers, the Father's ultimate goal of cosmic unity is not yet complete. Paul's depiction of the Church in Eph 1:23 (as the earthly presence and representative of the risen Christ), in turn, gives the Christian community a significant role in expanding the impact of Christ's victory and advancing the new creation inaugurated by his sacrificial death. Paul's statements in Ephesians 1:23 thus introduce his conception of the Church's identity in this letter and prepare the reader for his extended explanations of how the Church serves as Christ's "body" and "fullness" in Eph 4:11–16 and Eph 6:10–20 (see below).²⁵

²³ See Hoehner for an extensive survey of secondary literature related to the meaning of the participle *πληρουμένου* in Eph 1:23 (*Ephesians*, 296–99).

²⁴ Cf. Barth, *Ephesians*, 205–9; C. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in the Light of Its Historical Setting*, SNTSMS 63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82–85; R. Meyer, *Kirche und Mission im Epheserbrief*, SBS 86 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 44–48; J. Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, BNTC (New York: Continuum, 2001), 96; Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 79–83; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 114–15; G. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians* 5:21–33, BIS 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 242–45.

²⁵ For now, it is worth noting that the proclamation of the gospel represents

The final text that is relevant for establishing the literary context of Eph 3:2–13 is Eph 2:1–22. While Eph 2:1–22 comprises two distinct textual units, they are nonetheless linguistically and theologically related. More specifically, Eph 2:1–10 and Eph 2:11–22 are: (1) linguistically linked together through the presence of the "once-now" schema in vv. 1–4 and vv. 11–13; and (2) theologically connected as parallel accounts of new creation.²⁶ Ephesians 2:1–22 also builds upon the description of Christ's victory over the powers in Eph 1:20–22.²⁷ The literary relationship between these two texts suggests Eph 2 (broadly speaking) describes Paul's "enumeration of the triumphs of God in Christ demonstrating that the powers ruling the present evil age are indeed subject to the Lord Christ."²⁸ This triumph in Christ represents the outworking of the cosmic plan introduced in Eph 1:10 and is conveyed through: (1) the death-life imagery in Eph 2:1, 5; (2) the new creation language in Eph 2:10, 15; (3) the horizontal and vertical reconciliation depicted in Eph 2:11–18; and (4) the establishment of a new "temple" in Eph 2:19–22.

The Rhetorical Function of Ephesians 3:13a

Paul's comments in Eph 3:13a represent the climax of the digression and contain the key that unlocks the relationship between the digression and the remainder of the letter. The climactic nature of Eph 3:13a is principally evident in the introductory conjunction *διό* and the presence of an exhortation (*αἰτοῦμαι μὴ ἔγκρακεῖν*). The conjunction *διό* functions as a coordinating inferential conjunction that introduces *independent* clauses.²⁹ As such, it presents the reader with statements that draw a "*deduction, conclusion, or summary* to the preceding discussion."³⁰ Additionally, the verb

one of the means by which the Church serves as the "fullness" of Christ in both of these texts (cf. Eph 4:15; 6:17). Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 119; Meyer, *Kirche und Mission*, 43–46, 140–41, 144–45. Additionally, the use of the noun *εὐαγγέλιον* in the LXX is relevant here since this background suggests the gospel is ultimately a proclamation of divine victory (cf. Isa 40:9; 52:7; 61:1; Eph 1:20–22).

²⁶ Ephesians 2:1–10 is primarily an anthropological and individualistic account of new creation in Christ, while vv. 11–22 focuses on a corporate depiction of new creation (cf. Eph 2:10, 15).

²⁷ Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 86–88; E. Best, "Dead in Trespasses and Sins (Eph 2:1)," *JSNT* 13 (1981): 14; T. Allen, "Exaltation and Solidarity with Christ: Ephesians 1:20 and 2:6," *JSNT* 28 (1986): 103–4.

²⁸ Gombis, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," 405.

²⁹ BDAG, *διό*, 250.

³⁰ D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 673. Cf. BDAG, *διό*, 250; BDF §451, 5.

αἰτοῦμαι in v. 13a serves as a metacomment that explicitly draws attention to the request to not “lose heart.”³¹

The question then becomes, “What is the extent of the prior context that Paul is reaching back to as he draws this inference?” Scholars generally conclude that Paul is drawing upon his entire argument within Eph 3:1–12, and this conclusion is warranted on the basis of four textual features.³² First, the phrase ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου likely refers back to Paul’s statement concerning his imprisonment (ἐγὼ Παῦλος ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) in v. 1. Second, the repetition of the phrase ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν from v. 1 binds v. 13 to v. 1. Third, and closely related to the preceding point, the abundant references to Paul’s Gentile ministry in Eph 3:1–2, 5–9 indicate the exhortation in v. 13 draws heavily upon Paul’s argument throughout this text. Fourth, the exhortation in v. 13 likely represents the apodosis within the first-class conditional sentence at the beginning of v. 2 (εἴ γε ἠκούσατε . . . αἰτοῦμαι μὴ ἐγκακεῖν ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν).³³

In summary, Paul’s statements in Eph 3:13a serve a vital role within this digression. More specifically, Eph 3:13a provides the reader with the appropriate logical conclusion to the argument presented in vv. 1–12.

The Content of Ephesians 3:2–12

The digression in Eph 3:2–13 is driven by Paul’s reference to his imprisonment in v. 1, with a particular concern to clarify the phrase ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν (v. 1b). Scholars generally divide the digression into three major sections: vv. 2–7, vv. 8–12, and v. 13.³⁴ The first section primarily focuses on the origin of Paul’s apostleship and the content of his proclamation as “apostle to the Gentiles.” The second section then addresses the respective roles of Paul and the Church within God’s plan for cosmic unification (cf. Eph 1:9–10).

In large measure, Paul’s comments in Eph 3:2–7 equate the “mystery”

³¹ Runge offers the following definition of a metacomment: “When speakers stop saying what they are saying in order to comment on what is going to be said, speaking abstractly about it” (S. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010], 101). He suggests metacomments are a means of attracting attention to what is about to be stated and provide the author with a way of stating “the point less directly” than via an explicit imperative.

³² Cf. B. Merkle, *Ephesians*, EGGNT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 85, 98; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 220; D. Clark, “Discourse Structure in Ephesians, with some Implications for Translators,” *BT* 58 (2007): 47; contra, Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 191.

³³ Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 181; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 467.

³⁴ E.g., Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 168.

of vv. 3–6 with the divine “grace” God has tasked him with stewarding in v. 2. While the phrase εἴ γε ἠκούσατε in v. 2a syntactically contains the main subject and verb in this text, it is nonetheless semantically subordinate to the remainder of v. 2 (τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς) that contains the actual thrust of this text.³⁵ Paul presents himself in v. 2 as a recipient (τῆς δοθείσης μοι) of “the stewardship of God’s grace” (τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ). These two phrases in v. 2 constitute the primary thrust of this section and are the principal focus of Paul’s comments in vv. 3–7. The noun οἰκονομία in v. 2 pictures Paul as a recipient of the “responsibility of management,” particularly the “managing” of God’s grace to Gentiles.³⁶ The origin and nature of Paul’s stewardship is then clarified in v. 3a via the phrase [ὅτι] κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον.³⁷ After the parenthetical comments in vv. 3b–4 that inform the reader of the reality that Paul has already briefly described the nature of the divine μυστήριον, Paul then returns back to the primary topic of the digression at v. 5.³⁸ Paul first contrasts the prior hiddenness of the “mystery” with its current state of disclosure (v. 5). It is at v. 6 that Paul finally states the precise content of the “mystery,” and in doing so clarifies the meaning of the phrase τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς.³⁹ According to v. 6, the mystery Paul is particularly tasked with revealing concerns the unifying work of the gospel that grants equal status to Jew and Gentile in Christ.⁴⁰ This first section of Paul’s digression finally concludes in v. 7

³⁵ Sherwood, “Paul’s Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnè*,” 102. Somewhat similarly, vv. 3b–4 (καθὼς . . . ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) is a more obvious parenthetical comment in this text.

³⁶ BDAG, οἰκονομία, 697.

³⁷ Paul’s comments in v. 3a likely refer back to his Damascus experience, yet they also build upon (once again) the statements concerning the divine plan in Eph 1:9–10. The noun μυστήριον is generally understood as a divine secret that was previously hidden but has now been revealed. E.g., see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 214, 428–34.

³⁸ The similarity in content between Eph 2:11–22 and Eph 3:3–6 suggests Paul is referring here to his statements in the former passage regarding the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ (cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 187; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 227–28).

³⁹ Sherwood, “Paul’s Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnè*,” 103.

⁴⁰ Given the explanation of the “mystery” in v. 6, it is likely that the precise nature of the concealment of the “mystery” to the “sons of men” in v. 5a particularly pertains to the relationship between Jew and Gentile within the new covenant community. The OT certainly speaks to the salvation of Gentiles (cf. Isa

with a parenthetical description (using language that evokes v. 2) of Paul's status as a *διάκονος* of the gospel through the operation of divine power.

Paul's comments in Eph 3:8–12 primarily focus on the nature and the ecclesiological/cosmic implications of his apostolic ministry. Paul first emphasizes the unmerited nature of his apostolic ministry (v. 8a) and does so in a manner that draws upon his comments in v. 7.⁴¹ His self-deprecating comments in v. 8a are then followed by a two-fold summary of the purpose (conveyed via the infinitives *εὐαγγελίσασθαι* and *φωτίσαι* in vv. 8b–9) of his apostolic ministry. The first purpose of Paul's ministry according to v. 8b concerns the proclamation of τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ to Gentiles.⁴² The second purpose Paul associates with his apostolic ministry in v. 9 involves the revelation (*φωτίσαι*) of God's "mystery" to all humanity and likely refers back to the "mystery" in vv. 3–6 (cf. Eph 1:9–10).⁴³ The next major step in Paul's argument is a statement concerning the ultimate purpose (*ἵνα*) of Paul's ministry (cf. v. 10).⁴⁴ According to v. 10, as Paul performs his role as apostle to the Gentiles, the multi-ethnic *ἐκκλησία* formed through the proclamation of the gospel provides concrete evidence of the realization of God's plan for cosmic unity.⁴⁵ Paul

2:1–4; 49:5–6). Paul, however, here is suggesting the OT does not directly address the reality that God's plan for salvation history is for Gentiles to have a place of equality with Jews in the Messiah (cf. Gal 3:28; Eph 2:15; Col 3:11). Cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 197–98, 203.

⁴¹ Paul's comments in v. 8 are closely linked to v. 7 through: (1) the repetition of the noun *χάρις* and the verb *δίδωμι*; and (2) the pronoun *αὐτή*.

⁴² The noun *πλοῦτος* in v. 8b conveys the notion of abundance and is used elsewhere in this letter to point to the "lavish nature of God's relationship to his people" (Eph 1:7, 18; 2:7). Cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 213. When correlated with Jesus Christ in this text, the noun *πλοῦτος* would then refer to the limitless grace (cf. Eph. 1:7; 2:7) that "belongs" to Jesus Christ and is found in union with Jesus Christ.

⁴³ Paul creates a number of intratextual allusions back to Eph 1:9–10 at this point in the digression. The primary parallels between these two texts include: (1) the noun *οἰκονομία* (1:10; 3:9); (2) the noun *μυστήριον* (1:9; 3:9); (3) the phrase *τὰ πάντα* (1:10; 3:9); (4) the verb *γνωρίζω* (1:9; 3:10); (5) language evocative of the powers (1:10; 3:10); and (6) the references to the heavenly realm (1:10; 3:10). Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 197; Best, *Ephesians*, 322; Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethne*," 105, n. 17.

⁴⁴ Cf. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 94.

⁴⁵ Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 196–97; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 459, 462. Some scholars argue the phrase "through the church" indicates God's people are involved in actively proclaiming the gospel to the powers (cf. W. Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 89–96; Barth,

then clarifies the revelation of God's "manifold wisdom" in v. 11 by suggesting it conforms (*κατά*) to the eternal plan he has orchestrated "in Christ Jesus" (cf. Eph 1:10). This portion of the digression then concludes in v. 12 with a parenthetical comment concerning the work of Christ. Paul here shifts from explaining his own personal involvement in the divine plan to highlighting the implications of Christ's sacrifice for all Christ-followers. According to v. 12, Christ's faithfulness (*διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ*) grants his followers (including Paul) "boldness and access with confidence" (cf. Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 6:19).⁴⁶

Paul's Message in Ephesians 3:13a

What then is the nature of Paul's plea in Eph 3:13a? While the emphasis in Paul's exhortation lies with the infinitive *ἐγκακεῖν*, it is necessary to account first for the grammatical ambiguity created by the absence of an explicit direct object for the finite verb *αἰτοῦμαι* and an explicit subject for the infinitive *ἐγκακεῖν*. Generally speaking, interpreters have offered four solutions to explain the syntactical imprecision in Eph 3:13a. First, some have argued Paul is asking God to help him not become discouraged.⁴⁷ Second, it has been argued that Paul is asking the Ephesians to pray on his behalf that he would not become discouraged by his imprisonment.⁴⁸ Third, M. Barth suggests Paul is here asking *God* to help the Ephesians not become discouraged by his imprisonment.⁴⁹ Fourth, and finally, the vast majority of interpreters have concluded Paul is here asking

Ephesians, 363–66). There are two significant problems with this reading of v. 10: (1) the "rulers and authorities" in v. 10 are likely evil angels (cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 216); and (2) the passive verb *γνωρισθῆ* indicates this revelation is actually happening through God himself, not his people.

⁴⁶ The objective reading of the phrase *τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ* in Eph 3:12 is admittedly the reading preferred by most commentators. See Merkle for a summary of the arguments in favor of a subjective reading of *τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ* in v. 12 (*Ephesians*, 98). While Merkle himself prefers the objective reading, he does state "[t]hrough the obj. gen. is slightly more likely, the subj. gen. cannot be ruled out" (*Ephesians*, 98). Finally, the dominance of the objective reading in v. 12 could stem from the lack of attention to the meaning of the infinitive *ἐγκακεῖν* in Eph 3:13 (see below).

⁴⁷ E.g., Sellin, *Epheser*, 270–71; Clark, "Discourse Structure," 47–48.

⁴⁸ Cf. G. Thompson, "Eph 3,13 and 2 Tim 2,10 in the Light of Col 1,24," *ExpTim* 71 (1959–60): 188.

⁴⁹ Barth, *Ephesians*, 348.

the *Ephesians* that they not become discouraged as a result of his imprisonment.⁵⁰

In general, there are sufficient grounds for following the scholarly consensus on this issue. The first and second options, in particular, are problematic because they fail to account for Paul's positive outlook on his suffering and imprisonment within the immediate context of Eph 3:13b, the broader context of Eph 3:1–12, and the wider context of the Pauline corpus (cf. Rom 8:18–39; 2 Cor 1:6; 4:1; Phil 1:20–30; Col 1:24).⁵¹ The proposals that construe Eph 3:13a as a prayer to God are, furthermore, problematic on grammatical and syntactical grounds. More specifically, if Paul's statements in v. 13 were intended to be understood as expressing the content of a prayer of any sort, a coordinating conjunction such as *καί* would likely precede the explicit introduction of a prayer at the beginning of v. 14.⁵² Additionally, if v. 13 is the apodosis of the conditional statement in v. 2, it would then be incoherent (given the content of v. 2) for the apostle to express a prayer request in v. 13.⁵³ Furthermore, if v. 13 is the apodosis of the conditional statement in v. 2, since v. 2 is explicitly addressed to the believers in Ephesus (*εἴ γε ἠκούσατε*), the direct object of the *αἰτοῦμαι* must then also be understood as the believers in Ephesus. Finally, and perhaps most decisively, the absence of an accusative personal pronoun *ὑμας* or some form of first-person pronoun attached to the infinitive *ἐγκακεῖν* in Eph 3:13a suggests the direct object of the main verb and the subject of the infinitive are identical; this then rules out the first three options. In summary, the most plausible reading of Eph 3:13a (in a general sense) is that Paul is here urging the Ephesian believers “not to lose heart” because of his “sufferings” on their behalf.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ E.g., Merkle, *Ephesians*, 98–99; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 468–69; Best, *Ephesians*, 330–31; W. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 57; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 191; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 199; S. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 113–14.

⁵¹ Within the wider context of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul's personal request to the Ephesian church in Eph 6:19–20 (*καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ . . . ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι*) may be understood as a personal acknowledgement of his own despondency as a result of his imprisonment. Such a reading of v. 20, however, would not sufficiently account for the immediate context of Eph 6:10–18, where Paul has outlined a variety of spiritual resources that enable the believer to “stand against the schemes of the Devil” (v. 11).

⁵² Larkin, *Ephesians*, 57.

⁵³ Fowl, *Ephesians*, 114.

⁵⁴ The clause *ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου* in v. 13a should likely be understood causally. Cf. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 99.

A careful analysis of the infinitive *ἐγκακεῖν* further clarifies Paul's message to the Ephesian believers in Eph 3:13a. The infinitive *ἐγκακεῖν* is a form of the Greek verb *ἐγκακέω*. Commentators generally associate the verb *ἐγκακέω* with an emotional response of something akin to discouragement. Hoehner, for example, suggests the verb *ἐγκακέω* means to “grow weary or lose heart.”⁵⁵ While the emotional response of discouragement is certainly an aspect of the verb's meaning, BDAG offers two definitions of the verb *ἐγκακέω* (“to lose one's motivation in continuing a desirable pattern of conduct” or “to be afraid in the face of a great difficulty”) and supports the former.⁵⁶ While BDAG notes “some” scholars favor the second definition, a close examination of the four other uses of the Greek verb *ἐγκακέω* in the Pauline corpus suggests the referent of this verb involves two particular components: (1) an emotional response akin to discouragement or fear; and (2) the cessation of a certain activity.⁵⁷

While not as obvious as in some other texts, the correlation between action and emotional response associated with the verb *ἐγκακέω* is nonetheless present in 2 Cor 4:1. Paul's statements in 2 Cor 4:1 play a key role in his defense of his apostolic ministry within 2 Cor 1–7. The significance of 2 Cor 4:1 within Paul's argument is particularly evident in the retrospective phrase *διὰ τοῦτο*, which likely picks up on Paul's description of authentic Christian ministry in 2 Cor 2:14–3:18.⁵⁸ This connection between 2 Cor 4:1–6 and the preceding discussion of genuine Christian ministry is particularly evident in the phrase *ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην* (v. 1). The *διακονία* Paul is likely referring to, after all, is almost certainly the new covenant ministry depicted in 2 Cor 3. Paul's statements in 2 Cor 4:1 are thus drawing a logical inference (signaled by the phrase *διὰ τοῦτο*) that is grounded in his description of new covenant ministry in 2 Cor 2:14–3:18. The logical inference that Paul is pointing the reader towards in 2 Cor 4:1 is his own personal determination to “not lose heart,” even in the face of opposition. Once again, the wider context of 2 Cor 2:14–3:18 indicates the verb *ἐγκακέω* establishes a close connection between an action (persistence in genuine Christian ministry) and an emotional state (the absence of discouragement).

Paul's use of the verb *ἐγκακέω* in 2 Cor 4:16, once again, establishes a link between action and emotion. Paul again highlights his willingness to

⁵⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 468.

⁵⁶ BDAG, *ἐγκακέω*, 272. LN provides a similar definition: “to lose one's motivation to accomplish some valid goal” (*ἐγκακέω*, 319).

⁵⁷ BDAG, *ἐγκακέω*, 272.

⁵⁸ J. Lambrecht, “Structure and Line of Thought in 2 Corinthians 2,14–4,6,” in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, BETL 112 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 261–62.

engage in bold speech in v. 13 (cf. 2 Cor 3:12) and then presents a two-fold rationale in vv. 14–15 for his courage, even in the face of difficult circumstances. Concerning Paul's use of the verb *ἐγκακέω* in 2 Cor 4:16, it is the knowledge of eschatological hope (v. 14) and the external nature (both human and divine) of his motivation in v. 15 that undergirds Paul's response of perseverance (*διὸ οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν*) in 2 Cor 4:16a.⁵⁹ Paul's logic in 2 Cor 4:16 is thus similar to his reasoning in 2 Cor 4:1. That is, according to 2 Cor 4:16, boldly persevering in ministry (action) rather than giving in to discouragement (emotional response) is possible in Christian ministry, despite the very real presence of hardship and danger.

The close correlation between emotional response and action associated with the verb *ἐγκακέω* is also clearly present in Gal 6:9.⁶⁰ Paul's statements in Gal 6:9 are somewhat loosely connected to vv. 7–8 through the coordinating conjunction *δέ*.⁶¹ More specifically, Paul seems to build upon the reminder of eschatological judgment in v. 7 and the explication of that warning in v. 8 by urging believers to persist in orienting their lives around the work of the Spirit.⁶² Since the participle *ποιῶντες* (together with the nominal phrase *τὸ ... καλὸν*) likely functions as a complementary participle that clarifies the sense of the verb *ἐγκακέω*, the link between action (the pursuit of a life centered on sacrificially serving others by the power of the Spirit; cf. Gal 5:13–14, 16, 18) and emotional response (here, the absence of enthusiasm for godly conduct) once again continues.⁶³

The final use of the verb *ἐγκακέω* within the Pauline tradition occurs in 2 Thess 3:13. Paul's statements in v. 13 are part of his paraenesis concerning how to deal with those “walking in idleness” (v. 6) in 2 Thess 3:6–15.⁶⁴ At v. 13, Paul shifts from confronting the *ἀπάκτως* in vv. 11–12 to

⁵⁹ The inferential conjunction *διὸ* states (much like in Eph 3:13a) a logical conclusion or deduction from Paul's argument in vv. 13–15.

⁶⁰ Paul's statements in Gal 6:9 form part of his overall discussion of the believer's duty to exercise their freedom in the Spirit by lovingly serving one another (Gal 5:13–6:10).

⁶¹ The conjunction *δέ* in Gal 6:9 likely signals an important development in Paul's argument within this text. See Runge on the discourse function of *δέ* (*Discourse Grammar*, 28–36).

⁶² Within the context of this letter (particularly in light of the concluding nature of Gal 6:1–10), the phrase *τὸ δὲ καλὸν ποιῶντες μὴ ἐγκακῶμεν* in v. 9 is likely a summary of all that is urged upon the Christ-follower concerning life in the Spirit in Gal 5:13–6:10.

⁶³ The participle *ἐκλυόμενοι* in v. 9 is a close synonym of the verb *ἐγκακῶμεν* and heightens Paul's stress on perseverance in the life of faith.

⁶⁴ The specific cause for idleness among the *ἀπάκτως* is a topic of much scholarly debate. Given the absence of specific information concerning their

addressing the majority of believers in the Thessalonian church that are not engaged in disruptive behavior. The participle *καλοποιῶντες* in v. 13 clarifies Paul's admonition to the faithful believers in Thessalonica and specifies the object of the verb *ἐγκακήσητε*.⁶⁵ Second Thessalonians 3:13 is then a plea to faithful Christ-followers to not allow the indolence of the idle to hamper their motivation to financially assist others (cf. 1 Thess 5:15). Paul's usage of the verb *ἐγκακέω* in 2 Thess 3:13 then once again brings together the active pursuit of a certain course of action (engage in generous giving) and an emotional response (maintain a fervent longing despite the presence of discouragement).

Returning back to Eph 3:13a, the flow of Paul's argument in vv. 2–12 suggests Paul is again bringing together the cessation of a certain activity with a negative emotional reaction. Broadly speaking, Paul focuses on two central ideas in the digression within Eph 3:2–12 ... the divine origin of his apostleship (vv. 2–7) and his responsibilities as “apostle to the Gentiles,” along with their earthly and cosmic impact (vv. 8–12).⁶⁶ Both of these claims demonstrate the authenticity of his apostleship and involvement in God's plan for cosmic unification (cf. Eph 1:10). At the same time, there are three important features within Eph 3:8–12 that should be accounted for: (1) the presence of a number of allusions to Eph 1:9–10 (see above); (2) Paul's shift in focus from himself as “apostle to the Gentiles” to the Christian community in v. 10; and (3) Paul's statement concerning the impact of Christ's faithfulness in v. 12b. Thus, while the statements in Eph 3:2–12 principally focus on Paul's role in the *anakephalaiōsis* of “all things” (cf. Eph 1:10), Paul makes a clear transition in v. 10 away from himself to the responsibility of the wider Christian community and the work of Christ.⁶⁷ Ephesians 3:10–12 thus collectively emphasizes the

identity, G. Fee's cautious conclusion concerning the cause of their behavior is worth noting: “we simply do not know; and in fact getting an answer to this question would hardly affect our understanding of the text at all” (*The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 325).

⁶⁵ The participle *καλοποιῶντες* in v. 13 carries the same sense as the combination of the nominal phrase *τὸ ... καλὸν* and the participle *ποιῶντες* in Gal 6:9. The correspondence between these two texts, however, should not be overstated. Second Thessalonians 3:6–15, after all, addresses a much more specific problem.

⁶⁶ Cf. Caragounis, *Ephesian Mystery*, 73–74; Gombis, “Ephesians 3:2–13,” 318–19; Sherwood, “Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*,” 104–5.

⁶⁷ Paul's shift to the first-person plural verb *ἔχομεν* in Eph 3:12 is worth noting in that it highlights the implications of the gospel (cf. Eph 2:18) for both him (even in the midst of suffering) and the reader. The sudden shift to a first-person plural verb in v. 12 highlights for the reader the reality that Paul's imprisonment

Church's and Christ's roles in the *anakephalaiōsis* of Eph 1:10. Additionally, Eph 3:12 provides the reader with a subtle reminder of Christ's divinely-ordained suffering and places this entire discussion of Christian ministry within the framework of cruciformity. The digression's climax in Eph 3:13a then clarifies the purpose of Paul's transition at v. 10. More specifically, the exhortation in Eph 3:13a urges the reader to not allow Paul's own cruciform suffering to undermine their willingness to participate (cruciformly) in God's mission.

Reading the digression in Eph 3:2–13 with Paul's description of the identity and mission of the Church in Eph 1:23, clarifies the overall logic of this text. Paul's statements in vv. 2–12 are intended to counter any potential negative response to his self-description as "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (v. 1) that might lead a Christ-follower to ignore the portrait of the Church in Eph 1:23. By establishing the divine origin of his apostleship (vv. 2–7), as well as the nature and consequences of his ministry, Paul thus attributes his imprisonment to the sovereign will and plan of God (cf. Phil 1:16).⁶⁸ The exhortation in Eph 3:13a then builds upon the argument within vv. 2–12 by encouraging Christ-followers to respond to any fear that may result from the reference to Paul's suffering in v. 1 by considering the argument within vv. 2–12.

The Function of Paul's Plea for Perseverance within the Letter

An important aspect of Paul's discussion of the Church's mission in Ephesians is the opposition it will experience as it faithfully pursues its calling as Christ's "body" and "fullness" (cf. Eph 1:10, 20–22; 3:1, 10; 4:14; 6:10–20).⁶⁹ These references to hostility throughout the letter are part of the foundational motivation behind Paul's plea "to not lose heart" in Eph 3:13a. Admittedly, other Pauline letters (particularly 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and 2 Timothy) place much greater emphasis on suffering and encouraging Christ-followers to accept suffering for the sake of the gospel. Nonetheless, Paul's own experience in the city of Ephesus is indicative of the latent hostility that Christ-followers could experience in

does not negatively affect his status as a beneficiary of Christ's reconciling work. In context, Eph 3:12 therefore presents an implied encouragement to embrace hostility from the unbelieving world.

⁶⁸ Cf. Baugh, *Ephesians*, 212; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 114.

⁶⁹ Paul's argument in this letter then grounds opposition to him and the Christian community in the cosmic nature of the *anakephalaiōsis* in Eph 1:10 and the opposition Christ himself experienced at the hands of the powers (implicit in Eph 1:20–22).

first century Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:22–41).⁷⁰

Correlating Eph 3:2–13 with Paul's discussion of the Church's mission throughout this letter also clarifies the relationship between this digression and the preceding textual unit (Eph 2:11–22). While some scholars argue the introductory phrase *τούτου χάριν* in Eph 3:1 builds upon Eph 2:11–22, various literary considerations suggest Paul's point of departure at Eph 3:1 is particularly his description of the Church as an expanding "temple" in Eph 2:19–22.⁷¹ The missional significance of God's dwelling place (the central notion underlying temples in the biblical framework) within the story of Scripture likely forms the impetus for the missionally motivated digression in Eph 3:2–13 and Paul's prayer in Eph 3:1, 14–19.⁷² Paul's train of thought in Eph 2:19–3:19 thus proceeds in the following manner:

- a missional depiction of the Church as a burgeoning "temple" (Eph 2:19–22);
- an introduction to a prayer (Eph 3:1);
- a validation of the divine origin of his suffering (vv. 2–12) and an exhortation towards missional living (v. 13) that is motivated by the reference to suffering in v. 1 (Eph 3:2–13);
- a resumption of the prayer initiated in v. 1 (Eph 3:14–19).⁷³

Paul's plea to be the "fullness of Christ" in the face of opposition particularly lays a foundation for Eph 4:11–16 and Eph 6:10–20. Both of these texts are extended descriptions of how the Church is to live out its role as Christ's "body" and "fullness" (cf. Eph 1:23). Importantly, Paul's description of the Church's ministry in Eph 4:11–16 is grounded in and

⁷⁰ See P. Trebilco for a helpful discussion of the historical reliability of Luke's account of Paul's time in Ephesus (*The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, WUNT 66 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 104–7).

⁷¹ Cf. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 86; Larkin, *Ephesians*, 48; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 191; Sellin, *Epheser*, 248; Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethne*," 98. The dynamic nature of the "temple" in Eph 2:19–22 is principally evident in v. 21.

⁷² See G. Beale for further discussion of the missional nature of the temple ("Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *JETS* 48 [2005]: esp. 29–31).

⁷³ On the literary connection between Eph 2:19–22 and Eph 3:14–19, see R. L. Foster, "'A Temple in the Lord Filled to the Fullness of God': Context and Intertextuality (Eph 3:19)," *NovT* 49 (2007): 86–88; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 167.

flows directly out of his description of Christ's own ministry (via incarnation, exaltation, and gift-giving) in Eph 4:7–10.⁷⁴ Additionally, the presence of the phrase *ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα* in Eph 4:10 closely associates these two related texts with the *anakephalaiōsis* of Eph 1:10 and the description of the Church in Eph 1:23. These observations indicate Paul's description of the efforts of the gifted leaders in v. 11 and the *ἀγίων* of v. 12 are to be understood as part of God's plan for cosmic unification.⁷⁵ The ministerial goals of unity and growth towards maturity in v. 13 then comprise key features of the divine plan. Paul's references to false-teaching in Eph 4:14 ("every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes"), generally speaking, depict heterodoxy as a threat and impediment to the objectives outlined in v. 13.⁷⁶ While there are no direct references to false-teachers in the letter, the presence of the noun *μεθοδεία* in both v. 14 and Eph 6:11 does suggest Paul envisions "the powers of darkness as actively inspiring various forms of dangerous teaching (Gal 4:8–10; 2 Cor 11:13–15; Col 2:8)."⁷⁷ Paul thus pictures heresy as part of the opposition to the divine plan for cosmic unity in Christ put forward by the powers.

Two related preliminary issues concerning Eph 6:10–20 require attention before examining the relationship between Eph 3:2–13 and Eph 6:10–20. First, scholars often view Paul's statements in Eph 6:10–20 as a concluding summary to the body of this letter.⁷⁸ The patent emphasis Paul places on the Church's conflict with the powers then confirms the prominence of this theme within the letter. Second, while spiritual warfare is

⁷⁴ The repetition of the verb *δίδωμι* in Eph 4:7, 8, 11 binds Eph 4:7–10 to Eph 4:11–16. Cf. Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 173–74; Best, *Ephesians*, 375.

⁷⁵ The lexical links between Eph 2:19–22 and Eph 4:11–16 (*οἰκοδομή*, Eph 2:21//*οἰκοδομήν*, Eph 4:12, 16; *αὔξει*, in Eph 2:21//*αὐξήσωμεν*, Eph 4:15; *συναρμολογουμένη*, Eph 2:21//*συναρμολογούμενον*, Eph 4:16) also suggest the latter text explains the manner in which the Christian community's growth occurs. Cf. Foster, "Temple," 86–88, 95; M. Sterling, "Transformed Walking and Missional Temple Building: Discipleship in Ephesians," *Presb* 45 (2019): 90–91.

⁷⁶ At the same time, this *ἵνα* clause in v. 14 also likely modifies the verb *ἔδωκεν* in v. 11 and expresses a negative purpose underlying the giving of the gifted leaders in v. 11 (Merkle, *Ephesians*, 131; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 560).

⁷⁷ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 268. Cf. Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 190.

⁷⁸ A. Lincoln's analysis of this text is particularly helpful in this regard, though his suggestion that Paul constructs this text as a *peroratio* modelled after speeches delivered by military generals is problematic ("Stand, Therefore . . .": Ephesians 6:10–20 as a Peroratio," *BibInt* 3 [1995]: 102–9). Cf. L. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 407–8; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 411–14.

generally conceived of as a solo affair involving a single believer's confrontation with malevolent cosmic forces, this is not an entirely accurate way of conceiving Paul's depiction of the Church's conflict with the powers in *this* text. This incomplete account of spiritual warfare in Eph 6:10–20 fails to account for this text's rhetorical function as a summary of the entire letter, particularly its new creation theme and discussion of the Church's mission.⁷⁹ Ultimately, Eph 6:10–20 serves as an explanation (along with Eph 4:11–16) of how Christ's *σῶμα* is to execute its task of serving as his *πλήρωμα* (cf. Eph 1:23).⁸⁰

Four textual features within Eph 6:10–20 clarify how this text builds upon Eph 3:2–13. First, Paul's exhortation to "be strong in the Lord" within the midst of this cosmic struggle (v. 10) is conceptually similar to Paul's plea "to not lose heart" in Eph 3:13 in that both are related to his concern for faithful service in God's plan (even in the midst of external pressure) within this letter.⁸¹ Second, given the interplay within the Bible's story between the forces of cosmic evil and human governments, it is no mere coincidence that Paul refers to the powers in Eph 3:10.⁸² It is certainly within the realm of possibility that Paul would assign some measure of responsibility to the powers for his imprisonment. Third, the frequent connection Paul draws between donning the divine armor and the ability to "stand" and "withstand" in this passage (vv. 11, 13, 14) is also pertinent to this discussion since the verbs *ἵστημι* and *ἀνθίστημι* in this text point to the reality of cosmic opposition. Fourth, as a summary of the letter, one of the contributions of Eph 6:10–20 then is that it builds upon the rather general admonition to "not lose heart" in Eph 3:13 by pointing to the availability of divine resources (the "whole armor of God") that will enable God's people to participate in his plan for cosmic unification (cf. Eph 1:10, 23).

In summary, Paul's plea for perseverance in faithful ministry within Eph 3:13 anticipates the references to opposition within Eph 4:11–16 and Eph 6:10–20. The description of the Church in Eph 1:23 thus plays a critical role in the rhetorical development of this letter. Yet, before Paul explains how the Church is to serve as Christ's *σῶμα* and *πλήρωμα*, his own experience with opposition from the powers leads him to present a

⁷⁹ M. Owens, "Spiritual Warfare and the Church's Mission according to Ephesians 6:10–17," *TynB* 67 (2016): 87–88. Cf. Cohick, *Ephesians*, 408–9.

⁸⁰ Owens, "Spiritual Warfare," 101–3.

⁸¹ The passive imperative *ἐνδυναμοῦσθε* in Eph 6:10 likely has an active sense, though the passive voice is intended to communicate the reality that this empowerment comes from an external source (cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 417; Merkle, *Ephesians*, 210).

⁸² Cf. Deut 32:8–9; Ps 82:1–8; Dan 10:12–14, 20–21; 12:1; 1 Cor 2:6–8; 8:5.

theological account of his apostolic ministry in Eph 3:2–12 and, on the basis of those statements, exhort Christ-followers to resist the temptation to yield to external opposition.

Conclusion

The digression in Eph 3:2–13 weds together two central issues within this rich letter. First, Paul’s discussion of the Church’s mission in Eph 1:23 and Eph 2:19–22. Second, Paul’s brief references to opposition within two key texts that provide more extensive descriptions of the Church’s mission (cf. Eph 4:11–16; 6:10–17). Rather than *primarily* functioning as a defense of Paul’s apostleship, as some claim, Paul’s statements in Eph 3:2–12 closely correlate his ministry with divine agency, describe his ministry as the “apostle to the Gentiles,” and explicate the far-reaching consequences of his ministry. Through these statements in Eph 3:2–12, the apostle assuages any concern the reader might have about his imprisonment by establishing God’s sovereignty over his ministry and current situation. Paul then points the reader to the logical conclusion of his digression by imploring the reader to persist in faithful Christian service (Eph 3:13a), despite his own present hardship. The exhortation in Eph 3:13a then prepares the reader to embrace “the work of ministry” and “be strong in the Lord,” even in the face of opposition (cf. Eph 4:12, 14; 6:10–17).