

## The Mystery Made Known

**Text:** Ephesians 3:1-13

### Introduction:

1. In chapter 2:11-22, Paul has explained how God has united Jew and Gentile in one body through Christ's work on the cross. In this section, Paul will further elaborate on this theme.
2. The following summary by Harold Hoehner is helpful: "In 2:11-22 Paul has explained the union of Jewish and Gentile believers into one new person in Christ. He now proceeds to offer a prayer on behalf of these believers. However, just as he begins, he stops abruptly in the middle of his sentence (at the end of 3:1) and digresses to the subject of the mystery of Christ. He describes the mystery and his responsibility to make it known. After this digression he resumes his prayer beginning in verse 14...With this digression he intended to enhance his previous comments." Kenneth Wuest adds, "The purpose of the digression was to acquaint the Gentiles with their call and Paul's knowledge of the mystery of Jew and Gentile in one body."
3. We will divide this passage into 3 parts for our study.

### I. THE MYSTERY PAUL WAS ELECTED TO PROCLAIM (VS. 1-6)

Paul was chosen by God to be a custodian of a special revelation. Observe 3 important points about this mystery.

#### A. The Steward of the Mystery (Vs. 1-4)

1. The Incarceration of Paul (Vs. 1)
  - a. "For this cause" = means "for this reason" and refers back to the preceding paragraph. In light of who the Gentiles were now in Christ, Paul was moved to pray for them that they might progress in their spiritual understanding of God's love. But before he gets to that, he first digresses into giving further details of the great theme of the unity between Jew and Gentile.
  - b. "I Paul the prisoner" = a personal note from Paul to the Ephesians.
  - c. "of Jesus Christ" = Paul viewed his present trial through a spiritual lens. He didn't view himself as Caesar's prisoner or Rome's prisoner but the prisoner of Christ. He was there by Divine appointment!
  - d. "for you Gentiles" = Paul was imprisoned because of his ministry to the Gentiles. Take the Gentiles out of the equation and most of Paul's sufferings from the Jews would have ceased. See Acts 22:21-22 & 24:27. Paul repeatedly referred to himself as the "apostle to the Gentiles" (See Rom. 11:13; 15:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:7; Eph. 3:8).
2. The Dispensation given to Paul (Vs. 2)
  - a. "If ye have heard" = Paul is going to remind them of truths he had shared with them when he was ministering at Ephesus. The word 'if' here is used in the sense of "since", "surely", "assuming that" (if, indeed, as I may assume).

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- b. 'dispensation' = means a stewardship or administration. Our word 'economy' comes from this word. It means "the management of a household, or of household affairs, the management, oversight, administration of others property, the office of a manager, overseer, stewardship." (Wuest) We refer to "government administrations" which gives us a sense for the meaning of the word.
  - c. "of the grace of God" = means this administration committed to Paul was concerning the grace of God.
  - d. "which is given me to you-ward" = the Gentiles were the focus of this responsibility given to Paul.
3. The Revelation given to Paul (Vs. 3-4)
- a. 'revelation' = means an unveiling, an uncovering, a laying bare.
  - b. 'mystery' = defined specifically in Vs. 4 as "the mystery of Christ." A mystery is a "sacred secret" that was hidden to past generations but now revealed in the New Testament. There are a number of such mystery doctrines in the N.T. such as the rapture (1 Cor. 15:51), the indwelling of Christ (Col. 1:27), the present blindness of Israel (Rom. 11:25), the mystery of His will (Eph. 1:9), the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16) etc...
  - c. "as I wrote afore in few words" = a brief parenthesis. Could refer to 1:9 but more probable that it refers to what Paul has just outlined on this theme in the previous chapter (2:11-22).
  - d. "whereby, when ye read" = "Paul wants the Ephesians to read the previous section so that they can perceive or understand his insight." (Hoehner)

### **B. The Season of the Mystery (Vs. 5)**

- 1. The Time it was not made known (Vs. 5a)
  - a. "in other ages" = previous generations
  - b. "the sons of men" = men in general were not aware of this truth which was hidden from them.
- 2. The Time it was made known (Vs. 5b)
  - a. "now revealed" = this Divine truth now made known. Note that the truth was not created at this time. It existed prior to this in the eternal heart of God but this was now God's chosen time to reveal it.
  - b. "his holy apostles and prophets" = this mystery given to the N.T. Apostles and prophets. Note that Paul was not the sole recipient of this truth. He had a special responsibility to propagate it and pen it down but it was revealed to others at this time also.
  - c. "by the Spirit" = the revelation was given by the Holy Spirit. Notice the Trinity again. The Father reveals the mystery of Christ through the Spirit.
- 3. In summary, the definition of a mystery therefore is:
  - a. A New Testament mystery is not something hidden, but rather something revealed.
  - b. A mystery is revelation, not known to the Old Testament saints.
  - c. A mystery is new revelation revealed to the N.T. apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

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4. Illustration: The recent release of the Palace Letters (between Sir John Kerr and the Queen's secretary) on July 14, 2020.

### C. The Specifics of the Mystery (Vs. 6)

This verse gives the content/details of the "mystery of Christ". It concerned the fact that the Gentiles would be made:

1. Fellow heirs (Vs. 6a) – They would share in the same inheritance as the saved Jews.
2. Fellow members (Vs. 6b) – They would be a part of the same spiritual body as the saved Jews (the church).
3. Fellow partakers (Vs. 6c) – They would share promises of God concerning salvation with the Jews. While we have been made to share in the spiritual riches of Israel, the church does not replace Israel (see Romans 11).
4. Note: All these blessings were made possible "in Christ by the gospel."

## II. THE MINISTRY PAUL WAS EMPOWERED TO PERFORM (VS. 7-8A)

### A. The Might that made Paul Usable (Vs. 7)

1. Divinely Appointed (Vs. 7a)
  - a. 'whereof' = links to the word 'Gospel' in the previous verse. Paul was made a minister of the Gospel.
  - b. "made a minister" = Paul was not a self-made man. God had done the work to make him a minister of the Gospel. The word 'minister' simply means servant. The word 'deacon' comes from the same word.
2. Divinely Equipped (Vs. 7b)
  - a. "the gift of the grace of God" = Paul was given this high and holy privilege as an act of God's grace. Observe that in Vs. 2, "the administration of grace was given to Paul and in the present verse the ability to administer that grace was given. The "gift of grace" in this context refers to God's enabling power to minister." (Hoehner) The only way we can serve is by the grace of God. Without that grace, we could never do anything for Him. See 2 Cor. 9:8.
  - b. "by the effectual working of his power" = this grace was imparted to Paul by the power of God operating in his life.
    - i. "effectual working" = comes from the Greek word 'energeia' which is where our word 'energy' comes from. It refers to God's power in action. The English word 'effectual' means "producing the desired or intended effect" (Webster). It means effective. The same word is translated as follows elsewhere:
      - Eph. 1:19 "And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the **working** (energeia) of his mighty power,"
      - Col. 1:29 "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his **working** (energeia), which worketh in me mightily."

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- Col. 2:12 “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the **operation** (energeia) of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”
- ii. “his power” = (dunamis) refers to God’s strength and ability. So, it (working) is the activity of power produced by God’s ability. (Hoehner) God gives power to perform the responsibilities He gives us.

### **B. The Mindset that made Paul Usable (Vs. 8a)**

1. Paul couldn’t get over the fact God had saved him, let alone make him a minister of the gospel. Paul had a great sense of his own insignificance, of his smallness. He refers to himself as “less than the least of all saints”. This was not fake pride on Paul’s part. He honestly felt this way. Elsewhere Paul called himself the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15) and the “least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9).
2. There is a definite link between Paul’s humble attitude and his usefulness for the Lord. Pride stops up the wellsprings of God’s power in our lives. God hates pride (Prov. 6:17) and resists the proud (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).
3. Beware of pride in its many forms such as:
  1. Intellectual Pride – pride over our accumulation of knowledge, secular or spiritual. E.g., I have a degree!
  2. Spiritual Pride – pride that comes wrapped in a thin veneer of spirituality. E.g., one’s knowledge of the Scriptures, position in the church etc... Wiersbe writes, “Understanding the deep truths of God’s Word does not give a man a big head; it gives him a broken and contrite heart.” Notice how the revelation of this knowledge humbled Paul rather than puffing him up. How opposite we tend to be when having attained a little knowledge, we all of a sudden feel ourselves superior to others. The more we learn of God’s plan of salvation, the more humble we should become.
  3. National Pride – pride over one’s lineage, language, culture or heritage. E.g., The typical American “We are the greatest” talk or the Australian style of chipping everyone down to size and despising authority or the English mentality of always sitting on the fence with an unwillingness to take a stand or the African “big man” mentality or the Asian outward respect for authority but subtle behind the scenes rebellion and autonomy.
  4. Personal pride – pride over one’s career, gifts and achievements; a prideful approach to interpersonal conflicts (e.g., not being willing to admit you are wrong, a contentious spirit); pride in dealing with authorities in my life (e.g., parent, pastor, employer, government official).

## **III. THE MESSAGE PAUL WAS ENTRUSTED TO PREACH (VS. 8C-13)**

### **A. The Particulars of the Message (Vs. 8c-9)**

Paul was commissioned to preach:

1. The Marvels of Christ (Vs. 8c)

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- a. 'preach' = comes from the Greek word 'euaggelizo' meaning "to proclaim, announce good news".
  - b. 'unsearchable' = the word literally means "that which cannot be traced out." The same word is translated "past finding out" in Romans 11:33 – "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways **past finding out!**" The riches of Christ are **unfathomable** – you cannot plum their depths; they are **untraceable** – you cannot discover their end; they are **unlimited** – you cannot exhaust them, they are infinite and everlasting; they are **unsearchable** – you cannot completely comprehend them, they are beyond the reach of our finite, human minds. "I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how he could love me a sinner condemned unclean."
2. The Mystery of Christ (Vs. 9)
- a. "to make see" = to bring to light, illuminate, enlighten.
  - b. 'fellowship' = another aspect to this mystery. Because we have been united in one body through salvation, we enter into fellowship not only with God but with one another.
  - c. "which from the beginning of the world" = another reference to the time frame. This wondrous truth was hidden in God from the beginning of creation, reiterating the fact that it was unknown to men until this point.
  - d. "created all things by Jesus Christ" = reference to Christ as the Creator of all things. Christ cannot be created as He is the Creator!

### B. The Purpose of the Message (Vs. 10-11)

1. The Students of God's Wisdom (Vs. 10a)
  - a. "the principalities and powers" = the angelic beings, both good and evil. The unseen hosts of glorious beings in Heaven, as well as the vast armies of fallen spirits dominated by Satan, are learning the many-sided wisdom of God
  - b. Evil angels (fallen angels) learn of God's wisdom displayed in the church. The church reminds them of the power of the cross and of their defeat. No wonder Satan hates the church of Christ with such a passion!
  - c. Elect angels learn of God's wisdom displayed in the church. To learn more of the wisdom of the God they love and serve faithfully in heaven, they look at the church. The godly angels find the study of God's salvation a fascinating and intriguing exercise – "...which things the angels desire to look into." (1 Peter 1:12)
  - d. Wuest: "The church thus becomes the university for angels, and each saint a professor. Only in the church can the angels come to an adequate comprehension of the grace of God."
2. The School of God's Wisdom (Vs. 10b)
  - a. "by the church" = The wisdom of God is revealed through the church.

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- b. “manifold wisdom of God” = the word ‘manifold’ means many colored, many sided, multifaceted. It means “having numerous different parts elements or features.” The word was used in classical Greek to describe embroidery or flowers of many colors. The same word is used in 1 Peter 4:10 to describe the “manifold grace of God.”
3. The Source of God’s Wisdom (Vs. 11)
  - a. “the eternal purpose” = it was God’s eternal purpose to reveal His wisdom through the church. The church was not an afterthought to God.
  - b. “which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” = the Father purposed this in His Son. Note that Christ’s full title is used:
    - i. Christ = His title. He is the Messiah.
    - ii. Jesus = His name. He is the Saviour.
    - iii. Lord = His Lordship. He is Lord and Master.

### C. The Privilege in the Message (Vs. 12)

In Christ we now have:

1. Freedom of Address – ‘boldness’ (Vs. 12a). The word ‘boldness’ has the idea of freedom, confidence, speaking freely. The basic idea is freedom to speak without restraints. The phrase “we have” is in the present tense.
  - a. Hebrews 4:14-16 “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. **Let us therefore come boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”
  - b. Hebrews 10:19-22 “Having therefore, brethren, **boldness** to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...”
2. Freedom of Approach – ‘access’ (Vs. 12b). The word means freedom of approach.
  - a. Rom. 5:2 “By whom also we have **access** by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”
  - b. Eph. 2:18 “For through him we both have **access** by one Spirit unto the Father.”
  - c. The Apostle adds the words “with confidence” to further strengthen the words of assurance he has just given. The word ‘confidence’ means “fully persuaded” and refers to “a settled state of utter confidence.”

### D. The Personal in the Message (Vs. 13)

Essentially Paul says:

1. Please don’t be discouraged (Vs. 13a). The word ‘faint’ has the sense of “to lose courage, become faint of heart.”
2. Please be encouraged (Vs. 13b). Paul was concerned that the believers discern God’s design and purpose behind his sufferings.

**Conclusion:** Have you become a part of the body of Christ by faith? What is your attitude to the church? How much does it mean to you? Is it a priority to you?