

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 3:1-13, *THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH*

- A. A prayer interrupted by Paul (1), *For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—*
1. Paul began a prayer for his readers but interrupted it until verse 14.
 - a. He had more to tell them about the church.
 - b. He stopped to explain a mystery and his responsibility to proclaim it.
 2. *For this reason* points back to Ephesians 2:11-22.
 - a. He is referring to the blessings possessed by Jewish and Gentile believers.
 - b. He would continue the prayer in verses 14-21, praying that his readers would comprehend God's love for them.
 3. Paul stated that he was a prisoner on behalf of Gentiles.
 - a. At the time of the writing of this letter, Paul was under house arrest in Rome.
 - b. His proclamation of the Gospel as an apostle to Gentiles enraged Jews and led to his arrest, 2 Timothy 1:11-12, *for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.*
 - c. John Stott, *He not only preached his vision of the new and undivided humanity and wrote about it; he was at that moment suffering for the very truths he was expounding.*
- B. A mystery was made known to Paul (2-6)
1. He assumed they had heard of the responsibility given him by God (2), *assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,*
 - a. Paul was certain the Ephesians had heard of his ministry.
 - 1) *assuming* may be translated *if indeed* or *surely*.
 - 2) It is a conditional sentence which ends with verse 13 where Paul asked them not to be discouraged over his imprisonment in Rome.
 - b. Paul was given the stewardship of God's grace.
 - 1) *Stewardship* means the management of someone else's business.
 - a) It may mean *dispensation* or a plan for a specific time.
 - b) Here, it is the dispensation of God's grace, God's plan for bringing salvation to mankind withing the course of history.
 - 1] Warren Wiersbe, *God's principles do not change, but His methods of dealing with mankind do change over the course of history.*
 - 2] St. Augustine, *Distinguish the ages and the Scriptures harmonize.*
 - 2) Paul's responsibility was this stewardship of grace as apostle to the Gentiles.
 - a) Galatians 2:7, *On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised*
 - b) In this verse, Paul speaks of the revelation given him by God and in verse 7, he speaks of the commission to proclaim that revelation.
 - 3) The importance of perspective, William Barclay, *There is a famous story of the days when Sir Christopher Wren was building St Paul's Cathedral. On one occasion, he was making a tour of the work in progress. He came to a man at work and asked him: 'What are you doing?' The man said: 'I am cutting this stone to a certain size and shape.' He came to a second man and asked him what he was doing. The man said: 'I am earning a living at my work.' He came to a third man at work and asked him what he was doing. The man paused for a moment, straightened himself and answered: 'I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build St Paul's Cathedral.'*

2. He told them how the mystery was revealed (3-5), *how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*
 - a. Paul called the content of his stewardship a *mystery*.
 - 1) A *mystery* in the Bible is *revelation not previously given*.
 - 2) John Stott, *...a truth hitherto hidden from human knowledge or understanding but now disclosed by the revelation of God.*
 - 3) He clearly defined this mystery as we will see in Ephesians 3:6.
 - 4) The Ephesians could understand the mystery by reading what Paul had written in Ephesians 2:14-18.
 - b. This mystery had not been made known until this generation.
 - 1) Colossians 1:24b-26, *...the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.*
 - 2) Acts 26:15-18, *And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*
3. He defined the mystery to the Ephesian Christians (6), *This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*
 - a. Contents of the mystery
 - 1) Gentiles and Jews are fellow heirs of God's riches that he presently bestows on believers.
 - a) Galatians 3:29, *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*
 - b) Galatians 4:7, *So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*
 - 2) Gentiles and Jews are fellow members of the body of Christ, the church, Colossians 1:18, *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*
 - 3) Gentiles and Jews are fellow recipients of the promises concerning Jesus Christ in the Gospel.
 - a) John 3:16, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*
 - b) 2 Timothy 1:1, *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,*
 - c) Robert Wilkin, *...God gives many promises to those who believe in Jesus: eternal life that can never be lost, Jesus' soon return for His own, Jesus' establishing His righteous kingdom, the provision of glorified bodies for all church age believers, the reception of the Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, and many others. The good news that Christ died and rose again makes all these promises certain for the believer.*
 - 4) The mystery is realized in the Gospel.
 - a) Definition of the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*
 - b) Reception of the Gospel is belief which is placing trust in Christ alone Who is Savior and Lord.
 - c) The Gospel gives access to the mystery, the church.
 - b. The mystery is not that Gentiles would be saved which was revealed in the Old Testament.
 - 1) Genesis 12:3, *I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*
 - 2) The mystery is that God has joined Jews and Gentiles as equals in one body, 1 Corinthians 12:13, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

- c. Characteristics defined as miracles that distinguish the church from Israel.
 - 1) Jewish and Gentile believers are united into one body, the church, Ephesians 3:1-12.
 - 2) Christ indwells every believer, Colossians 1:27, *To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*
 - 3) The church is the bride of Christ, Ephesians 5:22-32.
 - 4) The Rapture is called a mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.
- C. The ministry of the mystery was entrusted to Paul by God (7-12)
 1. God chose Paul to be a minister of the Gospel (7-8a), ***Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given,***
 - a. Paul was made a minister of the Gospel by God.
 - 1) It was made known to Paul by revelation, Ephesians 3:3, *how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.*
 - 2) God's purpose for Paul was to be a servant and witness with an emphasis on proclamation, Acts 26:16, *But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,*
 - 3) This responsibility given to Paul was a *gift of God's grace.*
 - a) He was chosen by God based on grace, unmerited favor.
 - b) Paul's choosing had nothing to do with his abilities or worthiness but God's grace.
 - b. This responsibility included *the working of His power.*
 - 1) Paul was assigned the task by God and was given the power from God necessary to perform the task.
 - 2) Colossians 1:29, *For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*
 - c. Paul reiterated that his ministry was not based on his ability but on God's grace.
 - 1) He considered himself the least of all *saints* (believers), 1 Timothy 1:15-16, *The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*
 - 2) Harold Hoehner, *This denotes Paul's deep humility in view of God's incomparably generous grace.*
 2. Paul was tasked with two important responsibilities (8b-9)
 - a. He was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (8b), ***to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,***
 - 1) Paul's primary responsibility was to preach the Gospel to Gentiles.
 - a) Acts 9:15, *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."*
 - b) John Stott, *For once he had received his special revelation from God, he knew that he was under obligation to make known to others what had been made known to him.*
 - c) The Gospel is too good to keep to ourselves. It was revealed to be proclaimed.
 - 2) He described the Gospel as *the unsearchable riches of Christ.*
 - a) *Unsearchable*
 - 1] It is only used here and in Romans 11:33, *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable (impossible to understand) his ways!*
 - 2] It means *impossible to understand on the basis of careful examination or investigation.*
 - 3] It is tied to attempting to understand God's creative power in Job 5:8-11, *As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number: he gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields; he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.*
 - 4] Translators have searched for English words equivalent to *unsearchable* which include *inexplorable, untraceable, unfathomable, inexhaustible, illimitable, inscrutable and incalculable.*
 - b) *Riches*
 - 1] Ephesians 1:7, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,*
 - 2] John Stott on *riches*, *They include resurrection from the death of sin, victorious enthronement with Christ in the heavenlies, reconciliation with God, incorporation with Jewish believers in his new society, the end of hostility and the beginning of peace, access to the Father through Christ and by the Spirit, membership of his kingdom and household, being an integral part of his dwelling place among men, and all this only a foretaste of yet more riches to come, namely the riches of the glory of the inheritance which God will give to all his people on the last day.*

- c) Those who respond to the Gospel and place faith in Christ alone access His unsearchable riches.
 - 1] Robert Wilkin, *The riches here are not merely of the promise of life, but of Christ Himself. He is God, Savior, Redeemer, Sustainer, Creator, Provider, Protector, the Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, the Prince of Peace, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Firstborn of all creation...*
 - 2] John Stott, *...Christ never impoverishes those who put their trust in him, but always immeasurably enriches them.*

- b. He was to make known to everyone the mystery of the church (9), **and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,**
 - 1) Paul had just defined the mystery in verse 6, *This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*
 - 2) It was hidden by God for ages or earlier dispensations, 1 Corinthians 2:7, *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*
 - 3) This plan is integral to all God did and will ever do because He created all things.
 - 4) It is God's means of *bringing light* to mankind.
 - a) Ephesians 3:5, *which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*
 - b) The Gospel is the message for everyone, Jews and Gentiles.
 - c) John Stott, *Our responsibility is to be faithful in spreading the gospel, since this is the means which God has ordained by which to bring light to those in darkness.*

- 3. A purpose of proclaiming the Gospel was to make heavenly spiritual beings aware of the mystery of the church and the impact Jesus Christ has on believers (10-12)
 - a. A purpose of Paul's ministry was to instruct unfallen angels concerning God's great wisdom (10), **so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**
 - 1) The church is part of the manifold wisdom of God.
 - a) *manifold*
 - 1] It means *many and diverse, many-sided.*
 - 2] The wisdom of God is in many different forms, note 1 Peter 4:10, *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:*
 - 3] The wisdom of God is like a diamond with many facets, one being the church.
 - b) The church is composed of Jews and Gentiles reconciled into one body.
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *God's manifold wisdom is apparent in the church's manifold construction.*
 - 2] John Stott, *The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colorful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique. It is God's new society. And the many-colored fellowship of the church is a reflection of the many-colored wisdom of God.*
 - 2) Observers of God's manifold wisdom are the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
 - a) These *rulers and authorities in heavenly places* refers to angels.
 - 1] Unfallen angels, note 1 Peter 1:12, *It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.*
 - 2] Fallen angels, as well, note Ephesians 6:12, *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*
 - b) Angels are not omniscient and did not know God's master plan for the church.
 - 1] They learned of God's manifold wisdom as they saw the church come into being and grow.
 - 2] John Stott, *They watch fascinated as they see Gentiles and Jews being incorporated into the new society as equals.*

- 3] Warren Wiersbe, *What are the evil angels learning from God's "mystery"?* That their leader, Satan, does not have any wisdom! Satan knows the Bible, and he understood from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Saviour would come, when He would come, how He would come, and where He would come. Satan also understood why He would come, as far as redemption is concerned. But nowhere in the Old Testament would Satan find any prophecies concerning the church, "the mystery" of Jews and Gentiles united in one body! Satan could see unbelieving Jews rejecting their Messiah, and he could see Gentiles trusting the Messiah, but he could not see both believing Jews and Gentiles united in one body, seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and completely victorious over Satan!
- b. The means of instruction is the revelation of the mystery of the church (11), ***This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,***
- 1) God's eternal purpose was to make known His wisdom through the church.
 - a) The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus was not an afterthought. It was God's eternal purpose.
 - b) John Calvin, *How carefully does he guard against the objection, that the purpose of God has been changed! A third time, he repeats that the decree was eternal and unchangeable, but must be carried into effect by Christ Jesus our Lord, because in him it was made.*
 - 2) *Realized* reveals the cause by which something was attained.
 - 3) Here, the means by which God's manifold wisdom concerning the church was made known, was through the earthly ministry of Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - a) The Jews' rejection of their Messiah resulted in the postponement of the Messianic Kingdom and the beginning of the church.
 - b) Max Anders, *In the cross of Christ, God's eternal plan of salvation has been realized. The church lets all the world see that plan accomplished and in action.*
- c. A result of the work of Jesus Christ is that believers have direct access to God (12), ***in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.***
- 1) Christians have access to God through the work of Jesus Christ alone.
 - a) Ephesians 2:18, *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*
 - b) Romans 5:2, *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
 - 2) A Christian may approach God with boldness and confidence because of faith in Christ alone.
 - a) Hebrews 10:19, *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,*
 - b) Leon Morris, *Forgiven sinners do not come to God hesitantly, wondering about their likely reception. They rest not on their own achievement but on what Christ has done for them, and for that reason they come full of confidence.*
 - c) Charles Hodge, *Even the vilest may, in Christ, approach the infinitely holy, who is a consuming fire, with fearlessness. Nothing short of an infinite Saviour could effect such a redemption.*
 - d) John Calvin, *Faith produces confidence, which again, in its turn, produces boldness. There are three stages in our progress. First, we believe the promises of God; next, by relying on them, we obtain that confidence, which is accompanied by holiness and peace of mind; and, last of all, comes boldness, which enables us to banish fear, and to come with firmness and steadiness into the presence of God.*
- D. A request from Paul that they not be discouraged by his suffering (13), ***So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.***
1. Paul encouraged the Ephesians not to be discouraged by Paul's suffering for the cause of Christ.
 - a. He was called to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles.
 - b. He was called to give instruction concerning the mystery of God, the church.
 2. He explained that his suffering brings them glory.
 - a. Jews were hostile to Paul because he proclaimed the Gospel which reconciles man to man and man to God.
 - b. This message made Jewish leaders hostile to Paul but brought salvation to Gentiles which is their glory.
 - c. Max Anders, *Paul's situation in prison could easily discourage young churches and turn them away from Jesus. Paul urged the Ephesians not to let this happen. His suffering was no reason for sadness. It helped accomplish God's plan. Through Paul's suffering the Ephesian believers gain glory, that is they are led to know Christ more intimately and experience salvation more fully.*

CONCLUSION

- A. The mystery is that through the Gospel Jews and Gentiles become part of one body, the church.
- B. Jesus Christ is the head and every Christian is part of that body.
- C. Angels are amazed at what takes place when people place faith in Christ - sinners have full access to the holy God.