

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 3:1-13- GOSPEL MYSTERY, WISDOM, PURPOSE AND BOLDNESS

- I. PAUL'S CREDENTIALS OF APOSTLESHIP - vs. 1, 2 - "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you . . ."
- A. Vs. 1: "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles . . ."
- Paul had already penned his credentials in Chapter 1:1 - "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," which was his standard opening greeting for both letters to the Corinthians, the Colossians, and both letters to Timothy. He wants to assure them of his unfeigned humility, love and mission. He reminds them of his authority under Christ who called him. He wanted them to understand that his imprisonment wasn't part of any judgment of God, or the result of failure in his ministry. He doesn't say, "the prisoner of Nero the emperor for crimes I've committed." Christ Jesus is his sovereign. He is the lowly bondservant. He is in prison for loving both the Gentiles and the Lord of the Gentiles. He is in prison "for righteousness sake." And in Acts 9:16, "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." John Calvin - "So highly ought the name of Christ to be revered by us, that what men consider to be the greatest reproach, ought to be viewed by us as the greatest honor." Am I willing to suffer for the name of Christ? Am I ready to go to prison and be beaten and tortured for the sake of the Gospel? We must trust God in the moment. It is then that He gives us words to say and strength to endure. Luke 12:11,12.
- B. Vs. 2: "if indeed you have heard of the dispensation [stewardship] of the grace of God which was given to me for you,"
- Some years had elapsed since Paul had been in Ephesus. It is possible that some in the church had NOT heard about him, but that is highly unlikely. It makes more sense to replace "if" with "since." Note: Paul didn't choose his ministry. Who did? Did the Lord call you to a specific ministry? John MacArthur:
- "Every believer is a steward of the calling, spiritual gifts, opportunities, skills, knowledge, and every other blessing he has from the Lord. Everything we have belongs to the Lord, and we are therefore entrusted as stewards to manage our lives and everything we possess in behalf of the One to whom they belong."
- II. PAUL'S REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY- vs. 3-9 - "how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons

of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;”

- A. Vs. 3, 4: “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),”

Paul again humbles himself before the Ephesians by not taking any credit or honor regarding his message. It was by “revelation.” It was “made known” to him by Christ Himself.

How do we know that Paul’s revelation was true and contemporary revelations are not? Some preachers believe the canon of Scripture isn’t closed and we still receive direct revelation from God. Certain modern Charismatics claim direct revelation, visions, prophetic pronouncements, and audibly hearing God’s voice (God told me). They are in fact limiting the Scriptures, which are the complete and sufficient Word of God. If God is still speaking audibly, then an appendix needs to be added to the Bible. [Read 1689 Confession of Faith - Of the Holy Scriptures, ¶6]

“the mystery” - Greek: **μυστήριον** *musterion*: that which is secret or hidden, but in context “hidden.”

- B. Vs. 5, 6: “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,”

Here is the mystery revealed: that the Gentiles will share all the blessings of benefits of the

kingdom of God with the Jews. God never made salvation of the Gentiles a secret. The O.T. prophets clearly said so. Even Abraham was promised a progeny in Genesis 17:22, in “blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore;” and in Genesis 12:3 “In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” But the idea that both Jew and Gentile would become “one new man” (Eph. 2:15) saved through faith was hidden until the Gospel arrived. I take “revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” to mean N.T. apostles and prophets. See Eph. 2:20; 4:11

The Gentiles are “fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Both Jew and Gentile are now in the same family of faith where there are no second class citizens.

- C. Vs. 7-9: “of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;”

Paul’s humility is again in the forefront: Whatever power he has came from above. It is God’s power. Whatever pedigree he could boast in, he declares he was graceless before commissioned. He calls himself, “less than the least of all the saints” to show his contrition before God and lowly status in his own eyes. He is awestruck by God’s grace, as we should be.

R.C. Sproul: “To be a minister in any capacity in the kingdom of God is to carry a treasure in earthen vessels. There is not one of us who is qualified for this task in terms of his own righteousness, purity, or integrity, because the message that we preach is beyond estimation in terms of its value.”

It’s interesting that Paul adds that all things were created through Jesus Christ. Most modern versions delete it. How do you think it relates to what Paul is telling us about the Gospel being a mystery now revealed? That as Christ created the first heavens and the earth glorious (perfectly blessed), so He has now made a new creation of worshipers who give God glory in spirit and in truth. As Christ is the second Adam (I Cor. 15:45-49), we are in Him, members of His body, the Church.

- III. GOD’S WISDOM AND PURPOSE - Vs. 10, 11 - “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,”

Paul’s genius and the Holy Spirit contribute to his going deeper and deeper into the praise and glory of God. He cannot help himself as he declares “the whole counsel of God.”

This is the crescendo of Paul’s whole message.

- A. Vs. 10: “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*,”

God’s infinite wisdom is seen and extolled in His plan of salvation. The world is blind to it, but the church isn’t. As the church grows

and prospers, it reveals that heavenly wisdom to the angels. See I Peter 1:12. The Jews thought that God's wisdom was ultimately displayed in the Law, but Paul shows that it is much larger, saying it is "manifold," which means "exceedingly various, immense, or infinite."

Charles Hodge, "If then it is through the church God designs specifically to manifest to the highest order of intelligence, his infinite power, grace and wisdom, the church in her consummation must be the most glorious of his works. Hence preaching the Gospel, the appointed means to this consummate end, was regarded by Paul as so great a favour, "to me, less than the least, was this grace given.""

- B. Vs. 11: "according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,"

Very simply and wonderfully, this was all part of the plan in eternity past. In the infinite wisdom of the Godhead, all was determined and agreed to (The Covenant of Grace). God would be eternally glorified in the redemption of sinners. See Eph. 2:5-7. NOTE: The work is in the past tense: "accomplished." Jesus echoes that on the cross, "It is finished!"

- IV. OUR FAITHFUL RESPONSE - Vs. 12, 13: "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."

- A. Vs. 12: "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him."

What greater motivation to boldness than the Good News and the promises of God? Boldness to enter God's presence as a son or daughter by faith. Being confident that we will be received and heard as a child with their parents. Hebrews 4:15,16.

- B. Vs. 13: "Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."

"You Ephesians need not grieve for me or lose heart because of my suffering." It is also part of the plan - it is for your glory. Paul's faithfulness through trials and suffering brought glory to God and glory to the church. He was never accused of rejecting the gospel or the truth. He faithfully preached the truth no matter what outside pressures he felt. He ran the race to the end, never being called a deserter of the faith. This only strengthened the church. This resolution rubbed off on those under his care. God's name could be glorified through him whatever the circumstance because he remained faithful.

And now, after Paul has declared all that God has done for them and who they are in Christ, he is moved to pray for the Ephesians. We'll look at his prayer next time.