

The Pearl of the Epistles – Ephesians

Paul Receives the Mystery

Ephesians 3:1-6

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

Introduction

The Apostle Paul used the term “mystery” many times in his writings. As the name implies it is difficult to adequately define what a mystery is. I believe that is exactly the point of Paul’s use of the word. Mystery is used twenty-two times that in the New Testament, and Paul uses it 17 times in his letters. The other five times is one time in the Gospel of Mark and the Apostle John uses it four times in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Six times mystery is used in the epistle to the Ephesians and four times in this chapter.

James Montgomery Boice discusses Paul’s use in this way:

What is a mystery? In contemporary English it is something unknown. But this is not the meaning “mystery” had in Paul’s day. In Greek the word “mysterion” (from which we get our word) refers to something known only to the initiated. It is not that the thing itself is unknown. It is unknown – but only to those to whom it is revealed.¹

So let us become initiated in the mystery today as the Apostle Paul was instructing the church at Ephesus to the mystery of Jesus Christ.

¹ Boice, James Montgomery (1997). *Ephesians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, P. 95

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A Prisoner for the Truth (V. 1)

Ephesians 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

Paul says he was the prisoner of Jesus Christ in behalf of the Gentiles. The Greek says “Christ Jesus” instead of Jesus Christ. While this may seem slight, Paul is focusing on the Messiah instead of the person of Christ. It is thought that this Epistle was written when Paul was confined with chains at Rome (Acts 28:16, 30). He was a prisoner preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles and that was a cause Paul was willing to undertake.

Paul preached the Gospel to the Gentiles because God told him to. This included, much to the irritation of the Jews, that the Jewish ceremonies of the law, including circumcision and were not binding upon those who believe in Jesus.

Some Jews in Ephesus; who knew and heard him speak, saw the Apostle Paul when he was in the temple at Jerusalem and stirred up a mob and took him to kill him accusing him of teaching against the people, law and the Temple . News came to the Roman guards and they made him a prisoner (Acts 21:27). This is why Paul could say he was a prisoner for their cause.

Paul Was Entrusted With the Truth (V. 2)

Ephesians 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

If ye have heard should really be translated, “since you have heard.” Paul knows firsthand that he shared his testimony with the church of what he was and how God had changed him to accomplish His purpose. They knew God sent him to preach the gospel, including the Gentiles.

The Truth is that Paul was entrusted with is the dispensation of the grace of God. Dispensation is defined as, 1) The method or scheme according to which God carries out his purposes towards men. There are usually reckoned three dispensations, the Patriarchal, the Mosaic or Jewish, and the Christian or 2) A commission to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25).² The second usage is the meaning of the word dispensation in this verse. Paul was commissioned by God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

The Revealing of the Truth (V. 3-4)

² Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton's Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

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Ephesians 3:3-4 *How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)*

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery – Paul is referring to the revelation that was made to him during his conversion and his calling to be an Apostle on the road to Damascus.

as I wrote afore in few words – most commentators agree that this reference is to what he wrote to them in the previous two chapters. Others say this was another letter written to the church, but was lost before it could be included into the canon. It is hard to prove the latter, but there is no need. The previous chapters fulfill “as I wrote afore in a few words.”

Whereby, when ye read – would suggest that as they are reading (in the beginning of the letter) they are to apply and understand the revelation of the mystery.

The Promise of the Truth (V. 5-6)

Ephesians 3:5-6 *Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:*

Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men – God’s total plan and purpose of salvation has not been revealed to man until now (Romans 16:25-27).

Romans 16:25-27 *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, 26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: 27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. Written to the Romans from Corinthus, and sent by Phebe servant of the church at Cenchrea.*

as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; - The Holy Spirit is now revealing and teaching the meaning of the mystery, to the Apostles and the prophets.

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That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: - this is the mystery, the revelation of God to mankind: the gentiles are included and are fellowheirs, on the same footing and equal partakers of the promise of salvation through Christ to all men. While this is the direct translation of the verse but it is hard to understand Paul's meaning. J. B. Phillips translates this verse in this way:

It is simply this: that the Gentiles, who were previously excluded from God's agreements, are to be equal heirs with his chosen people, equal members and equal partners in God's promise given by Christ through the Gospel. (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

The mystery that has been revealed has been skillfully referred within the first, second and third chapters of Ephesians: the kingdom of the Messiah was to be extended to the Gentiles.

The Old Testament refers to the blessings to the Gentiles as early as Genesis 12:3; "*All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*" We now can look at God's plan all along and see that He has always included the Gentiles in his plan of salvation. But during the time of Christ, everyone understood that that reference only applied to those Gentiles that became Jews and proselytes to the Jewish faith. In Paul's other writings, he reviewed some of the promises to the Gentiles in the book of Romans:

Romans 15:9-12 *And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. 10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. 11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. 12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.*

In the above passage, the Apostle Paul quotes scripture from Psalms 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalms 117:1, 2; Isaiah 11:10 showing it was always God's design that the Gentiles would find salvation in the LORD.

Psalms 18:49 Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name.

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Deuteronomy 32:43 Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

Psalms 117:1 O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.

Psalms 117:2 For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

Isaiah 11:10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

Looking at the mystery now, the solution is so simple...Gentiles were previously excluded from God's promises but they are now equal; equal in every way according to God.

Conclusion

There is no room in the Church for separation. Where we are the strongest is when we are together in the Holy Spirit of God to do His purpose: to spread the Gospel.

Secondly I would like for you to think with me about the cost to the Apostle Paul for preaching the Gospel. It was costly to him personally. Everything he owned was now gone. His liberty was removed and he was imprisoned for the cause of Christ.

What cost are you willing to pay for the cause of Christ? What if your job was in jeopardy for the cause of Christ? Would you willingly and happily give it up? What if it cost you all your family and friends for the cause of Christ? What if it meant imprisonment for the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

What are you willing to give away for the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

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