

The Pearl of the Epistles – Ephesians

Paul Minister of the Mystery

Ephesians 3:7-13

***Ephesians 3:7-13** Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. **8** Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; **9** And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: **10** To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, **11** According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: **12** In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. **13** Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

Introduction - Priceless and Unique



I want to talk to you about something that is priceless and unique. The picture at the left is the “Mona Lisa.” This is a 16th century painting by Leonardo de Vinci. Leonardo began this work in Florence in 1503 and completed it in 1506 and it remained in his private collection until his death in 1519. It’s hung in the Louvre art museum in Paris. I have personally seen this portrait which is in a room to itself. No flash photography can be taken and security guards are on hand to ensure she remains in that room unharmed.

The picture is a copy found on the internet. It is basically worthless. The original, signed by the artist is priceless and unique.

Today we will look at Ephesians 3:7-13. In this passage the Apostle Paul will continue talking about the mystery. Salvation is priceless and unique, worth so much more than the Mona Lisa. Paul’s message will cover three areas that will help us to understand the priceless and unique gift that is salvation.

A Revealer of the Mystery (V. 7-9)

Ephesians 3:7-9 *Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:*

Whereof I was made a minister – the used of the word minister in this case means “service; one that waits on tables, the position of a bond-slave; a steward.” Paul is God’s steward, being used to reveal His purpose, with respect to the salvation of the Gentiles.

“*according to the gift of the grace of God*” – Paul did not seek this office. From a position of importance in the eyes of the world to becoming a servant to the Most High God is not something he sought after. As it is a gift, Paul readily accepted the task understanding it is the grace of God that he is now a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“*by the effectual working of his power*” - refers to the power, *effectual working*, which God used in Paul’s conversion and surrendering to the ministry. Remember at the time of Paul’s conversion, he was *breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord* (Acts 9:1) and had “letters from the high priest” to arrest and bring Christians to Jerusalem. He was in opposition to the gospel because of his education and belief system. Only the power or “energy of God” could change his cold heart filled with so much hatred.

This same grace and power should be at work in the lives of each Christian. Christian, do you remember your *B.C.* – you’re Before Christ? Do you remember your life and where you were bound for before you met the Savior? I do and it is passages like this one that bring that back to memory as these words did for the Apostle Paul. Only the grace of a loving God could make the change in my heart.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints – What would your reaction be if you met God on a roadway with a blinding light and no one but you heard and saw Him? Would you take pride in the fact that the Messiah met you face to face? Would you think you were someone special that God took the time to give you the Gospel personally? Paul did just the opposite. He understood with great knowledge comes great responsibility. Listen to the Apostles words as he writes to the church in Philippi.

Philippians 3:4-6 *Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as*

touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

He also writes to the church at Corinth talking about his testimony:

2 Corinthians 11:22-28 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. 28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

If there was ever a man that could brag about the work he was doing for God, it would be Paul and yet Paul creates a new word in the Greek for “least of smallest” that appears nowhere else in the New Testament. His word is “leaster”. He is the least of the least. Whoever is at the bottom of the least list of being a saint, he is below that person. Literally it means, “who am not worthy to be reckoned among the saints.” That is the way he chooses to use for himself.

“...is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” – the phrase “unsearchable riches” means that they cannot be traced out, or explored. The Apostle considered it the highest honor to be permitted to proclaim the Gospel to the world. The Gospel message is so rich and the sufficiency of Jesus is more than he could ever imagine.

“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery” – To make all men see, would include gentiles as well as Jews. The goal is that the entire world would see what “the fellowship of the mystery” is. The idea of fellowship of the mystery then means that the “secret counsel of God, was now common to all believers. It was not to be confined to any class or rank of men.” (Barnes, 1957)

“...which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God” – God created the plan of salvation from the very beginning of time, but He did not make it known.

“...who created all things by Jesus Christ” – There may be a two-fold meaning to this phrase. First and most obvious would be that Jesus was active in the creation and forming of all things. A second thought may concern the new birth is created through Jesus Christ. Therefore salvation was “created” at the same time as everything else.

The Eternal Purpose of the Mystery (V. 10-11)

***Ephesians 3:10-11** To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, **11** According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:*

“To the intent” – The plan of salvation has always been God’s intent, design and purpose

“...that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known” – The angels in heaven might now know the plan as well. M. R. Vincent defined principalities and powers in his book, Word Studies in the New Testament (Vincent, 1887) as:

“Principalities and powers” - These words usually refer to angelic powers; either good, as chapter 3:10; Colossians. 1:16; 2:10; or bad, as chapter 6:12; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Col. 2:15; or both, as Romans 8:38. See on Colossians 1:16; 2:15. Here probably good, since the passage relates to Christ’s exaltation to glory rather than to His victory over evil powers.¹

***1 Peter 1:10-12** Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: **11** Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. **12** Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

I want us to look at one more quote from R. Kent Hughes (Hughes, 1990)²

¹ Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 3, p. 373). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians, The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Crossway, p. 109

The inference of our text and that in I Peter is that God has not revealed his complete plan for history and the reconciliation of the universe to the angels, so they observe us to learn about it. Angels, we know, are messengers of God. They also watch over his people. We know too that they gather in innumerable hosts to sing hymns to God and that they delight in beholding the Father's face (Matthew 18:10). We know they were present when each new star was freshly minted and the planets were set to gliding in their courses - "the morning stars [the angels] sang together" (Job 38:7). They have seen the greatness and wisdom of creation. They have navigated the immense distances of space. They have watched God's people from the beginning - Aaron and Moses, the blood-drenched offerings and clouds of smoke in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and on and on.

They have seen the advent of Christ - the incarnation, death, and resurrection of their blessed Lord. Yet there still remains much to learn. How will it consummate? They wonder.

And as they watch the Church, God reveals his "manifold wisdom" (literally, many-colored wisdom, a rare poetical adjective used in the Septuagint to describe Joseph's coat of many colors - Genesis 37:3, 23, 32). The many-colored fellowship of the Church, the variegated third race of Jews and Gentiles - multicultural and multiracial - shows the many shaded wisdom of God. Through studying the Church the angelic host observes the reconciling work of Christ, which is the model for the reconciling of the universe when everything on Heaven and earth will be brought together in him (cf. 1 :9, 10; Colossians 1: 17-22).

by the church the manifold wisdom of God" –

Literally, much-variegated. It means the greatly-diversified wisdom. It does not mean merely that there was great wisdom, but that the wisdom shown was diversified and varied; like changing, variegated colours. There was a "beautiful and well-ordered variety of dispensations"

*towards that church, all of which tended to evince the wisdom of God. It is like a landscape, or a panoramic view passing before the mind, with a great variety of phases and aspects, all tending to excite admiration.*³

The Perseverance of the Mystery (V. 12-13)

Ephesians 3:12-13 *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

“*In whom we have boldness*” – The Apostle is using the term “freedom of utterance”. Meaning that believers, Jew and Gentile, may enter into prayer with confidence knowing that through the work of Jesus on the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit in our body that we the freedom to speak to the Creator!

“*...and access*” – Jesus reconciled us to the Father and since we have the freedom to speak with God, but we could talk to a wall all day and there is no communication, only speech. But when we are in the presence of another person, we have access to them and now our speech reaches the others ears and communication may now take place. It is also important that we have access to God in order to speak with Him face to face, so to speak.

“*...with confidence by the faith of him.*” – I am reminded of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews every time I hear the word “faith.”

Hebrews 11:1-3 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good report. 3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

Hebrews 11:4 *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,*

Hebrews 11:5 *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death;*

Hebrews 11:7 *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house;*

³ Albert Barnes, Note on the New Testament,

***Hebrews 11:8** By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

***Hebrews 11:17** By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,*

***Hebrews 11:20** By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*

***Hebrews 11:21** By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*

***Hebrews 11:22** By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.*

***Hebrews 11:24** By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;*

***Hebrews 11:28** Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.*

***Hebrews 11:29** By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.*

***Hebrews 11:30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

***Hebrews 11:31** By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

Our faith then gives us confidence, boldness and access to the throne of Grace, for mercy can only come from faith in the name of the Redeemer, Jesus the Christ and a relationship with Him. It is the grace of God the covenant keeper, which keeps His promise of hearing our prayers. It is most important to understand that the boldness the Apostle is speaking about is not reckless, foolish or rash. Also our faith is never disrespectful, inappropriate or presumptuous as some teach today. But Paul is saying that

we may come to the very throne room of God without hesitation and with assurance that our prayers will be heard because God allows it.

“Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory” – Because of all that Paul has said, he wants the faithful at Ephesus to not grow weary, troubled, dismayed or discouraged. There is so much to be thankful for.

Conclusion

A Revealer of the Mystery (V. 7-9)

The Eternal Purpose of the Mystery (V. 10-11)

The Perseverance of the Mystery (V. 12-13)

The Apostle Paul was full of joy at being called by God to minister.

W. E. Sangster, a Methodist preacher said,

“Called to preach...commissioned of God to teach the word! A herald of the great King! A Witness of the Eternal Gospel! Could any work be more high and holy? To this supreme task God sent his only begotten son.”⁴

Shouldn't we express this same joy in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

In his book *Ephesians, the Mystery of the Body of Christ*, R. Kent Hughes says that there are three areas in which Paul focused his message. (Hughes, 1990)

1. First it was to inform the Gentiles (v. 8b)
2. Secondly to inform the world of the Church (v. 9)
3. Thirdly to inform the angels (v. 10-12)

Robert C. Crowder

⁴ John R. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982, p.43