

EPHESIANS
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SESSION 3

PAUL AS MINISTER OF THE MYSTERY TO THE GENTILES (3:1-13)

Paul begins by introducing himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus, not acknowledging the second causes of the Roman prison, but acknowledging God's total sovereignty in his life.

For the sake of the gentiles - his imprisonment was due to his emphasis on gentile acceptance and Jewish reaction.

He seems to be starting a prayer (which he takes up in v14) but interrupts himself by referring to his ministry.

1. **THE MYSTERY REVEALED TO PAUL** (V2-6)

A. **A Stewardship of Grace.** (v2)

- (i) v 2 - Like salvation itself, Paul's call and gifting of apostleship is by grace. He had the grace of apostleship. (Ro 1:5, Eph 4:7)
- (ii) v 7 - On the basis of the working of his power. Not human qualifications.
- (iii) v 8 - Grace given to the 'very least' (cf 1 Cor 15:9 - not fit to be called an apostle)
- (iv) v 2 - Given to me for your, not for prestige.

- (a) Jesus gathered 12 (unique) - see John 17
- (b) Paul, Barnabas and James
- (c) Other Apostles
- (d) Apostles today.

B. A Mystery Revealed.

(i) Not a puzzling obscure secret.

- Stott "Christian mysteries are truths which, although beyond human discovery, have been revealed by God and so now belong openly to the whole church."

(ii) Formerly hidden.

- (a) All scripture is inspired - God breathed.
- (b) Earlier generations did not know. (cf 1 Pet 1:10-12)
- (c) Jesus said that he had more to say, but they could not yet receive it.

(iii) Now revealed to apostles and prophets. (v5)

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come to the apostles and lead them into truth (Jn 14-16) particularly about Christ.

- Paul had 'insight into the mystery of Christ' (v4)

We must understand O.T. through the eyes of the N.T.

(iv) The apostles gave identity to the N.T. Community (ie the Church)

- Their revelation and teaching were foundational.
- Those who responded to Peter's sermon were "added".

(v) Its essential content. (v6)

Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

- In Greek - the prefix 'syn' is added to three words.

- Lincoln "He is not celebrating the relationship of Gentiles with Israel. With the terms he uses he directs attention to unity within the church rather than with Israel and her past...he views the church as a new entity which transcends old divisions and categories and what for him is at the heart of that disclosure is that the gentiles are an essential constituent of this new entity...."

The gentiles have not been added to an already existing entity; they are fully equal joint members, totally necessary for the life of the body, which without them would not exist."

Note the emotive subject of 'replacement theology' which 'Restorationists' are sometimes accused of.

- Stott "What neither the Old Testament nor Jesus revealed was the radical nature of God's plan, which was that the theocracy (the Jewish nation under God's rule) would be terminated, and replaced by a new international community, the church, organically united to him and that Jews and Gentiles would be incorporated into Christ and his church on equal terms without any distinction."

- Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones

"This is what demolishes all attempts to perpetuate a distinction between the Jew and the Gentile. There is no distinction any longer. There is no superiority and no inferiority. The system of dispensationalism maintains that there is, that there is a 'heavenly people' and an 'earthly people' and that the Jews will be brought back and be given a very special place again at some future time. Such teaching is a denial of what we are told here, that all that is finished forever, and that there is one body, and that Jew and Gentile are equally joints impacted together in the one body."

(N.B. We must also note Rom 9-11)

2. THE MYSTERY PROCLAIMED

Paul's calling was now to proclaim this gospel.

He equates the 'mystery' with the 'gospel'.

Grace was given to him to have insight into the mystery (v4).

Grace was also given to him to preach it (v8).

A. Making known Christ's riches to the Gentiles. (v8)

These riches are unsearchable (cf Job 5:9, 9:10, Ro 11:33).

Never ending revelation centred in Christ will always captivate us. Keep praying for a Spirit of revelation in knowing him and an ever increasing grasp of what he accomplished in his cross, resurrection and ascension.

- Mitton "The unsearchable riches of Christ suggests the picture of a reservoir so deep that soundings cannot reach the bottom of it. No limit can, therefore, be put to its resources."

B. Enlightening them regarding its content.

Paul's apostolic ministry equipped him not only to proclaim these riches, but also to enlighten people. (cf Rom 1 - I long to come to impart some spiritual gift that you may be established.)

- Acts 26:17-18 - Paul's call 'to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light.'
- 2 Cor 4:6 - God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts.
- Also 'administration of the mystery' - the whole outworking of the ramifications of what God has done in Christ.

Not a last minute plan or panic adjustment.

C. Making known God's wisdom to cosmic powers. (v10)

The birth of the church as a reconciled multi-racial humanity is a public demonstration of God's power, grace and manifold ('many coloured') wisdom.

- (i) God made known the mystery to Paul (and apostles and prophets) by revelation.
 - (ii) Paul then proclaimed gospel to all world.
 - (iii) God's wisdom is made known to principalities and powers through the fact of the church.
- Lincoln "In Eph 1:21-23 Christ's lordship over the cosmos is shown to be on behalf of the Church and the Church has a special role as the medium of Christ's presence and rule in the cosmos. Here in 3:9-10 we should understand that it is because the Church alone is Christ's body and fullness that only through the church can principalities and powers be shown with clarity the claim of Christ's lordship."
 - Crucial for us to see the centrality and glory of the church in God's great eternal plan.

She is God's delight, his multicoloured revelation not only to the nations, but to the whole seen and unseen world.

- v10. NIV - HIS INTENT was that NOW through the Church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to rulers and authorities in heavenly places.
- v10. Through the Church God will amaze "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places with his wisdom."

The Church and the salvation of God are the greatest manifestation of the wisdom of God.

CREATION

Principalities and powers had already witnessed God's wisdom in creation - sang for joy in creation.

HISTORY

They have watched his wisdom through history - especially history of Israel.

NOW MANIFOLD WISDOM on display

As though God's pure white light is suddenly broken up through church into a FULL SPECTRUM OF COLOUR.

The Church to which you and I belong is the most astonishing phenomenon the world has ever seen. More wonderful than anything else in all creation.

Solving the problem of sin and a fallen humanity, a cursed earth was a greater challenge to God's wisdom than the whole creation.

- Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones

How terribly wrong it is for those who call themselves Dispensationalists to say that the Christian Church was a mere after-thought in the mind of God, that He had never really intended it in eternity.

The greatest thing in the universe, the greatest manifestation of God's own wisdom, an afterthought.

The Church, far from being an afterthought, is the brightest shining of the wisdom of God. It is equally wrong to say that the Church is only temporary, and that a time will come when she will be removed and the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached to the Jews! There is nothing beyond the Church. She is the highest and the most supreme manifestation of the wisdom of God; and to look forward to something beyond the Church is to deny not only this verse but many another verse in the Scripture. The Church is the final expression of the wisdom of God, the thing above all others that enables even the angels to comprehend the wisdom of God.

FINAL APPLICATION

- (a) The Gospel is personal - it always starts with the personal, but it goes beyond the personal and individual to God's great plan.
- (b) God had a great scheme for his world and for man.
- (c) God who created a perfect world, has purposed because it is his world to restore the whole universe again to perfection. He has planned to do so by a new creation.
- (d) The central part of that new creation is his church. Ever since Christ was in the world this new humanity has been forming.

- (e) God is preparing us for his day of full manifestation.
- (f) A day is coming which Jesus called "THE REGENERATION when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory." (Mt 19:28)

A Regeneration of the whole COSMOS - a new heavens and new earth, where righteousness dwells and all this CENTRES in CHRIST and HIS CHURCH.