

Ephesians

Lesson Nine The Revelation of the Mystery

3:1-7

Introduction:

1. The book of Ephesians began with the reminder that God is the source of all blessings and that no spiritual blessings are found outside of Christ and his church.
2. Because Christ is highly exalted, those who are a part of His body – the church – are also exalted, in heavenly places.
3. In Christ, those who were dead in sin are resurrected to new life, because of salvation – by grace through faith.
4. This leads to reconciliation in one body, the church – reconciliation between God and man, and between Gentile and Jew.
5. In chapter 3, Paul declares that this salvation and reconciliation in the church was God's eternal purpose – His plan of the ages.
6. However, in times past, this plan was a mystery – one that was not revealed until the preaching of the Gospel...

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

- A. Notice that the thought Paul begins in this verse is not followed up on until verse 14. *{In essence, verses 2-13 from a parenthetical statement; yet, one of great importance!}*
- B. "For this cause" refers back to the teaching of chapters 1 and 2.
 1. It refers to all that Paul had taught about the Gentiles.
 2. Their inclusion in the church as citizens, saints, brothers, and stones also united them with the believing Jews.
- C. Because of this message, Paul had been imprisoned by the Jews (cf. Acts 21 – 28).
- D. Yet, he preached it anyway!
 1. He ("I, Paul") was chosen as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9; 22; 26).
 2. The message was true because it was from God; in fact, it was a part of His eternal purpose.
 3. Thus, Paul was willing to suffer imprisonment for the Lord, for the gospel and for the Gentiles.

3:2-3a If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery

- A. This dispensation of God's grace is the acceptance and inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation in the church – preached by Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.
- B. This was a mystery that man could not know or understand unless God revealed it.
- C. God chose to reveal this mystery through the Gospel, preached by Paul.

1. The word “dispensation” means, “The management of a household; the oversight or administration of other’s property; stewardship.”
2. Thus, this word is translated as “steward” (3 times), “stewardship” (3 times), and “dispensation” (4 times) [1 Cor. 9:7; Col. 1:25; Titus 1:7; Luke 16:1-8].
3. In 1:10, the idea was that God managed the times until everything was right to bring His plan to fruition and fulfillment.
4. Here, the idea is that God manages His grace – and it was His will that it be offered to the Gentiles by the preaching of Paul (cf. Matt. 14:19; 15:36).
5. Thus, God made known the mystery – to Paul, by inspiration.

3:3b-4 (As I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

- A. As God revealed the mystery to Paul, he wrote it down in words.
 1. Paul refers specifically to what he has written in this epistle.
 2. Thus, the mystery involved:
 - a. All spiritual blessings in Christ
 - b. The eternal plan and purpose of God – *election and predestination*
 - c. Redemption through the blood of Christ
 - d. The exaltation of Christ as Head of the church
 - e. Salvation by grace through faith
 - f. Unity and union of Jews and Gentiles in the church
- B. Or, he may have reference to his statement in 1:9-10 – a few words about the revelation of the mystery.
- C. This passage teaches an important lesson about the inspiration of the Bible.
 1. God made known the information by revelation.
 - a. This means that Paul did not make it up himself.
 - b. It was revealed – a process that involved the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-10; Gal. 1:12, 16-19; 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Sam. 23:2; Luke 1:70; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:11).
 2. The information revealed to Paul was written down.
 - a. He did not add to, take from, change or alter the message in any way.
 - b. Thus, the words he penned are the words of God.
 3. The information revealed to Paul was written down **in words**.
 - a. This refers to the language of man.
 - b. God’s Word was written in human language.
 - c. It did not (and does not) require some special, heavenly language.
 4. Those words could be read and understood.
 - a. God does not speak in “God-talk” that man cannot comprehend.
 - b. Instead, He revealed His will in words that are accessible to man.
 5. By reading Paul’s words, one can understand Paul’s knowledge.
 - a. The reader can know the same things that Paul knew.
 - b. Truth can be understood; and, it can be understood the same way by all.
 6. Thus, the mystery that was made known to Paul is also made known to all men – if they will read, study and understand the Bible.
- D. Also, by reading this epistle, the Ephesians would understand that Paul had true, revealed knowledge of the mystery of Christ – even if they had never met him, seen him, or heard him preach.

3:5 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

- A. This mystery had not been revealed in the other ages of the world – times past.
 - 1. The fact that God had a plan was revealed in OT times.
 - 2. But, the full understanding of that plan was not made known.
 - 3. The revelation of God's plan was only for the last age – the Christian dispensation (cf. Romans 16:25; 2 Timothy 1:8-11; Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-12; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 1:20).
- B. This highlights an important fact about prophecy.
 - 1. Foretelling or prophesying about future events did not mean that the prophet fully understood what he was predicting (cf. Matthew 13:17; 1 Peter 1:10-12).
 - 2. The accuracy of their prophecies in spite of their lack of understanding is further evidence of their inspiration.
 - 3. Yet, the prophecies were such that one with an honest heart could see and understand when they were fulfilled.
 - 4. For an illustration, compare Genesis 12:3; John 8:56; and Galatians 3:29.
- C. Note that the mystery is **now** revealed – in the Gospel.
- D. It had been revealed to and made known by the holy apostles and prophets of the New Testament.
 - 1. There were 12 apostles (Judas being replaced by Matthias) plus the apostle Paul, as one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:8).
 - 2. Prophecy was a miraculous endowment given to some by the laying on of the apostles' hands (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-31).
 - 3. There is a contrast between the **holy** prophets of the Gospel and the vile and profane prophets of paganism.
 - 4. However, this does not mean that they were "more holy" than other Christian; just that they had been chosen for a special work of the Spirit.
- E. This was accomplished by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel

- A. Jews and Gentiles are heirs together – same Father, same family, same inheritance.
- B. Jews and Gentiles are part of the same body – incorporated together, dependent upon one another.
- C. Jews and Gentiles are joint participants in the promise of God – included from the beginning.
- D. Thus, there was to be no Jewish arrogance or condescension toward the Gentiles.
- E. Also, the Gentiles were not to despise or look down upon the Jews.
- F. They were one in Christ, by the Gospel.

3:7 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

- A. Paul was made a minister of this Gospel – which he had preached unto them.
- B. His preaching was a manifestation of God's grace in miraculous inspiration and confirmation of the Word.
- C. Paul's preaching was energized by the power of God – inspiration!