

Ephesians

Lesson Ten

The Church – God’s Eternal Purpose

3:8-12

Introduction:

1. God’s plan of redemption and fellowship in one body – the church – was a mystery for many years.
2. However, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God has now given the revelation of the mystery.
3. Men like Paul, the other Apostles, and the inspired prophets and spokesmen of the New Testament age had received, preached and written down the Word of God.
4. Now, Paul comes to the heart of this revelation – the ultimate significance and importance of the church.

3:8 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

- A. When Paul thought about the grace, blessings and opportunities that God had given him, he always remembered how undeserving he was.
 1. He considered himself the lowest of the low because of his actions before he became a Christian (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:12-15).
 2. Paul had been exalted by God from persecutor to Apostle.
 3. Yet, he always felt his unworthiness – not “was,” but “am.”
- B. Paul had been granted a vital and important duty – to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.
- C. The beauty of the Gospel is the unsearchable riches of Christ.
 1. “Unsearchable” means, “unable to be tracked out, untraceable; unable to be comprehended.”
 2. The word “riches” refers to an abundance, wealth, fullness or plenty (1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:16).
 3. Remember, the context of this passage is the revelation of the mystery.
 4. Thus, the riches of Christ are unable to be tracked out ***without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit revealed in the Word of God.***
 5. How else could Paul preach these riches to the Gentiles?

3:9 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

- A. Part of the riches of Christ involved the fellowship of the mystery – the revelation of fellowship among Jews and Gentiles in the church.
 1. The mystery – salvation by the blood of Christ in the body of Christ – had been revealed.
 2. Now, Paul is focusing on the fellowship made possible by the revelation of the mystery.
- B. This truth about the fellowship of all men in Christ had been hidden in God from the beginning of the age.

1. The Greek word here is *aion* (meaning, “age” or “period of time”) not *kosmos* (referring to the world).
 2. From the call of Abraham, there was a distinction made between the Jews and the Gentiles.
 3. Yet, God’s plan was to include both in the church.
- C. All things were created by God through Christ – material creation and the ordering of the ages of time.

3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God

- A. The goal of God’s plan was to reveal His wisdom to all creation.
1. This was also the purpose of Paul’s preaching of the Gospel.
 2. Furthermore, it was the purpose of creation.
- B. The “principalities and powers” are the angelic beings that dwell in the spiritual realm.
1. The angles have an interest in man and his salvation (Luke 15:10; 1 Peter 1:12; cf. Daniel 8:13; 12:5-6).
 2. Yet, the truth and purpose of God’s plan had not been revealed unto them.
 3. They only learned of it as it unfolded in the history of the world.
- C. The culmination of that plan was the church.
1. The church was purposed (Acts 3:12-26; Matthew 25:34; Eph. 1:4).
 2. The church was planned (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:26-29).
 3. The church was prophesied (Isaiah 2:1-4 [Heb. 3:6; 12:22-29]; Amos 9:11-12 [Acts 15:13-17]; Isaiah 66:18-24 [1 Peter 2:9-10]; Isaiah 49:6 [Acts 13:47]; 2 Samuel 7:12-17 [1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 16:18-19]; Daniel 2:44 [Luke 1:22-23; Col. 1:1, 13]; Zechariah 6:12-13 [Heb. 6; Acts 2:29-36]).
- D. All of this reveals the wisdom of God; for, no man could have conceived and carried out such a plan.
- E. God’s wisdom is manifold.
1. This word means, “Variegated; multicolored; many-tinted or hued.”
 2. In the LXX, this word was used for Joseph’s coat (Genesis 37:3).
 3. It refers to the many facets of the wisdom of God – all of which are revealed in the church.
 4. This word is used only here; but, its root is found several times (Matt. 4:24; Mark 1:34; Luke 4:40; 2 Tim. 3:6; Heb. 2:3-4; 13:9; Jam. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:6; 4:10).

3:11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord

- A. The fact that the church would reveal the manifold wisdom of God was God's eternal purpose.
- B. His purpose was eternal.
 - 1. As long as God has had a plan for the redemption of man, the church has been a part of it.
 - 2. The church was not an afterthought or contingent due to the postponement of another plan or purpose.
 - 3. Throughout the dispensations of time, God worked in the history of the world to bring the church into existence – as fulfillment of His plan.
- C. The church was the purpose of God.
 - 1. This Greek word for 'purpose' is found 12 times in the New Testament.
 - 2. Four times, it is translated as "showbread" (Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4; Hebrews 9:2).
 - a. The root idea of this word is, "A setting forth; placing of a thing in view."
 - b. Thus, the showbread was "the bread of setting before," or "the bread placed in view before God."
 - i. The Jews made bread every day.
 - ii. But, the showbread was planned and purposed for its place in the Tabernacle and Temple.
 - c. When it came to the redemption and salvation of man, God "set forth" a plan.
 - d. Thus, much like the showbread was a memorial, the church is a memorial to God's wisdom by revealing His eternal plan.
 - 3. Eight times, it is translated as "purpose" (Acts 11:23; 27:13; Romans 8:28; 9:11; Ephesians 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; 3:10).
- D. The word "purposed" means, "To make, do, accomplish, produce, etc."
- E. God's eternal purpose was made and accomplished in Jesus – our Lord.
 - 1. The existence of the church is impossible without Christ.
 - 2. Thus, the church and the Christ cannot be separated from one another.

3:12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him

- A. In Christ – thus, in the church – the saved have great blessings.
 - 1. Boldness is "freedom in speaking, frankness, bluntness; free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, assurance."
 - 2. Access is "admission, approach; the act of bringing to or moving toward."
 - 3. Confidence is "reliance or trust."
 - 4. Thus, the Christian has assurance that he can come to God with complete trust in Him.
- B. These blessings are for both Jew and Gentile.
 - 1. The Jews had a taste of this with the Law of Moses.
 - 2. Now, the Gentiles have the same inheritance as the Jews (cf. Hebrews 10:19-21).
 - 3. They are all equally the children of God.
 - 4. "On the account of adoption according to purpose, the spirit of fear gives place to assurance."
- C. All of this is made possible by the Gospel – the faith of Him (cf. Gal. 2:16; 3:22).