

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

The Mystery of Christ

Ephesians 3:1-12

1998

Introduction

In the last half of Ephesians 2, Paul elaborated on how Gentiles became fellow citizens (Eph 2:11-22). God, in Christ, removed the things that caused age-old division between these two oppositional people groups. As a result of the work of Christ on the cross, Gentiles can now become one body with the Jews in Christ (Eph 2:14-18).

When you examine Eph 3:1 and Eph 3:14, it's evident in verse one that Paul was about pray on behalf of the Ephesians. But he interrupts himself for 12 verses to talk about something he's very excited about--the Mystery of God! Today we're looking at Paul's interruption. In this passage, he reveals the answer to a mystery that had remained unsolved until the coming of Christ.

Mystery that:

God shows us grace

God calls and loves us

God reveals himself through us

I Paul's Calling and Mission

A. God appointed Paul (appointment, stewardship)

Gal 1:15-16 "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles..."

1. By His grace

Rom 15:15 "I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God..."

2. For the Gentiles' sake

Rom 15:16 "... so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

B. God revealed the mystery to Paul

1. By divine revelation

1 Cor 2:6-10 "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that

God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"-- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."

Damascus road conversion

C. God commissioned Paul

1. To share the revelation of the mystery

Col 1:26-27 " ... the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

a. Not previously known

Rom 16:25 "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past ..."

b. Now revealed

Revealed = "To make plain" "bring to light" or "show forth" the secret plan of God or what has previously been hidden

Rom 16:26 "... but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him ..."

1. Through hearing the Word - v. 8

Col 1:28-29 "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

2. Through reading the Word

John 20:31 "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

II Paul's Revelation Of The Mystery

Mystery = Not because it *remains* a mystery, but because that is what it was for so long in times past!

We know the "mystery" has now been revealed, but *what*, exactly, is the "mystery"?

A. The gospel

Col 1:25-27 "I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

B. Jews and Gentiles:

1. Heirs together with Israel vs. "Separate from Christ"

Eph 1:9-10 "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

Gal 3:26-29 "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

2. Members together of one body vs. "Excluded from citizenship in Israel"

3. Sharers together in the promise in Christ vs. "Foreigners to covenants of promise", "Without hope" - 1 Thess 4:13 "Without God in the world" - Gal 4:8

III Paul's Self-Assessment

Rom 12:3 "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

A. A prisoner of Christ

Eph 6:19-20 "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

He refuses to consider himself as a victim either of the Jews or of the Roman Emperor Nero. He is "the prisoner of Jesus Christ"

1. For the sake of others

a. Notice:

No self-pity

No bitterness

No anger

No disillusionment

B. A servant

2 Cor 4:5 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Col 1:23, 25-26 "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints."

C. A recipient of God's grace

D. Empowered by God

Eph 1:19-20 "... and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms ..."

Col 1:28-29 "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

E. Least in the kingdom of God - 1 Tim 1:13-16

1 Tim 1:13-16 "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."

He knew he had no standing, no personal worthiness, no claim, no natural position or gifts, that he should receive the grace of reconciliation, and become and preacher of it.

IV Paul's Encouragement

A. The church's calling and mission

1. Depository of the manifold wisdom of God
2. Revealer of the manifold wisdom of God

Manifold = Variegated; suggests the integrated beauty of an endless variety of colors. "Today it is technical term in geology, specifying unusually assorted crystals. The wisdom of God displayed in creation and embodied in Christ is a many-splendored thing, iridescent with constantly unfolding beauties."

Matt 28:19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

2 Tim 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

a. This wisdom is made known "through the church"

1. Paul did his part as an apostle
2. The church must do its part
 - a. By what it "is"
 - b. By what it "teaches"

b. This wisdom is made known to rulers and authorities

Col 2:15 "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

1. According to His eternal purpose accomplished in Christ

Eph 1:11 "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will ..."

2. Accomplished in Christ

B. The church's supernatural resource

1. We can approach God:

- a. Because we are in Him
- b. Through faith in Him

Rom 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

2. We can approach God with:

- a. Freedom of speech
Literally = "Telling all"
- b. Confidence of access

Heb 4:15-16 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Conclusion

Paul doesn't want his readers to be discouraged by his imprisonment. As a prisoner of Christ, he was magnifying the manifold wisdom of God. In the midst of whatever we're suffering, we can either identify as victims or ambassadors. God wants us to magnify the multifaceted beauty of Christ! We have a high calling. The King of Kings has called us to be his unblemished Bride set apart for him. We've been appointed as ambassadors of the most remarkable message--the mystery of the ages, but now revealed, which *is Christ in you, the hope of glory*. You are his witness, his expression in flesh and blood on earth. May that inspire you to live a life to the fullest for the kingdom of God. He loves you and he'll fill and empower you with everything you need to live as his ambassador!

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