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The Mystery of Christ

Ephesians 3:1-13

Introduction

1. When you hear the word “mystery” what does your mind generally turn to?
2. When I was a young teenager, I enjoyed reading a series of mysteries known as the “*The Hardy Boys*.”
3. Young ladies could follow along with another series known as the “*Nancy Drew*” mysteries.
4. Others which come to mind are works by Agatha Christie or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
5. However, such mysteries as these are not what the apostle Paul had in mind.
6. In the New Testament, the Greek word *musterion* means something which is beyond natural knowledge, but has been opened to us by divine revelation through the Holy Spirit.
7. Paul uses this word three times here in the first nine verses of Ephesians 3.

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8. He begins this chapter by referring to himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles” (v. 1).
9. This leads him to speak of two things:
 - a. “. . . the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you” (v. 2)
 - b. and, “the mystery” (v. 3)
10. For the next ten verses he describes this mystery, what it reveals, with whom it is being shared, and its ultimate result.
11. It is this mystery that I would like for you and I to examine this evening.

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12. In Colossians 1:26 Paul expounds on this idea by identifying it as: “the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints.”
13. Something that had previously been undreamed of is now wide open and revealed to the saints — an open secret.
14. Let’s look more closely now at this open secret.

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I. What Does The Mystery Reveal?

A. HEIRS TOGETHER (V. 6)

“... the Gentiles are fellow heirs”

1. Most, if not all of us understand the concept of ‘heir’.
 - a. “A person legally entitled to the property or rank of another on that person’s death”
 - b. “Anyone who receives property of a deceased person either by will or by law”
2. All the way up until the time of Christ any Jew would consider himself an heir of the promises of God made to Abraham
3. Long ago God promised Abraham that he would bless his descendants and that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3).
4. These promises included . . .
 - a. A special relationship with God — He would be their God and Israel would be His people
 - b. The land of promise — a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8,17)
 - c. The promise of blessing
5. Now, Paul states that God has revealed His divine plan — it is that through the gospel all the families of the earth should be blessed
 - a. Not just Abraham’s offspring

- b. But, Gentiles as well (that is what we are)
- 6. What is that inheritance?
 - a. Salvation and heaven
 - b. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29)
 - c. "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you," (1 Peter 1:4)

Slide 5**B. MEMBERS TOGETHER (v. 6)**

"the Gentiles are . . . fellow members of the body"

1. Because Gentile Christians have been incorporated into the same body as Jewish believers they are thus "fellow-members" of the body of Christ.
2. This is the one new man of which Paul spoke in 2:15 — the new humanity of which we spoke last week.
 - a. God's city (2:19)
 - b. God's family (2:19)
 - c. God's temple (2:21f.)

Slide 6**C. SHARERS TOGETHER (v. 6)**

"the Gentiles are . . . fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"

1. The term "fellow partakers" or "fellow sharers" comes from one word which means "one who shares in a possession or a relationship."
2. Earlier, Paul had said that Gentiles were excluded from "the covenants of promise" (2:12).
3. Now, through the blood of Christ, Gentiles (we) have . . .

- a. Been “brought near” to God (2:13)
- b. Been sealed “with the Holy Spirit of promise” (1:13)

[To sum up, the mystery of Christ which is now revealed is that God has brought about the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of each with Christ.]

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II. With Whom Is The Mystery Shared?

A. WITH THE GENTILES (v. 8)

“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ”

1. Several times in his letters, Paul expresses his own unworthiness . . .
 - a. “I am the least of the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:9)
 - b. “the very least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8)
 - c. “I am the foremost (chief) of all (sinners)” (1 Timothy 1:15)
2. We are not so much unlike Paul — as long as we live we will struggle with weaknesses, temptations and failures.
3. Paul, no doubt, considered himself “the very least of all saints” because he had “persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9).
4. But thanks to the gift of God’s grace Paul now has the opportunity to share “the unfathomable riches of Christ”
5. Paul describes the riches of Christ as “unfathomable” or “unsearchable”
 - a. “Impossible to comprehend”
 - b. These riches of Christ are “saving riches,” “eternal riches”
 - c. They are inexhaustible — though Christians have been drawing from them for centuries, they continue to be as plentiful as when they were first made available.
6. There is a very important truth which Paul wants us to grasp here — it is

that Christ never subtracts from life, He enriches it — makes it better.

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b).

7. While these riches are “unsearchable” consider a few which Paul speaks of in his first letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30)

“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

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B. WITH ALL PEOPLE (v. 9)

“To me . . . this grace was given . . . to bring to light (make all know) what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God”

1. The gospel is personal — it starts with ‘me’ — but it goes beyond the personal and the individual to something far greater.
2. It has always been necessary for the gospel to be preached to a world that has troubles and trials, war and bloodshed — a world in which people are confused and asking questions.
3. Some of the questions being asked are . . .
 - a. Does Christianity hold out any hope?
 - b. Does it shed any light on the situation in which we find ourselves?
4. Paul states that the second group to whom Paul is to reveal this “mystery of Christ” is “all people” — in other words, the world.
5. That which is to be revealed is “the administration (purpose, plan, arrangement) of the mystery.”
6. God has a plan, a purpose, a great scheme, for the whole of life in this world and for each of us.
7. The Bible is the revelation of that plan and purpose.
8. But that plan “has been hidden in God” since the beginning — now we can know how it is being carried out.
9. God “created all things” — this is my Father’s world, it belongs to Him and

is controlled by Him.

10. Initially it was perfect in every way, but sin distorted it and separated us from God.

11. Now God has revealed to everyone His mystery through the Gospel — it is to re-unite everything in Christ (cf. 1:10)

“the summing up of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth”

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C. WITH THE POWERS (v. 10)

“so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places”

1. The third purpose for Paul’s opening the mystery is, *to inform the angels*.
2. He calls them “the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”
3. Someone once said, “The history of the Christian church becomes the graduate school for angels.” (John McKay, president of Princeton Theological Seminary)
4. British professor, John Stott, once wrote, “It is through the old creation (the universe) that God reveals his glory to humans; it is through the new creation (the church) that he reveals his wisdom to angels.”¹
5. What Paul is saying is that angels are watching us because we are part of the mystery!
6. In 1 Peter 1:10-12, Peter describes how the prophets searched intently to understand the prophecies regarding Christ which have now been made clear in the gospel.
7. At the end of verse 12 he adds, “Even angels long to look into these things” (literally, *even the angels stoop to look*).
8. What we learn from our text and 1 Peter is that God has not revealed his complete plan for history and the reconciliation of the universe to angels,

¹John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1979), p. 119.

so they observe us to learn about it.

9. As the angels watch the Church, God reveals His “manifold wisdom.”
 - a. It is through studying the Church that the angelic host observe the reconciling work of Christ.
 - b. This serves as the model for the reconciling of the universe — when everything in Heaven and on earth will be brought together in Him (cf. 1:9,10; Colossians 1:17,22).

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III. What Is The Mystery’s Focus?

A. THE CHURCH IS CENTRAL TO HISTORY

1. It is the church, God’s new humanity that will judge both the world and angels (1 Corinthians 6:2f.)
2. When all the false religions and human philosophies are long gone, the Church will stand triumphant at the end of time.
3. Only the Church will survive history.

10a

B. THE CHURCH IS CENTRAL TO THE GOSPEL

1. Paul teaches us in Ephesians that the complete gospel involves both the preaching of Christ and the mystery of the Church.
2. Christ died and rose from the dead not only to save us, but to create one new humanity.
3. That means that the Church of which we are the local body is very important.
4. Both the world and the angels of heaven watch we.
5. When we preach Christ and live as the Church, souls are inevitably drawn to Christ the Head.

10b

C. THE CHURCH IS CENTRAL TO CHRISTIAN LIVING

1. Paul ends this portion of our text with an allusion to his suffering:
"Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory." (*Ephesians 3:13*)
2. Paul was willing to pay any price to see the Church go forward.
3. As an apostle he saw his sufferings as the Church's glory.

Conclusion

1. The bottom line is that the Church is not an option for believers.
2. I realize the Church on earth is imperfect, but nevertheless, we must be committed to the local body of the universal Church.
3. We must be committed to regular worship and worship with all we have.
4. We must be committed to this congregation's fellowship as well.
5. If we only attend worship, we are robbing the church and ourselves and Christ.
6. We must be involved in a Bible school class where we can interact with and minister to others.
7. Since Christ and His Church have the only answer for the world, we must be involved in sharing both.
8. Evangelism is not an option — we must reach out to those who have yet to take hold of what Christ offers.

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9. When we do, we will be living out one of the supreme glories of the Church.

*I love Thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode,
The Church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood.*

*For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be giv'n,
Till toils and cares shall end.*