

The Mystery of the church

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Mystery; Church at Ephesus / Ephesians 3:1–13

The Mystery of the church

Introduction

Many of you might be feeling discouraged with this current pandemic that just seems to keep on going.

Its easy to lose motivation.

For the church in Ephesus, the longevity of Paul's imprisonment, the challenges of life, may easily have made them want to lose heart.

Paul reminds them of the mystery of the church.

Paul shared how the mystery of the church glorifies God to the angels and ultimately as you understand the greater purposes of God encourages believers

Reading

Ephesians 3:1–13 *ESV*

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,

⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,

¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,

¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Proposition

4 truths that explain how the mystery of the church glorifies God to the angels and encourages believers in times of suffering

1. The revealing of the mystery 1-4
2. The explanation of the mystery 5-6
3. The preaching of the mystery 7-9
4. The purpose of the mystery 10-13

1. The revealing of the mystery 1-5

Ephesians 3:1–5 ESV

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you,

³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

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⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

1 For this reason

For this reason/on account of this refers back to chap 2

In 2:1-10 Paul had explained how in Christ, God had made the Gentile believer spiritually alive, raised them up and seated them with Christ in the heavenly places.

In 2:11-22 Paul explained how in Christ the Gentiles were brought near to Him creating peace, changed their nature and relationship and how they were incorporated into one body with Jewish believer and were fellow citizens of heaven and members of God's household.

On account of these truths Paul begins to pray that the Ephesian believers would comprehend these truths, but he changes direction to reemphasise the truth that he had just taught.

He eventually continues in his prayer in vs 14

Like when someone is about to pray and he says, "just before we pray and then shares something"

I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

Paul begins by explaining his credentials calling himself a prisoner of Christ.

You would assume that since the Jews arrested and the Romans imprisoned him, that he would call himself a prisoner of the Jews or of Rome.

Instead he calls himself a prisoner of Christ revealing biblical perspective on suffering trials.

Paul viewed his trial, being imprisoned from God's perspective.

The imprisonment was because Christ allowed it, He was in control and He was accomplishing His divine purposes.

Paul understood that his imprisonment served to advance the gospel.

Philippians 1:12–14 ESV

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served

to advance the gospel,

¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Implication from the text

- How you respond to your circumstances is more important than the circumstances
- If you feel good when it goes well and feel bad when it does not, it implies that your circumstances control you
- God is sovereign and He controls what happens in your life to accomplish His purposes.
- You should know that trials to grow your faith, your character and grows perseverance which leads to Christlike-ness.

2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

In the grammar , conditional statement in the Greek should read: "surely you have heard", which does not question that they had heard. It assumes they heard.

Translation: Surely you have heard, or since you have heard of the stewardship of Gods grace that was given me.

Stewardship= Gk management, a set of arrangements, responsibilities of arrangements

Gods grace=(Gods unmerited favour, something you did not deserve.)

Paul had been entrusted with the management of this mystery(to proclaim the gospel and explain the Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ.)

3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

Paul's point is that the mystery was made known, revealed by divine means.

It was not from:

- man.
- human ingenuity or cleverness

But from God

God was the one who uncovered or brought this truth out of hiding.

As I have written briefly = Paul refers to what you and I read in 2:11-22.

He had explained how the Gentiles were now incorporated into one body with the Jews

The truth and reality that the church incorporates both the Jews and the Gentiles(Nations) comes from God not man.

Application

You should know that Christ church, and the unity in Christ over tribe and nation boundaries is Gods plan not man.

Unity is not optional for believers in Christ, but God created.

Your and my responsibility should always be to love one another and be united in Christ to other fellow believers.

Our unity is a testimony to the world

John 17:20–21 *ESV*

²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,

Paul wanted his readers to understand (grasp the meaning intellectually, the depth of Paul's comprehension and understanding) his insight into the mystery.

Illustrated & application

when you know somebody has a PHD on subject matter, you are much more willing to believe and place value on that person's words than someone who has no experience.

Since Paul deeply comprehended this mystery, you can trust, value and be encouraged by them.

2. The explanation of the mystery 5-6

Ephesians 3:5–6 *ESV*

⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

Paul begins to explain the general meaning of the term mystery here before he actually explains what particular mystery was revealed.

English the term “mystery” creates confusion as it refers to a secret people have tried to uncover, but which they failed to do so.

But the Biblical term mystery = refers to secret that was previously unknown, has now been made known.

Its better to translate the term mystery as that which was not known before.

None of us knew beforehand that in 2020 our lives would we turned upside down by the corona virus, and the way we live life would be radically changed. And so now we look back and the whole world no knows about the corona virus and its implications.

For 4000 years this mystery remained veiled to the sons of men, to mankind.

For all the previous generations of man, the mystery remained hidden.

Finally after 4000 years , with the arrival of the church age, God by means of the HS uncovered this mystery to His Holy apostles and NT prophets.

His= they belonged to God

Holy= implies they were set apart by God to receive this truth.

God instrument to unveil the mystery was the HS. John 14:25-26, 2 Pet 1:20-21

Vs 6 sheds light on what specific mystery(secret that was previously unknown, has now been uncovered.)

vs6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise

Your and My familiarity with the church for 2000 years now make it hard to understand how profound this truth was for the church age believers. For any Jews this truth would have been preposterous(outrageous, absurd, ludicrous, unbelievable).

It would be like saying that someone with Ebola, will no longer be isolated, but included into your own personal households.

In the Greek each of the Greek words(fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise) have the same prefix(letters stuck on the beginning of words) which means: altogether or united You could read: the Gentiles are:

- altogether heirs- united heirs,
- altogether members- united in one body
- altogether partakers -united partakers

It emphasises the union between the Jews and Gentiles in the Body

Like sugar mixed in your coffee, one new substance the church

The Gentiles would be **fellow heirs**= Those who were formerly excluded , were now inheritors in Christ.

This would include:

- all the spiritual blessings in heavenly places 1:3-14 that comes from being a believer

The Gentile believers were now also **fellow members of the same body**(united in the corporate body of Christ, Jews and gentile believer in Christ)= they were no longer excluded.

Fellow partakers of the promise, = the promise is not defined

In the near context Eph 2:11-12,, refers to the Gentiles having been strangers to the covenants of promise, you can logically deduct that believers in Christ will have some part in the covenants promised to Israel.

In the future, Jesus will return to set up His Davidic kingdom on earth in Israel fulfilling the covenants of promise.

In Rev 19:7-8, the bride of Christ is clothed in fine linen, bright and pure, yet the armies are clothed in the same way.

Revelation 19:14 ESV

¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

I believe the body of Christ and the armies of Christ are one and the same.

This implies the church in the future, with Christ return, partake in the covenants of promise.

The mystery is not that **Gentiles would be saved**, but that they would be united with the Jewish believes in the body of Christ, will inherit and partake in Gods covenants of promise.

a New blessed society

in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

This Mystery is implemented in Christ through the gospel.

As Gentiles and Jews repent and trust in Christ death and resurrection , they are united together in to the unveiled new corporate body of Christ(the church)

Application

You should know that if you are part of Christ church as a believer,:

- you have a glorious inheritance in Christ
- you belong to God's family, a member of his household and citizen of heaven
- You will partake (experience something of that) in the covenant promises given to Israel, in Christ's 2nd coming.
- This is critical since it gives you biblical hope, which we all need in desperate times of suffering.

3. The preaching of the mystery 7-9

Ephesians 3:7-9 ESV

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Paul discussed his role in God's ministry.

He was proclaimer, a herald.

Paul called himself a minister, meaning deacon or servant of the gospel

He understood that he was served only by unmerited favour of God.

He did not feel worthy , nor did he boast in that fact. 1Cor 9:16-18

Implication

- Never enter ministry unless you are certain of Gods calling into that ministry.
- If you are called to preach, you loses your effectiveness , when you stop thinking of yourself as a servant and begin to exalt yourself.
- So many ministries is more about the preacher, than God and His word.

8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints,

Even though Paul was an apostle, he called himself the least of the saints.

Paul's honest assessment of himself was.

- chief of sinners 1 Tim1:15
- blasphemer and persecutor of the church 1 Tim 1:13,
- unworthy to be called an apostle 1 Cor 15:9
- and here the least of the saints

The more he understood God's righteousness, the more he saw his own sin.

Paul felt unworthy not only of Gods grace for salvation but also unworthy in being appointed to be a proclaimer of the gospel.

Implication

The more you grow in Christ likeness, the more you begin to comprehend the depth of your own depravity.

Humility, the Christ like attitude should characterise your life as a believer.

this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,

Paul believed Gods grace was given not only to save Him , but also tell others of the unsearchable riches of Christ and to explain this mystery.

unsearchable = incomprehensible, impossible to understand, impossible to search out, impossible to understand on the basis of careful examination.

He was to preach the incomprehensible wealth that was available in Christ

You and I at least know something of the wealth in Christ from our passage, but we don't fully understand it. We know something of

- wisdom and knowledge of God Rom 11:33
- His mercy and love Eph 2:4
- His glory Eph 3:16
- His supply of all things to enjoy 1 Tim 6:17
- His assurance Col 2:2
- His word Col 3:16

Paul was also called to shed some light, on the mystery that had been hidden for the 4000 years in God.

God created not only the universe, but He also is the one who created the church, and unveiled this new body soon after he sent Jesus to Calvary.

Implication

The church is Gods creation, not man.

You and I should honour and respect Gods creation.

Sadly many view on the concept of the church with disdain and disrespect.

If this is your view, I encourage you to repent of that view.

Yes the church is in a mess, but its in a mess because of sin and man, but its still the body of Christ.

There is a higher purpose to the church, that you and I don't tend to think about.

4. The purpose of the mystery 10-13

Ephesians 3:10–13 *ESV*

¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,

¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

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

Rulers and authorities refer to the angelic beings in the spiritual realm. Eph 1:21,6:12

The very existence of the church serves as a spotlight upon the manifold (diverse, many sided) wisdom of God that provides reason to the angels both good and bad to praise God.

The Mystery unveiled (God uniting Jews and Gentile believers into the same body, the body of Christ) is God's divine instrument to display his great wisdom to the angelic beings in the heavenly places.

Peter reveals that the angels long to look (make considerable effort to find out) about the gospel

1 Peter 1:12 ESV

¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Implication

If the angels long to understand the gospel, do you?

Do you make the effort to understand the depth of the gospel, the depth of the church, which is the wisdom of God on display in the spiritual realm.

- The church does not exist ultimately to make disciples.
- The church exist as a display of His infinite wisdom to angelic beings in the heavens.
- The church exists ultimately to glorify God.

The Mystery of Gentiles united with Jews in Christ body glorifies God to the angels

Angels were created to praise God and give him glory. Ps 148:2

So the church provides content for angels to worship God.

You and I will ultimately in heaven join with the angels praising Him for His wisdom and glory.

Revelation 5:11–13 ESV

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,

¹² saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

As God creates worship communities on earth, it facilitates angelic worship in the heavenly places.

As God saves Gentiles and Jews uniting them into His body, it leads to worshippers on earth and angelic worship in heaven.

11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord,

This was not some last minute thinking of God.

This was not a 2 minute noodle planning in the last moment.

In eternity past, Gods planned to unveil the mystery of the church to glorify himself in the heavenly places and this was brought about through Christ death and resurrection.

12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

In Judaism only the High priest could enter the Holy of Holies.

He could only do this once a year, on the day of atonement after having made sacrifices for himself and the people of Israel.

It was a fearful thing for the high priest to enter God's presence.

but now as a believer you and I can come to God the father with boldness.

Trusting in Jesus gives you both the confidence and direct opportunity to meet with God the Father.

Implication

To come to God confidently, you simply need to pray.

13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

vs 13 concludes a grammatical construction that started in vs 2

In English we call it a correlative= If then statement

The if part "assuming" is introduced in vs 2

The "then" part "so" is continued in vs 13

What Paul was saying is that

Since you (Ephesians) heard, the mystery (that the Gentiles are included into the body of Christ with all its promises and blessings,) so I ask you not to lose heart.

The Ephesians had encountered:

- Racial divisions in the world
- idolatrous behaviour
- and now Paul, the apostle of Christ in prison

Left them discouraged, losing heart, demotivated

Having explained that the mystery was the work of God, Created by God, unveiled 4000 years after creation to them, the wonderful news that they were fellow heirs, fellow members of his body and fellow partakers of the covenants in the future, aimed at displaying God's wisdom to the angels served as the fuel to fire up their hearts and encourage them. despite the trials of life.

In essence the very existence of the church of Christ, serves as fuel to encourage you in times of suffering.

Paul as a result of this ministry of the mystery enduring suffering for the gospel.

His arrest and imprisonment appeared to be a setback.

But what appeared as a setback ultimately glorifies God.

There is a relationship between suffering and glory.

2 Corinthians 4:17 ESV

¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

Romans 8:17 ESV

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Suffering is the prelude/runup to glory.

In this case the suffering was Paul's and theirs, but it would lead to glory for them.

Suffering as a believer ultimately leads to glory.

Application

You should know that the very existence of the church displays God's His wisdom , to the angels.

In light of these truths you can be encouraged even when you face severe trials in life, as a believer in Christ , walking in obedience to Him ultimately glorifies God and leads to future glory.

The next time somebody out there threatens you unfairly, persecutes you unjustly, for being a Christian or the gospel, remember that your a part of Gods eternal plan, that ultimately leads to glory and worship.

May that encourage your heart, to set your eyes of the future glory of Christ.

1 Peter 1:3–7 ESV

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,

⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

4 truths that explain how the mystery of the church glorifies God to the angels and encourages believers in times of suffering

1. The revealing of the mystery 1-4 was by God
2. The explanation of the mystery 5-6 is that you are united with the Jewish believers in his body(the church)
3. The preaching of the mystery 7-9 is something you and I can do
4. The purpose of the mystery 10-13 brings God glory and encourages suffering believers.