

## Mystery and Revelation Ephesians 3:1-13

INTRO: God has a plan, and Ephesians chapter three speaks about that plan. It is an established principle of Christian history that “God’s plan is a man.” God did not chose to use angels to get the Gospel message out to the regions beyond; He chose man. It is God’s plan to carry out his work among men through the ministry of men. That was true in the Old Testament when men like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Malachi proclaimed the message of a coming Messiah and blood redemption throughout the pages of the Old Covenant. The scarlet thread of blood redemption runs all through the Old Testament into the New. During the earthly ministry of Christ, He chose a ban of twelve men whom He instructed, organized, and sent out to do His work. When He left this world at the ascension, He gave the commission for proclaiming the Gospel to the church. The church has the authority to send out preacher men (Rom. 10:13-15). When the time came for the Gospel to be preached to the Gentiles, God chose a man-- Paul the Apostle. And men have been preaching to the Gentiles ever since.

### I. VSS. 1-6, THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

- A. Vs. 1, “For this cause,” or “For this reason,” refers to “the preceding argument about God’s elective grace” (A.T. Robertson Vol. 4, 530). “For this cause” points us back to the first part of the epistle where Paul discussed God’s grace to the Gentiles (1:4-6; 11-13).
  1. Also in view is chapter 2:11-22 which refers to our position in Christ which is all of grace. Herschel H. Hobbs says, “‘For this cause’ reads, *Tou tou charin* literally, ‘For this grace’” (54). God in His grace has provided a means for man’s redemption, the blood of Christ.
  2. “I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.”
    - a. Paul was literally in jail, under house arrest.
    - b. He was under house arrest because of Jewish opposition to his preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles or anyone else.

3. In verse one, Paul had begun to pray; then he digresses to speak about the mystery of Christ. This digression lasts from verse two through verse fourteen.
- B. Vs. 2, "If ye have heard," he assumes they have; so we could translate this: "Assuming you have heard."
1. What did he assume they had heard? The dispensation of the grace of God...
    - a. "Dispensation" is the Greek word *oikonomia* meaning "house management". This was a position held by a trusted slave. Paul often spoke of himself as a slave for Christ.
    - b. Paul recognizes his obligation to be a faithful steward in his duties (1 Cor. 4:2).
  2. Paul had been saved by grace, and God had further graced him by making him a steward of the Gospel to the Gentiles-- "to you-ward."
- C. Vs. 3, God had revealed to Paul the mystery, "that which is hidden, secret, or beyond normal human understanding...."
1. This Mystery would have remained unknown had it not been revealed by the Lord.
  2. The mystery was the grace of God, the Gospel, that Paul was to preach to the Gentiles. This is something he had written about earlier.
- D. Vs. 4, God had opened up the mystery to Paul so clearly that other believers who read can understand the secret.
1. This mystery centers in Christ the Redeemer-- "the mystery of Christ."
  2. Christ saves us by grace and by grace Jew and Gentile can now worship together in the same church as fellow-heirs and "partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel" (3:6).
- E. Vs. 5, Before Christ came this mystery was not known to Gentiles. It was implied to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3: ". . . in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." It was not until Christ came that the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles. Verse six goes on to tell us the specifics of the mystery.

- F. Vs. 6, The revealed mystery is “that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs.”
1. The Jews had the idea that they had everything wrapped up, that they had a monopoly on God’s grace and love.
  2. The Jews had held the Gentiles at arms length; and now by grace, they worship in the same church body.
  3. “Partakers of His promise” means the Messianic promise.
  4. All of this because of the Gospel!
- II. VSS. 7-9, PAUL’S MINISTRY
- A. Vs. 7, Paul was a servant of the Gospel. The word for “minister” is *diakonos*: one who served tables, a bonds slave.
1. This serving is rooted in the gift of God’s grace given to Paul by the strong working of the Spirit.
  2. “Effectual” is the Greek word *energeia* used in the New Testament of super human power.
- B. Vs. 8, God gave Paul this grace to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” This is the first thing Paul was to do. “Unsearchable” means unfathomable, without reaching the bottom. “Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus.....”
- C. Vs. 9, Paul was to disclose to everyone God’s plan of redemption.
1. This mystery had been hidden in God, the creator of the universe.
  2. Even before God created “all things,” he had the plan of redemption in mind. It is part of His eternal plan (1:4, 11).
  3. Preachers are to disclose the plan of redemption. “Preaching is incandescent personality radiating the light of the world” (James R. Hobbs 59). This is the preacher’s ministry.
- III. VSS. 10-13, THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH MINISTRY.
- A. Vs. 10, “To the intent”--that the mystery might be made known “to principalities and powers in heavenly places”--

Hobbs believes this refers to angelic beings. A.T. Robertson sees it as meaning that the Gospel is to be “blazoned forth to all powers” (531).

1. I Peter 1:12 tells us that the “angels desire to look into” the redemptive work of Christ. They do not understand sin and suffering and for this reason the Gospel has been committed to men.
2. Paul says that it is through the church that the “manifold” or “many colored” wisdom of God is to be made known.
  - a. The church is God’s instrument on earth.
  - b. The church has the only message to meet the very deepest need of man.
  - c. “The church is to proclaim the gospel and to develop those who believe in Christ into the kind of citizens who will change the social order. This is where Jesus placed his emphasis. And the church-- yes, the local church-- cannot do otherwise and remain true to him who founded it” (H. Hobbs 61).

B. Vs. 11, Before the foundation of the world, God purposed the salvation of His people; and He did this in His Son. This purpose is eternal; it spans the ages.

1. The purpose of God is accomplished through the blood of Christ.
2. Throughout this passage, the Gospel is in view.

C. Vs. 12, “In whom” is Christ Jesus.

1. It is in Him that we “keep on having” boldness to enter into the presence of God.
2. “Faith in Christ gives us free and confident access to God because of sonship (1:5) based on redemption” (Harper 464).

D. Vs. 13, Paul did not want the Ephesians to faint or be discouraged by his tribulations.

1. He was suffering because he had preached the Gospel to the Gentiles. His suffering was for their glory. Because of Paul, they were saved.
2. The word “tribulation” means to be pressed as grapes. We need to look beyond the process, the pressing, to the produce, the wine (Rom. 8:28).

CONCLUSION: From ages past, God has had and does have a plan for man's redemption-- the blood of His Son.

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