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Revelation & Purpose of the Mystery

Jews & Gentiles: the Body of Christ

(Ephesians 3:1-13)

Introduction

At the beginning of this series on Ephesians I identified three dimensions of revelation in the Word of God. First, there are some things known only to God and are never revealed to us, or anyone, Deut 29:29; Matt 24:36. Second, there are some things that are secret, but God reveals them to choice servants, Amos 3:7; Dan 2:20-23. Third, there are some things that God keeps hidden at one point in time and then reveals them to His people in a later point in time. These mysteries are especially related to the church age and the latter days, Eph 1:9-10; 3:3-13; 5:32; Rev 1:20; 17:5.

In Ephesians 1:1-14 God revealed all that He has done for us as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In 1:15-23 the apostle entreated God for wisdom. In 2:1-10 we learned that our salvation is by His grace in Christ. In verses 11-22 we learned of the unity brought to Jew and Gentile. The blood of Christ, brought the peace of Christ, and body of Christ made up of Jew and Gentile alike. All of these lessons are a prelude to the "mystery" revealed in chapter three. Chapter three presents six aspects of the mystery of the church as the body of Christ as follows:

I. The Man of the Mystery, 3:1

1. God uses people not programs. Programs only are successful when God-called men and women commit to further His plans and purposes. Paul is a marvelous example. He grew up in Judaism, persecuted the church, and converted on Damascus road, appointed an apostle to the Gentiles, and apostle of the "mysteries" of the Gospel, Acts 9:1-9.
2. Paul was in prison in Rome, a prisoner "of Christ Jesus," see also Eph 4:1; 2 Tim 1:8; Philemon 1, 9. In our suffering there is a sense we are suffering with Christ, 1 Pet 4:12-19. He was suffering on behalf of the Gentiles because of his ministry to them, Acts 9:15; 22:1; 26:17-18; Gal 1:16; 2:7-9; Rom 1:5 11:13; 1 Tim 2:7; see especially 2 Cor 11:22-33. He faithfully shared the "mystery" 2 Cor 4:3.

II. The Management or "Dispensation" of the Mystery, 3:2-4

1. Paul was called and commissioned on the Damascus road, Acts 9:1-9, and trained by God for three years in the wilderness of Arabia, Gal 1:11-24.

2. Paul was given the "mystery" of the "dispensation" (Gk *oikonomian* , Eph 1:10 & 3:9) of the "grace of God". Paul used the same language about the "dispensation" or "stewardship" of the "mystery" in Colossians 1:24-29.
3. The ideas for this "mystery" were not his own but those communicated to him by God. A "mystery" refers to information known only to God. Paul's ministry was a "mystery" namely to take the Gospel to the Gentiles was the outcome of his call to minister to Gentiles, see also Eph 3:7-8.

III. The Method of the Mystery, 3:5-6

1. It was revealed by the Holy Spirit. There are Three aspects of this "mystery". (a) It was concealed in ages past; (b) It was revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets; (c) It was made available to Jews and Gentiles alike.
2. So what was Paul supposed to do with this "mystery"? It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 4:1-13. We are to be good stewards of this mystery.
3. It was confirmed by Jesus' death and resurrection, by preaching of the Gospel, see 1 Cor 1:18-20; 15:1-8.

IV. The Ministry of the Mystery, 3:7-9

1. Paul received his assignment to minister by the grace and power of God. This "mystery" of preaching the Gospel releases the power of salvation to all who believe, Rom 1:16. Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said,

"The Gospel is preached in the ears of all, but comes with power to some. That power in the Gospel does not lie in the preacher's learning otherwise it would consist of the wisdom of men. We might preach till our tongues rotted out, but never a soul would be converted unless there were a mysterious power going with it, the Holy Spirit charging the will of man. Oh sirs, we might as well preach to stone walls as to preach to humanity unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word to give it power to convert the soul. We are nothing - less than nothing!"

2. Paul received the grace of God and his call and ministered it in humility, knowing his opposition before his salvation. Yet, to him was given the opportunity to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles.
3. The "mystery" calls for humility. It is the "fellowship" (dispensation) or "stewardship" of the mystery that was hidden from the beginning of the ages but revealed to us in the last days, see Heb 1:1-4, that His eternal purpose was accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 3:11

V. The Motive of the Mystery, 3:10-11

1. When we are a part of the work of God, 1 Cor 4:9; believers are God's object lesson to the world and to the angels of heaven, 1 Pet 1:3-12.
2. The more obedient we are to the will of God the more the angels and all spiritual powers will see the wisdom of God in creating the human race, 3:10, and see that all things work for His eternal purpose, 3:11, Rom 8:28.
3. "God's eternal purpose" in 3:11 was to provide His redeeming grace for all who would receive Jesus as their personal Savior. God made plans for our salvation before time began. God was not caught off guard by the fall of Satan nor the sin of Adam.

VI. The Merits of the Mystery, 3:12-13

1. Boldness - this is a virtue of lack of timidity because we know God is with us, Acts 4:13; 2 Cor 7:4; 2 Tim 3:13; Heb 10:19; 1 Jn 4:17-19
2. Access with Confidence - in the Garden the Cherubim blocked the way of access to God, Gen 3:24. Now in Christ we have access again, with confidence. This word Greek *prosagoge*, "confident access", Jn 6:37. It appears only three times in the New Testament, two of which are in Ephesians, Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12.
3. Steadfastness - Paul says don't faint, (do not lose heart), at my tribulations. What were his tribulations? See the list in 2 Cor 11:22-28. His tribulation was for their glory.
4. Glory - all that Paul had done by carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles and even from his imprisonment he reminds them that it was all "on behalf of you, which is for your glory." This "glory" is both the present benefits of belonging to Christ and the eternal "glory" that comes from knowing Him!