

Ephesians: Grace Changes Everything

Part 6. The Mystery Revealed

As we continue our study of the book of Ephesians, we come to chapter 3. In the first 13 verses here, the Apostle Paul explains the mystery that has been revealed to him, a mystery that has profound implications for both Jews and Gentiles. This passage emphasizes the inclusivity of the gospel and the boldness we have in Christ.

Let's read the passage together from the New International Version (NIV):

Ephesians 3:1-13 *"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles - surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory."

This passage can be divided into three main sections: Paul's explanation of his ministry and the mystery of Christ (verses 1-6), the purpose and power of his ministry (verses 7-10), and the confidence and encouragement for believers (verses 11-13). Each section provides us with profound insights into the nature of the gospel and our relationship with God through Christ.

1. Paul's Explanation of His Ministry and the Mystery of Christ (3:1-6)

Paul begins by explaining his role as a servant of the gospel and the mystery that has been revealed to him. This mystery, previously hidden, has now been made known through the Spirit.

"For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles..." Paul identifies himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. At the time of writing, Paul was literally in prison, likely in Rome, because of his ministry to the Gentiles. However, he sees himself as a prisoner not of Rome but of Christ, indicating his complete dedication to the cause of Christ. Paul's imprisonment underscores the cost of discipleship and the commitment required to follow Christ. It also highlights the seriousness with which Paul takes his calling to minister to the Gentiles.

The Administration of God's Grace:

Paul then speaks of the special stewardship or administration of God's grace entrusted to him. *"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly."* This grace involves the revelation of a mystery that was previously hidden. This mystery, revealed by God, is central to Paul's ministry. It is a divine revelation that has been made known to Paul and other apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

The Mystery of Christ:

Paul refers to his insight into the mystery of Christ, a mystery that was not revealed to previous generations but has now been made known through the Spirit. *"In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets."* This mystery, as Paul explains, is that the Gentiles are now fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. This was a radical and revolutionary revelation that broke down the long-standing barriers between Jews and Gentiles.

Unity in the Gospel:

"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." The mystery revealed is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the promises and blessings of God. Through the gospel, Gentiles and Jews are united as heirs, members, and sharers together in Christ. This unity is a profound demonstration of God's grace and the power of the gospel to break down barriers and create a new, inclusive community in Christ.

2. The Purpose and Power of Paul's Ministry (3:7-10)

Paul continues by describing the purpose and power behind his ministry. He emphasizes the grace given to him and the responsibility to make the mystery of Christ known.

A Servant of the Gospel:

"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power." Paul describes himself as a servant of the gospel, a role given to him by God's grace and empowered by God's working. His ministry is not based on his own abilities but on the grace and power of God. This highlights the humility and dependence required in ministry. It is God's power at work in and through us that enables us to fulfill our calling.

Preaching the Boundless Riches of Christ:

"Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ." Paul humbly acknowledges his unworthiness but emphasizes the grace given to him to preach the boundless riches of Christ. The riches of Christ refer to the immeasurable blessings and treasures available to believers through Christ. Paul's preaching is focused on revealing the vast and boundless blessings that come from a relationship with Christ. These riches include salvation, forgiveness, eternal life, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Making the Mystery Plain:

"And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things." Paul's mission is to make the mystery of Christ plain to everyone. This mystery, hidden for ages, is now revealed and must be proclaimed to all.

The revelation of this mystery demonstrates God's sovereign plan and purpose. It was hidden in God, the Creator of all things, and has now been made known through the gospel.

The Manifold Wisdom of God:

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." God's purpose in revealing this mystery is to display His manifold wisdom through the church. The church, as the body of Christ, is the instrument through which God's wisdom is made known to the spiritual rulers and authorities. The term "manifold wisdom" suggests the multifaceted and diverse nature of God's wisdom. It is displayed in the unity and diversity of the church, reflecting God's grand design and purpose.

3. Confidence and Encouragement for Believers (3:11-13)

Paul concludes this section by offering confidence and encouragement to believers. He emphasizes the access we have to God and the boldness we can have in Christ.

God's Eternal Purpose:

"According to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." The revelation of the mystery and the inclusion of the Gentiles are part of God's eternal purpose, accomplished in Christ Jesus. This eternal purpose reflects God's sovereign plan for redemption and reconciliation. Knowing that our inclusion in God's family is part of His eternal purpose gives us confidence and assurance. It reminds us that our salvation is not an afterthought but a central part of God's redemptive plan.

Access to God:

"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." Through Christ, we have direct access to God. We can approach Him with freedom and confidence, knowing that we are accepted and loved. This access is a profound privilege that was made possible by Christ's sacrifice. It signifies a restored relationship with God, where we can come to Him without fear or hesitation.

Encouragement in Suffering:

"I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory." Paul concludes by encouraging the believers not to be discouraged by his sufferings. His imprisonment and hardships are for their benefit and glory. Paul's perspective on suffering challenges us to see difficulties and trials through the lens of God's purpose. His sufferings are not in vain but will become part of God's plan to advance the gospel and build the church.

4. Practical Applications

Embrace the Mystery of Christ:

Reflect on the profound mystery of Christ revealed through the gospel. Embrace the inclusivity of the gospel and the unity it brings among believers. Recognize that in Christ, there are no barriers of race, ethnicity, or background. Take time to meditate on the unity we have in Christ. Consider how this unity can shape your interactions with others and your involvement in the church. Consider how this truth impacts your view of others and your role in the church. Reflect on the ways you can promote unity and inclusivity in your relationships and community. Engage in conversations and activities that promote diversity and inclusion within your church and community. Celebrate the unique backgrounds and perspectives of others and seek to build meaningful relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

Participate in initiatives that promote unity within the body of Christ. Whether it's through community service projects, interfaith dialogues, or church events, look for ways to build bridges and promote understanding.

Depend on God's Grace and Power:

Like Paul, acknowledge your dependence on God's grace and power in your life and ministry. Recognize that it is not your abilities or efforts but God's grace that enables you to serve and fulfill your calling. Pray for God's grace and power to be evident in your life. Regularly pray for God's grace and power to be evident in your life. Acknowledge your dependence on Him and seek His strength in every aspect of your ministry and daily life.

Cultivate a posture of humility and dependence on God. Recognize that it is not your abilities or efforts but God's grace that enables you to serve and fulfill your calling. Seek to glorify God in all that you do. Share testimonies of God's grace and power in your life with others. Encourage others by sharing how God has worked in and through you and inspire them to trust in His grace.

Proclaim the Boundless Riches of Christ:

Commit to sharing the boundless riches of Christ with others. Recognize the immeasurable blessings you have received in Christ and seek to make them known to those around you. Whether through personal conversations, small group discussions, or public speaking, let the message of Christ's riches flow from your life.

Be intentional about sharing your personal testimony. Prepare a brief version of your story that highlights the key moments of your transformation and the impact of God's grace. Demonstrate the boundless riches of Christ through acts of service and kindness. Look for opportunities to serve others and to be a blessing to those around you. Let your actions be a testimony to the love and grace of Christ. Look for opportunities to have gospel-centred conversations with others. Whether through casual conversations, small group discussions, or public speaking, seek to share the message of Christ's riches with those around you.

Demonstrate God's Manifold Wisdom:

Seek to display the manifold wisdom of God through your life and the life of your church. Embrace the diversity and unity within the body of Christ and reflect God's wisdom in your relationships and actions. Celebrate the unique gifts and perspectives of others and work together to advance God's kingdom. Engage with your community in ways that reflect God's manifold wisdom. Participate in community events, volunteer opportunities, and initiatives that promote unity and diversity.

Approach God with Confidence:

Take advantage of the access you have to God through Christ. Approach Him with freedom and confidence, knowing that you are loved and accepted. Bring your needs, concerns, and praises to Him in prayer. Make prayer a central part of your daily life. Develop a habit of coming to God with confidence, trusting in His love and faithfulness.

Set aside dedicated times for prayer each day, and throughout the day, maintain a posture of openness to God's presence and guidance. Keep a prayer journal where you record your prayers, reflections, and how God answers them. This practice can help you see God's faithfulness over time and encourage you to approach Him with even greater confidence. Meditate on Scriptures that emphasize God's accessibility and love. Verses like Hebrews 4:16, "*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need,*" can strengthen your faith and encourage you to come boldly before God.

Find Strength in Suffering:

When facing difficulties and trials, remember Paul's example and find strength in knowing that your sufferings are not in vain. Trust that God is at work in and through your hardships to accomplish His purposes. Reflect on how God has used past sufferings to grow and strengthen you. Find encouragement in knowing that He is with you in your current challenges and will use them for His glory. Reflect on Paul's example and his perspective on suffering.

Understand that suffering can be a part of God's plan to accomplish His purposes. See your trials as opportunities for growth and deeper dependence on God. Build a support network of fellow believers who can encourage and pray for you during times of suffering. Share your struggles with trusted friends or mentors and allow them to walk alongside you. Continually remind yourself of God's faithfulness and sovereignty. Trust that He is with you in your suffering and will use it for His glory and your good. Reflect on Romans 8:28, which assures us that "*in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*"

Theological Reflections on the Mystery of Christ

To further understand the depth of the mystery of Christ revealed in Ephesians 3:1-13, let's delve into some theological reflections.

The Nature of the Mystery:

The term "mystery" in the New Testament often refers to something that was previously hidden but has now been revealed. In this context, the mystery is that Gentiles are now fully included in God's redemptive plan. This inclusion was not fully understood in previous generations but has now been made clear through Christ and the apostles.

Revelation through the Spirit:

The mystery of Christ was revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets. This underscores the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and revealing God's truth. The Spirit's work is essential for understanding and proclaiming the gospel.

Unity in Diversity:

The inclusion of the Gentiles highlights the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. God's redemptive plan is inclusive, breaking down ethnic, cultural, and social barriers. This unity in diversity reflects the heart of God and His desire for all people to be reconciled to Him and to each other.

The Church as a Witness:

The church, as the body of Christ, is the instrument through which God's manifold wisdom is displayed. The unity and diversity within the church serve as a powerful witness to the world and to the spiritual realms. It demonstrates God's redemptive power and His ability to bring harmony out of diversity.

Living Out the Mystery of Christ

Understanding the mystery of Christ and its implications should lead to practical changes in how we live and interact with others. Actively work to include others in your church and community. Reach out to people from different backgrounds and cultures, seeking to build inclusive and welcoming environments. Reflect the inclusive nature of the gospel in your actions and attitudes.

Recognize and celebrate the unity and diversity within the body of Christ. Participate in events and activities that highlight different cultures and perspectives. Embrace the richness that diversity brings to the church and the community. Let your life be a witness to the unity and love of Christ. Demonstrate through your actions and relationships the power of the gospel to break down barriers and create a new community. Share the message of Christ's inclusive love with those around you.

Engage in service and mission work that reflects the unity and diversity of the church. Serve alongside people from different backgrounds and experiences, and work together to advance God's kingdom. Let your collective efforts be a testimony to the world of the transformative power of the gospel.

Conclusion:

In Ephesians 3:1-13, Paul reveals the profound mystery of Christ, emphasizing the inclusivity of the gospel and the unity it brings among believers. He explains his role in making this mystery known and encourages believers to approach God with confidence and not to be discouraged by his sufferings.

As we reflect on these truths, let us embrace the mystery of Christ, depend on God's grace and power, proclaim the boundless riches of Christ, demonstrate God's manifold wisdom, approach God with confidence, and find strength in suffering. May we live out these truths in our daily lives, promoting unity and inclusivity, and being a witness to the transformative power of the gospel.