

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for August 26, 2018

The Mystery Revealed
Ephesians 3:1-6

I. The reflection (3:1)

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

- We see three aspects of Paul’s reflection in verse 1
- First, Paul reflects upon the glorious theology he had just spelled out in chapter 2, particularly verses 11-22
- We see this in the phrase, “For this reason”
 - This phrase forces us to look back at what Paul had just said in order to find the “reason”
 - Paul had just explained that there was no longer division and hostility in the church (2:14)
 - Instead, Christ’s life, death, and resurrection fulfilled the Law and made it inoperative (2:15)
 - Now, both Jews and Gentiles that have believed in Christ have become joined to the new man (2:15)
 - They are now one in Christ, at peace with God and at peace with one another (2:16)
- Second, Paul reflects on his position as a prisoner of Christ Jesus
- This is found in his statement, “A prisoner of Christ Jesus”
 - At this point in Paul’s ministry, he was a prisoner
 - He was arrested in Jerusalem and held in captivity for two years in Caesarea in the book of Acts
 - Then the book of Acts ends with Paul going to Rome where he would probably spend a couple more years as a prisoner in Rome
 - During his Roman imprisonment, Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians
 - However, notice how Paul identifies himself
 - Not as a prisoner of Rome (though he was according to the state)
 - Not as a prisoner on behalf of Christ Jesus (though he was considering why he was arrested)
 - He is Christ’s prisoner
 - He is bound to Christ
 - He is held captive to Christ
 - In addition to his self-identified titles of slave/bond-servant or minister or apostle, Paul also saw himself as Christ’s prisoner

- He would do whatever Christ would have him to do
- Third, Paul reflects on the reason for his imprisonment to the state and to Christ
- Paul states this in the phrase, “on behalf of you Gentiles”
 - Paul did not only remember his relationship with Christ, being His servant and prisoner
 - Paul also remembered his role and mission to take the gospel to the Gentiles
 - This mission is ultimately what landed Paul in jail
 - After ministering abroad on his missionary journeys to the Gentiles, Paul returned to Jerusalem where hostile Jews desired to take his life
 - This led to his imprisonment for a span of time
- After reflecting upon all these things, Paul desires to pray for the Ephesians
- However, if you look at the rest of our verses this morning, there isn’t any praying
- In fact, Paul doesn’t pray until verse 14
- Instead, Paul interrupts himself for the next several verses to give some parenthetical comments
- Most English bibles indicate this interruption with a hyphen at the end of verse 1, “–”
 - Why this interruption? Why this parenthesis?
 - In reflecting, Paul realizes just how significant the information was that he had delivered at the end of chapter 2
 - This may not have been easy for the Ephesians to grasp
 - The mixture of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in that area were to view each other as one new identity
 - They were to see themselves as coequals in the inheritance and plan of God that was now unfolding in the church
 - For Jewish Christians, this would be difficult because they never anticipated a plan of salvation coming about in this manner
 - For Gentile Christians, this would be difficult because they had probably become jaded and used to the Jewish people being their own segregated group
- This difficult teaching drives Paul to give a parenthesis where he autobiographically confirms his authority to deliver and teach such truth to the church abroad
- This difficult teaching also drives Paul to pray for the church as we will find when we pick up Paul’s thought in verse 14
- Until then, we continue by examining Paul’s explanation of his authority to teach such unity in the church

II. The responsibility (3:2)

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

- Paul feels a major sense of responsibility which he calls a “stewardship of God’s grace”
 - The word “stewardship” could also mean administration or management
 - God had made Paul a manager of His own grace
- This grace was given to Paul for the purpose of ministering to the Gentiles
- This is something that we learn and see played out in the book of Acts from the moment that Christ confronted Paul on the road to Damascus all the way through to the end
 - This was God’s plan for Paul’s life as He revealed it to Ananias
 - **Acts 9:15-16** “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’”
 - Paul testified to this when he was on trial later in the book of Acts
 - **Acts 26:16-18** “But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”
 - Paul declared this responsibility at other times in his life and ministry
 - **Romans 15:15-16** “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

III. The revelation (3:3-5)

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.

- Paul must exhort the church to unity in Christ because of his responsibility
- Now, we see that Paul must exhort the church to unity in Christ because of his revelation
 - In these three verses, we see three aspects of Paul’s revelation
- First, we realize that Paul’s revelation is ***from God***
- *3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.*
- Notice how Paul explains his discovery of this mystery

- Paul did not figure this information out on his own by his own intellect
 - Paul did not receive this information from the other Apostles
 - Paul states that the mystery “Was made known to me by revelation”
 - **Galatians 1:12** “For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”
 - Paul learned of this mystery from Jesus on the road to Damascus and for three years in Arabia
 - **Galatians 1:15-18a** “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem...”
 - The mystery of Jew and Gentile as one in the church was revealed to Paul by God
- Second, we understand that Paul’s revelation is ***focused on Christ***
 - *4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,*
 - Notice how Paul describes the mystery as “the mystery of Christ”
 - Paul had not only received this mystery from Christ when he was converted on the road to Damascus, Paul knew that this revelation was regarding Christ
 - Paul had received more information about the Messiah that led him to preach the gospel to both the Jews and Gentiles as well as exhort the church to be one
 - The Messiah was not only a prophesied King, Ruler, and Judge that would come and reign over the nations of the earth
 - The Messiah was a sacrificial lamb and suffering servant that would lay down His life in order for all people to be at peace with God and peace with one another
 - Paul had received a fuller understanding of the Messiah that launched him into a ministry to the Gentiles and preaching peace among the diversified church of Christ
- Third, we discover that Paul’s revelation is ***for the church***
 - *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.*
 - Notice the contrast that Paul makes between the “other generations” compared to “now” specifically through the “holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”
 - Some people state that Paul’s mystery that he understood was the offering of salvation unto the Gentiles
 - This is not what Paul has taught here and this is not the teaching of the Old Testament
 - Even the Old Testament saints generations before Paul knew that Gentiles would be saved

- **Genesis 12:3** “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
- **Isaiah 49:6** “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”
- The Jews expected Gentiles to be saved
 - But they never expected the Law to be done away with
 - And they never expected the Gentiles to be equals with them in the Messiah
- This affirms that the mystery revealed was the unity of Jew and Gentile into Christ as equals
- This is truly a new piece of information on the timeline of redemptive history
- This revelation was to motivate Paul’s ministry and set the trajectory for the church age

IV. The review (3:6)

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.

- Paul reviews his exhortation to the Ephesian church in a clear statement of the mystery in verse 6
- **Ephesians 3:6 NIV** - “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.”
 - This summarizes what Paul has just finished teaching in Ephesians 2:11-22
 - This also confirms the content of the mystery of Christ
 - Not that Gentiles can be saved
 - But that Gentiles and Jews can be equal and have equal standing in the body of Christ
 - Paul communicated this in three different statements in this one verse
 - “Fellow heirs” in receiving Yahweh as their God
 - “Members of the same body” in fellowshiping in the same group
 - “Partakers of the promise” in receiving the same Holy Spirit
 - Galatians 3:14 “so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”
 - The mystery was the creation of a new humanity in Christ for all peoples
 - Jews needed to learn how to share and rejoice in this revelation
- Notice that this mystery is only possible through the gospel
 - It is the gospel that pronounces all men as sinners before a holy God
 - It is the gospel that pronounces a Savior and Mediator between all mankind and God—namely, Christ Jesus

- Is it the gospel that invites everyone into relationship with God if they will trust in Jesus as their Savior who makes them right with God