

The “Mystery” Revealed

*“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— (2) if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you. (3) how that by revelation He made known to me the **mystery** as I have briefly written already. (4) by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the **mystery** of Christ, (5) which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: (6) that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,” Eph. 3:1-6.*

The writer of the preceding verses was the apostle Paul, who identified himself as “*the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles,*” v. 1. At the time he penned the verses he was literally a prisoner in Rome, having been imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Christ. This refers us back to Acts 21 wherein we learn that upon his arrival in Jerusalem upon the completion of his “third missionary journey,” Paul was arrested in the temple, then dragged out, and would have been beaten to death were it not for the intervention of the “*commander of the garrison,*” verses 26-34. He was initially incarcerated in Jerusalem, but was sent from there to Caesarea under heavy armed escort after “*the commander*” was made aware of over 40 Jews who had entered into an oath that they would neither eat or drink until “*they had killed Paul,*” Acts 23:11-35. He remained imprisoned for over two years in Caesarea, during which time he gave his defense before Ananias the high priest, Tertullus, and certain elders, (Acts 24:1-21), then before Governor Felix, Acts 24:22-27, and later before King Agrippa (Acts 26:1-32), both of whom were convinced he had done “*nothing worthy of death or chains,*” Acts 26:31. But Paul, being a Roman citizen, exercised his rights as a Roman citizen; he “*appealed to Caesar,*” Acts 26:32; hence, he was sent from Caesarea to Rome on that very dangerous and eventful voyage, Acts 27:1-28:16, where he remained under house arrest for “*two whole years,*” Acts 28:30. During this time he wrote what has been called his “prison epistles,” namely Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Hence, at the time he wrote Ephesians Paul was a prisoner in Rome; yet he called himself “*the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,*” Eph. 3:1. He was a prisoner “*of Jesus Christ*” because he had been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was a “*prisoner of Jesus Christ*” for the “*Gentiles,*” in that he had been preaching to Gentiles, pointing out that they were not bound by the law of Moses, which Jesus fulfilled, Matt. 5:17-18, and which upon His death was “*taken out of the way,*” having been “*nailed..to the cross,*” Col. 2:14. For these reasons Paul’s greatest enemies were Jews who generally resented his message with a passion.

In Eph. 3:2 Paul referred to “*the dispensation of the grace of God,*” which was given to him “*for*” the Gentiles. This refers to Paul’s commission to preach to the Gentiles, which here is called “*the dispensation (or the stewardship) of the grace of God,*” a work which he took very seriously and which he viewed as “*the grace of God.*” Notwithstanding the beatings, the imprisonments, etc., he received for the crime (?) of preaching the gospel of Christ, he looked upon it as a “*grace,*” or a favor from God, a “*grace*” which was “*given*” to him “*for*” the Gentiles, and all to whom he preached the gospel.

In Eph. 3:2 Paul referred to “*the mystery*” which he had written, and which “*by revelation*” was “*made known*” to him. “*Mystery,*” as used here is from the Greek *musterion*, and “denotes not the mysterious, but which being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension can be made known only by divine revelation... (**Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, by W.E. Vine). Hence, this “*mystery*” was not something mystical, or mysterious in nature, but it was that which heretofore had not (in prior dispensations) been fully revealed. However that “*mystery*” which “*by revelation*” was “*revealed*” to Paul was that which he had “*already*” briefly

written, no doubt referring to Eph. 1:9-12, where he wrote about “*the mystery of His will,*” which was “*made known*” to him, and about which he wrote.

Interestingly, in Eph. 3:4, alluding to that “*mystery*” about which he had “*written,*” Paul said “*by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.*” Summing it up to this point, we observe that this “*mystery*” had been “*made known,*” Paul wrote about it, and then stated in essence, that when you read what I wrote, you can understand what I understand! This “*mystery*” was not mystical; it was not incomprehensible; it could be understood — understood by those who take the time to read what was written! Yes, contrary to what we often hear from the lips of many religious leaders, it is possible to “*understand*” the scriptures. After all, Jesus had previously said to His Jewish audience, “*you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,*” John 8:32. Of course, we must “*hunger and thirst for righteousness,*” Matt. 5:6; we must “*rightly*” divide “*the word of truth,*” 2 Tim. 2:15; we must be intellectually honest, and we must not be like those who do not have “*the love of the truth,*” and thus will likely believe a lie instead of the truth, 2 Thess. 2:10-11.

According to Eph. 3:5, this “*mystery*” which was “*made known*” to Paul, about which he wrote, and which can be understood by those who read what he wrote, was “*revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.*” It was not something about which they dreamed, or had figured out for themselves; it was that which was “*revealed by the Spirit,*” and it was revealed — not to every Tom, Dick, and Harry — but to the “*holy apostles and prophets.*” Herein Paul was affirming the inspiration of the message he preached and about which he wrote. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

But what was the **message** of “*the mystery?*” The answer is given in Eph. 3:6, it being: “*that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.*” Let us now examine the contents of that “*mystery*” more closely.

“*That the Gentiles...*” The Law of Moses was given to the Israelite nation. Cf. Deut. 5:1-3. It was to serve as a “*tutor*” to bring them to Christ, Gal. 3:24, a law which Jesus fulfilled, Matt. 5:17-18, which was succeeded by that “*better covenant,*” or the New Testament, of which Jesus is “*the mediator,*” Heb. 8:6; 9:15-17, and which placed Gentiles on an equal footing with the Jews.

“*Should be fellow heirs,*” Eph. 3:6. “*Fellow heirs*” with the Jews. They would be co-heirs, or joint participants in that heavenly inheritance awaiting Christians. Rom. 8:17.

“*Of the same body,*” Eph. 3:6. The “*body*” to which he alludes is identified as “*the church,*” over which Jesus reigns as head, Eph. 1:22-23, of which He is the “*Savior,*” Eph. 5:23, in which both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled “*to God,*” Eph. 2:16, of which Jesus is the Builder, Matt. 16:18, and which existed in “*the eternal purpose of God,*” Eph. 3:10-11. Anyone who reads these verses and then concludes that the “*church*” herein referred to is not necessary for salvation must be in the category of those who do not have a proper “*love of the truth,*” cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-11, or whose understanding is adversely affected by preconceived ideas planted in their minds by those whom Jesus identified as “*blind leaders of the blind,*” Matt. 15:14.

“*and partakers of His promise in Christ,*” Eph. 3:6. God’s “*promise*” takes us all the way back to Gen. 12:3; 22:18, wherein God said to Abraham, “*in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*” We spring forward from Gen. 12:3 to Gal. 3:16, and discover that Jesus Christ was that promised “*seed*” of Abraham, and then we note in Gal. 3:29 that those who belong to Christ “*are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*” But we further observe from

Eph. 3:6 that those who are “*partakers of His promise*” are identified as being “*in Christ*,” which reminds us of Gal. 3:27 wherein we learn that “*as many...as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*.” Being “*in Christ*” is vitally important, because Scripture informs us that “*salvation...is in Christ*,” 2 Tim. 2:10. To be saved, one must be where God put Salvation, and He put it “*in Christ*.”

“*through the gospel*,” Eph. 3:6. “*Gospel*” is from *euangelion*, and means “glad tidings” or “good news.” Good news is the opposite of bad news. The bad news is this: “*all have sinned*,” Rom. 3:23, and “*the wages of sin is death*,” Rom. 6:23. *But sinners can be saved* “through the gospel,” Eph. 3:6, which is “*the power of God unto salvation*,” Rom. 1:16, but which must be obeyed, 2 Thess. 1:7-9.

Conclusion: Thank God for this “*mystery*” which has been “*revealed*,” which you can “*understand*,” and to which we must all sincerely submit. —Bobby Witherington