

## 6. The Revelation of God's Mystery—Ephesians 3

Previously Paul has shown that God's eternal purpose was in Christ (Eph 1:1-10) and in the church (Eph 1:11-23), stating in plain terms in Eph 1:11b-12 that all this was according to the eternal plan of God.

In Eph 2:1:10, Paul taught that both Gentiles and Jews are saved "by grace through faith." With faith as our part in God's eternal plan of salvation, we must ". . . do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10)." Through his eternal plan of salvation, God reconciles people unto himself in Christ and in the church, according to Eph 2:15-16:

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Previous lessons have taught that the one body is the one church. In Eph 2:19-22, that set of descriptive terms for the church broadened:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but **fellow citizens** with **God's people** and members of **God's household**, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the **whole building** is joined together and rises to become a **holy temple** in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a **dwelling** in which God lives by his Spirit. [Emphasis Added]

This lesson turns to how God made known to us his will, which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world.

### ***The Mystery of God Made Known to Paul***

Eph 3:1-3

*1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles –*

*2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.*

God gave the administration of his grace to Paul. Paul elaborates in Eph 4:11-13 that it also came to others to make sure that God's saving grace went to all:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Paul was one of that inspired group—apostles and prophets—whom Paul had just named in Eph 2:19-20 as the foundation of the household of God, the church: "19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, . . ."

Evangelists, pastors, and teachers—continued beyond the apostolic age even until the present, administering God's saving grace and using the inspired written word left to us in the New Testament by the apostles and prophets. Paul returns to this word *administration* in verse 9: "9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things." In verses 10-11, Paul placed the responsibility of spreading God's saving Grace on the church: "10 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, . . ."

## Eph 3:4-6

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 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.

What Paul had written makes people able to understand his insight into the mystery of Christ. *Mystery* means something that was once hidden, but now is made known. Paul explains in precise terms the process of revealing this mystery in Rom 16:25-27:

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him . . .

1 Cor 2:7-8 tells us how long the mystery was hidden:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

This study has already shown in Eph 1:9-10 that God made known the mystery of Christ, bringing all things together:

9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

When people, then and now, read what the apostles and prophets wrote, they can get the full and exact meaning and understanding of the mystery of God, just as the apostles and prophets themselves had it. In the letter to the sister church of the Colossians, Paul made certain that he meant *full riches* and *complete understanding*. In Col 2:2-3, he wrote:

2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

There is neither need for nor any room for latter day revelations or ecclesiastical utterances. The revelation is complete.

Verse 6 tells exactly what the mystery is, leaving no room for speculation: "6 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."

Remember here that the body is the church, the institution to which all Christians are added. This definition of mystery emerges in the *Revelation* where Christ revealed through John when the mystery of God would be accomplished. Rev 10:7 reads: "7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

In Rev 11:15, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet and what follows is exactly what Paul is teaching:

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,  
and he will reign for ever and ever."

The thought finishes in Rev 11:16-19:

16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,  
the One who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great power  
and have begun to reign.

18 The nations were angry;  
and your wrath has come.

The time has come for judging the dead,  
and for rewarding your servants the prophets  
and your saints and those who reverence your name,  
both small and great —  
and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.

In Eph 2:21-22, Paul taught that the household of God, the church, is his temple:

21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

### ***The Manifold Wisdom of God Made Known through the Church***

Eph 3:7-9

*7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.*

By the gift of God's grace, Paul preached the "unsearchable riches of Christ." In Col 2:2-4, cited above, Paul had described these unsearchable riches of Christ as "all treasures of wisdom and knowledge." There, he said that we might have "complete understanding." Now he writes that he preached to "make plain to everyone the administration of God's mystery." Paul's teaching leaves no room for further modern interpretation or latter day revelations. What Paul and the apostles and prophets wrote was scripture, complete and perfect in every way. 2 Tim 3:16-17 teaches: "16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

What was revealed in the New Testament is *plain*, made so by the inspired writers moved by the Holy Spirit of God, just as Peter testified in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Eph 3:10-13

*10 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, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

Just as God's eternal purpose was that his son should be offered; that the church should be the fullness of him who fills all in all; that man should be saved by grace through faith and good works; that Jews and Gentiles were reconciled in one body, the church; so it is that God's eternal purpose is that his manifold wisdom of God be made known through the church. As the age of apostles and prophets approached its end with the demise of inspired men, the word of God remained in the scriptures of the New Testament. The scriptures charge the church to make the truth known. Thus, it is that 1 Tim 3:15 calls the church the pillar and foundation of the truth: "15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

### ***Grasping the Love of Christ***

Eph 3:14-17a

*14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

To make known the manifold wisdom of God and to be the pillar and foundation of truth, the church—the family of God—must be and remain strong in the inner being of each one of us. This power comes by allowing Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith. The church has remained strong, fulfilling Paul's prayer over the centuries. Therefore, the New Testament church that Christ purchased with his own blood continues thousands of years later, making known the manifold wisdom of God.

Eph 3:17b-19

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Paul's prayer calls for Christians to be rooted and established [grounded ASV]. All the saints have power that comes from grasping the incomparable love of Christ—a love beyond human knowledge and a love that fills Christians "to the measure of all the fullness of God." In this context, as the church presses on to make known the manifold wisdom of God, how can the church fail? Who can be against it? Paul similarly wrote in Rom 8:31; 37-39:

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### ***To Him Be the Glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus***

Eph 3:20-21

*20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Our power is in Christ from God. That power of God, as was his love, is immeasurable. Therefore, the glory for what Christians are and do belongs to God; but this glory belongs to him in Christ and in the church. This principle is eternal to the end, literally, into the ages of the ages. Ephesians 1 ended stating that Christ was head over all things; and the church, the body, was the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 2 ended with all men, Jews and Gentiles, saved and reconciled to God by Christ in the one body, the church. Now at the end of Ephesians 3, that same Christ and that same church is where God receives the glory. There is no other way.

### **Study Questions from the Scriptures**

1. Eph 1:1-10: What was the role of Christ in the eternal purpose of God?
2. Eph 1:11-23: What was the role of the church in the eternal purpose of God?
3. Eph 1:11b-12: Does God have a plan for us?
4. Eph 2:1-10: How are we saved?
5. Eph 2:10: What kind of works are we to do?
6. Eph 2:15-16: How did God reconcile man?
7. Eph 2:19-22: How many names for God's people are in this passage?
8. Eph 3:1-3: What was the administration of God's grace? How was God's mystery made known? After receiving it, what did Paul do with it?
9. Eph 4:11-13: What are the offices of God's administration? What do they do?
10. Eph 2:19-20: Which of these offices included inspired men?
11. Eph 3:4-5: After Paul wrote the revelation, what were they to do with it? What were they able to understand? In whom was the revelation revealed?
12. Rom 16:25-27: In what kind of writings was the revelation made known? By whose command? What are all nations to do with these writings?
13. 1 Cor 2:7-8: How long was the mystery hidden?
14. Col 2:2-4: How complete is the revelation?
15. Rev 10:7: When was God's mystery to be accomplished?
16. Rev 11:15: When the seventh trumpeted sounded, what had happened to the kingdom? What was Christ doing?
17. Rev 11:16-19: What did the twenty-four elders say had happened? What happened to the temple of God?
18. Eph 2:21-22: What is the temple of God?
19. Eph 3:7-9: What did Paul preach? What did Paul make plain?
20. Col 2:2-4: What are all the treasures of Christ?
21. 2 Tim 3:16-17: How complete are the scriptures?
22. 2 Peter 1:20-21: How do we get the scriptures?
23. Eph 3:10-13: Through what is the manifold wisdom of God made known?
24. 1 Tim 3:14: How does Paul describe the church?
25. Eph 3:14-17a: Where does Christ dwell? From where does our strength come?
26. Eph 3:17b-19: What surpasses knowledge? Why?
27. Rom 8:31; 37-39: Who can be against us? What can separate us from the love of God?
28. Eph 3:20-21: In whom and in what is the glory given? To whom is the glory to be given?