

Ephesians 3:1-13

"A Sacred Secret Shared"

Today; some of you are going to learn something new. Something (I believe) you (perhaps) never even knew was in your bible. But it's right here for all to see. Or perhaps you've *seen* it, but simply never really taken notice *of* it. But it's fascinating to think *on*, to take *in* & even be changed *by*...

Now, if you'll simply take a look at the 1st 3 words of Eph Ch 3, you'll see that they call for just a little review of what we've taken in thus far. Paul says, "For this reason," for what reason? Well, the reason found in the 1st 2 Ch's culminating specifically at the end of Ch 2.

In Ch 1 Paul drew our attention to God's great work of redemption in man. & He demonstrated the inseparable union of the Godhead in it all... He pointed out the work of the Father, the work of the Son & the work of the Holy Spirit (who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the day we stand before Him to the praise of His glory).

He concluded Ch 1 w/a beautiful yet powerful & profound prayer for the Ephesians that God would give them the spiritual ability to understand these tremendous truths concerning His work in their lives. That they might receive a spirit of wisdom & revelation in the knowledge J.C., the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know the hope of His calling & the power of the resurrection at work in their lives. It's a wonderful prayer that we would do well to adopt in our prayers for one another!

Then in Ch 2, Paul goes on to speak about the great work of God's reconciliation. How He's reconciled man to *Himself* through the cross of Christ (having made us alive [spiritually speaking] though we were dead in trespasses & in sins) by grace through faith. But then also how He's reconciled the 2 great people groups who were radically/emphatically divided at that time; the Jew & the Gentile. How that God's plan would effectively do away w/any & all division by bringing both together to form one *new man*; the body of Christ, the church.

He concluded Ch 2 by giving us the picture of God constructing a great temple (a place in which He would dwell), being built upon the foundation of the apostles & the prophets (J.C. Himself being the Chief Cornerstone). & The building blocks of the temple are people from every tribe, tongue & nation, Jew & Gentile alike who've come to know J.C. in a personal way through faith in Him. All have equal access to God through faith in Christ, we're all the very dwelling place of God in the spirit... This is revelatory, mind blowing kind of stuff. Now look at Ch 3.

Vs 1-5

In these 1st 5 Vs Paul brings us right to the edge of our seats. He's speaking here of this great secret that's been revealed to Him by God that he's preparing to share w/us. Both the what, & the why behind it.

So back in Vs 1 he says, "For this reason", "In light of all the things I've just written to you... I, Paul, the prisoner (notice) of Christ Jesus..." Prisoner of Christ Jesus? Wait a minute Paul, I thought you were the prisoner of Rome? Let's remember that when Paul penned this letter he was in jail. There he was on house arrest, free to move about the house, yet nevertheless under the supervision of Roman soldiers. Being chained to a soldier every night to prevent him from escaping (no different than Rome would treat any other prisoner on house arrest).

Yet Paul had a completely different perspective. He didn't consider himself a prisoner of Rome, as though Nero was in control. Wherever he was, whatever was happening in his life he was firmly fixed on the fact that *God* was in control therefore if he was in prison he was the prisoner of J.C.

& Perhaps w/the "wrongest" of words w/the "rightest" of heart we're grateful that Paul was placed in prison! Paul was quite literally a man on a mission! Always on the go, always sharing the good news of J.C. & Him crucified for the sin of the world. But we have 4 NT letters thanks to the fact that he was forced to slow down being placed in prison (the book of Eph being one of them).

Not only that but as you might imagine, Paul would share Christ w/those soldiers who were charged to supervise him. They probably had the feeling that he wasn't chained to them so much as they were chained to him! ☺ But these prison guards were getting saved & returning to Caesar's palace as born-again believers! That's why when you read Phil 4 (another prison epistle btw) Paul says, "*All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.*"¹ It wasn't because he was eating grapes w/Caesar sharing the gospel w/his servants. It was because his palace guards were getting saved on prison duty!

Here's what I'm saying, wherever you are, whatever you are, it's because God has ordained you to be a light in that place. "The school teacher of J.C.", "The student of J.C.", "The business owner, or day laborer of J.C."

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Php 4:22]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus had captured Paul's heart & he was the prisoner of Christ Jesus. Now I suppose I should say this as well. Everyone is serving someone or something. Some people are prisoners of destructive things. Prisoners of drug addiction, imprisoned by alcohol, some are bound by pleasure or always trying to please a parent or make someone happy w/them.

It seems that everyone will be a prisoner to someone or something... Paul chose to be the prisoner of J.C. It's counterintuitive I know, but to serve Jesus is the greatest freedom you'll ever know. For whom the Son sets free, is free indeed. Why be a slave to sin when you could be a slave to righteousness? Why live for the present when you can live for eternity? What profit is it to gain the whole world & lose your own soul? Paul maintained the eternal perspective...

A prisoner of Christ Jesus (notice) *for* you Gentiles. It was due to his missionary efforts on behalf of the Gentiles that he was arrested in Jerusalem when a riot broke out & now is awaiting his trial in Rome. Ladies & Gentlemen, Paul wasn't writing this letter overlooking the clear blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea eating bon bons & sipping tea! He suffered for the truth that he's about to explain to us in the coming Vs.

Having said that, it's not that Paul wants us to feel sorry for him, but we should realize that in many respects his pain made for our gain. (Look at it again Vs1-2).

Vs 1-2

Paul is saying, "Listen, God gave something *to* me but it wasn't just *for* me, it was for *you*." What was that something? It was the, "dispensation of the grace of God." You say, "dispensation" what's a "dispensation"? Really, it's quite simple. You know what a "dispenser" is right? (There you are at the convenience store, you step up to the soda dispenser & you receive a *dispensation* of soda that you are now responsible for).

We're speaking here of a portion of something that he was to be responsible *for* & a steward *of*. That's what this word speaks of in the literal sense, a stewardship. It's something that belongs to God, but He entrusted it to Paul to manage & administer on His behalf.

So God, in His grace dispensed a calling, gifting & enabling to Paul, along with (amongst other things) a particular insight/understanding. Gave to him (the word is, Vs 3) "revelation" of this mystery. The "mystery" being God's plan to make one new man from all believers, Jew or Gentile, right? That's what he's been speaking of in brief throughout these 1st 2 Ch's regarding God's redemption & God's reconciliation. You can read it directly in the last ½ of Vs 15 of Ch 2, "so as to create 1 new man from the 2, thus making peace..."

Jew & Gentile being one in Christ, no benefit in being Jew (ethnically), no detriment in being Gentile, we're one in Christ (Christian; the body of Christ, the church).

Now folks I know that this isn't hitting you in a major way, we're 2,000 yrs & 7,000 miles, continents & cultures removed. But this was *radical* in Paul's day. The fact that Gentiles shared equally in the grace of God through faith in J.C. was enough to start riots wherever Paul went!

Why? Because this was something unheard of until the apostolic era. That's what he says here in Vs 5 where he writes, "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 & prophets:" Or to understand that another way, you can scour the O.T. all you like, you will never deduce from the scriptures of old that God had a plan to make 1 new man from the 2 in Christ. You will never deduce the creation of the church from simply reading the O.T.

Yes, there are *many* scriptures that speak of the Messiah being *a light* to the Gentiles, or Gentiles coming to salvation, that's not the mystery (or the sacred secret). That which was never foreseen nor revealed was the coming together of Jew & Gentile, together making up the body of Christ.

This was something God revealed to the N.T. apostles & prophets. Now, Jesus mentioned the church to His disciples, but even at that He didn't clarify what exactly it would look like, how it would function, or any of that. It was the Holy Spirit (Vs 5) who revealed this treasured truth to His holy apostles & prophets, notice Vs 6.

Vs 6-7

Btw if you want to read of Peter's revelation of this same truth you can find it in Acts Ch's 10-11.

But we read here that Gentiles are now fellow heirs, of the same body, partakers of His promise in Christ. Gentiles are now *full partakers* of God's promise, this was no longer a privilege reserved only for the believing Jewish person. A Gentile didn't need to convert & become a Jew to partake of God's promise but now the Gentile can partake of the precious promise of the Messiah, how? Notice, "Through the gospel."

The gospel brings the good news that all men everywhere have an equal standing in Christ. We don't have common ground through circumcision, through Judaism or any other religious ritual or rite, but through the gospel. This is the great mystery that God revealed through Paul & the other apostles & prophets. He didn't announce it ahead of time, He simply revealed it at the *right* time to these foundational leaders of the church.

This gospel message (Paul says), “of which I became a minister (or servant) (notice again) according to the gift of the grace of God.” Why was it that Paul was enlisted into the ministry (the service of the gospel)? Was it because he was so smart? He was a scholar of scripture? He had popularity & influence? Was it due to his piety, his spirituality or his ability? No. The means of Paul’s ministry was one thing; grace.

God doesn’t call the qualified, He qualifies the called. We aren’t “ministers” of the gospel because we’re highly trained professionals, but because of the grace of God exclusively.

& We notice that whom God enlists, He enables. Paul says that he ministered, “by the effective working of His power.” Again, he didn’t minister out of the effective training he’d received at seminary (though it’s certainly not wrong to go to bible college or whatever). But what makes a minister effective isn’t the fact that he’s eloquent, articulate or charismatic, it’s the resurrection power of Christ at work in his life.

Vs 8-9

Btw, can I just say that the bible knows nothing of the idea of evolution? The bible knows nothing of the idea that purports perhaps God put all the ingredients in the mix & then just allowed it to evolve from there. The bible knows only that God said, & it was so. That He created all things through Christ Jesus. That as we read in the gospel of John, *“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”*²

But look at what Paul says here in Vs 8. “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints,” Paul was genuinely amazed, he marveled at the fact that he was called to preach the gospel & all the more that he was entrusted to bring clarity to this mystery that was otherwise unknown...

If you’re unfamiliar w/Paul’s testimony, & the calling of God upon his life, I’d encourage you to look into it. Read the book of Acts, it’ll blow your mind. The calling of God upon his life truly *was* all of grace. Prior to his conversion Paul was a terrorist (for a lack of a better way to say it) toward the church. He had it in his heart to literally snuff it out of existence, he persecuted the church of God w/zeal & vehemence.

But one day Jesus revealed Himself to Paul & he would never be the same. Who among us could ever receive a clear vision of Jesus & remain the same? He’s changed us hasn’t He? Paul was no different. & He was truly humbled by the calling of God upon his life.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 1:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& I have discovered that the closer one truly grows to God, the humble they become. Every now & then you'll hear these testimonies of all that someone gave up to serve God or to be in ministry... That doesn't really impress me. Can I just tell you that we don't give up anything *for* Christ, we gain everything *in* Christ. It's *His* sacrifice we're to magnify, not ours. He *gave* all that we might *gain* all...

Humility; it's simply the byproduct drawing near to true holiness... Think of all the things Paul did, how many churches he planted, how much the world owes to his faithfulness to run his race to win. 2/3s of the N.T. which would be penned by his hand... & Yet he would say things like, *"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am,"*³ Or like here, "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints..." Toward the end of his life he wrote, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."*⁴ Family, these aren't the words of false humility, but the testimony of a man who's spent time in the presence of God...

It's when we truly see God for who He is that we realize exactly who we're not. You might write it down & look it up later, Isaiah 6:1-5. When we see the Lord in truth, it changes everything. It won't give you a big head, but rather a broken & contrite heart...

Paul was called to preach (or make plain) the unsearchable, unfathomable, previously undetectable riches of Christ that are so vast, none can plumb their depths. In the book of Romans Paul put it like this, *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"*⁵ No matter how deep you go into the love of God, the grace of God, the wisdom & knowledge of God, the mercy, compassion & lovingkindness of God, there's always more to be discovered. We'll never know their depths, how incredible is that? (Vs 9).

I like the phrase, "...the fellowship of the mystery". When it comes having insight & understanding, it goes beyond facts to be known, it's life to be lived. It seems some have the *facts* of the mystery, but the *fellowship* of the mystery is absent from their lives. Again, the bible knows nothing of the isolation or separation of believers, only unification & fellowship in the bond of peace.

Ok, so we've come to understand the "what". The question is why? Why did God do things the way He did them.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 15:9-10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Ti 1:15-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 11:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Not announcing before, bringing together the 2 to create in Himself 1 new man...
why?

Vs 10-13

Wait... what!? Did we read that right? Why did God do things the way He did them? Vs 10, "to the intent that now the manifold, (multifaceted) wisdom of God might be made know *by* (or through) the church... *to the principalities & powers in heavenly places.*" You say, "Does that mean what I think it means?" It means exactly what you think it means! God is literally schooling the angels (both faithful & fallen) in His infinite wisdom through His work in your life!

Let's remember that angels aren't omniscient beings, they're created beings, not all knowing. & God wants His creatures to know His great/manifold, multifaceted wisdom (think of the intricacy, complexity & beauty of a multifaceted diamond, it can be examined from all sorts of different angles). & One purpose in God's great plan of the ages is to reveal His wisdom to the angels... Not for His sake, but for their good & His glory. The glory of the creature is directly connected to the glory of the Creator...

So this tells us *how* God will reveal His wisdom & to *whom* He's going to reveal it. He reveals His wisdom *by or through* His work in the church & who does He reveal it to? Initially we'd be prone to believe He's revealing His wisdom to us, right? But here's the news flash, it's not all about us! 😊 God is revealing His wisdom *through us to* angelic beings... As one has said it, "The Church thus becomes the university for angels, and each saint a professor."

Now, of course God wants to reveal His wisdom to the church. But isn't it interesting that He doesn't use the angels to reveal His wisdom to the saints, but He uses the saints to reveal His wisdom to the angels?

Let this remind you that you're called for something far greater than your own individual salvation/sanctification. You & me, we are called to be the means by which God teaches the universe a beautiful lesson concerning His manifold wisdom!

Read 2 Kings 6:16-17 & you'll discover that we are literally surrounded by angelic beings all the time! & They know you far better than you know them... & They're learning from your life. You & me, we can put our best foot forward in front of others. We can cause people to think we have our act together, we're spiritual, that we're firing on all cylinders. Can I tell that the angels see right through *all* of that... They see you at home, in secret, when no one is watching, when you think you're alone & no one knows...

They see us in weakness, in frailty, in sin... & yet God has chosen to redeem us, to work through & even live *in* us... To the flip side we may think our lives are small & insignificant; the angels see beyond that as well. They see the spiritual reality of your high standing in the family of God, that you're seated in heavenly places in Christ...

But this is one reason the conduct of the church is so important, because angelic beings (both faithful & fallen) are interested *in* & instructed *by* our lives as believers. God teaches them through us (write it down, read it later 1 Cor 11:10, 1 Pet 1:12, 1 Timothy 5:21). & It seems to me that we should take the responsibility seriously. After-all the bible speaks to the fact that angels are given the responsibility to carry our souls to heaven when we die (Matt 13:39-43, Luke 16:22). I'd hate to receive a "bumpy ride" because I didn't offer much in the classroom of my life!" 😊

But our lives are a lesson in the eternal purpose which God accomplished in J.C. our Lord...

"in whom we have boldness & access w/confidence through faith in Him." You have the freedom to come before God & pour your heart out *to* God anytime you want to *through* faith in Jesus.

So come boldly, come frequently, receive of His grace & mercy, to the praise of His glory...

Prayer Points:

God we praise You in Your infinite wisdom. That You don't call the qualified but You qualify the called, that You enable those You enlist. May we walk in humility, being the light You've called us to be & may our lives fulfill the purpose for which You have redeemed us; be glorified in us.

God wants to be glorified in your life. That starts by receiving new life, Christ in you the hope of glory. God loves you, Jesus gave His life for you, you have nothing to lose, everything to gain, turn from your sin, trust in J.C. today.