

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians
Knowing Your Privilege in Christ
"The Function of the Church (2)"
(Ephesians 3:1-13)

1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, **2** If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: **3** How that by revelation he made known unto me the **mystery**; (as I wrote afore in few words, **4** Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the **mystery** of Christ) **5** Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; **6** That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: **7** Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. **8** Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; **9** And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: **10** To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, **11** According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: **12** In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. **13** Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

OUTLINE

(1) Unveiling the Unsearchable Riches of Christ (v1-13)

- a. **By God's Word (v1-6)**
- b. **By God's Servants (v7-13)**

Continuation...

(1) Unveiling the Unsearchable Riches of Christ (v1-13)

a. By God's Servants (v7-13)

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

(i) Encounter/Experience of God (v7-9)

The Apostle Paul was called of God to share the unsearchable riches of Christ to a dying world. He was a rebel. One who persecuted the church. Yet, God forgave and saved him. He understood the debt he owed for the pain that he has caused the church before his spiritual eyes were opened. He called himself one who is "*less than the least of all saints*". He understood how unworthy he was for all the evil that he had done before his conversion.

Precisely! It is his unlikely conversion that helps us to see that salvation is by the grace of God as he admitted in **Ephesians 2:8-9** *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

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In his own words, he testified **Ephesians 2:4-7** *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

He understood what great things God is doing for him rescuing him from the ravages of hell and transporting him to the bliss of heaven.

And he testified... *7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

It was not Paul who appointed himself to this spiritual work but God was the one who called him. He was struck down by a bright light from heaven and he was blinded for three days. Jesus sent Ananias to baptize him and to instruct him concerning his will for Paul's life to serve Him.

Acts 9:11-16 *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, **Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.***

It was Christ who made Paul a minister. He explained that he had been placed in the ministry of the gospel with God's enabling grace (v7-8a) to preach the unsearchable wealth of Christ and to enlighten all of humanity concerning the mystery which had been hidden in God (v8b-9).¹

CH Spurgeon in his Lectures to my Students said, "Any Christian has a right to disseminate the gospel who has the ability to do so; and more, he not only has a right, but it is his duty so to do as long as he lives...but to the work and office of the bishopric, in which is included both teaching and bearing rule in the church, which requires the dedication of a man's entire life to spiritual work, and separation from every secular calling..."

2 Timothy 2:4 *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

And entitles the man to cast himself for temporal supplies upon the church of God, since he gives all his time, energies, and endeavours, for the good of those over whom he presides.

1 Corinthians 9:11 *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*

What are the spiritual things? Matthew Poole defined well, "The apostle meaneth the doctrine and sacraments of the gospel; which are called spiritual things, because they

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians – An Exegetical Commentary, Baker Academic, 2007, 458.

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come from heaven, they affect the soul and spirit of a man, they tend to make men spiritual, they prepare the soul for heaven.”

What then are the carnal things? Poole again defined, “By carnal things he means things which only serve our bodies, which are our carnal, fleshly part.”

The spiritual ministry work ought to be considered worthy of compensation and ought to include the provision of physical sustenance. It is good that we express our appreciation of spiritual benefits with material blessings. [Zodhiates]

1 Timothy 5:18 *For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.*

Such a man is addressed by Peter in the words, “*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof.*” 1 Peter 5:2.

Now, all in a church cannot oversee, or rule – there must be some to be overseen and ruled; and we believe that the Holy Ghost appoints in the church of God some to act as overseers, while others willing to be watched over for their good. All are not called to labour in word and doctrine, or to be elders, or to exercise the office of a bishop; nor should all aspire to such works. Since the gifts are necessary are nowhere promised to all; but those should addict themselves to such important engagements who feel, like the apostle, that they have “received this ministry”.

2 Corinthians 4:1 *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;*

No man may intrude into the sheepfold as an under-shepherd; he must have an eye to the chief Shepherd, and wait his beck and command. Or ever a man stands forth as God’s ambassador, he must wait for the call from above; and if he does not so, but rushes into the sacred office, the Lord will say of him and others like him, “I sent them not, neither commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, said the Lord.” Jeremiah 23:32.”²

The Apostle Paul acceded that his entering into the gospel ministry it came *by the gift of the grace of God*. God called and equipped him for service – “*by the effectual working of his power.*” God’s hand was with him to prosper the ministry.

Galatians 1:15-18 *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.*

8 *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;*

Indeed, the Apostle Paul admitted he is an unlikely candidate for the ministry but for God’s sovereign call in the fullness of time - **1 Corinthians 1:26-28** *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God*

² C.H. Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, Old Paths, 1990, 18-19.

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hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

His mission work to the Gentiles was by God's appointment. It was at the church in Antioch in Syria where the Holy Ghost sent him on his first missionary journey.

Acts 13:1-4 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

His task was to show to the gentile world the unsearchable riches of Christ! This is the mystery of God's redemption plan revealed to him.

Jesus is the Creator, Sustainer and Saviour. This the Apostle Paul, I believe to be the writer of the book of Hebrews said so well.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

I relate to you my journey of faith whilst studying in Far Eastern Bible College. There were times when I wondered how I would be able to meet the needs of my family, wife, children and retired parents when all I did day in and day out was memorise vocabulary after vocabulary. Little did I know I was learning the lesson of faith. This lesson was even spelt out for me when I did an exegetical paper on Hebrews 1:1-3, "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*"

I learnt that Jesus is (1) Creator (2) Sustainer and (3) Saviour. What does it mean that Jesus is the Sustainer of this world? That He is "upholding all things by the word (ῥῆμα) of his power"? In searching for the answer, I made a word study of this word "word" (ῥῆμα).

The Lord led me to a discovery that strengthened my faith to trust in Jesus Christ and to the conviction that He alone is my true security. As I made a word study of the word "word" or "ῥῆμα" in Greek, I came to these three verses — Matthew 4:4, Luke 5:5 and John 6:66.

Matthew 4:4 "*But (Jesus) answered (Satan) and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*"

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Spiritual food is more important than physical food. Physical food is only for this lifetime, spiritual food lasts for eternity. That is why I am diligently studying God's Word. It is food to my soul, much more than physical sustenance can ever be to my body. I learn to esteem the spiritual above the physical. And I thank the Lord that I experienced His faithfulness in taking care of my physical needs throughout my studies.

Luke 5:5 *“And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”*

The Word of God has power. Jesus is the Sustainer of our livelihood. Remember, Peter was an experienced fisherman. He went fishing the entire night but caught nothing — an impossibility for an experienced fisherman like Peter. When instructed by Jesus to let down the net for a draught, the catch was a whole net full. Truly, Jesus is able to take care of us! Power resides with Him to sustain us in life's pathway. Later, Peter tried going back to fishing but it was not the Lord's will for him. That he came up empty taught him the futility of struggling against the will of God for his life. When he again trusted the Lord, and was obedient to His Word, he received a whole net full.

John 6:66-68 “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”

Jesus is the only way to eternal life. “To whom shall we go?” Peter thought thoroughly through the question, considered and concluded there was nowhere else to go. Many of the disciples had left Jesus after He stopped feeding them. Remember, at the beginning of John 6, Jesus had fed the five thousand and taught them. When He tested them for the true motive of their following Him, many failed the test. Only the 12 were left. Note the words of Peter for our learning.

Therefore, faith in Jesus Christ is an objective faith! Jesus is the living and true God because He is our Creator, Sustainer and Saviour. Are you following Him, worshipping Him and connected to Him? For, truly, we can do no other for He is the way, the truth and the only way to everlasting life! “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” These words cut my heart, chided me for my faithlessness and secured my heart to a simple trust in the leading of the Lord.

(ii) Expression (v10-13)

10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

Having encountered and experienced God, the Apostle Paul as God's servant, is given the charge to express his encounter and experience with God in Christ. It is interesting that God purposed to make known his manifold wisdom, the mystery, to earthly rulers through the church rather than telling them directly.

And the revealing of the manifold wisdom of God is not a haphazard idea or thought to be conveyed but one that was according to the eternal purpose of God.

John 6:38-40 *For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him*

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that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jesus came to live a perfect life on our behalf and to die on the cross, taking the penalty for our sins, and three days later rose from the dead victorious over sin and death.

All who trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead have their sins forgiven and is given the privilege to have free access to the heavenly Father.

And this access to the heavenly Father is given through faith in Christ!

This is the unsearchable riches, having the broken relationship with God mended through Christ. And having the privilege to receive unending privileges and life with the heavenly Father. Hallelujah! Accordingly, we can with confidence continually speak freely to God and boldly enter God's presence. For all who are alienated from the presence of God, this is good news!

Luke 11:10-13 *For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

Hebrews 4:16 *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Hebrews 10:19 *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,*

The Apostle Paul boldly preached the Word and God bless it with the conversion of souls.

13 *Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

The Apostle Paul sought the believers in Ephesus to not faint and lose heart concerning their faith because of his imprisonment. The present tense of the verb tells us that the Christians there are already weary and doubting and fainting and he is asking them to stop such faithless thought and actions.

The imprisonment of the Apostle Paul, he tells them will work out for the profit of the Ephesian Christians. Although he did not mention how, one such I could think of is that he wrote the prison epistles that taught the believers throughout the ages to understand the unsearchable riches of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Unveiling the Unsearchable Riches of Christ (v1-13)

- By God's Word (v1-6)

- By God's Servants (v7-13)

Amen.