

EPHESIANS 1:9
The Wonderful Work of Salvation
Message 19, June 27, 1999

INTRO: I know that very few if any of you really care much about grammar. I do not blame you. But an understanding of grammar is one of the most important tools in Bible study. I have a grievance against English grammarians and I have often wished for some English teacher who knows a whole lot more than I do that I might go nose to nose and file my grievance on a certain grammatical point. That's how my Jewish friends do in education. I know this does not mean much to you but at least I can let off a little steam. The English grammarians, unless I misunderstand them, teach that a participle is an adjective only and cannot modify a verb (an adverb). Now I have a serious disagreement with that but I have found a good way around that supposed English rule. You see, in English that is not allowed but in Greek it is a perfectly legitimate practice. So when I come to a text like we have before us this morning I go by Greek rules not English rules. Again, I know that is mostly meaningless to you but I feel a lot better now that I have kind of vented myself against this English grammar rule.

"So", you say, "what's your point?" My point is that Ephesians 1:9 begins with a participle, "...having made known..." According to the English rule this participle modifies the pronoun "he" in verse 8. According to the Greek it may modify the verb "made" in verse 8. If it modifies the pronoun "he" then it is an adjective and answers the question, "which one?" If it modifies "made" then I believe it answers the question, "how?" And that is my point. It is my understanding of verse nine that it tells us how God made His riches to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence. How did God make His riches abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence? By making known to us the mystery of His will! This then is the topic of our message this morning.

In Ephesians 1:3 we were informed that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. We have looked at four reasons why we should bless the Lord. First, because God blessed us in Christ (1:3). Second, because God chose us in Christ in eternity past (1:4). Third, because God predestined us in Christ (1:5-6). Fourth, because God redeemed us in Christ (7-8). And although grammatically, verse 9 is a continuation of the

thought of this redemption I want to give this as the fifth reason why we should bless God. It is that He has made known to us His will in Christ (1:9).

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In Ephesians 1:3 we were informed that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Among the greatest of blessings is the fact that God has made known to us His will. Even today, millions of people walk the face of this earth and do not know the will of God. Yet God has made known to man His will. We have it here in the Word of God.

Six times the will of God is mentioned in Ephesians (1:1, 5, 9, 11; 5:17; 6:6). But only in our text does he speak of the mystery of God's will. What is mysterious about the will of God? To answer that calls for an understanding of the word *mystery*. The Greek word *musterion* speaks of things which can only be known by a special few. There were various religions in Paul's day and a person could go through special religious rites in their temples and thus be initiated into the religion. Once one had gone through those rites some information was given to the initiated which other people could not know. The secret of these mysteries was given behind closed doors and was closely guarded by those who were initiated. Sometimes to reveal these secrets meant death. Such rites are common in today's Mormonism and Masonic Lodges. If you stripped a good Mormon to his underwear you would find a very interesting piece of clothing. And on this underwear you would see certain marks and cuts. Each of these is a mystery. A Mormon who is initiated gives the Mormon elders the right to slit his throat if he is untrue to Mormonism or lets others know the secrets made known to him.

Vine's Dictionary says of the Greek word *musterion* (mystery) that it is "primarily

that which is known to the *mustees*, the initiated (from *mueo*, to initiate into the mysteries)."

Now the Bible speaks of numerous mysteries. According to C.I. Scofield there are 11 mysteries given in the NT: (1) The mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:3-50); (2) the mystery of Israel's blindness during this age (Romans 11:25, with context); (3) the mystery of the translation of living saints at the end of this age (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:14-17); (4) the mystery of the NT church as one body composed of Jew and Gentile (Eph. 3:1-11; Rom. 16:25; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3); (5) the mystery of the church as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:28-32); the mystery of the inliving Christ (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:26-27); (7) the 'mystery of God even Christ,' i.e. Christ as the incarnate fulness of the Godhead embodied, in whom all the divine wisdom for man subsists (Col. 2:2, 9; 1 Cor. 2:7); (8) the mystery of the processes by which godlikeness is restored to man (1 Tim. 3:16); (9) the mystery of iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7; Matt. 13:33); (10) the mystery of the seven stars (Rev. 1:20); (11) the mystery of Babylon (Rev. 17:5, 7).]

The knowledge of these NT mysteries is not available to the uninitiated. A New Testament mystery is a truth that cannot be known by the unaided mind. And the aided mind is one that has been initiated by the new birth. In other words, the unsaved do not have an understanding of true Christianity until they are initiated by the new birth. Turn with me to 1 Cor. 2:6-16. We are initiated by the Holy Spirit and by Him we can know all things (See 1 John 2:20 and 27). Without the Holy Spirit we cannot know the things of God. Now our question: How does God make His grace abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence? By initiating us into the mystery of His will. God does not reveal the mystery of His will to just anybody.

Turn with me to Matthew 11:25-26 to see from whom God withholds His wonders and to whom He reveals them (Read). The wise and prudent here are the worldly wise. Those who think they know it all. They are the proud. The babes are those who come to Him in humility. The self exalted will never find out the truths of God. The humble have the truths of God revealed to them. Turn with me to yet another passage (Read 1 Cor. 1:18-26). Why is it that not many who are wise according to the flesh are called? Not many mighty? Not many noble? (Queen Elizabeth is to have said she is glad it does not say, "Not any.") Well, the reason not many wise according to the flesh and not many mighty and not many noble are called is because of pride. If these humble themselves God calls them as well.

Now in Ephesians 1:9, the mystery He has made known to us is the mystery of His will. I think that the mystery of His will here refers to all saving and sanctifying truth of Scripture in that great doctrine of salvation as it relates to making of both Jew and Gentile one body, the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul is here writing to the Ephesian believers. To them the Gospel of salvation had been revealed through Paul's preaching. Here in Ephesus both Jew and Gentile were formed into one. This is the mystery of the will of God.

It is no mystery that God would bless the Gentiles. The OT had revealed that. But you can study from Genesis to Malachi and not find this truth revealed that God would make of Jew and Gentile one body, the Church. But now, from Paul's day onward, this truth was revealed to the initiated, the born again believer.

Now I remind us that the grace of God has been made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence by making known to us the mystery of His will. If one does not understand God's will in this matter of salvation, God's grace

cannot abound toward us. That's what makes missions such a priority. It is up to us to share this message with the world.

Verse 9 now goes on further to tell us after what manner God made this mystery known to us. It is according to His good pleasure. Permit me to quote here from an earlier message in 1:5 where we are told that we were predestined according to the good pleasure of His will:

"But now see what was the guiding principle by which He predestined us. It was "...according to the good pleasure of His will."

Now notice this similarity in the character of God with ours. There are things God wants. He has a will. Wow, you say. It must be nice to be God and have things you want because then you could have everything you want! Did you know that not even God gets everything He wants? God does not want anybody to go to hell. But does He get His way? No! God wants us to do some things and He does not want us to do other things. Does He always get His way with you and me? No.

But look at something else in this phrase that you might find surprising. God knows what it is like to feel good. Some things happen that can make God feel good. It is described by this word pleasure. There are some things that God wants which bring pleasure to Him when they happen. There are some things God does not want and they bring displeasure to Him. God becomes angry. As a matter of fact there is a time period called the tribulation when God's anger will be vented on a wayward world..."

Consider now the fact that God made known the mystery of His will to us *according to His good pleasure*. You see, God does things in the way that it pleases Him. According to Romans 9:20 we do not have the right to say to God, "Why have You made me like this?" Now how did it please God to make the mystery known to us?

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1:17-21 (Read). God chose to use preachers and the foolishness of the message preached to make known the mystery.

Now let us read a little OT story together (2 Kings 5:1-13). How many mighty men and noble men would respond to the Gospel if God rolled out the red carpet and set them up above others? But if they then responded, they would not be fit for the kingdom of heaven. So it pleased God through the preaching of the message of the cross to save sinners. The path of salvation is marked by faith and humility. Unbelief and pride cannot walk there.

The goodness of the character of God was satisfied and pleased to make the mystery known through the preaching of the cross. Oh the riches of the wisdom of God! How unsearchable are His ways!

But look now at the last phrase in this verse, "...having made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure *which He purposed in Himself*." Now there is another grammatical question here and if it is answered wrongly then the interpretation will be wrong as well. The pronoun *which* in the end of verse nine connects to what antecedent? His good pleasure or the mystery of His will? In my interpretation, and I believe it is correct, it is the mystery of His will which He purposed in Himself.

Way back in eternity past God made a plan. He made this plan in the counsel of His will. He said to Himself, I will make a free moral agent to worship me. But if I make a free moral agent he will have the potential of going wrong. I see already that he will go wrong but my will is to go ahead with this plan. And I will make salvation available to man. And I will reveal my will to man. And many will respond to me. I have chose that man must come to me in humility and faith and I

know that if I reveal my will to man, many will come to me of their own free will.

The Greek word for purposed is *proethetw* (2nd. aor. ind. mid.). It means to set things out beforehand. It is a plan of action. Now let me give another little lesson in grammar. A verb has tense, voice and mood. Verbs give a lot of information. It is the voice of this verb that I want to point out. In English verbs have only two voices. If I say, "I hit the ball" *hit* is the verb and it is in the active voice. That means I do the action. If I say, "The ball hit me" the verb *hit* is passive voice. That means the action is done to me. Those are the only two voices possible for the English verb. But in the Greek language the verb has three possible voices. Two are the same as the English but the third is what is called the middle voice. It speaks of the person doing an action which happens to himself. For example, this sentence, "I hit myself with the ball" would be expressed by the Greek middle voice. The subject is doing the action while at the same time receiving the results of that action.

That is the voice of the verb purposed in Ephesians 1:9. When God made this plan in eternity past He Himself did it with a view to His own benefit. Verse 10 tells us that He works all things according to the counsel of His will. When God plans to do something He consults with His will and says, "What do you will?" And whatever He wills He does. Does God benefit out of His plan which He purposed in Himself? Yes! In many, many ways. Look at 1:18 and find out that not only do we have an inheritance in Him, but He has an inheritance in the saints! Amazing isn't it?

CONCL: So in conclusion we ask this question: How does God make the riches of His grace abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence? He does so by making the mystery of His will known to us. Only the initiated, or the born again believer understands this mystery. The unaided human mind is not able to comprehend it. This mystery was something He

planned in eternity past and which He revealed to us in Christ. It is the fact that He makes of both Jew and Gentile one body, the Church of Jesus Christ. This He does through salvation in Jesus Christ, redeeming us, justifying us; and sanctifying us. In verse 10 we will discover the purpose of all of this.

I have told you of the Texas rancher who eeked out a living on his dry land. When he was old oil was discovered on his land. He had been rich all along but did not know it. You and I have the Word of God which reveals the will of God. Yet many Christians are spiritually poor. May I encourage us to study this book and become truly rich.