

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN -

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH IS REVEALED

In the present chapter we will no longer be thinking in terms of the Body. We will think now in terms of the Building (Ephesians 2:19-22), the mystical Body of CHRIST which is the New Testament Church, formed through the power of His Blood and the operation of The HOLY SPIRIT. He who "borns" us and baptizes us into the body, produces or brings about the new man which GOD now has upon the earth. This new man (Ephesians 2:15), is not the individual believer, but the church, considered as the Body of CHRIST in the sense of Ephesians 1:22-23, I Corinthians 12:12-13, Colossians 3:10-11, and of Hebrews 12:23-24, which says, "**To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in Heaven, and to GOD the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the Blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.**"

This new man, brought about through the power of the Blood, is made up of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, bond and free, by and through one principle only: Faith in the finished work of the Lord JESUS. Therefore those of us who are gathered together in this new organism . . . the new man, the new personality . . . henceforth constitute the people of GOD. We born again believers are fellow-citizens of GOD's commonwealth. Each and every believer is a child of GOD individually - and together, we make up the household of GOD.

In chapter two, we have our position in CHRIST: "**YE... IN ME.**" In chapter three, it is possession of CHRIST: "**I IN YOU.**" We see this truth set forth in John, chapter 15:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). JESUS is the vine; we believers are the branches. In the vine we bring forth fruit - but apart from the vine we cannot produce fruit - and please notice that the vine without the branches does not produce fruit. It is the branches that bring forth fruit - but in order to bring forth fruit the branches must be connected to the vine: "**Ye... in Me, and I in you.**"

In this glorious age of grace, believers (the new man) have access to Him. JESUS delights to have us come into His presence . . . yes, boldly - to make our requests known, and to allow Him to share our sorrows and our joys. As the new building, He has access to us . . . He abides in us. We are the temple of GOD.

Verses 1-8: "**For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have**

heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 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; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel: 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, 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."

Throughout the third chapter, Paul is looking upon himself as the Holy-Spirit-appointed minister of the new covenant, the building of GOD. What Paul is saying is simply this: "You Gentile believers at Ephesus know well that I received this ministry on your behalf . . . the ministry with the message of GOD's marvelous grace, that makes Gentiles fully equal with all others in the body of CHRIST.

Because of this ministry - the Gospel that I have proclaimed without fear or favor - I am in prison. But I do not want you to faint or feel badly because of my bonds. Rather, I crown my labors on your behalf by turning to prayer, praying in the Spirit, presenting your need to the Heavenly Father, and beseeching the Father of our Lord JESUS CHRIST to **'grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of CHRIST, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.'**

I am praying for you believers at Ephesus that you will go on, grow in grace and become full-grown believers, living examples of the grace of God."

In verse 3 Paul again points out that the Gospel he preached was by revelation, that he did not receive it by man nor from man, and that he did not consult the religious leaders at Jerusalem; but his message was direct from GOD by revelation. The message was the revelation of the mystery of CHRIST, which in other ages had not been made known unto the sons of men - but now GOD had been pleased to reveal unto His holy apostles and prophets (by The HOLY GHOST) this great mystery, that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs and of the same body, there being no difference between Jew and Gentile.

In verse seven Paul states that he was made a minister according to the gift of grace. He did not take up the ministry as a vocation. He did not begin to preach the Gospel because his friends told him that he appeared to have the qualifications to make a good preacher. Today some young men go to theological schools because their loved ones tell them they would make "a good preacher."

Some young men go to theological institutions to learn how to preach. GOD have mercy on this poor ignorant age in which we live! GOD's ministers are called of GOD, ordained of GOD, commissioned of GOD, sent by God - and their message is from GOD. Paul was GOD's minister.

In verse two Paul refers to the "**dispensation**" of the grace of GOD, which GOD had given to

him to reveal to the Gentiles. The word dispensation is a very interesting word. The Greek word is the word that is translated "*house*" in the English. Its full meaning is, "*the law of the house.*" It means the regulation, or the management, of the house. The word can also be translated into English as "*economy.*" So . . . during the Dispensation of Grace (the economy of grace) Paul was appointed by GOD the steward of this new law of the house, so to speak, or the one who would regulate the new management.

The same truth is clearly stated in Romans 11:13: "**For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office.**" GOD appointed Paul a minister to the Gentiles in his experience on the Damascus road. Acts 9 gives the interesting story of Paul's conversion. He saw the Lord, he was stricken to the ground, the brightness of the face of JESUS blinded his eyes and he cried out, "**Who art thou?**" The voice from the sky answered, "**I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.**"

Then Paul said, "**What wilt thou have me do?**" And JESUS told him. From that point on, JESUS led and Saul of Tarsus followed. He thereby became Paul the preacher, the minister to the Gentiles. Paul's experience is a beautiful picture of what will happen when the nation of Israel accepts the Lord. They will one day see JESUS. They will see the scars in His hands. They will ask Him where He received those scars and He will tell them,

"**In the house of my friends.**" And a nation shall be saved in a day. Paul was born out of due season... He was saved when he saw the face of JESUS looking down from the sky as he traveled the Damascus road.

Suppose we look at the record: "**But the Lord said, unto him (Ananias), 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**" (Acts 9:15-16).

"**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 (Gentiles); IMMEDIATELY I CONFERRED NOT WITH FLESH AND Blood**" (Galatians 1:15-16).

"**At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from Heaven, above the brightness of the sun (that light was none other than the brightness of the face of JESUS), shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, TO MAKE THEE A MINISTER AND A WITNESS BOTH OF THESE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN, AND OF THOSE THINGS IN THE WHICH I WILL APPEAR UNTO THEE; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, UNTO WHOM NOW I SEND THEE; to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me**" (Acts 26:13-18).

Therefore, I say that GOD gave to Paul the message, the doctrine, the rules and regulations for the management of the new building . . . the New Testament church. You will find the heart of the doctrine for the church in the Epistles, written through the inspiration of The HOLY SPIRIT as Paul penned down these letters.

The word "**mystery**" used three times in these verses does not mean something mysterious, something that can not be understood; but rather it means something that is made known only by revelation . . . something hidden until the proper and appointed time for that specific thing to be revealed or uncovered. I think this statement will substantiate what I said: "**Which in other ages was not made known . . . as it is now revealed . . .**" (Ephesians 3:5).

There are many mysteries referred to in the Word of GOD.

Let me point out just a few here:

- The mystery of the church - the Bride of CHRIST (Ephesians 5:32).
- The mystery of CHRIST indwelling us (Colossians 1:27).
- The mystery of the church - His body (Ephesians 5 and our present chapter).
- The mystery of CHRIST incarnate (I Timothy 3:16).

All of these mysteries were hidden in previous ages but are revealed in the New Testament.

The mystery referred to in our present passage is "**that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel.**"

It is only in the writings of the Apostle Paul that we find the position, the doctrine, the walk and the eternal destiny of the New Testament church, the Body of CHRIST. The mystery "**hid in God**" was the divine purpose from the very beginning, to make Jews and Gentiles a wholly and entirely new thing . . . in reality a new organism (the church) which is the Body of CHRIST, formed by and through the baptism with The HOLY GHOST, and in which the distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears.

This mystery is mentioned (but not explained) by JESUS when Peter said, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" JESUS said to Peter, "**Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, BUT MY Father WHICH IS IN Heaven.**" Peter's testimony was not the product of human reasoning, nor of human ability. JESUS said, "**Thou art Peter, and upon this rock** (upon the testimony Peter had just given, a testimony that came by revelation, that JESUS was the virgin-born SON of GOD, yea, very GOD in flesh) **I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!**" (Matthew 16:13).

The great mysteries of GOD can be known by man only by revelation directly from GOD. In Matthew JESUS states the mystery - but later He ordained Paul to receive the revelation of that mystery. That is what Paul is declaring in the third chapter of Ephesians.

It was extremely difficult for the Jew, during the transition period, to accept the fact that the Gentile "dogs" had become sons of GOD, co-heirs of GOD, co-members of the Body of

CHRIST, and co-sharers in the promise of the Spirit. The Jews just could not take it in. Read carefully Acts 15 (...the entire chapter) and you will see that the Jews could not believe that Gentiles had received the blessings that had in former years been bestowed only upon GOD's chosen nation, Israel.

Many times we hear ministers crying long and loud, "To the Jew first . . . to the Jew first . . . to the Jew first!" Yes - I love the Jew, I want the Jew saved, I believe in Jewish missions; but my precious friend, the Jew had his chance first! GOD offered JESUS to the Jew.

Pilate said, "I have Jesus and Barabbas; whom shall I release? Whom do you want?" And they said, "Give us Barabbas! Kill JESUS! **His Blood be on us, and on our children!**" GOD called Paul to make known "**the mystery**" unto a people who were not a people.

Because Israel refused to accept the kingdom, GOD turned to a people less favored by Him, and through that people now flow the blessings of GOD's grace to all who will hear and believe the good news of the Gospel.

The revelation of the church, and the good news of the Gospel of the grace of GOD was committed unto Paul.

In his own words he said, "**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.**"

In Galatians 1:12 Paul says, "**For I neither received it (the ministry, the message) of man, neither was I taught it (by teachers in the flesh), BUT BY THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.**"

Paul unmistakably traces his message back to divine origin. The message concerning the "**gift of... grace**" came to Paul by and through "**the... working of... power**" . . . the power of The HOLY GHOST.

The exalted position of the Apostle Paul, the heavenly revelation that came to him, did not puff him up - or as we would say, "It did not give him the big-head." But instead, it humbled his heart:

"**Unto me, WHO AM LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS, is this grace given.**" Those words could come only from a heart totally and entirely possessed by the HOLY GHOST and surrendered to the will of GOD. I do not believe any man who ever lived on this earth was ever more completely surrendered to GOD's sovereign will than was the Apostle Paul.

Writing to the young preacher, Timothy, Paul declared that he (Paul) was chiefest of sinners (I Timothy 1:15b).

Writing to the believers in Corinth, he said concerning himself that he was the least of the apostles, not meet (worthy) to be called an apostle (I Corinthians 15:9). And in our present chapter he makes known his humble spirit by saying, "**[I] am less than the least of all saints**" (verse 8).

It seems to me that Paul is endeavoring to get across to the Ephesians (and to us) this fact:

"Just think of it! Can you imagine . . . to my trust GOD has committed the Gospel! I am chief of sinners . . . I wasted the church . . . I persecuted the followers of JESUS. Yet GOD has counted me faithful, putting me in the ministry and revealing to me the mystery of the body of CHRIST . . . the New Testament Church!"

Paul was faithful to his call and to his commission.

Just before he was beheaded for his testimony, as he looked death in the face, he looked up to Heaven and said, "**The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness!**"

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul also seems to be saying, "And to think that I, a Jew, am called and commissioned to take this good news to the Gentiles . . . to make known unto them the unsearchable riches of CHRIST!"

Any part of CHRIST can be summed up in one word:

UNSEARCHABLE! When we attempt to describe "**the unsearchable riches of CHRIST**" words fail us; but I am sure that Paul must have had in mind the fact that JESUS was in the beginning with the Father, in the bosom of the Father, the most precious jewel in Heaven, co-equal with GOD the Father, Creator of all things. Nothing was made without Him, but by Him all things were made. He was worshiped and honored in Heaven because He was Deity, co-equal with the Father.

Paul thought of the riches of CHRIST's willingness to leave all of Heaven's glory, honor, and praise, and come into the world to lay His life down in the most shameful, cursed way that any man could die; and I think Paul has the riches of His grace in mind when he says to the believers in Corinth, " . . . **though He (JESUS) was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich**" (II Corinthians 8:9).

To the Philippians Paul said that even though JESUS was equal with GOD, He took a body of humiliation, became obedient unto death . . . even the death of the Cross. I am sure Paul was thinking of the riches of the sinless life of JESUS here on earth.

No man ever lived like JESUS lived. No man ever spoke like JESUS spoke. No man ever worked miracles like JESUS did. No man ever loved like JESUS loved. Everything He did was so different to the way other men would have done it (if they could have done it)! When JESUS performed His wonders, the people said, "**We never saw it on this fashion.**"

Then - Paul must have thought of the exceeding riches JESUS demonstrated, in that He never one time complained or grumbled. He said, "**Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head!**"

- He borrowed a boat for a pulpit.
- Many nights He spent alone, in the Garden in prayer.
- He had no lunch, but He took a little boy's lunch and fed five thousand.
- He never performed a miracle of any kind to bring comfort or profit to Himself.

Surely Paul must have been thinking of the exceeding riches of His sacrifice, His unselfishness, His kindness, His goodness, His generosity - and then of course the riches of His death.

He came - and announced clearly that He was in the world - not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many. He did just that. When men reviled Him He did not scold them - He said, "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!**"

When men called Him ugly names He did not fight back.

At the beginning, both thieves railed on Him, mocked Him, sneered and jeered even though they were in the same condemnation. Finally, one of the thieves saw something in JESUS, or heard something fall from His lips, that changed his mind, and he cried out, "**Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.**" JESUS in His dying hour saved a thief who had been His enemy but moments earlier. Any phase of the life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection of JESUS can be described as "**unsearchable.**"

My precious friend, you may be poor in this world, so far as goods and the secular things of life are concerned. Your belongings and your wealth may be very meager - but you can be a multi-millionaire in the grace of GOD!

Through His poverty, you can be as rich as Heaven's unsearchable riches.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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