# Ephesians

Ephesians 3:1-13

## Introduction

This week we come to the first part of chapter 3 of Ephesians. Having laid out for us in chapter 1, the blessings that come to us from God through Jesus and our position in Christ of being seated in heavenly places, and then in chapter 2 having given us the basis of our salvation and the importance of unity for the sake of building a temple for God to dwell in by his Spirit, Paul picks up once again, in chapter 3, one of the cosmic themes of this epistle.

Essentially, he takes us from the immediate – the new man created in the church – to the spiritual reality in heavenly places which frames the purpose of the church. It is almost as if he can’t stop himself from going off at tangents, so amazed is he at the ultimate purpose that God has for the Church.

On another level, this leads us to see that our practical service and behaviour, as an outworking of our salvation, have cosmic significance, and this is what we shall consider as we proceed through this morning.

## God’s Mystery

Paul begins this discussion by saying in v.1 ‘For this reason…’ In the previous passage, Paul has expounded the fact that the Gentiles are now fellow citizens with the saints and are being ‘built together into a holy temple in the Lord’. This is the context of these verses: Jew & Gentile joined together into a single house, a ‘dwelling of God in the Spirit’. God lives amongst us when we dwell in unity together. Thus, what he is about to say links back very clearly to what he has already said about the body of Christ being a unity of Jews and Gentiles.

He then reminds them that he is a prisoner: v.1 ‘Paul a prisoner for the sake of you Gentiles’. He is writing this epistle from Rome after being arrested in Jerusalem on the false charge of bringing gentiles into the temple. Thus, the reason for his arrest, though false, is on the basis of taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

In v.2 he talks about ‘the Stewardship of God’s grace’. He reminds them that he has been given a role of serving them specifically with the grace of God (like a waiter at a table). Each one of us has a ‘stewardship of God’s grace’. We need to find out at which table we need to be serving.

Then he comes, in v.3, to ‘the Mystery’ made known to Paul, the ‘administration of God’s grace’. He has already referred to this mystery in 1:9. Now he explains what the mystery is.

Our understanding of the word ‘mystery’ is ‘anything that arouses curiosity because it is unexplained, inexplicable or secret’, (Macavity the mystery cat). The New Testament meaning of the word here is different from that. It means a religious truth divinely revealed to the initiates and unknowable through reason. It is not ‘knowledge withheld’ as we would normally understand it. Instead it is ‘truth revealed’. Let me explain this further.

1. A Biblical mystery is not some problem that can be solved solely through the use of the human intellect (although God does use this as a vehicle). A Biblical mystery is not solved by human reasoning but comes through revelation.
2. A Biblical mystery is not something which only the holiest and most spiritual can unravel. It is an open secret for all who come into the church.
3. The solving of a Biblical mystery is not open to those who are versed in the mysteries of secret formulae which one finds in some religions and in Freemasonry. Rather it is open for all who want to hear it.

Essentially, a Biblical mystery is something that was once unknown or hidden, but has now been made known and is therefore an open secret for all who have access to it.

So then, if understanding a Biblical mystery is not incomprehensible to you and I, and is not solved through reasoning with our human intellect, is not understood by only the most holy and spiritual, and the key to unlock a Biblical mystery is not in secret formulae and cult religions, how are we to understand God’s mysteries?

The divine mysteries are only made available to us through the Holy Spirit. If you are born again, you do have the Spirit of God within you to understand God’s deepest mysteries, for they are ‘not revealed to the wise and intelligent but revealed ... to infants’, Matthew 11:25.

In v.5 Paul tells us that the mystery was not made known in previous generations. In other words, it was there hidden in the scriptures but nobody quite grasped hold of it. It has only come to light through Jesus and his cross and resurrection.

We live in a privileged time – the era of God’s grace. God has always worked in grace but we live in the time in which that Grace has been revealed to the world - where the truth of God’s purposes has been made available to us so that we can come and be part of those purposes.

Having told us about the mystery in v.2-5, in v.6 Paul reveals to us exactly what the mystery is. It is like a Poirot where he has all the suspects in the room, he has explained the case, and now he is going to reveal who the murderer is.

The mystery is that the Gentiles are now part of the covenant people of God, having been excluded previously. Nobody ever quite grasped that this would be the case. It was known that the blessing of God would affect the whole world through the Jews, but not that Gentiles would come into the covenant as well. This yields three benefits to us:

1. We are heirs. We share in the inheritance that was promised to Abraham. I need to qualify that slightly. The Abrahamic covenant included physical and spiritual elements. Some of them related to the Promised Land and multiplication of his descendents. These have not come to us. But other parts relate to being blessed to be a blessing. That does come to us. In addition, as Paul says in Romans 4:13, Abraham was to become the inheritor of the whole world. So in the same way the whole world is our inheritance because, at the Return of Christ we shall reign with Jesus over this world which will come fully under his authority.
2. We are fellow members of the body (not second class or excluded as we were previously). We are on equal status with every other member of the Body of Christ.
3. We are fellow partakers (sharers) of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. In other words, all the covenant promises which have come through Jesus are available to us.

We are in an incredibly privileged position this morning. We do not deserve any of this, but God, in his great mercy, has chosen to make this available to us and bring us into covenant relationship with him. We are in on the mystery of God.

Salvation is not just about going to heaven (in fact it is not about going to heaven at all). It is about sharing in the covenant promises of God to his people, and being part of his purposes to redeem and renew this world. This is what Paul is revealing to us.

## God’s Many Coloured Wisdom

In v.7-9, 9 Paul tells us that he has specifically been given God’s grace to make known this mystery to the Gentiles. He revels in and counts it a privilege that he has been given the task of preaching and sharing the riches of Christ. I am so grateful to God this morning that he did!

I believe God has also given us this privilege to make known to people around us that they can come into covenant relationship with God.

* God has revealed his purposes to us (to you)
* He has made you one of his people
* He has given you an inheritance
* He has made you to become a place in which he dwells by His Spirit
* He has given you the joy of being able to tell others

Then in v.10 Paul explains the reason for all of this:

V.10. the church is a demonstration to the principalities and powers of God’s many-coloured wisdom.

The angelic beings, good and bad, are looking on and seeing us, the way we act, the way we speak and the way we enjoy the grace of God. We are a big display board or hoarding to them declaring the wisdom of God. As we, the church, become what we are supposed to be we show fourth God’s wisdom.

V.11. this was not something God thought up on the spur of the moment. It was always God’s purpose from eternity. He always had in mind the Church as the place through which he would fulfil his purposes. He always intended to reveal his purposes this way. He always intended that you would be part of this revelation.

V.12 By this grace we can approach God with freedom and confidence.

Because we now are part of God’s purposes, we know that we have access to the Father. It is by his grace that he has brought us into relationship with Him and he wants to give to us all that we need to declare his grace to others and to demonstrate his wisdom to the angels. For this reason he gives us access into his presence. We come with boldness and confidence. This does not mean we come with arrogance or complacency but our confidence is by faith in his grace which has already been at work in us to bring us to him.

## Application & Conclusion

How we live as Christians matters. What we do, what we say, how we relate to each other is not a matter of personal preference. It is a demonstration of the grace of God. You cannot be a Christian and live how you like. You cannot be a Christian and disregard his body. You cannot be a Christian and not seek to serve in the church and in the world. All of these things are a contradiction in terms.

How we live as Christians is to be a demonstration of the wisdom of God to all who are looking on. Paul makes it very clear in this passage that we are being watched.

Firstly, we are being watched by the supernatural principalities and powers who see worked out through our covenant relationships with God and with one another the wisdom of God. They will either stand in awe or they will weep, depending on how we use or abuse the grace of God given to us.

Secondly, we are being watched by the world around us. The church is here to exemplify what life in the kingdom is like. We are to live as kingdom people with a different set of values and a different set of behaviours that will demonstrate how the grace of God is transforming our lives. Of course, we are not all perfect yet, but we do need to be demonstrating a difference from the world around us, especially in the way we relate to one another. If the world looks at the church and sees its values and behaviours as no different from the world, what is the point of being a Christian? You and I are recipients of the grace of God; in the same way we need to be givers of the grace of God, especially to one another.

Thirdly, we are being watched by God. There is an accounting that is going to be carried out one day for how we have handled the grace extended to us through our covenant relationship with him. That is not something that should hold fear for us. But neither is it something we can ignore. The parable of the talents springs to mind here. Let us be those who can say to the master ‘that which you have given me I have doubled’, rather than the one who says, ‘that which you gave me I did nothing with’.

God bless.