

# ***The Mystery Revealed***

## ***Ephesians 3:1-13***

Everyone loves a good mystery, a thriller, a whodunit! Some of the most popular books, movies and TV shows of all time are mysteries. We all enjoy the challenge of solving the puzzle of a mystery. The theme of today's passage, and one of the major themes of the book of Ephesians is the revelation of God's great **"mystery."**

When we read the word **"mystery"** in the Bible, it has a very specific meaning. Paul uses this word 21 times in his letters. And by it he means **"something which is beyond natural knowledge but has been opened to us by divine revelation through the Holy Spirit."** Col.1:26 explains it well: **"...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."** In other words, in the NT, a **"mystery"** is a truth from God that was kept secret in the past, but now has been openly revealed. In the words of Warren Wiersbe, it is a **"sacred secret."** It was only known in the mind of God for thousands of years. No one but God knew it, not the patriarchs, not the priests, not the prophets, not even the angels!

There are hints and shadows of the mystery of Christ in the Old Testament, but it was not until Jesus came that God truly began to unveil this mystery. Jesus said to His disciples, **"To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'"** (Luke 8:10).

The mystery is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Paul had already written in 1:9-10 that God, **"made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him."** Certainly we can all agree that Christ is the subject of Old Testament revelation. There was, however, much about the Lord Jesus which was mysterious, and which was only clear after His birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection. There is much about Jesus Christ and His church that God had to reveal in a new way through His Son. That's why we have a New Testament. The Old did not tell the whole story.

What then is this **"mystery"** this secret that was hidden but now has been made known? I'm glad you asked. Stated simply, the **"mystery"** Paul refers to here is that *through Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in one body, one church.* The truth of this **"mystery"** is stated succinctly in Gal. 3: 28, **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."** This was a surprise God sprung on the world! Look to vv. 5-6 of our text. Though **"in other ages [it] was not made know... it has now been revealed... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ..."** This is heart and soul of God's great **"mystery,"** His sacred secret now made know to all.

The mystery of the body of Christ, the church is a great theme throughout the book of Ephesians. It is first mentioned in **1:9-10** and elaborated in **vv. 22-23**. In 2:10, Paul hints at it saying we are **"His workmanship [His masterpieces!] created in Christ Jesus."** We see more in 2:15, God has taken both Jews and

Gentiles and brought them together as "**one new man**," a new humanity, a new nation. 2:16 describes this new humanity as "**one body**." 2:19 describes us as "**fellow citizens**" and "**members of the household of God**." And verses 20-22 say we are "**being fitted together**" as a "**holy temple in the Lord**."

You may say, "**What's the big deal? Why is this such a significant issue?**"

Let's begin today to examine the significance of the "**mystery**" by looking at how God revealed His mystery and why it is significant to us.

## **I. The Revelation of the Mystery (vv. 1-5).**

### **A. Paul's Reason for Writing (v. 1a).**

We know from the first three words of chapter 3 that this chapter is directly related to chapter 2. Paul begins, "**For this reason** ..." We find the same expression in verse 14. Paul is about to pray, as he has already done in chapter 1. It would seem, as though Paul may have moved his hand in writing, and that the chains by which he was bound may have somehow caught his attention. Perhaps they were clinking as Paul's hands moved from his ink supply to his parchment. Perhaps the links of his chain became tangled, keeping his hands from moving freely. Nevertheless, Paul was somehow reminded of his status as a prisoner, not only a prisoner for Christ, but also a prisoner for his Gentile readers.

So verses 2-13 in chapter 3 are a sort of parenthesis. Paul starts to pray, but stops to clarify what He has been writing about so far in chapters 1 and 2.

So he begins, "**For this reason...**" For what "**reason?**" It's the "**mystery**" that we have been made "**one new man**," "**one body**," that Gentiles who were "**afar off**" have been brought near, that all believers are "**citizens**" of God's kingdom and "**members**" of God's family and that we are all "**being built together**" as a "**temple... the dwelling place of God in the Spirit**."

### **B. Paul was a Prisoner as He Wrote (v. 1b).**

Notice also that Paul says he is a "**prisoner**." He really was a "**prisoner**" as he wrote this letter. Chains bound him as he moved his pen.

Acts 21:27-28:16 details how he had gone to Jerusalem to personally deliver an offering to help the impoverished church there. While in the city, he was falsely accused of taking Trophimus, a Ephesian Gentile brother into a forbidden area of the temple. He was taken and almost killed by the Jews. However, he faced numerous hearings before the Jewish courts and Roman governors before finally being taken "on appeal" to Caesar in Rome. He had been a prisoner for maybe 5 years when he wrote this letter.

Note though, Paul doesn't say he is the "**prisoner**" of the Romans or of the Jews. He says he is "**the prisoner of Christ Jesus**." It is striking that nowhere does Paul ever refer to himself as a prisoner of Caesar. The reason is obvious when you read his letters. He saw that Caesar was not the one who had the final say about him; Jesus did. The duration of his confinement was not determined by Caesar, but by the Lord Jesus. Paul

was where he was because of His obedience to Jesus. This is a tremendous lesson to us, who sometimes become so worried about what the political powers-that-be are doing in the world today. Paul understood clearly that Caesar was not in control; Jesus is. And He still is.

Paul also says he was a **"prisoner... for you Gentiles."** At one time, Paul then Saul, was a staunch defender of Judaism and a violent persecutor of Christians. He sent them to prison and even killed some of them. But Jesus Himself arrested Paul on the road to Damascus and said to him, **"I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'"** (Acts 26:17-18). Now he was in prison in Rome and a **"prisoner of Christ Jesus"** as an apostle to the Gentiles. His whole life's focus was to tell Gentiles about Jesus and reveal the **"mystery"** that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ.

### C. Paul had a Stewardship from the Lord (vv. 2-5).

Notice the word **"dispensation"** in v.2. It comes from a compound Greek word, *oikos* – meaning "house" and *nomos* – meaning "law," thus meaning "the law of the house." In common usage, it came to mean the management, stewardship or responsibility of overseeing a household or a person's assets. Bible scholars often refer to biblical ages as dispensations or God's differing methods of managing His creation in time.

For our understanding, it's best to think of **"dispensation"** a responsibility or a stewardship entrusted to us from God.

God gave Paul the responsibility of **"the grace of God."** Note in v.3 that God **"by revelation... made known"** to Paul **"the mystery."** God had made Paul a steward not only of leading Gentiles to faith in Christ, but also then to teach them of their wonderful position in the body of Christ!

In Christ, Jews and Gentiles are brought together. If you know Jesus, Abraham has nothing on you. If you are saved, you rank right alongside Moses. As a believer, King David is your brother!

Paul has already **"briefly written"** about the mystery. We saw this specifically in 1:9-10 and 2:14-22. He says that when we read these passages we should **"understand my [his] knowledge in the mystery of Christ."** **"Knowledge"** comes from *sunesis*, which literally means, "to come together." It refers to insight and comprehension. Paul's great desire is that we gain insight and comprehend the **"mystery"** of the church.

John MacArthur says, **"Spiritual insight must always precede practical application, because what is not properly understood cannot be properly applied."**

As we've already mentioned, he goes on to tell us in v.5 that this **"mystery"** was hidden **"in other ages"** but **"has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets."**

2 Pet.1: 20-21 says, **"No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."** At just the right time, God revealed, explained and made evident the "sacred secret" that He has been building for Himself a new covenant people.

## **II. The Significance the Mystery (vv. 6).**

As I have said, it is incredibly difficult to grasp how revolutionary the concept of the **"mystery"** was to the people of Paul's day. Yet it is true. When you come to Christ, you have a double union with God and God's people. This is expressed in 1 John 1:3, **"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."**

So in verse 6 Paul uses three words to describe the significance of the mystery. Each of these is a compound word that uses the preposition *sun* meaning "with" or "together with." We could translate these words as joint-heirs, joint-bodies, and joint-partakers. When they come to Christ, Jews and Gentiles together are co-heirs, co-members of one body, and co-partakers of the promise.

### **A. The Gentiles are "Fellow Heirs" with the Jews (v. 6a).**

Look back to 2:12. We were once **"aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise."** Now as **"fellow heirs"** we have been given equal legal status in God's Kingdom.

Gal. 3: 29 says, **"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."** We will receive the inheritance that God promised to Abraham and his descendents.

We are not aliens, strangers, foreigners or "Gentile dogs." We are sons and daughters and equal heirs with the children of the covenant!

### **B. The Gentiles are "of the same Body" as the Jews (v.6b).**

Even though we are **"fellow heirs"** some may tend to think of Jews and Gentiles being seated in different classes like "coach" or "first class" on an airliner. Not so! We are equal parts **"of the same body."**

In the eyes of God we are indistinguishable. There are no Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. There are no white Christians and black Christians. There are no male Christians and female Christians. We are all *just* Christians, we are all co-members **"of the same body."**

### **C. The Gentiles are "Partakers of His Promise" with the Jews (v.6c).**

Regardless of who we were before we were saved, we now share everything that pertains to Christ **"through the gospel."** We receive everything Jesus is given.

Once we were on the outside and we had no claim on the promises of God. However now that we have been born again, we can claim every promise!

There is no distinction whatsoever in the "**body**." We are all equal and full "**partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.**"

Underline again that small prepositional phrase "**in Christ**." Because we are "**in Christ**" we partake in all the benefits of "**His promise**."

And he sums up all this in these words: "**the mystery of Christ**" -- Jesus Christ, at the heart of all things. What does that mean for us today?

None of us can help but be aware that this is an extremely troubled time in which we are living: We do not know how to solve the problems which are overwhelming us. It seems that even as our society and world become more connected by technology, we are increasingly splintered by all kinds of problems. Many are the issues that divide us. One generation is pitted against the next generation. Male against female, white against black, the rich against the poor, the haves against the have-nots, Republicans against Democrats, nation against nation. It seems never-ending.

The world has no answers to all of this. We don't know how to feed the world. We are unable to stem the tide of broken marriages, and so our divorce rate increases and the marriage rate decreases. Many writers -- thoughtful, perceptive men -- are sitting down and trying to analyze where we have gone wrong, and why cannot we understand what to do. Some propose one solution and some another; some are partially right, and some are almost totally wrong. But the reason they cannot grasp the answer is that they have never dealt with the heart of the problem, the great secret to all things.

The key mystery is Christ, says the apostle. This is Paul's explanation of the great mystery. It is a breakthrough, a new and marvelous way of life which has already begun in our experience, and which, ultimately, will solve all the problems facing humanity. The remarkable thing about it is that you can experience it right now. In Colossians Paul puts it this way: "**Christ in you, the hope of glory**," (Colossians 1:27b). It is the only hope you will ever have of living according to the glory God designed for man when he created him in the beginning.