

Eph ch 3 vs 7-13 (A Close encounter)

Now last week I mentioned to you the fact that we can look at vs 1-13 and break them down into 4 basic subdivisions, those being #1 vs 1-3 which we called the dispensation and revelation of the mystery (you recall that Paul had dealt earlier in the book in part with this “mystery” that’s been entrusted to him and now he’s in the 1st part of this chapter explaining it in greater detail, or stating quite bluntly that which he’d been hinting at earlier). #2 vs 4-6, the explanation of the mystery, #3 vs 7-9 the proclamation of the mystery, and finally #4 vs 10-13 the intention or the application of the mystery, which in reality would seem to be 2-fold, one aspect of the intent lies in vs 10, *“that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”*

The 2nd aspect of the application being that which I stated to you last week, that being to grant us boldness and access to the Father with confidence through faith in Jesus Christ (vs 12). and Paul says in this ch that he’s been made a steward of this mystery of the grace of God, the mystery of Christ for you and me, he’s been entrusted to enlighten the gentiles concerning the reality of these profound truths from the heart of God, the fact that we should *“be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”* and God seemed to use Paul the apostle more than any other of the apostles to be the instrument through which He would reveal the truths of these mysteries (which in other ages wasn’t made known to the sons of men) and last week we took the time to look at just a few of the many of these mysteries that God had revealed to Paul the apostle, that he in turn made known to us, because there are many “mysteries” that are spoken of in the NT.

Paul made known to us the mystery of the rapture of the church, he made known to us the mystery, or the sacred secret only known by God until such time as He chose to reveal it to man, of marriage, he made known to us the mystery of the gospel and many others the biggest being the one that’s before us in this text, the mystery of Christ. Now when God makes known to us one of these sacred secrets, how is that to impact our lives, why does He make these things known to us? No doubt one reason is simply to unveil to us a deeper aspect of His love for us, and to give us all things in His word that pertain to life and godliness, in order to equip us for the work of the ministry, but I believe it goes beyond that, the bible says that to whom much is given, much more will be required. So God doesn’t reveal these things to us just for our own well being, though certainly He’s concerned for our own well being, but when we’re brought into the light of the truth of the word of God we become accountable before God for that which we’re made aware of.

So when Paul said that he had become a steward of the mystery of Christ and the grace of God, don't think that it stopped with him, God revealed these things to him and then expected him to be busy about making it known to others, and when God reveals these things to you, are you being faithful to make known to others that which has been entrusted to you? Listen to this 1 Cor 4:1-2 *“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”* How is it that people should be able to consider you if you know the Lord, if you're a Christian? As servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, and if you are a steward of that which is revealed and given to you (which you are) then it is required (the bible says here) that we be found faithful, not beyond fault or never making a mistake, but consistent in using that with which you've been entrusted to the profit of the master.

Look sometime at Matt ch 25 beginning around vs 14 in regards to the principal of good stewardship. So what are we to do with these mysteries? We're to learn them, seek the Lord concerning them, desire to walk in them, be found faithful in the light of them, and teach them to others. That's what a steward does, takes that which is not his own, but belongs to another, and pours out his own life in order to use those resources and insights for the benefit and profit of the master, which in our case is the Lord Himself to whom we're accountable for regarding these mysteries of His word.

Every believer is a steward of the calling, spiritual gifts, opportunities, skills, talents, knowledge and or any other special blessing that you've received from the Lord. John MacArthur concerning this concept of stewardship said this, *“Everything we have belongs to the Lord, and we are therefore entrusted as stewards to manage our lives and everything we possess in behalf of the One to whom they belong. We are faithful stewards when we use what we have to minister to those within the family of God and witness to those who are without.”* and Then he sights 1 Peter 4:10 which says, *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”*

We find here Paul doing just that in making known to us the mystery of Christ, which in condensed form, or in summary is here in vs 6 (read). The mystery that he's speaking of here in short is the church, which we spent a little bit of time on last week, the fact that there would be an age of grace whereby God would be drawing from the gentiles the body of Christ. and It wasn't so much that God would somehow reach the gentiles that was the big problem or the big mystery to the Jews, because the OT is layered with scripture that shares the fact that the gentiles will be blessed of God. and That the gentiles will in turn bless God; that the Messiah would come to the gentiles, and that they would be saved by the Messiah, and even that they would receive the Holy Spirit. and You find these references in books like Gen, Psalms, Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Joel.

So it wasn't that God would reach the gentiles that was the biggest stumbling block, even though for many even that seemed preposterous, but what the big deal was, was that the gentiles would be placed on the same par and enjoying the same exalted position in Christ as would the Jews. That God would make no distinction between the 2, it wouldn't be saved Jew and saved Gentile and you go here and you go there, and since the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God they'll be on a higher and more prestigious plain than you lowly gentiles who are in reality nothing more than dogs. But we'll be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. Gal 3:29, "*if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*" As gentiles in Christ we're not strangers, we're not slaves, but rather we're sons of God, having the same legal, heavenly status as all other believers and heirs of the kingdom according to the promise.

Vs7

So we've gone over the dispensation and revelation, and we've gone over the explanation, now we enter into the proclamation. Paul says here concerning this mystery, "of which I became a minister" or maybe your bible says of which I was "made" a minister. and What Paul is saying basically is that this is what God has caused me to be, this is what I was created to be, a minister of the gospel according to the gift of God's grace, given to me. In 1 Cor 15:10 Paul would say in a similar tone, "*by the grace of God I am what I am.*" and The implication here is that a minister is what he was made, in other words it wasn't what he chose to be.

It's what God ordained him to be, Paul chose to be a Pharisee and a persecutor of the church, but God ordained him to be a minister of the grace of God and the mystery of Christ. and It's important that you grab a hold of this concept, Paul didn't enter into the ministry as a career choice, he wasn't setting around one day contemplating what he would do and then said, hey I know, I'll enter the ministry, I'll learn all I can about the bible and then do what I can do to get a job teaching it to others. Oh I know I'll be persecuted, hated by people whom I perceived to be friends, stabbed in the back from time to time, lied to, deceived and taken advantage of, but hey, it sure beats picking up rocks. No ministry, (and you've probably heard this many times), but it isn't nor can it be a career choice, it has to be a calling. You may receive the ordination of man, but that in no way guarantees you the ordination of God, and if God doesn't go with you, you'd better not go. Because just because you choose the ministry, doesn't mean that God's chosen you for it, Peter tells us to be "*diligent to make our call and election sure.*"

Paul was *made* a minister, and you can read of his commission in Acts ch 13:2 and again in Acts ch 26 vs 1-18, it wasn't his education that qualified him to be a minister, (though there's nothing wrong with education), it wasn't his natural abilities, experience, power, influence, or anything else that qualified him to be a minister of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. That's what he was appointed to be and made to be by the grace of God and will of God for his life, now the bible does give a couple of clues in order to discern this call of God upon our lives.

In 1st Tim ch 3 the 1st thing that's mentioned is desire, if you feel a tug and a desire in your heart towards the things of the ministry, it could be that God is calling you, placing that desire in your heart, and then in that ch it lists some further qualifications that need to be in one's life, not that one seeks to line up with the qualifications in order to be used, but that these things are already taking place in your life as a result of the work of God in your life again not from the outside in, but the inside out. and Then it's confirmed or verified through the church, in other words God begins to do a work in your life, gives you a desire, works out blamelessness and the other qualities necessary in your life as found in 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus (you know, humility, not given to wine, of good behavior, able to teach etc) and the church bears witness and acknowledges that which God is doing in your life and commends you to that work, and that's exactly the way it happened in Paul's life. Now understand that Paul isn't saying that the ministry is some exalted position more so than any other work that God may be having you do.

The word minister used here actually means servant, in specifics one who waits tables, one who takes orders from others and recognizes and submits to a higher power, a servant's primary responsibility is to do what he is told to do. and Paul is simply stating the fact that his primary responsibility is to do what God has placed before him to do, because it's God that he serves, what has God placed before you to do, are you being faithful to Him and doing it? Paul says that it's the grace of God that called him, that revealed to him the mystery of Christ and enabled him to share it with others, he calls it, "the effective *working* of His power." That word that's been translated "working" is the Greek word "energeia" from where we get our word energy. and It's speaking of that same resurrection power of God that we've talked about before, that's the power or the "dunamis" energy or efficiency that causes him to be effective, it's all God's work, none of his own.

Vs8

Now, I want to pause here for just a minute because there's an important truth kind of tucked away here that's important that we catch. Paul says that to him it was given that he should preach or proclaim, announce the good tidings, among the gentiles of the unsearchable, untraceable, unfathomable, and unlimited riches of Christ.

His riches are past finding out, Rom 11:33 says, *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”* The riches of Christ are inexhaustible, and they’ve been made available to you in Him to draw upon and live from, in order that you might walk in victory and live a fruitful Christian experience that brings much glory to God. But that’s not what I want to focus on, as powerful as that is. I want to draw your attention to this profound, self-evaluation of Paul the apostle, he says, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given.”

Some people see Paul as this proud and arrogant individual who was always pushing his weight around, but these people obviously haven’t truly examined the deep inner workings of God in this man’s heart. and Not only that, that mind set is in opposition to the position of the scriptures, it’s kind of an oxymoron to believe that God would use a man as radically and profoundly as He did Paul the apostle, and entrust the writing of the majority of the NT word of God to a prideful, arrogant and haughty individual. The bible says that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble; did God make an exception in Paul’s case? Because He sure didn’t seem to resist him much, instead He gave him understanding to the mysteries of God, used him as a diligent laborer and an apostle with which to lay the foundation of the church, and entrusted to him the writing of His word.

In the one place in scripture that Paul begins to list his academic credentials he ends the statement with what would’ve been gain to me in the world; I count as loss for Christ. In other words it was all for nothing as far as spiritual value goes and he said in-fact I count them as dung, *“that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”* This statement that we have here before isn’t some form of false or mock humility, but the honest assessment of a man who’s had a true encounter with Jesus Christ You recall that before he was converted, his name was Saul, probably named after the 1st king of Israel, they were both of the same tribe, and he no doubt bore the name with pride, named after the 1st king of Israel, came from the same tribe, was a Hebrew of Hebrews and he stood tall. But after he met Jesus Christ he changed his name to Paul; which means “small”, he saw himself as morally and spiritually less than the least of all the saints.

That my friends (humility) is an earmark of a person who’s had a close encounter with Jesus Christ When I look around and see people who reek with pride and arrogance as they share the gospel, I’m not talking about boldness, or confidence and assurance, but when I see these people who are all haughty with their presentation of the gospel.

My only conclusion is that these people must not have had a true encounter with Jesus Christ or if they did they're no longer walking intimately with Him today. Jesus, the very Son of God, if there was ever a person who had every right to be a proud man, it was Him and yet He said of Himself that I am meek and lowly or humble of heart. and If you're hanging out with Jesus, you're going to take on His characteristics. Paul's attitude toward himself was that of astonishment that God would entrust such an awesome privilege to one as lowly as himself, the lesser of the least of all the saints. Because he knew where he'd been and what he'd done, he persecuted the church of God, and that seemed to haunt him his whole life. In 1 Cor 15:9 he said, *"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."* Again in 1 Tim 1:12-13 he wrote, *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."* and Then in vs 15 *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."*

Paul was very sober minded concerning himself and that's always the case with the one who has a close encounter with Jesus Christ Isaiah, upon seeing the Lord said woe is me for I am undone, I'm a man of unclean lips. When Daniel saw the Lord he said, my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. When Peter realized who the Lord was in truth, he said, depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man. and Here Paul considered himself less than the least of all the saints.

You see understanding the deep truth's of the word of God doesn't give a man a big head, it gives him a broken and contrite heart. It's been said that the man who truly sees God, will see himself in truth, and Paul had a tremendous insight given to him by the Holy Spirit concerning the truth of the character and the heart and word of God. and The greater your revelation of God, the more profound your understanding will be of your own sin, and because Paul had such an unusually clear understanding and clear comprehension of God's righteousness, he also had an unusually clear comprehension of how far short of that righteousness that he himself fell.

That's why he could say so emphatically here that this privilege was ushered to him as a result of the grace of God, ministry and the grace of God are intensely interwoven in their relation to one another. That's how the message of the mystery reaches the world, through God's grace abounding in the lives of servants who are operating in humility. It would probably blow our minds to see how much of the operations of the church world that God is in reality opposed to, why? Because it's being carried out by proud and boastful men not operating in the power of the Holy Spirit but seeking to do the work of the Spirit in the efforts of the flesh.

They can't say as Paul did concerning their labor, yet not I but the grace of God that was with me. Instead their ministry operates all around themselves, it's their energy, their tenacity, their brainstorming, their ideas and talents, they are the dynamic, they can't say yet not I. But before you can truly say Your kingdom come, you have to be able to say, my kingdom go, Paul says that the ministry that's been entrusted to him has nothing to do with him, it's all by the grace of God given to him, that he should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Col 2:3 *"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."*

Vs9

Before we can do what the Lord would have us to do for Him, we have to understand what it is that He's done for us, Paul says here that he's been called to enlighten or cause us to understand the fellowship or again stewardship of this mystery. Which in the past, before the Holy Spirit was given, has been hidden in God who created all things through Christ Jesus. Notice that; not that all things evolved, but all things were created, through Christ Jesus, John 1:1-3 *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."* John 1:10 In regards to Jesus Christ, *"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him."* Col 1:16 *"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him."* Heb 1:1-2 *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds."* One more, Rev 4:11 *"You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; (why) For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*

Vs10-11

The 1st aspect of the intention and application of the mystery, that now the manifold, or multi-faceted wisdom of God might be made known by the church, to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. What does that mean? Are you ready for this? God is educating the angels by means of the church. The angelic beings are what are being referred to here as the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. and Angels are created beings, they're not omniscient as God is, they are limited in knowledge according to what God reveals to them. Even as we are.

We read in 1 Peter 1:10-12 *“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.”*

In other words the angels were curious as to how exactly God’s plan of salvation would be worked out here on earth, and they probably had their minds blown to hear of the fact that God would Himself become a man, all the while maintaining His deity, lead a sinless life and then lay it down on the altar of the cross as a payment in full for the sin of the world. We learn in Luke 15:10 that, *“there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* In fact Heb 1:14 teaches us that angels are *“spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.”* and So there are angelic beings all around the church, you and me always “stooping over” so to speak so as to intently observe so that they might learn. and What is it that they are learning from the church? The manifold wisdom of God, they seen the power of God in creation, the wrath of God at Sinai, the love and grace of God at Calvary, and they’re learning of the wisdom of God through the church.

Through studying the church the angelic hosts observe the reconciling work of Christ, both to Himself and to one-another. They see God taking Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female (who all together murdered the Messiah and are worthy only of hell, eternal separation from God). and Making them, by that cross upon which He was hung, one spiritual Body in Christ Jesus, they see Him breaking down every barrier, and every wall that separates or divides and making all believers one, in an indivisible, intimate and eternal union with the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, along with every other believer from every other age and circumstance. (Mac Arthur pp 97). You might say that in the classroom of God’s universe, He is the Teacher, the angels are the students, the church is the illustration, and the subject is the manifold wisdom of God (MacArthur).

VS12

In Christ we have boldness and access to God with confidence, even though we’re to live meek and humble lives before the Lord, that doesn’t exclude, boldness and confidence and assurance in the work that Jesus Christ has done on our behalf in granting us access to God. You see this isn’t speaking of self-confidence or pride and arrogance, it’s not speaking about being flippant or irreverent before God, it’s speaking of Christ-confidence trusting in His righteous covering that grants you access to God where by we can come to Him with honest and open hearts, and not only tell Him what’s on our hearts, but also receive from Him what’s on His.

We can approach God, in Christ with boldness, this timid and unworthy approach that some take is unscriptural, now again we're not worthy in and of ourselves, but in Christ you can come to God with confidence knowing that His ear is turned toward you and He is listening to your praise and your petitions, He's concerned for those things which hurt you and that you struggle with. Heb 4:14-16 *"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* 1 last reference, Heb 10:19-22 *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."*

Vs13

Again Paul was imprisoned in Rome, but concerning the divine perspective a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Like Joseph in the OT, his faithful stewardship resulted in false arrest and imprisonment. But ultimately it brought incredible glory to God and salvation to both Jew and Gentile. and So Paul says don't lose heart at my tribulation, because it's your glory, rejoice in the message that's gotten me here, the grace of God toward to gentiles and salvation through Jesus Christ to whoever will call upon His name.

(Aren't able to approach God, you know you're unworthy, your sin has separated you, Jesus wants to give you boldness and confidence, access through Him.)