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C0443 -- November 3, 2004 – Ephesians 3:7-9 –
The Unfathomable Wealth of Christ

REVIEW:

12 NEW TESTAMENT “MYSTERIES”
10 DIVINE AND 2 SATANIC MYSTERIES
(THINGS PREVIOUSLY UNREVEALED BUT NOW REVEALED)

Matthew 13:11

Mark 4:11

Luke 8:10

“New Truths Regarding the Kingdom of Heaven/God”

Romans 11:25

1 Timothy 3:9, 16

Colossians 1:27

Ephesians 3:3-9

“Partial Hardening of Israel Until Fullness of Gentiles”

“Mystery of Faith and Godliness”

“Christ in You”

“Believing Jews and Gentiles are Co-Equals in One
New Body, the Church”

Ephesians 5:32

Revelation 1:20

2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7

1 Corinthians 15:51

Revelation 10:7

Revelation 17:5, 7

Ephesians 1:9

“Church as the Bride of Christ”

“Seven Stars and Seven Lampstands”

“Mystery of Wickedness”

“Rapture of Church Saints”

“Mystery of the 21 Tribulation Judgments Fulfilled”

“Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations”

“God Will Bring Together All Things and Restore the
Whole Creation Under One Head”

3. The Ministry (3:7-12)

Verse 7 is a transitional verse between 3:2-6 and 3:8-13. The relative pronoun at the beginning of verse 7 (**of which**) unites this verse with 3:2-6 and with the following channel

through which the revelation of the mystery dispensation (the Church) would travel (God to Apostles and Prophets to Church to Angels). The mystery dispensation was hidden in God until revealed to Paul and the other apostles and prophets who then made it known to the Church. And the Church becomes the means by which God's wisdom is made known to the angelic realm. So, verse 7 is transitional.

a. The Placement into the Ministry (3:7-8a)

Paul describes how he was placed in the ministry, not by his own doing but by God's doing. Paul himself expresses his feeling of unworthiness (8a) but that the means by which he will accomplish this task is by the power of God (7b).

Greek Text 3:7 ou egenethen diakonos kata ten dorean tes charitos tou theou tes dotheises moi kata ten energeian tes dunameos autou

Translation 3:7 of which I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power

ou egenethen diakonos, “**of which I was made a minister**”. Paul was made a minister of the gospel (*egenethen – aorist passive indicative*). He did not make himself a minister of the gospel. All ministers ought to be made ministers of the gospel. Being a minister ought to be the last resort of any man. If there is anything else you can do in life then do that. Do not ever become a minister of the gospel unless there is nothing else you can do. I fear that many who are ministers of the gospel made themselves ministers. They have a strong desire to serve Jesus but God has not made them a minister. They do not have the gifts of pastor and teacher. They do not like to study the word of God. What they like to do is get together with the local ministerial alliance and waste time. I know what most ministers do and it is not study the word of God. Most ministers today spend less than one hour preparing to teach a lesson. That is because God didn't make them a minister, they made themselves a minister. And people, thousands of people, attending these churches, suffer because these self-made ministers are lazy and gifted at social get-togethers rather than teaching the word of God. They don't have the wisdom of God they have the wisdom of men and that's how they run their churches. On the other hand, I also know of those who were made ministers of the gospel and yet they rejected it. Both of these situations are terrible. I have known of men who had very strong calls on their life for ministry and never ministered. There are three basic reasons men who are made ministers never minister: (1) cost of education (elitists schools) (2) unwillingness because of the weight of the task and (3) being a minister doesn't pay a lot. Some of these men are some of the most brilliant men in the world. But the tug of the culture is so great toward material success that they opt to take secular jobs

so they can have a lot of money. I have seen men do this, brilliant men, and the results are devastating. These men are under severe divine discipline today (mental problems, self-esteem problems, etc.) because of their failure to live by faith and be who God made them to be. But Paul was one of those men who had integrity and drive. God made him a minister of the gospel and Paul responded by fulfilling that ministry.

The Greek word for **minister** is *diakonos*, from which we get the word “deacon”. It’s a synonym of the Greek word *doulos* (slave). The word “slave” refers to the relationship of servant to master and **minister** refers to serving the master. Paul considered himself *bond-slave* (for life) and a *minister* (Rom. 1:1). Paul was a slave of Christ Jesus and served in the capacity of preaching to the Gentiles.

***kata ten dorean tes charitos tou theou tes dotheises moi*, “according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me”.** *kata* with the accusative denotes the standard by which Paul was made a minister of the gospel. That standard was **God’s grace** (genitive of possession or source). The word **grace** means ‘unmerited or undeserved favor’. We are saved by God’s grace and its God’s grace that also enables us to perform God given tasks. God will never give you a task without also giving you the ability to complete the task. **God’s grace** is a **gift** (*dorean*). A **gift** is something you do not earn or deserve; gifts are free and come from the heart of the giver. The entire salvation by grace through faith mechanism is a gift of God. We did not earn this mechanism of salvation. It was not by works (Eph. 2:4a-8a, 9; See Lesson 22: The Gift of God). In the same way Paul did not earn his ministry. It was given to him according to the standard of God’s grace. So, not only was the mystery dispensation revealed to Paul but even the ability to minister this mystery to others was given. All that humans have is received by grace and never by works.

***kata ten energeian tes dunameos autou*, “according to the working of His power”.** Again, this is *kata* with the accusative which always denotes the standard or the measure. Here it denotes the measure of something. The measure of the **grace** God gave to Paul can only be measured by God’s power (which is infinite; it’s immeasurable). The words for **working** and **power** were used in Ephesians 1:19. If you recall, these two words are *energeia* and *dunamis*. We get the English words “energy” and “dynamite” from these two words. The word for **energy** refers to *kinetic energy*; energy in motion; energy that is doing work (and the word for **power** refers to *potential energy*; stored energy, energy that has the ability to do work (e.g., car battery, rock on the side of a cliff, etc.). God has the ability to do work and He is doing work in Paul. God’s potential energy is toward you as a Christian (1:19; 3:20). The same power that raised Christ from the dead (reversal of biological, chemical, and physical processes), seated Christ at the right hand of the Father is the same

power that regenerated you and is available to you to complete your God-given calling in life. The amount of **grace** that God gave to Paul can only be measured by God's ability at work; God doing something in history (e.g., resurrection; session; regeneration; etc.). Paul had a terrific calling in life He had to travel all over the Mediterranean world. He didn't have cars or good roads to travel on. He had to travel by foot or by boat. He was hated by lots of people, remember the riot that was started in Ephesus. Over 25,000 confused Ephesians rioted to have Paul put away. Remember the Jews in Jerusalem who had Paul imprisoned for four years (during which Paul wrote this letter). And these are just a few of the hardships Paul faced because of his calling. Paul gives us a few details of his hardships in **2 Corinthians 11:23-33** Paul says, you want to compare boastings with me...try this on...

Are they servants of Christ? -- I speak as if insane-- I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments [imprisoned for more than 4 years], beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes* [Deut. 25:1-3, these lashings were so bad that they sometimes killed the man; cf. Mishnah]. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods (by the Romans illegally because Paul was a Roman citizen), once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶ *I have been* on frequent journeys [didn't have time for his body to rest], in dangers from rivers [crossing raging rivers], dangers from robbers [Paul had to be on the lookout for paid and unpaid bandits], dangers from *my* countrymen [the Jews whom Paul loved (Rom. 9:3-4)], dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren [there was no safe haven, not even in the church]; ²⁷ *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure [Paul had enough to survive but hardly]. ²⁸ Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? [Paul also had the burdens of fellow brothers and all the churches] ³⁰ If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness [why? because that demonstrates God's strength]. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³ and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and *so* escaped his hands [becoming an apostle did not lift Paul but lowered Paul].

Now, do you think Paul could have carried out his ministry in his own power? Paul almost speaks as if he is insane here. Most of us would be insane after such hardships. But Paul only boasted in Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). He boasted in his weakness and not in his strength. These hardships were to demonstrate Paul's weakness and God's power.

Here Paul is saying it was not by my own work that I know the mystery, I received it by revelation; nor was it by my own work that I am a minister of the mystery, I was made a minister by God; nor is it by my own power that I minister to you Gentiles; I am constantly being empowered by God to minister to you. So, you can see that it's all of God's grace and by His power that Paul received the revelation, was made a minister, and ministered the grace of God and never because of his own obedience or works. Nobody can pay off God. God decides who He wants to use, how He wants to use you, and He doesn't leave you hanging there without His enabling power to get it done. So, you can see that it's all by the grace of God and apart from His power toward you, you can't do it. So, stop trying to do it all on your own steam. How do you think Paul would have made it if he tried to do it on his own steam? He wouldn't have gotten very far. So, God designed Paul's life and all the hardships to demonstrate God's power toward you.

Greek Text 3:8a emoi to elachistotero panton agion edothe he charis aute,

Translation 3:8a to me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given,

verse 8a is a parenthesis. Westcott-Hort sets off this section by dashes to make this clear. "It is a sudden outburst of amazement that God would use him, giving him not only the responsibility but also the power to communicate this gospel to all people. Paul felt he did not deserve this honor."ⁱ **to me** is emphatic. Paul is emphasizing himself here, not to boast in himself at all, but simply to make sure everyone knows he's talking about himself in the next phrase. He says he's **less than the least of all saints.**ⁱⁱ "But Paul, you wrote more than half of the NT, you're not the least but the greatest saint." Not according to Paul. Paul is making a genuine claim of humility (the highest virtue in the Christian life (Phil. 2:5-8). This is not false modesty. Christians should avoid false modesty. False modesty means you don't really have any real reasons behind acting modestly. Paul had genuine reasons, two in particular, for making this statement which we'll look at in a moment. Notice also that Paul is not comparing himself with his fellow apostles here. In 1 Cor. 15:9 Paul says he was the least of the apostles, indeed not even fit to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God, but he was what he was by the grace of God. Here Paul is saying something even more than that. He's not only the least of the apostles but he's **less than the least of all saints.** We looked at the word **saints** in Eph. 1:1 and there we

concluded that it is a term that means “believers”. Paul never considered himself a super-saint. He considered himself **less than the least of all saints**. There are two reasons for this: (1) he considered himself to be the foremost of sinners (**1 Tim. 1:15**). Paul recognized who he truly was by nature (Eph. 2:1-3). Of all people on the planet Paul considered himself the foremost sinner. (2) He blasphemed against Christ, he persecuted Christ and the Church, and he was a violent aggressor (**1 Tim. 1:13; Acts 9:4, 5; 26:11, 14, 15**). Now you can see why Paul considered himself **less than the least of all saints**. If you have ever thought that someone was so bad they could never be saved, then you want to think about Paul. God can save anyone He wants and He can change people from violent aggressors and haters of Christ and Christianity into some of the most powerful and effective Christians the world has ever seen. The moment you forget this is the moment you have just forgotten the omnipotence and grace of God. You’ve also forgotten that Jesus was a carpenter. That was not by Chance. He was a carpenter because carpenters take old things and make them new. This is what God can do with anyone He wants.

b. The Performance of the Ministry (3:8b-9)

(1) To Preach the Unfathomable Wealth of Christ

Greek Text 3:8b tois ethnesin euaggelisasthai to anaxichniaston ploutos tou Christou

Translation 3:8b to preach to the Gentiles, the unfathomable wealth of Christ

Gentiles is in the emphatic here, designating who Paul was sent to minister to. His function is given by the infinitive **to preach**. Paul was **made a minister**...and sent **to the Gentiles to preach** (Gal. 2:7-8). The word for **preach** is the infinitive of the verb for “gospel” or “good news”. What was the good news here that Paul was sent to preach to the Gentiles? **the unfathomable wealth of Christ**. The article precedes **Christ** indicating that Paul has in mind the Jewish Messiah “in whose riches the Gentiles participate”. Remember, the Gentiles are partakers of those aspects of the OT Covenants that are repeated in the NT and applied to the Church. These constitute some of the spiritual blessings that come from these unconditional covenants (Abrahamic and New Covenants). The word **unfathomable** means something that can’t be traced out by the human mind; something that can’t be figured out. It is beyond man’s ability to investigate. How then can Paul preach **the unfathomable wealth of Christ** if it is **unfathomable**? Because it has been revealed from God to Paul so that **the Gentiles** can perceive it. We are to comprehend the wealth or riches of Christ (3:14-19). It should be **wealth** rather than **riches** because the noun is in the singular. It emphasizes what is found in Christ as a singularity. What does the wealth of Christ entail? Turn to Col. 2:2ff. “*Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom*

and knowledge. ⁴ *I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument... ⁸*
See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles (stoichea; earth, air, fire, water) of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Paul is wanting to emphasize all that is found in Christ. Christ is not just useful for salvation from eternal death. Christ is the center of everything. ALL THE TREASURES OF WISDOM AND ALL KNOWLEDGE ARE HID IN CHRIST. Do you realize the implications of this statement? I’ve been trying to teach you this since I’ve been here. I’ve been trying to teach you that you cannot know any area of life apart from Jesus Christ. This is what Paul meant in 1 Cor. 2:2 when he said *“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”* This does not mean that Paul tried to forget thinking about other areas of life and only think about Christ’s crucifixion. This does not mean that Paul only went around telling Jesus stories. What this means is that Paul never determined to know anything apart from divine revelation. Paul was interested in other areas of life. His writings and the rest of the Bible are full of information about every area of life. The Bible is very interested in these things because they are a part of creation. What this means by application is that you should never, and I mean never, seek to know some area of life apart from Christ. For anything studied apart from Christ will always exalt itself in rejection of Christ. This means art, education, family, government, history, language, money, philosophy, stewardship, and worship. The revelation of God has to be the center of all these things. This doesn’t mean putting Christ first and these other things second. It means putting Christ in all things. You’ve got to submit every area of wisdom and knowledge to Christ. In 1 Cor. 8:1 Paul says *“knowledge puffs up but love edifies”*. Paul wasn’t talking about Christ-oriented knowledge. Christ-oriented knowledge can never puff up because it’s received by revelation, not figured out by your human intellect. People always try to use this verse to say “oh, you don’t want to get too much knowledge of the Bible, knowledge puffs up, let’s leave room for love!” That couldn’t be more antithetical to the Bible. If you’ve been paying attention to 1 John, you would know that is a false spirit, not the Holy Spirit. That’s tearing this verse out of context! Paul never meant to communicate that message. Paul could desire nothing more than we increase our knowledge, but he wants it to be Christ-oriented knowledge and not human wisdom. In fact, he often prays for us to come to *epignosis*, full, in depth knowledge. The kind of knowledge Paul is talking about in 1 Cor. 8:1, the kind of knowledge that puffs up is not knowledge of Christian doctrine and how it applies to every area of life. He’s talking about human knowledge, vain knowledge, knowledge of things that is from the local university; knowledge not taken captive by Christ. Knowledge taught independent of Christ and Him crucified. That’s the kind of knowledge that puffs up because it’s not by revelation, it is by self-study. You can take university courses, but don’t forget that as a Christian, unless you have the Bible on one side and your lecture notes or textbook on the

other, both open, then you're committing a treacherous act against Christ. You're actually moving away from Christ every time you do this. You're disobeying Christ's command to "take every thought captive" (2 Cor. 10:5). This means you can't come to know things properly unless you come to know them in terms of Christ and His word. You can't go take some college class and assume that what you have there is knowledge. Paul calls that knowledge falsely so-called (1 Tim. 6:20). That's knowledge in a vacuum. Most Christians can't even see the relationship between these areas of life and Christ. If this is you, then you can't be enjoying **ALL THE TREASURES OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE** because they are hidden in Christ. If you can't even see the relationship between these areas of life and Christ, then you don't understand the **unfathomable wealth of Christ**. Some of these areas are simple for most Christians to see their relationship to Christ (e.g., family, money, stewardship) but others have been so abstracted from Christianity that Christians are totally clueless about how they are related to Christ, they go about working in these areas as if God doesn't even exist (art; education; biology; physics; mathematics, history, government, or philosophy can only be known according to Christ). Re-orienting the way you think about these areas according to Christ is the only way they can truly be known, because how many things are hidden in Christ? **ALL THINGS**. If you don't then you're never going to be able to see this treasure that is hid in Christ, you're never going to understand the unfathomable wealth of Christ. Christ will just be a tack on in your daily life. "Oh yeah, I had my devotional today." That's not the goal of the Christian life, that isn't even the tip of the iceberg. If you are here tonight and you've never made a self-conscious decision to take your studies, all that you've stored up over the years and pull it out of the compartments you've stored it away in, you need to do that. You have to pull out all the drawers of so-called knowledge. You've got to get them all open at the same time and look at them and see how they fit together (they are probably extremely jumbled up and contradictory). You've got to clean up your drawers. Satan has pulled a very deceptive stunt in the 20th century. He's taught us how to be idolaters and not even know it. Eventually I'll teach you about how to *get out* and *stay out* of idolatry, but it basically has to do with this concept of cleaning out and organizing your drawers by re-organizing what you've supposedly learned and re-learn it according to Christ.

(2) To Enlighten the Administration of the Mystery (3:9)

Not only is Paul to **preach to the Gentiles...the unfathomable wealth of Christ**, but he is also **to enlighten all people what is the dispensation of the mystery**.

Greek Text 3:9 kai photisai [pantas] tis he oikonomia tou musteriou tou apakekrummenou apo ton aionon en to theo to ta panta ktisanti,

Translation 3:9 and to enlighten [all] what is the dispensation of the mystery which has been hidden from the ages in God who created all things,

kai photisai [pantas], “and to enlighten [all]”. Paul uses a conjunction connected with another infinitive here showing that this phrase is parallel to the previous infinitival clause **to preach to the Gentiles**. The coordinating conjunction shows that **to preach to the Gentiles** is inclusive of **enlightening all**. **all** here shows that Paul felt an obligation to “all human beings”, Jews and Gentiles. There is obviously no way Paul could **enlighten all** men about the “mystery”, but this reveals that Paul had a “revelation debt”. We talked about this a few weeks ago. Paul was a prisoner of Christ Jesus because of all the special revelation he had received. He felt an indebtedness to **enlighten all** men with this revelation so he could be freed from his revelation debt (Gal. 1-2; Rom. 1:14).

tis he oikonomia tou musteriou, “what is the dispensation of the mystery”. Here Paul uses the Greek word *oikonomia* once more. He used it in 1:9 and 3:2. It’s the Greek word for **dispensation**. The **dispensation of the mystery** obviously refers to the Church as an intercalation in Israel’s calendar. It is not an intercalation in God’s plan as Paul proves in v. 10. I think Paul has in mind here God’s “strategy” of the Church. Paul is going to enlighten all to the Church’s strategic role in God’s plan. The mystery was revealed to Paul; Paul revealed it to us in v. 6, and now God’s strategy with the mystery is about to be revealed in v. 10. It’s important for us who are a part of God’s mystery to know what God’s strategy for us is all about. If you don’t even know where the battlefield is and what the strategy is how can you effectively fight the battle?

tou apakekrummenou, “which has been hidden”. As I’ve told you before this mystery dispensation of the Church **has been hidden**. This is the perfect tense of *apokrupto*. The perfect tense expresses completed action with continual results. Therefore, the mystery was hidden and has remained hidden until revealed by God to Paul and other apostles and prophets. Who was it hidden from?

apo ton aionon, “from the ages”. It was hidden **from the ages**. **Ages** here refers to time (not evil angels, good angels, or both). It was hidden from all **ages** since the beginning of time. Where was this mystery dispensation hidden?

en to theo to ta panta ktisanti, “in God who created all things,”. It was not hidden in the OT and just not recognized (Progressive Dispensationalism). It was **hidden...in God** who is inscrutable. Nothing can be known about God’s mind unless God reveals His mind. Such is the case with the **mystery dispensation**. Who is this God? This God is the one **who**

created all things. This points to God's creativity and omnipotence. Perhaps Paul brings up God's creativity and omnipotence to remind us that God was in control of everything and that His creation of a new entity, the Church, was a part of His plan from all eternity. God also planned to wait until the NT era to reveal this part of His plan. Dispensationalists are violently charged with making the Church plan B. Since plan A with Israel didn't work then God's plan was thwarted and God had to resort to plan B to try and salvage history. This phrase is contrary to this charge. The Church is not plan B! God's plan has not been thwarted nor can it! But what can happen is God can hide some revelation **from all** previous **ages** and reveal it in the NT era. This is what he has done. God's plan was revealed in various stages of revelation and not all at once. This is what we call Progressive Revelation. The Bible did not come down from heaven all in one piece but was gradually revealed over time! God has always had and will always have one plan, but God does reveal new aspects of that plan at His pleasure.

ⁱ Hoehner, Harold, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 452.

ⁱⁱ This is a figure of speech in the Greek text called a "litote". A "litote" is the use of a negative statement to make an affirmation. Here it is a negative statement designed to affirm Paul's genuine humility and the grace of God in his life as an undeserving sinner. cf. Zuck, Roy, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, pp. 156-157.

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