

“The Mystery of His Will”
Ephesians 1:8-9; 17
(Preached at Trinity, December 1, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 3-14** Paul describes the spiritual blessings God has prepared in Christ. Paul refers to them as, "spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ" They are blessings by God and for God. He alone receives all the glory. Paul writes in **Verse 6**, "to the praise of the glory of His grace"
2. After stating that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places he proceeds to describe the blessings. As I've stated, in the Greek it is one continuous sentence of over 200 words.
3. In **Verses 4-5** Paul states the context of these blessings. He puts these blessings in the context of election and predestination. The Bible here says that God has chosen us that we might be holy and blameless and he has predetermined to adopt us. "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself"
4. In **Verse 5** Paul reminds us that we were chosen and foreordained for a particular end—that we might become the children of God – "He predestined us to adoption as sons"
5. In **Verse 7** Paul continues enumerating the Divine blessings. He declares the redemption God has provided for us in Christ: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses"
6. Now, in **Verses 8-9** he states another of the blessings of God's grace. God has blessed His chosen people with Divine illumination. Paul says God has made known to us the mystery of His will:
"In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will"
7. Paul makes a similar statement in **Verse 17**
"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."
8. This is a fantastic statement. Every committed Christian is interested in the question, how can I know the will of God. We want to follow Him. We want our lives to be conformed to His perfect will for us. We want to know God's will regarding our education, our life's vocation and our choice of a mate. We want to know God's will regarding which church to join, which house to buy and which job to accept. We want to know God's will regarding how many children to have, how He would have us to educate them, and the endless other decisions regarding how we raise them.
But Paul isn't talking about some supernatural entrance into the decrees and counsels of God that can only be known by Him.
What does Paul mean by "the mystery of His will" in this passage?

- I. Paul is talking about a particular aspect of God's sovereign will or what is sometimes referred to as God's decretive will or will of decree. God's sovereign will is the essence of God's eternal decree. God is working out all things after the counsel of His own will. Paul states it in **Verse 11** - "who works all things after the counsel of His will"
- A. The Bible has much to say about God's Sovereign will
1. It is exhaustive.
Verse 11 - "who works all things after the counsel of His will"
Isaiah 46:9-10 NAU - "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';"
 2. It cannot be frustrated either by men or angels
Proverbs 16:9 NAU - "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."
NAS **Daniel 4:35** - "And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'"
 There is nothing that happens outside God's sovereign will. Every detail of every day is marching forth at God's sovereign command.
 This means God has a purpose for your life.
- B. One of the characteristics of God's decretive will is it is secret. It is hidden in the mind of God.
Deuteronomy 29:29-1 NAU - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. "
1. God does not always reveal His sovereign will
NAS **Romans 11:33** – "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?"
 2. Paul refers to it here as the "mystery of God's will"
 3. How is it God has made known to us the "mystery of His will"
- C. What Paul is talking about here is God's illuminating grace whereby He enables us to understand the essence of His purposes as revealed in His Word.
Ephesians 1:10 NAU - "with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him"
1. Paul is referring to the glory of God's redemptive purpose which from the beginning of the world was cloaked in mystery but has now been fully revealed in Christ.
 2. This is exciting! God has revealed to us the essence of the plan and purpose for everything He does upon the earth.
 3. God has given us an understanding of His eternal purposes. We understand the Gospel. We have a right understanding of His Word. Paul says God reveals to us an understanding of the fullness of times.

II. How is it that Paul refers to it as a mystery?

A. One of the characteristics of the lost man is a complete inability to discern the things of God

1 Corinthians 2:14 NAU – “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

Ephesians 4:18 NAU – “being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;”

B. This doesn't mean lost people have no knowledge

1. The lost man is able to acquire great stores of knowledge regarding this physical world. He designs computers and puts men on the moon.

2. But regarding the things of God's glorious designs in Christ he is absolutely void of discernment.

a. He is blind to the reality of God's purpose upon the earth. He denies God's presence and power. He denies the glory of what God is doing in bringing His people to Himself.

b. The lost man cannot comprehend the beauty of Christ. He cannot appreciate the excellence of the cross or the perfection of Christ's blood.

3. While all men are religious they are blind regarding the Gospel. Jesus declared that He is the only way—Christianity is the only way, but few believe this. Most see such a declaration as being narrow and intolerant.

4. The ways of this world all seem so sensible to the carnal mind.

C. But God has shined upon us His glorious illumination

2 Corinthians 4:6 – “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

1. God has shined upon us in such a way that now everything has come into focus. Through God's redeeming power we now see clearly.

a. Illustration of the light on the end of the wing – it seemed like a light in the distance until I saw clearly it was actually only feet away.

b. Jesus told Nicodemus

John 3:3 NAU - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

c. Paul described God's mighty power

2 Corinthians 4:6 NAU - "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

2. This is at the heart of the New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:33-34 NAU - "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

3. We know God and we understand His purposes. We know God's saving grace. We know God is saving men from every tribe and tongue. We know there is no longer division between Jew and Gentile, the glorious mystery now made known.

- B. While multitudes have access to the Word of God all do not have access to understanding it.

In paragraph 6 of the first chapter of the London Baptist Confession we read: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.⁹ Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word"

III. Paul says God has made known to us the mystery of His will.

"He made known to us the mystery of His will"

- A. This understanding is given to us by God's sovereign determination "according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him"

1. The mystery of God's will is revealed to His particular people
Matthew 13:10-11 NAU - "And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted."

Matthew 13:16 NAU - "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear."

2. According to God's sovereignty and purpose there are millions of people who live and die and never hear the gospel.

For 2000 years before Christ the heathen nations never had access to the Word of God. There are still many millions of unreached people today who have never heard the gospel.

3. And what about the millions in our generation who hear and yet continue in unbelief?

What about the millions who die without Christ in spite of churches on every corner?

4. We are not saved according to any merit of our own or wisdom of our own. It is not according to our own wisdom or understanding. God reveals His truth according to His good pleasure.

Ephesians 1:18 – "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,"

- B. So what is this mystery? It is the glorious Gospel that God has ordained in Christ It is God summing all things up in Christ.

Ephesians 1:10 NAU - "the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth"

1. Human beings came under God's judgment and condemnation but God chose to have mercy upon an elect people through the Gospel of Christ.

2. It was first revealed after the fall through the revelation of a chosen seed
Genesis 3:15 NAU - "I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."
 - a. That there would be a righteous seed that would come forth from the woman
 - b. The forerunners, pre-figures of this seed would always be upon the earth by God's grace, a righteous and holy remnant.
 - c. It was seen in righteous Abel
Hebrews 11:4 NAU - "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."
 - d. It was seen in the righteous seed of Seth
Genesis 4:26 NAU - "To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then *men* began to call upon the name of the LORD."
 - e. It was seen in Enoch who walked with God
Hebrews 11:5 NAU - "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God."
 - f. It was seen in righteous Noah who found grace in God's eyes
Genesis 6:6-8 NAU - "The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."
2. It was seen in God's promise to Abraham and through Israel that God set apart from among all nations
3. All of God's Old Covenant promises have found their fulfillment in Christ.
4. And God has revealed the great mystery of the inclusion of the Gentiles so that both Jews and Gentiles would be united into one holy church.
Ephesians 3:4-6 NAU - "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶ *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"
5. God has revealed His glorious plan and purpose to us!! Jesus, God's holy seed has come to save His people from their sin.

Conclusion

1. It is a glorious blessing to be given the mystery of God's will—that we might know Him and the treasure of the Gospel. We understand God's redemptive purpose. We know the end from the beginning.
The most simple-minded Christian has more discernment than the greatest minds of this world
2. The Gospel today is open and plain. It is available to all. The reason people will not have it is they harden themselves against it.
3. What effect should God's illuminating grace have upon you?
 - A. It should humble you.
If you know Christ you should praise God for His grace. No man can come to Christ unless his mind is renewed, unless the Holy Spirit illuminates his mind. God only does this for the elect.
 - B. It should fill your hearts with gratitude