

"The Mystery of Christ, Part One"

Ephesians 3:1-7

May 11, 2008
by C.W. Powell

Ephesians 3:1-7

*1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:
3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,
4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)
5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:
7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

The stupendous things that Paul had described in the first two chapters of Ephesians need some more explanation, and he begins this explanation in chapter three, which flows naturally. What are these things? I might be good to pause and reflect, before going on.

1. He begins by blessing God for the very things that irritate the humanists the most. His sovereignty, His predestination; His free and unmeasured grace. Instead of apologizing for these great truths, Paul puts them into context and sees them as a reason to bless and honor the Lord, not apologize for them. He would shout these things to the world, for they are a reason for blessing God, not apologizing for Him, and being embarrassed about it. We looked at these things in a couple of sermons at the beginning of this series.
2. He will list the immense spiritual blessings that God has given to us because of Jesus Christ. As Francis Faulks put it in the Tyndale Commentaries: "election from the very beginning; sonship by adoption; redemption, which is forgiveness; insight into God's all-embracing purpose; the privilege for both Jews and Gentiles to be His people; the sealing of the Spirit, which is the earnest of the final inheritance." We also examined these things in detail.
3. He prayed for a general blessing from God: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened..." from verses 17, 18 of chapter one. Every minister must pray this prayer for the people that God has called him to serve; and each one of them must also pray for themselves and for one another, for

there is not greater blessing that God can give than the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; and there is no greater curse than to be blinded to these things.

4. He also prayed for three specific things for them to understand and see: 1) the hope of their calling; 2) What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; 3) The exceeding greatness of his power to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This power results in the newness of life that comes to us, in which God works the great virtues of faith, hope, and charity in the hearts and lives of the believers—weaving them into the very fabric of the soul of the Christian.

5. He explains what is meant by this and the effect of this in chapter 2: Although we are dead in trespasses and in sins, without hope and without God in the world, under the power of the devil we lived our lives in the lusts of the flesh and lusts of the mind, worthy of the wrath of God, children of Adam under the curse of his disobedience, yet God has been rich indeed in mercy to us, quickening to new life by faith in Christ unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

6. We have therefore been reconciled to God by the same gospel message that was preached to the Jews, who were called to faith in Christ, renouncing their own works, for the gospel of peace was preached to both Jew and Gentile, and by that Gospel of peace through the blood of the Cross of Christ we have been reconciled into one body, so that there is no longer Jew nor Greek, but we are one in Christ, and together grow up into the temple of God, and temple not made of bricks or stone or mortar, but by living stones, people in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

7. There is one family of God, one people of the Lord, from the beginning of the world, the elect of God, which are not taken from Israel, united with those called of the Gentiles, as was confirmed by our Lord Jesus: that His sheep hear his voice and follow Him. He had other sheep which were not of Israel; He would call them also and there would be one fold and one shepherd.

Now we come to the words of chapter 3.

Vs. 1. Paul was in prison for one reason essentially: he preached the gospel to the Gentiles; this stirred up enmity from the Jews, and they connived to have him thrown into prison. This was an offence that threatened, in their mind, their favored status before the Lord, and it could not be tolerated. They did not understand their calling and their election, perverted these great doctrines and were filled with hatred, lies, and murder rather than the faith, hope, and charity that Paul had talked about in chapter one.

Vs. 2,3. Paul had been given a special dispensation of the grace of God to the Gentiles. He was the apostle to the Gentiles and understood the significance of the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world because of the special revelation that he had received from Christ himself. This was known to the whole world, although there was great opposition to this gospel, then and now. Those who are born of the flesh always persecute those who are born of the Spirit as Paul says in Galatians.

Vs. 4, 5. Although the promise of the Messiah's coming, and the blessing to the whole world was certainly known from the beginning, for Abraham had been told that that whole world would be blessed by the promised seed, yet the minds and hearts of the people were blinded to the fullness and extent of the promise, indicated by the words, "as it is not revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."

1. How different was the mission of Paul from what Israel considered their mission to be. They gathered behind their walls of self-protection and self-righteousness, and were highly offended when Paul understood to preach the Gospel to every creature under heaven. How could this be.

2. Paul's understanding of the work of Christ was at least three-fold to this part of this great epistle:

a. The great blessing that God has given us in Christ, reserved in heaven for us—described in chapter one, culmination in the works of faith, hope, and charity.

b. The great and powerful work of the sovereign power of God in raising Christ from the dead and working new faith and life in us by the Gospel, unto good works which God hath before ordained, making all the saints of one body in the family of God: described in chapter two.

c. The great mission of the church, to take this great gospel to the whole world, to every creature under heaven, as Jesus had said, "Go ye therefore and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Vs. 6: The Jew could understand the work of Messiah being extended to the ends of the world; but he could not accept the idea that there would be equality between Jew and Gentile. "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." There is a bunch of stuff here:

1. Fellowheirs: The Gentile would inherit the earth, for the promise is to all the meek. The fruit of the earth is for all as Ecclesiastes tells us: Ec 5:9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. God created the world for the whole world, and the whole world shall reap the results of the Gospel. People out of every nation and tongue and kindred and tribe shall together sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb and enjoy the blessings of God forever.

2. This was not revealed to Paul alone, but to Peter and the other apostles also. Peter was given a great vision in chapter 10 of Acts:

a. He had gone to pray on the rooftop and was very hungry.

- b. While they prepared the meal, he fell into a trance and had this vision.
- c. Immediately the messengers from Cornelius arrived.
- d. He went with them to the house of Cornelius and preached the gospel
- e. Immediately the Holy Spirit fell upon them, they spoke with tongues, and Peter said, we have to baptized them, for they have received the Holy Spirit, even as we at the first.
- f. The gospel is to go to the whole world, as Jesus had said: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” (Joh 12:25)

3. Partakers of the promise of God in Christ: this inheritance will not come from some screwy idea of pretending that all religion is the same, that everyone is to follow God according to his own opinion, but it is Christ who is to be preached. Paul message was to turn from darkness to light; from the power of Satan unto God; from unbelief to faith. There was no equivocation on this in the message of Paul: The Gentile were to inherit with the Jew, but there is no question what the inheritance is: it is eternal glory in Christ forever: not some utopia of equality and misery in unbelief and wickedness:

“7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; 10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. 11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.” (2Th 1:7-11)

4. In the Gospel: It is the preaching of the cross that is the power of God unto salvation. This brings us back to the enumeration of the blessings of chapter one:

“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; 8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.” (Eph 1:3-12)

5. Paul then reaffirms his mission, which he had received as a gift from God, and for which reason he was in prison. Paul never received any earthly reward for his work, but tribulations and trials and misery in the flesh. He was beheaded in Rome for the gospel's sake, sealing his testimony with his blood.

Application:

1. Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.
2. There is no room for the elitism of the flesh in the church of Jesus Christ, for we are all one in Christ. Let us pray that that eyes of our understanding might be opened as well, so that we would see to true mission of the church and the true blessings of the saints.
3. Let us be ready as we are able and equipped, to preach the gospel to all, for we do not know whose life will be transformed by the cross of Christ.
4. Let us make sure that the Gospel we preaching is that which transforms and changes the life, calling men to repentance and faith in Christ, resulting in faith, hope, and charity, as Paul has said.

May God Bless you.

Amen and Amen.