

Series: Ephesians: *The Christian Mystery and Mission*

Week 9

CDOBC – beginning on 2/6/11

Title: “The Mystery of the Church”

Ephesians 3:1-13 ~ April 3, 2011

OBJECTIVE: To help believers understand the mystery of the Church, and God’s work in history.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- VBS Sign-ups continue today
- Prayer Gathering – tonight @ 5 p.m.
- Youth p.m. – tonight @ 6 p.m.
- Baptism May 22nd
- Baby / Child Dedication May 8th – Mother’s Day
- Men’s Breakfast – This Saturday 6:45-8:15
- Become a member of CDOBC – New Members welcomed on April 10th

Opening prayer

Why was Paul in prison?

Paul’s personal history and why he is in prison – for the sake of the Gentiles (see Acts 21-28).

- Paul arrives in Jerusalem – reports to the Church Council (21:18-19) what God had been doing among the Gentiles through his ministry.
- Paul goes to the Temple for purification purposes
- While Paul is at the Temple (7 days later) some Jews from Asia (Gentile territory) saw Paul and stirred up the crowd by making false accusations about Paul – that he had brought “Greeks into the temple area” (21:27-29)
- A riot soon breaks out – and Paul is at the center of it – being beaten
- Roman troops stationed nearby rush in and rescue Paul – by arresting him
- Before being taken away, Paul asks if he can speak to the crowd...and he spoke to them in Aramaic/Hebrew and shared his entire testimony with the crowd – until he told them that Jesus had

told him to “Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.” (21:33-22:21)

- When Paul said this, the crowd went crazy, and the commander of the troops had Paul taken into the barracks and flogged to get some answers out of him. Right before they started to flog him, Paul informed them that he was a Roman citizen, and it was illegal to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't been found guilty.
- The next day the commander took Paul before the Sanhedrin which resulted in another shouting match, and when he heard of a plot to kill Paul, he had a detachment of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen escort Paul to Caesarea – so that Governor Felix could hear his case, since Paul was from Cilicia, a region he had authority over (Acts 23).
- Felix held a trial, and after the trial he continued to ask Paul to come and explain more about Jesus. After 2 years, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but Paul was left in prison (house arrest – Acts 24).
- After a few more weeks, Festus holds another trial for Paul – and the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Paul traveled to Caesarea and made many accusations against Paul. However, as a favor to the Jews, Festus was going to release Paul to them so they could try him in Jerusalem. Paul knew he would not receive a fair trial – so as a Roman citizen, he appealed the court's decision to Caesar (25:1-12).
- As Paul waited to be sent to Rome for his appeal, King Agrippa II (grandson of Herod the Great) made a visit to Festus, and requested to hear Paul – which Festus arranged for the following day (25:13-26:32).
- After departing for Rome, Paul had a vision where an angel encouraged him that he would indeed stand trial before Caesar.
- The ship he was on was shipwrecked, but all were saved – and all made it to Rome on another vessel.
- It was while he was in prison in Rome that Paul writes this letter to the Ephesian believers.

Paul begins “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...”

Then he is diverted by the unique ministry he had. Verses 2-13 are a parenthesis, with his original thought being taken up in vs. 14.

Paul was a prisoner of Christ – he says this because he was completely sold-out to Christ – he was no longer living life according to his own plan, but to the plan of Christ – but he was also a prisoner of Christ because he had broken no Jewish law – nor had he broken any Roman laws – he could have been a free man (Acts 26:32), but instead he chose to remain in chains so that he could share the gospel with Caesar and other high ranking government officials!

Primarily, his imprisonment is because of his ministry and calling to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles – he is a prisoner for their sake (vs. 1). Then, beginning with verse 2, he begins to explain his ministry.

Ministry = Caring for the grace of God vs. 1-4

Vs. 2 - “...the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you...”

“Administration” is *oikonomian* – which means to manage the household – to be a steward – to care for the affairs of the owner.

Paul says that he was given this task – to care / steward God’s grace. Also – this was given to him – he didn’t seek this ministry – God chose him for it.

He then explains that this is “...the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.”

Now a mystery, in the Biblical sense, is not something we need Columbo or CSI to figure out for us. This is one of Paul’s favorite words, and it speaks of something that was previously unknown, but that God has now revealed. Now we know that the grace of God was not unknown before Paul, but as we discussed last week, the grace of God for the Gentile was new – and this is the mystery

that Paul speaks of. He has already “written briefly” – 1:9-12; 2:11-12, and now he will repeat and expand his thoughts.

Now, much of what Paul says here is repetition from the last part of chapter 2. Why does he repeat these things? Why is this important for us to look at again?

First, repetition is a key to learning – and good teachers always repeat important things so that their students will hear the message clearly.

Second, I believe this issue is one of huge importance for the church to hear – and to practice. Prejudice and divisions have always plagued the church. Whether it was the Jewish/Gentile controversy of the first century, or the modern day ethnic or racial divisions in some churches – the truth of God is clear – we are one in Christ – no matter what background you come from, or what ethnic or racial make-up you are – all believers of every skin color are a new creation in Christ!

The unity of the local and universal church is one of the great appeals to the world. When the church is unified in Christ, even though it is greatly diverse in its persons, the unbeliever is curious and amazed by that reality.

The mystery of the church - revealed vs. 5-6

The mystery of the church – was revealed fully in the N.T. era – in the Church Age. Paul was the leading Apostle in this mystery, but others were also involved - “...holy apostles and prophets.” Men who were holy – living obedient lives to God’s Word – who God used to communicate this wonderful mystery –the family of God was now open to all who had faith in Christ. No longer did you have to become Jewish and live under the Law to know God and be in His family!

In vs. 6, Paul once again unfolds the mystery for us by giving us three new realities of God's grace:

First, we are co-heirs with Israel

Romans 4:13 – Abraham received the promise that he would be the “...heir of the world”. That’s a pretty good inheritance!

Matt. 5:5“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Titus 3:7“so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

Romans 8:17“Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

So, being an heir with Israel means that our inheritance is eternal life, and we inherit every spiritual and physical blessing God has given/promised to Israel!

Second, we are onebody

This is a mystical reality - but it has very practical application for us. As Paul details in 1 Cor. 12, each part of the body is vital to its optimal function. Nobody is disposable. All are valuable. Each believer in the local church has a role they are designed to fill better than others (2:10). A hand does a better job at most tasks than an ear or eye can!

As all members of the same body, each member is valued – no member is a second-tier part of the body.

Third, we have the same promise

This promise (singular) would point to the promise of forgiveness and new life in Christ. All believers have this same promise – no matter what race, people group, culture or background, the promise is the same – eternal life in Christ.

The Mission of the Church vs. 7-13

Earlier we saw that Paul was given Vs. 2 “...the administration of God's grace...” Here in vs. 9, Paul once again speaks of the “administration of this mystery”– his stewardship or care for the Gospel.

We also see that he was a servant of the Gospel – by the grace of God (vs. 7 – “became” = aorist passive indicative). Vs 7 sums up Paul’s dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus, where the power of God came upon him and he was saved.

Vs. 8 –This is not false humility. Paul understood his own sinfulness both before his conversion and after his conversion. This is probably why he so cherished the grace of God. **Unless you understand the greatness of your own sin, you won’t be amazed at God’s grace toward you!** Before his conversion, he was the most aggressive persecutor of the Church (Acts 26:9-11), imprisoning many Christians and giving approval to their death. After his conversion, he was still aware of his sin, as he made clear in many passages we read in the N.T. (Rom. 6:6; 7:24;8:2; 1 Timothy 1:15). In addition, he considered himself to be the least of all the apostles because he wasn’t in the original group of disciples, but primarily because of his persecution of the church (1 Cor. 15:9).

God’s purpose for history*vs. 10-13*

The church – and the message the church has been entrusted with – is the focal point of history. We tend to be occupied with the economy, politics, entertainment, war, natural disasters, new inventions, technology, relationships, and other things that dominate our time and energy. But God is at work in one primary area – the church. Through the church his “manifold wisdom” – lit., multi-colored wisdom – is on display. Paul says that the

“rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” are watching all of this.

God’s intent is that through the Church – God’s multi-colored wisdom as displayed through Christ will reconcile mankind to one another – and will reconcile man to God – through faith.

And let me close with another application of these verses. No matter what your background – God calls you to be involved in changing the world...in making an eternal impact in history.

When you steward – care for the grace of God so that another person puts their faith in Christ – you have impacted history!

Personally, this is how God drew me into the ministry – to impact eternity – not just something in this life that would burn up in the end.

Application

Understand and apply the unity of each believer.

Commit your life to the mission of the church – the purpose of God in history.

Be involved in what God is doing – don’t just change the world in your lifetime...change the world for all eternity!

Closing prayer – transition to communion