



REVEALED - The Mystery of the Church

[Ephesians 3:1-13](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIRST THOUGHTS	2
EXPLORE THE TEXT	2
THE MYSTERY	2
THE PROCLAMATION	3
THE PURPOSE	4
SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE	5
Personal Challenge:.....	5
Bibliography	6

FIRST THOUGHTS

Who doesn't like a good mystery. Hollywood spends millions if not billions each year producing mystery movies and shows. Americans spend millions on mystery books. Everyone likes a good mystery. We cannot wait until the end when the mystery is revealed.

The religions of the ancient world were cloaked in mystery. Only those who became members can know the mysteries and rituals of the religion. Which would include secret ceremonies of initiation and worship. In Ephesus that would have been the worship of Artemis (Diana).

Paul uses the culture to explain the gospel. He uses the word mystery to describe the content of the gospel. In [Ephesians 3](#), Paul revealed a mystery hidden but made known.

Paul declared that he had not received the mystery by joining the cult of Artemis but by revelation from God. He further stated that this mystery had been known all along but was kept until the appropriate time. The mystery was that the Gentiles could be joint heirs with the Jews. This all occurred not because Paul was some important person but because God was a God of grace. Apparently, many of the Gentiles listened to Paul's teaching because many of them came to faith in Christ through his preaching ministry in Ephesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE MYSTERY

[Ephesians 3:1–6](#) (LSB)

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—² if indeed you heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; ³ that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴ About which, 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 was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit: ⁶ that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

What mystery did God reveal to Paul?

After discussing the need for unity in the church between Jewish and Gentile believers ([Eph 2:11–22](#)). Paul begins to offer a prayer on behalf of the believers in Ephesus. But Paul interrupts his prayer for the Ephesians to explain the mystery of the gentiles coming into the household of faith. Jews and Gentiles were being united as one in Christ.

In the early days of the church the apostles were not sufficiently clear and unequivocal on how they stood when it came to the equality of the Gentiles as it related to the Jews. We have to understand until now Jews had nothing to do with Gentiles. Paul tells the Ephesians that God had revealed to him, by special revelations, the mystery of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the household of faith. This mystery of inclusion had been shown to Peter in a roof top vision ([Acts 10](#)). God showed Peter, in a vision, that the barrier between Jew and Gentile had been removed.

Paul calls this mystery a dispensation of the grace of God ([Eph 3:2](#)). In Scripture, the word “mystery” refers to something that was previously unknown or hidden but is now revealed because the timing is right. The mystery that Paul is referring to was something not revealed in the Old Testament and therefore unknown to man. Now it is revealed in the New Testament. The mystery is that Christ is risen and is the Head of a new body made up of Jews and Gentiles and of all tribes and peoples of the earth. This was not revealed to the Old Testament saints.

God had given Paul the responsibility to take the gospel to the Gentiles, and fulfilling that responsibility was the reason he was in prison. Paul believed God gave this task to him for the Gentiles’ good. He was called by grace to share the message of grace. He did not travel to Ephesus of his own decision or his own desire but for the will of God to take the gospel to the Gentiles there.

THE PROCLAMATION

[Ephesians 3:7–9](#) (LSB)

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. ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for all what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

Why was Paul so passionate about his mission?

Paul considered himself to have no qualifications for the mission God gave him. He ranked last on the list of applicants. God chooses by different criteria than we do. He did not search out Paul’s resumé to determine if he could do the job. God in love gave Paul the opportunity to tell Gentiles who had never heard the gospel the story of God’s unsearchable riches of Christ.

Paul was a minister not because of his piety, his spirituality, or his ability. The means of Paul’s ministry was singular. It was grace. Paul described the grace of God in his life as the working of his power. The Greek word for working is where we get our English word energy.

Paul regarded it a privilege to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles and shed light on the miracle God is working in His church. He was overwhelmed by the gospel, and he never ceased to be amazed at what God accomplished in Jesus. Paul was convinced that all who put their trust in Jesus will never be impoverished, only enriched. Only a radical transformation could have compelled a legalistic Jew like Paul.

As stewards of this mystery of grace, Christians have a choice to just hold on to the message for themselves or invest the message by sharing it with others. The responsibility of every believer is to fulfill the “Great Commission”: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* ([Matthew 28:19–20](#))

So, Is sharing the gospel more of a responsibility or a privilege? What is the difference?

THE PURPOSE

Ephesians 3:10–13 (LSB)

¹⁰ so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. ¹³ Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my afflictions on your behalf, which are your glory.

The purpose of God's revealing the mystery of the church was that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places, namely, the angels. The church does not exist simply for the purpose of saving souls, though that is a marvelous and important work. The supreme purpose of the church, as Paul makes explicit here, is to glorify God by manifesting His wisdom before the angels, who can then offer greater praise to God.

The revealing and execution of this “church plan” is consistent with the eternal purpose of God. This is no longer just a plan to be realized at a later date. But is come to completion in the finished work Christ on the cross. God’s eternal plan of salvation has been realized. We now have access to the throne room of heaven through our prayers.

I can just imagine the angels in heaven must be saying, “*This motley crew can come marching into Your throne room anytime they want, Father, cast their cares upon You, and get help from You?*” and God answering with a resounding “*Yes, because of what my son did for at Calvary.*”

Now from the exalted, cosmic view, the apostle turns to the most practical significance that it has for the everyday life of the Christian. To this mighty God, whose purpose embraces heaven and earth, time and eternity, we, in Christ, have boldness and confidence of access. The word boldness (*parrēsia*) is basically ‘freedom of speech’ An individual’s confident access to God is another purpose accomplished in finished work of Christ.

God has set forth His plan that is bringing every race, every gender and every ethnicity together. The church is to demonstrate to the spiritual world and the physical world what the Kingdom of God looks like. To the angelic realm, God’s plan demonstrates His manifold wisdom. To Satan, God’s plan demonstrates His victory and Satan’s defeat. To the world, God’s plan demonstrates what it can look like when heavenly values are placed into practice.

Faith in Christ is personal but not private. The gospel is good news of a new life in Christ. The church is central to God’s eternal plan. As believers live in fellowship with God and each other, we display to the world God’s power and purpose to bring about true reconciliation and restoration.

Many people are searching for purpose in life. The purpose of the believer for being on this earth is to share the gospel with others. This is not always going to be easy. Paul, who was in prison, asserted that any hardships we encounter in living out and sharing our faith are worth it.

How can believers today share God’s revealed mysteries?

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

- The “*mystery*,” the church, is the centerpiece of God’s work in the world today.
- The gospel is not a secret to be selfishly hoarded but great news to be generously shared. That occurs when we’re overwhelmed by the gospel.
- Believers reveal God’s truths by living in a diverse community of believers...the church.
- We’ll never come to the end of the riches Jesus has in Himself. He gives us what we need to share the gospel and live in unity.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE:

Are you hoarding or sharing salvation?

Deep-down, do you think a place in Christ’s church is only for people like you? Determine ways you’ll share God’s secret this week. Always remember the Great Commission of the church is the spread of the Gospel.

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