

Ephesians #4 – The Mystery of Christ

Ephesians #1 was on true and false callings.

Ephesians #1B was on sanctification.

Ephesians #2 was on the activities of the Trinity in our salvation

Ephesians #3 was contrasting the “Before” and “After” states of the Christian.

Now we proceed to chapter 3, where Paul expands on the idea of Jews and Gentiles being united in one body as fellow believers, but here he refers to it as the “mystery of Christ” – 3:1-12.

What exactly is the mystery? 3:4-6 – “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the God’s promise in Christ by the gospel”. Remember that 2:12 says that as Gentiles, we were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world”, but 2:19 – “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”

In Col. 1:25-27 it also refers to the mystery, saying that it had been hid from ages and generations, “but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is **the riches of the glory of this mystery** among the Gentiles; **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**” That is to say, it was a mystery that God would not only deliver his people by the Messiah, but that the Messiah would also indwell his people (we now know, by the Holy Spirit), now in this life, thus producing a real hope of the glory to come.

The word “mystery” is used in about a dozen different ways in the NT, referring to things that were previously unknown or unrecognized, but now have been, or in the future will be, revealed.

Why is it called a mystery? 3:5 says it is because it was something that was unknown in the OT, “as it is now revealed” by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets of the early church. Now certainly we can look backwards and see that there are many OT scriptures showing, that not only God’s sovereignty, but also his love and mercy would extend to the other nations. These scriptures are much easier to see in hindsight though. Because of the general tenor of the OT, and at least 2000 years of history from Abraham to Christ’s coming, it is very understandable that the Jews of Jesus’ day would see themselves as exclusively God’s own, and believed that their Messiah was to come for their deliverance, as the King of the Jews.

God intended from the very beginning that Christ would come, and die to bear our sins and bring redemption to man, but there was a proper time for it. Until then, God gave a progressive revelation of himself and gave wonderful covenant promises, but they were all funneled through a particular people, the Jews as children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Dt. 7:6 – “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: **the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself**, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.”

To whom did God reveal himself but to the Jews? It was to them alone that he gave the ten commandments, and the Tabernacle, the priesthood and the ordinances of worship. He sent mighty words and promises through his prophets, and did mighty works, that they and all the world may know that he alone is God.

Ps. 147:19-20 – “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel. **He hath not dealt so with any nation:** and as for his judgments, they have not known them.”

God concentrated his revelation, his promises, and his covenant mercies on one people alone. He constantly warned them not to intermarry with other nations, and not to serve their gods. Sometimes he wrought great deliverances on their behalf against other nations and their armies. They came to see other peoples as polluted heathen, and themselves as the sole beneficiaries of God’s favor.

This is why, even after Christ was raised from the dead and the church established, the disciples had no concept of God's salvation being extended to the Gentiles (the whole non-Jewish world). In fact, it took a divine vision and an outpouring of the Spirit on the household of Cornelius, to overcome the disciples' preconceived notions (Ac. 10-11). As a result of this, Paul went especially to the Gentile world, preaching the gospel of Christ.

It is very sadly ironic, that over the following 2000 years, the pendulum has swung the other direction, and the "Christian" nations have looked at the Jewish people as God's outcasts, and have looked on them with the same, or worse, scorn than had the Jews for the Gentiles before Christ.

A related topic, much too much for today's study, is from Rom. 9-11, on God's purpose for the Jews even in their current state of unbelief, and how they will, in the end, be restored to Christ and be saved. They will be "grafted back in" to their own olive tree. God is preserving a remnant among them; this is why they have been preserved as a distinct and cohesive people even through 2000 years of dispersion and horrible persecutions. This period of time between Jesus' first and second comings is called "the times of the Gentiles", and is an opportunity for the Gentile nations to enter into God's covenant, but in the end we shall see plainly that there are both Jewish and Gentile believers in God's kingdom, and that we really make up one true body of believers as "the Bride of Christ".

What exactly is the ultimate purpose of the church? 3:10-11 – that the manifold wisdom of God will be made known (i.e., revealed) by the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. This was his eternal purpose in Christ.

Those principalities and powers in the heavenlies refer to the various kinds of angelic creatures, both good and evil that are in heaven (at least for now). It does not mean that we as humans, even redeemed, could teach them anything, but rather that the very existence of this mixed group of believers united in Christ, is a revelation of God's eternal purpose, which had been hidden in God from the beginning of the world. God had a plan all along, that not even the angels knew. They could observe his dealings with Abraham's seed, but did not know that God would finally redeem, not just the Jews, but men from all nations.

What does the church of God reveal to the heavenlies?

1. **That God is able and willing to redeem** men who are utterly lost and dead in sins.
2. **It will show the riches of God's glory in forgiveness and mercy** men who are utterly lost and dead in sins.
3. **That God is both just and merciful.** His justice is fully satisfied in the punishment of sins (through the substitutionary sufferings of Christ for his elect, and by the eternal torments of the lake of fire for those who reject Christ). His mercy and love go out to his elect by providing all that is necessary for them to be made alive in Christ as fully forgiven and redeemed members of the family of God.
4. **That the Fall was not some glitch or failure in God's plans** – that his intent all along was to reveal his love in the redemption of a people for his own possession. Christ's coming was not a "plan B".
5. **That the people of God can actually become as he is – holy.**
6. **That the redeemed are collectively known as "the Bride of Christ"** and are therefore crowned with glory and honor, and "robes of righteousness".

I am sure that there is a great deal more that is involved here that I do not presently see, but it may suffice to say that **the very existence of a glorified body of redeemed humanity does now, and will forever, be a glorious demonstration and revelation of God's love, power, wisdom, justice, and sovereignty, and will be a motivation of those praises and songs that we see among all the inhabitants of heaven in the book of Revelation.**