



All-Ages Adult Life Group Expositional Study

Ephesians Ch. 3:1-6

The Mystery Revealed

Class Reference: **Knowing the Bible Series**

Week 6: An Interlude on the Mystery of Gentile Inclusion

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Version 1

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Lesson Schedule

Teacher	Date	Lesson #	Lesson Text	John MacArthur Commentary Chapter/ Title	James Boice	RC Sproul	KTB
Scott	August 17	#8	3:1-7	8a. The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)	Ch. 16 3:1-6	Ch. 4 1:13-23	Week 6: 3:1-13
Paul	August 24	#9	3:8-13	8b. The Mystery Revealed (3:8-13)	Ch. 17 3:7-13	Ch.5 2:1-10	Week 6: 3:1-13
Paul	August 31	#10	3:14-21	9. The Fullness of God (3:14-21)	Ch. 18 3:14-19 Ch. 19 3:20-21	Ch.5 2:1-10	Week 7: 3:14-21
	Sept. 7	#11	4:1-6	10. The Lowly Walk (4:1-6)	Ch. 20 4:1-3 Ch. 21 4:4-6	Ch. 6 2:11-22	Week 8: 4:1-16
	Sept. 14	#12	4:7-11	11. The Gifts of Christ to His Church (4:7-11)	Ch. 22 4:7-13	Ch. 6 2:11-22	Week 8: 4:1-16

ESV Commentary Outline (This Week)

- VI. Paul's Situation, Stewardship, and Service([3:1-13](#))
 - A. Paul's Situation ([3:1](#))
 - B. Paul's Stewardship of the Mystery ([3:2-7](#))
 - C. Paul's Service in Proclaiming the Mystery ([3:8-12](#))
 - D. Paul's Encouragement to the Ephesians ([3:13](#))

JM Outline (This week 3:1-6)

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-13](#))

THE PRISONER OF THE MYSTERY ([3:1-4](#))

Prisoner Paul ([3:1](#))

Stewardship ([3:2](#))

Revelation ([3:3-4](#))

THE PLAN OF THE MYSTERY ([3:5-6](#))

Mystery Previously Unknown – Now Known ([3:5-6](#))

THE PREACHING OF THE MYSTERY ([3:7-9](#))

THE PURPOSE OF THE MYSTERY ([3:10-11](#))

THE PRIVILEGE OF THE MYSTERY ([3:12-13](#))

Before we begin . . .

- Set-up for Chapter 3.
 - Chapter 3 is a prayer by Paul for the believers in Ephesus.
 - A large portion of Chapter 3 is actually a parenthesis (vs. 2-13). Put a pin in that.
 - We will also see that a majority of the discussion in the parenthesis is repeating some of the truths he just discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.
 - **QUESTION:** Why is repetition important?
 - Paul realized the importance of repetition, especially when establishing such a new and non-traditional doctrine. This concept of the mystery revealed was completely foreign to all people of the time.
 - In business, repetition is a powerful tool. *It's not just about saying the same thing over and over, but about consistently reinforcing your message and values through various channels, creating familiarity and trust with your target audience.*
 - We, too, need to hear the truths again – right?
 - As we re-read the Bible, we gain new nuggets of understanding we didn't see before.
 - As we re-read the Bible, we are reminded of things we may have forgotten.

Before we begin . . .

- Set-up for Chapter 3.
 - Think about what Pastor Mark has been preaching the last few weeks in Acts.
 - **Read:** [Acts 10:9-16](#).
 - Here we see God gives this vision to Peter how many times?
 - And, yet in Verse 17, it says *“Inwardly Peter was perplexed.”* Put a pin in that also.
 - We see that God realizes we (with our puny little brains) have to hear things over and over again – and, yet sometimes we can still be “perplexed.”

Today's Verses Ephesians 3:1-6

READER #1:
Ephesians 3:1-4

READER #2:
Ephesians 3:5-6

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

PRISONER OF THE MYSTERY ([3:1](#))

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ,

- “For this reason . . .” **QUESTION:** What reasons?
 - That the person in Christ becomes new. (2:15).
 - That all believers are now one body (2:16).
 - That Gentiles, once far away, have become near when they believe (2:17).
 - That all believers are equal citizens of God’s kingdom (2:19).
 - That all believers are members of His family (2:19).
 - That all believers are being built into God’s temple and dwelling (2:21-22).

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

PRISONER OF THE MYSTERY ([3:1](#))

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ,

- Paul goes on to say that he is a “**prisoner of Jesus Christ**”.
 - Although arrested under the Jewish law – Paul does not say he was a prisoner of the Jews.
 - Although imprisoned by the Romans – Paul does not say he was a prisoner of Rome.
 - Although Paul appealed to Caeſar – Paul does not say he is a prisoner of Caeſar.
 - But what we do see is that Paul is a prisoner of **Christ Jesus**; not because he has sinned or is being punished by God – on the contrary – Paul is stating that he “belongs” to Christ.
 - Why? For the sake (behalf) of the **Gentiles**. **READ:** [Col. 1:25-26](#).
 - This is called in Greek linguistics a “genitive of originating cause.”
 - In other words, **Christ** is the “originator” or “source” of **Paul** being “called” to preach to the Gentiles; we could paraphrase *“... belonging to Christ, selected as an apostle to the Gentiles.”*
- Now we get to the “—”. Does anyone know what that symbol is?
 - It is an “em dash”. It is used to indicate a sudden break in thought. For our purposes – we could insert a parenthesis here “(”. This is where Paul digresses from his original intention (prayer) to his further explanation of his role as an apostle to the Gentiles and the mystery of the gospel.

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

STEWARDSHIP ([3:2](#))

² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

- Interrupting his prayer, Paul says, “**assuming that you have heard . . .**”.
 - This is not the assuming like we think – where we are “guessing” that they have heard. It could be better translated “. . . *If indeed you have heard.*”
 - But even that does not give the true meaning – in Greek linguistics, this is a first-class conditional clause which makes it a true statement. We could paraphrase “*As I am sure you have already heard . . .*” meaning Paul knows they have heard it before.
- **of the stewardship** of God’s grace . . .
 - The Greek word for “steward” is *oikonomian* [oy-kon-om-ee’-ah] which means “administrator” or “manager.” A steward in the time of the early church meant Paul was responsible for taking care of that which belonged to someone else.
- As we continue, we see Paul is “the steward **of God’s grace . . . given to me for you**”.
 - Paul was appointed a steward by God’s grace then became a steward of God’s grace. [JM]
 - **READ:** [1 Corinthians 9:16-17](#). [1 Corinthians 4:1](#).

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

REVELATION ([3:3-6](#))

³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly,

- The “**mystery was made known to be by revelation. . . written briefly,**”
 - The “mystery” was that of the Jew and Gentile being made one in Christ. He had written briefly before in 1:9-12 and 2:11-12.
 - It was a truth hidden from all men until revealed by God.
 - **READ:** [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#). [2 Peter 1:19-21](#).
 - Repetition: Paul is re-stating the truths he had written previously – we may think “OK Paul – we get it; lets move along”. But we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the early church believers; we had Jews and Gentiles together, correct?
 - **QUESTION:** What was the mindset of the Jews in their “relationship” to God versus their belief about the Gentiles “relationship” to God?

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

REVELATION ([3:3-6](#))

4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,

- Paul continues, **when you read this**, you can “**perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ**,”
 - Paul's intention here was not to merely state the mystery, but to explain it; provide the believers in Ephesus “**insight**”. The Greek word here for insight is *synesis*, which means “grasp its full meaning and understanding.”
 - Going back to Peter (at the beginning of the lesson). Even after God revealed to him in a vision (x3) the acceptance of Gentiles as equals, did he “grasp” the meaning?
 - No! He was still *perplexed*, right? ([Acts 10:17](#))?
 - What did it finally take for Peter to understand the mystery?
 - It took the Holy Spirit “falling” on the household of Cornelius for Peter to fully understand. **READ:** [Acts 11:15-18](#).
 - So, if it took Peter, a disciple of Christ, who walked with Christ for 3+ years, who became an apostle for Christ, to understand (grasp the full meaning) the revelation through visions and the filling of the Holy Spirit on the household of Cornelius, we can understand why Paul is repeating himself to the Ephesians.
 - This is the same reason we need to keep reading the Bible. Its not just a book we read once and put it down and say “wow – that was a good book.” No – we need the repetition to grow and learn more.

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

THE PLAN OF THE MYSTERY ([3:3-6](#))

⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

- We see this mystery was “. . . **not made known to the sons of men in other generations**”
 - First – we need to understand the “**Sons of men**” were not just the Israelites – it refers to all of mankind.
 - Second – we need to understand “**in other generations**” refers to the time before Christ.
 - Having the New Testament, we now understand passages of the Old Testament which was not revealed before.
 - No one knew the full meaning of God’s promise to Abraham. **READ:** [Gen 12:3](#). [Galatians 3:8](#).
 - No one knew the full meaning of Isaiah’s predictions. **READ:** [Isaiah 49:6](#). [Acts 13:46-47](#).
 - The Old Testaments saints had no understanding that there would be a New Testament church – assembling together as one group of believers into one unified Body; that there would be no racial division.

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

THE PLAN OF THE MYSTERY ([3:3-6](#))

⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it **has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets** by the Spirit.

- “Has . . . been revealed . . .”

- In Greek linguistics, this is in the aorist tense. In aorist tense, *a past action* (glimpses of the unified body of Christ in the Old Testament) *has now been completed* (in the New Testament). One definition indicates the “past action as a completed bound event; wholly complete.”
- In other words, the **revealing** of the mystery was given exclusively to the “**holy apostles and prophets**” and not to anyone before them or after them. There is nothing more that can be added to it.
- **Holy apostles versus prophets.** We will get into this in more depth in Chapter 4.
 - Apostles (one sent on a mission) were over prophets ([1 Cor. 14:37-38](#)).
 - Apostles were given a much broader ministry, not confined to one location.
 - Apostles were not replaced once they died.
 - Prophets, it appears, worked exclusively in the local church (Paul was called a prophet when ministering to the church at Antioch but is also called an apostle in his general ministry).
 - The message of apostles was more general and doctrinal, while the message of the prophets was more personal and practical.
 - Once the New Testament church was established, prophets ceased to exist (Eph. 2:20).

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

THE PLAN OF THE MYSTERY ([3:3-6](#))

⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

- Paul wraps up the plan of the **mystery** by noting four things:
 - First: The Gentiles are **fellow heirs**.
 - Those that were once excluded from Israel and stranger to the covenants promises (2:12), now had exactly the same legal status as the Jews (God's Chosen people). (Ref: [Gen. 12:3](#))
 - Second: The Gentiles are now **members of the same body**.
 - Literally – one new man (2:15).
 - Together both Jews and Gentiles form the body of Christ, the church.
 - Third: The Gentiles are **partakers of the promise**.
 - This is the promise of the Holy Spirit (1:13).
 - It could also refer to the promise to Abraham (Ref: [Gal. 3:8](#)).
 - Fourth: Through the **Gospel of Christ Jesus**.
 - The first three points can only be fulfilled as a result of union with Christ through the proclamation and acceptance of the **gospel**.

The Mystery Revealed ([3:1-6](#))

THE PLAN OF THE MYSTERY ([3:3-6](#))

⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

These few words, as it is now revealed, throw additional light on the admission of the Gentiles to be the people of God. It is on the condition that they shall be placed on a level with the Jews and form one body. That the novelty might give no offense, he states that this must be accomplished by the gospel. Now, the gospel was itself a novelty, for it had never till now been heard of, and yet was acknowledged by all the godly to have come from heaven. John Calvin, Commentary on Ephesians.