

# THE DEFINITION OF THE MYSTERY

## Ephesians 3.6-7: Message 21, Paul defines the revelation given to him

### Remember what we have seen thus far in our study of Ephesians 3:

#### 1. Context of Paul's comments in Ephesians 3.

- (Eph 2.19-22) Paul just finished speaking about our edification and growth in holiness—growth in Christ and Christ-likeness.
- (Eph 3.1) “For this cause...” (our edification and growth) Paul says what he says in Ephesians 3.
- (Eph 3.14) “For this cause...” Paul intends to pray for the believers: (v14-21) ...for their edification.
- But, before he prays for them, he takes the time (v1-13) to explain to them something that is essential for their growth in Christ-likeness (something that, without which, all the prayer in the world will not result in the growth that the Paul desires to see in them—and that the Lord desires, too, obviously!).
- So Paul takes these first 13 verses to explain himself before praying for the Ephesian believers.

#### 2. (v1-5) Paul's writings (the revelation given to him by God) are essential for us to grow in Christ.

- Remember what we've seen thus far: Paul was the first steward of a new stewardship.
- The Jews rejected Jesus Christ and therefore God postponed the coming of the Kingdom (the second coming and the Millennium) until after the church age.
- God gave new revelation for this new stewardship, and He gave that direct revelation to the first steward: Paul (new direction in God's dealing with man required new revelation).
- (v3-4) Therefore, if we (stewards who have received our stewardship through Paul) desire to be faithful in what God has entrusted to us (the Mission: be and make disciples), then we need to read what God gave us to instruct us in how He wants us to execute our stewardship: Paul's writings.

### (v6-7 cf. v3) “That...”: Paul is going to define the mystery that was hidden but that now is made know.

- That mystery is most specifically about Jew and Gentile now being equal in the Body of Christ.
- But don't miss one very important element in this mystery! You get to participate in it by the Gospel given to Paul.
- These are the two things we want to look at this morning: The Mystery of the Body and the Gospel...

#### I. (v6a) The Mystery of the Body of Christ

- Remember: The term *mystery* in Scripture is used to refer to something that was hidden but that now is revealed.

#### A. The Mystery is about unity and equality—Jew and Gentile united as one in the Body of Christ.

##### 1. Before: God chose Israel from all other nations (i.e., Gentiles).

- a) (Gen 12.1-3) God gave His unconditional promise of salvation and blessing to Abraham and his descendants after him.
- b) (Exod 19.5-6) That Promise eventually passed down to the nation of Israel, whom God set above all other nations (i.e., Gentiles).
- c) (Eph 2.11-12) That's why Gentiles were separate, outside God's salvation and blessing.
- d) Gentiles had to become Jews (called *proselytes*) in order to be saved and experience the blessings God promised to His own.

2. Now: (Eph 2.13-18) God has made both Jew and Gentile alike in the Body of Christ.
  - a) In Christ, now there is no more “wall” between Jew and Gentile. That separation is over; there is not equality between Jew and Gentile because we have been made one (united) in Christ.
  - b) Paul explains this unity and little more in the rest of Ephesians 3.6...

**B. The Mystery is about equality with regard to inheritance.**

1. The Gentiles are now “fellowheirs” with the Jews.
  - a) Both Jews and Gentiles now have equal access to the reward of the inheritance.
  - b) The inheritance is now not based on being a Jew (a physical descendant of Abraham)...
2. (Eph 2.8-9) Remember: Salvation is by grace through faith, not by works.
3. (2Cor 5.10) However, the reward of the inheritance is based solely upon works: If we, as stewards, have been faithful in what God has entrusted to us, we will receive a reward (inheritance).
  - a) All those in Christ (Jew and Gentile, without distinction) are “fellowheirs” and have the same opportunity to receive a full reward—a complete inheritance—just as God desires.
  - b) (Col 3.23-25) There is no respect of persons with regard to the inheritance. Jew and Gentile alike have equal opportunity to be faithful in the Mission and receive a full reward.

**C. The Mystery is about being united as members of the same Body.**

1. (Eph 2.14-18) Both Jew and Gentile, when they are saved, become members of the Body of Christ.
2. (2Cor 5.17) This is something entirely new that God did not do before the Church Age.
  - a) The new birth in Christ makes us completely new creatures.
  - b) (Gal 3.28) In Christ, we are no longer Gentiles, and Jews are no longer Jews: We are no both made something new—we are made *sons of God* (something never seen before in history).
3. We all now have equal opportunity to receive the reward of the inheritance from the Father because we are all born spiritually as the Father's children (we are all made sons of God at salvation by the new spiritual birth by the Spirit of God). It is the same for everyone: both Jew and Gentile.

**D. The Mystery is about participating equally in the Promise.**

1. The Promise: (Gen 12.1-3) Paul is referring to the promise of salvation and blessing given by God to Abraham and *to Abraham's descendants*.
2. Now, in Christ, both Jew and Gentile participate equally in that promise of salvation and blessing.
  - a) Before it was only for the Jews (and Gentiles who chose to be proselytes, like Ruth) because only the Jews were the chosen descendants of Abraham that received the Promise.
  - b) (Gal 3.16) Now things are different because Christ is the promises Seed—the promised Descendant of Abraham.
  - c) (Gal 3.13-14) Therefore, *all* those who are in Christ, Jew or Gentile (it doesn't matter), are made to participate in the Promise because they are now *spiritual descendants of Abraham*.
  - d) By being made sons of God in Christ, we receive the Promise of salvation and blessing given to Abraham because we are now his spiritual descendants (we are “in” the Seed, Christ).
3. What follows in Ephesians 3.6-7 is very important! Both Jew and Gentile have entrance into this Promise (of salvation, blessing, and inheritance) *by the gospel given to Paul*.

## II. (v6b-7) The Mystery and the Gospel Given to Paul

### A. Distinguishing Paul's Gospel

1. Paul makes a clear distinction between Gospel messages, referring to his message as his Gospel.
  - a) The Gospel given to Paul was given to him by God; it is distinct from other Gospel messages.
  - b) (Rom 1.16 cf. 2.16) This is why the Gospel message we preach to both Jew and Gentile today is called by Paul, “my Gospel.” It was a new message of good news for salvation given to him.
2. Paul's Gospel message is unique—it is different from other Gospel messages in Scripture.
  - a) (1Cor 15.1-4) Paul clearly defines the core message of his Gospel: The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ according to what was written in Scripture.
  - b) (Luke 18.31-34) Before God revealed this message to Paul, no one understood it.
    - (1) Observe the same elements of Paul's Gospel in this passage: The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ according to what was written in Scripture.
    - (2) No one was preaching Paul's Gospel message before Paul because no one understood it.
3. This distinction is very important: Galatians 1.6-9.
  - a) If we do not understand that there are different and distinct Gospel messages preached at different times in man's history, we end up preaching a false Gospel (a message meant for other people at another time, or some mixture of elements from all Gospel messages mentioned).
  - b) There are at least three different Gospel messages mentioned in Scripture...

### B. Different Gospel Messages

1. Paul refers to his Gospel (the message of good news) as the “Gospel of the Grace of God.”
  - a) (Acts 20.24) This is the same message we preach today.
  - b) This Gospel message is based on Christ's substitutionary death and subsequent resurrection, and offers to all sinners alike salvation and blessing by God's grace, through faith in Christ.
  - c) But, like we saw in Luke 18, this is not the same message Gospel message that the Twelve were preaching (they did not understand this Gospel message).
    - Before getting into the Gospel preached during Jesus' day, let's look quickly at the Everlasting Gospel mentioned in Revelation.
2. The Everlasting Gospel: Revelation 14.6-7
  - a) This message of good news (“Gospel” message) is preached by an angel to all the inhabitants of the earth during the final days of the Great Tribulation, right before the second coming.
  - b) Notice that in this Gospel message there is no mention whatsoever of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
  - c) This Gospel message calls men everywhere to fear God and worship Him as Creator and its focus is the judgment that is coming (the second coming).
  - d) This is completely different that the Gospel we preach today. But, this Gospel does not seem to cause as many problems for us today as does the Gospel of the Kingdom...
3. The Gospel of the Kingdom (the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts 1-7).
  - a) This Gospel message was the *good news* that the King had arrived and was offering the Kingdom to Israel.
    - (1) (Mat 3.1-6) John the Baptist preached this Gospel—this message of the coming Kingdom.
    - (2) (Mat 4.23) Jesus preached this same Gospel message (observe: this Gospel is accompanied by signs and wonders such as healing).

- (3) (Mat 10.5-8) The Twelve preached this same Gospel message.
    - (a) Observe again: This Gospel is accompanied by signs and wonders.
    - (b) Observe also: This Gospel is most specifically for Israel, not for Gentiles.
  - (4) (Acts 1.6-8 cf. 3.19-21) The Twelve preached this Gospel to Israel during Acts 1-7.
- b) The Gospel of the Kingdom...
- (1) Is primarily for the Jews (for Israel) because it is the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel with regard to their King and their Kingdom (their rule over the nations).
  - (2) The Gospel of the Kingdom ties God's blessings to works. because that was how God set up his covenant with Israel under the Law (e.g., Deut 28: good works for blessing).
  - (3) (Mark 16.15-18) This Gospel is accompanied by signs and wonders, because God promised Israel that the coming King would be like Moses (and Moses started the dispensation of the Law with signs and wonders: healing the leprous hand, changing water to blood, etc.).
4. The Problem: Mixing elements of the Gospel of the Kingdom with the Gospel we preach today
- a) There are those today (mostly among the neo-Calvinists with their “Reformed doctrines of grace”) who refuse to recognize the distinction between the Gospel of the Kingdom preached by Jesus and His disciples, and the Gospel of Grace preached by Paul.
    - (1) They do that because Calvinism usually comes along with the baggage of Covenant Theology that teaches that there is only one people of God, and therefore the Church of the New Testament is the same as Israel in the Old.
    - (2) They will pull many of their teachings from the Gospels and apply them directly to the Church, especially as it relates to the Gospel message (saying there is only one Gospel).
  - b) There are others who mix the element of works into their Gospel message—either works for salvation or works for blessing (when our salvation and all spiritual blessing today are given freely in Christ to anyone who will repent and believe).
  - c) And then there are those who say the signs and wonders that follow the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom are for today as we preach the Gospel of the Grace of God.
5. The Solution: Rightly divide the Word of Truth, be a good steward of what God has given to you (not to Israel), and preach Paul's Gospel to every creature.

**Paul has primacy for all believers in the Church Age because he was the first steward of the new stewardship (he received the new dispensation).**

- Therefore, God gave to Paul the new revelation (Scripture) about how we are to live in this Age.
- We follow that same revelation, but for us it is not direct revelation but rather written revelation.
- Paul received direct revelation (Eph 3.3) and God expects us to read that revelation (Eph 3.4) in order to follow His instructions and be good and faithful stewards of the stewardship He has given us.

**There is no other area more important in this context that the Gospel message we preach.**

- We preach Paul's Gospel: The Gospel of the Grace of God. And we preach to Jew and Gentile alike.
- The core message of our Gospel is the substitutionary death of Christ and His resurrection to life.
- The result of our Gospel is the new birth, a new creation, a son of God, a member of the Body of Christ.
- Therefore the goal of our preaching of the Gospel is a mature (edified, Christ-like) believer who is also preaching Paul's Gospel to every creature and helping new believers to grow in Christ by teaching them to read and obey Scripture, giving primacy to the writings of Paul.