

PAUL'S MINISTRY: GRACE TO MAKE GENTILES WISE

Ephesians 3.8-9: Message 22, Paul teaches and shows us how to live wisely

Paul's desire for the believers in Ephesus is...

- (Eph 2.19-22) ...that they might grow—be edified—in holiness (Christ-likeness).
- (Eph 3.1, 14-19) And to this end he intends to pray for the believers, that they might grow in Christ.

But, before Paul prays for their growth in Christ, he has something to say—something essential for their spiritual growth (which is what we find in Ephesians 3.1-13).

- (v3-4) If we do not understand Paul's knowledge in the mystery of Christ (the Body of Christ, the Church), then we will never grow as God desires (as Paul expresses in Ephesians 2 and 3).
- So Paul takes these first 13 verses in Ephesians 3 to explain how and why his teaching has primacy for us during the time of the Church (between the first and second comings of Christ).

(Eph 3.1-7) We just finished the passage where Paul explained the mystery that God revealed to him.

- (v5) It's revelation that was hidden and not revealed until Paul (at the very earliest: Acts 9).
- (v6-7) It's the revelation of something unique in all of history: The Church, Body of Christ.

(Eph 3.8-13) Now Paul focuses more on *his ministry*, rather than on the mystery of the Body of Christ itself (since he just defined and described it in the verses that went before).

- (v8-9) In this message we are going to see that Paul's ministry gives us a clear path to follow in order to fulfill the mission God gave us during the Church Age (to be good stewards of our stewardship).
- (v10-13) Then we'll see God's purpose in this ministry that He gave to Paul (and to us through Paul).

(Eph 3.8-9) Paul's ministry was God's grace given to him to make us (Gentiles) *wise*...

I. (v8a) Ministry: A Gift of Grace

A. Paul's Gift of Grace for Ministry

1. "This grace" given to Paul is...
 - a) (v2) The "grace of God" given to him for the Gentiles.
 - b) (v7) "This grace" that God gave Paul was a *gift* given to him so he could *minister* to Gentiles.
2. Paul was greatly used of God, but don't ever think that he was used because of what or who he was.
 - a) A lot of talk is given to "the great missionary and theologian, Paul" (and he was that!). But, don't think that his "success" in the ministry had anything to do with him.
 - God did not use Paul because he was smarter, "seminary educated," or better trained in cultural adaptability than the next guy.
 - b) Paul himself, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, says *clearly* that he was the *least* of all saints. Apparently that is not an exaggeration...
 - (1) Before Paul got saved, he made a *lot* of bad decisions:
 - (a) He stood by while Stephen was stoned to death in Acts 7 (approving of it all).
 - (b) He hauled Christians off to jail, tortured them, approved of their execution, and forced them to blaspheme the Lord Jesus Christ.

- (2) And even after he got saved, he had his problems and “character flaws”:
 - (a) He couldn't get along with Barnabus in Acts 15, being so stubborn (for good or bad) that he went his own way and Barnabus when the other way.
 - (b) Paul later returned to Jerusalem when God told him three times not to go there (and Paul ended up in jail for years because of his decision).
- c) So, whatever Paul did in the ministry (and he did a lot!), understand that it was because of the grace of God not because he was a “great man.”
 - (1) Paul was the least of all saints (which is probably why God chose him: so He/God could have all the glory).
 - (2) Paul's ministry among the Gentiles, a ministry that spanned continents and centuries, was “successful” because of the gift of grace God gave to him to do that ministry.
 - (3) And why is this important? Because even though Paul was the first steward of this new stewardship (the Church Age), but he was not the only steward...

B. Your Gift of Grace for Ministry

1. (Rom 12.3-8) God has also given to you the gift of grace: Ministry.
 - a) So don't think for minute that because of your past, your character flaws, your personality quirks, etc. that God cannot or will not use you in the work of the ministry (the mission).
 - (1) God used Paul mightily, and Paul was the least of all saints (a murderous religious fanatic before he was saved, and a stubborn, dogmatic, hard-headed “my-way-or-the-highway” missionary-theologian after he was saved).
 - (2) If God can use Paul (and He did, in a big way!), He can certainly use the rest of us, too. It doesn't depend on us, but on God's grace.
 - b) Obviously, some “errors” in life will disqualify a person for certain ministries (adultery, for example, forever disqualifies a man from the pastorate in his church).
 - But, as long as you are breathing air on this earth, God has a ministry for you to fulfill (a work to do in the mission of being and making disciples of the Lord).
2. Ministry is a gift of grace given to each member of the Body of Christ.
 - a) It is not about your ability. It's about God, and God's grace given to you for the ministry.
 - b) So, how can you learn about, understand, and get busy in the ministry God gave you? I'm glad you asked: Ministry today is based on the revelation God gave to Paul...

II. (v8b-9) Ministry Today: Revealed through Paul

A. (v8b) Preaching: Paul declares to us the knowledge we need today.

1. Paul's ministry (the grace God gave him) was first and foremost to preach among the Gentiles.
2. Preaching is announcing or declaring something with authority (it's the “Thus saith the Lord!”).
3. Nehemiah 8.8 gives us a very clear example of what biblical preaching is: Declaring God's Word.
 - a) For Paul that meant announcing what God said to him direction (direct revelation).
 - b) We get that same revelation today through Paul's preaching... in Scripture (his writings).
4. Paul preached (announced, declared) the revelation of the knowledge of the unsearchable riches of Christ that we enjoy today being sons of God.
 - a) If we want to know what God has given us in Christ during the Church Age (all the riches He has lavished on the Gentiles), we have to read what Paul (!) wrote.

- b) There is nowhere else to go in the Bible to get the knowledge that God wants us to have today.
- c) This is why we say that Paul has primacy: He is first in line to preach to Christians!
- d) Example: It's Paul who gives us the knowledge of the unsearchable riches we have in Christ...
 - (1) (Rom 2.4) Paul gives us the knowledge of the riches of God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering.
 - (2) (Rom 11.12 cf. 11.15) Paul gives us the knowledge of the riches we Gentiles have in our reconciliation with God in Christ (because the Jews rejected Him).
 - (3) (Eph 1.7) Paul gives us the knowledge of the riches of God's grace for our redemption and forgiveness in Christ.
 - (4) (Eph 2.7) Paul gives us the knowledge of the exceeding riches of God's grace in His kindness (!) toward us in Christ.
 - (5) (Php 4.19) Paul gives us the knowledge of God's riches in glory by Christ that supplies our every need.
 - (6) (Col 1.27) Paul gives us the knowledge of God's riches of glory in the mystery (the glory we share with Christ because we are in Christ, members of His Body).
 - (7) (Col 2.2) Paul gives us the knowledge of the riches of the full assurance we have in Christ (the surety of all that we have in Christ).
 - (8) And here's a good one for us today...
 - (a) (Heb 11.23-26) First, read what Paul wrote to the Hebrews: There are riches to be had in this world...
 - (b) (1Tim 6.17-19) And Paul is the one who gives us the knowledge of how to handle these riches in a good way! And don't think for a minute that doesn't apply to you and me—it most certainly does! We are rich in America and Paul says that's a blessing given by God, but that we ought to invest those riches in eternity.
 - (9) You will never find that kind of knowledge outside of Paul
 - (a) It was Paul who received the revelation of the knowledge of the unsearchable riches of Christ that we enjoy today being sons of God.
 - (b) And it was Paul who preached (announced, declared) that knowledge to us Gentiles.
 - (c) But it doesn't stop there... with the preaching (the declaring of the revelation)...

B. (v9) Teaching: Paul gives us the understanding we need today.

1. Knowledge does you no good (it is vain) if you don't understand how to apply it.
2. Paul's ministry (the grace God gave to him) was also to make all men “see” (to “get it,” to understand) the new revelation that God gave him.
 - a) If you want to know how the Church, the Church Age, and the Body of Christ are meant to function, you have to go to Paul.
 - b) If you want to know how you, as a member of the Body of Christ, in the Church Age are supposed to function, you have to go to Paul.
 - c) God “dispensed” the knowledge of the Church and the Church Age to Paul, and Paul not only announces/declares that knowledge to us (through preaching), but he also gives us the understanding we need in order to “see” and “get it” so that we can live according to it.

3. Paul's ministry was about preaching and teaching, knowledge and understanding, doctrine and application.
 - a) (Neh 8.8) Paul not only announced the revelation of God to impart knowledge of the new revelation he had received, but he also “gave the sense” so we can understand that knowledge.
 - b) You can see this even in the structure of his Epistles:
 - (1) Preaching: The first of his Epistles announces/declares doctrine, knowledge.
 - (2) Teaching: The second part of his Epistles teaches us how to apply that doctrine—it gives us understanding of the knowledge so we can see what we're supposed to do with it.
4. Therefore, God through Paul has given to you, a Gentile believer in the Church Age...
 - a) ...the knowledge of what you have in Christ (the unsearchable riches in Christ), and
 - b) ...the understanding of that knowledge so you can “see” and “get it” in order to live according to it.
 - c) And this would lead us to our conclusion...

When Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah and King, God started something new: The Church Age.

- God postponed the coming of the Kingdom on earth that He promised to Israel (what we call today the Millennium).
- And then God revealed what He had hidden since before time began: The Church, the Body of Christ (both Jew and Gentile made new creatures, sons of God, being born of the Spirit and made one as joint members of the Body of Christ).
- The revelation of this new thing was “dispensed” to a new Apostle, the Apostle to the Gentiles: Paul.
 - ✓ Through Paul we have received the knowledge God wants us to have about this new dispensation.
 - ✓ Through Paul we have received the understanding of that knowledge that we need in order to live in the Church Age like God wants us to.

What you personally do with that knowledge and understanding is totally up to you.

- Just as God used Paul (the least of all saints), so He wants to use you in His mission today. He has given you all that you need: The gift of His grace, knowledge, understanding, a good example to follow (Paul).
- However, there is one thing He will not do for you: Choose. He will not force you into living for and investing in the Mission of being and making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (Prov 1.5-7) There are basically two kinds of people in the world today: The wise and the foolish.
 - ✓ Knowledge combined with understanding results in wisdom if you follow what you understand.
 - ✓ Knowledge and understanding rejected is foolishness. The fool is the one who knows what God said and understands what he should do... but then chooses not to do it.

Paul has primacy for us today: It is wise to learn from him and then follow him.

- He is the first steward of the new stewardship (dispensation)... and we have received that same stewardship.
- We would be wise to be followers of Paul even as he was of Christ.