

**01.09.11 / Ephesians 3:1-13****Passage Insight**

This extraordinary passage carries such weight and casts such vision for those of us in the body of Christ. It puts us in our spiritual and temporal place as it shows us that we are in such dire need of our Lord as to require His salvation and it then shows us where our affection and energies are to be placed in this lifetime, with the earthly body of Christ, His church. Praise the Lord. Let's take a look.

In verses 3 and 4, we see that the Greek word for "mystery" is *mysterion*, which is different from our modern English concept of mystery. *Mysterion* suggests that while the mystery is still in part a secret, it is no longer closely guarded but rather open to all who would see it. In its original form, this word referred to a truth into which someone had been initiated. Matthew 11:25 says this:

"At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

We see that we become initiated into the body of believers not by our own doing in any way whatsoever, but rather due to the work of Christ as He reveals the Father to us more fully. We see in today's passage and in Matthew that this mystery remained hidden until the coming of Jesus.

In verse 8 we notice much about Paul and His calling to deliver this message to the Gentiles. His Roman surname, Paulus, means "little" or "small," and tradition holds that Paul was a small man. Regardless, Paul is making a statement affirming his own smallness in all ways, even using a word that means essentially "leastest," or extra small. In 2 Corinthians 11:30, he does the same thing when he says, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." In this we are reminded that it is his weakness that allows for the strength of the Lord. It is likely that in the Ephesians passage Paul is specifically speaking of being least in that initially he worked hard to persecute the very church that he now has given his life to uphold, protect, and build. In this, Paul combines personal humility with apostolic authority, and while minimizing himself, he magnifies his position.

Verse 9 speaks of bringing to light. The Greek verb used is *photizo*, which means to enlighten. Enlightenment happens when light is shone into darkness. As we've seen during the Advent season in Isaiah 9, Christ is indeed a light in the darkness of our sinful souls. To be clear, Satan plays a role in wanting to keep people in the dark. As we see in 2 Corinthians 4:4, Satan blinds the minds of those who don't believe in Jesus. What he is blinding them from is the light itself, the image of God. Let us be reminded that in order for others to see Jesus, they must have our minds enlightened, illuminated, by Christ Himself. It is not on us to enlighten, but rather on us to preach Christ, who Himself does the enlightening. May we not attempt to wrest control from the Lord and unwittingly sin against Him by taking credit for His gospel.

Verse 10 shows us that the church will even serve to make known the wisdom of the Lord to the heavens, including the angels, both good and evil. And what are the evil angels to learn from the revelation of the Lord's mystery? That while their leader, Satan, has knowledge, he possesses no wisdom. He knew that a Savior would come, but he knew not of the Lord's perfect wisdom. The remarkable thing to note is that the church, in living out our calling as the body of our Lord, demonstrates to Satan and his minions their ultimate failure and God's eternal glory. Praise the Lord for His victory.

In addition to the obvious good news of salvation from our sins, Paul is making the point here that Christ died and rose also to bring to bear a new humanity of both Jews and Gentiles. We are reconciled to God, and we are reconciled to one another. The church itself, in this multicultural, multinational, multiracial form, presents the gospel by its very makeup. This gospel is a good news of both a new society and new life for all in it, it is only our spiritual birth in Christ that can unite us, as we see in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, which says:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”

As the church is called to participate in the enlightenment of those who are blinded by Satan, how is this outreach to the lost functionally accomplished? The answer is simple: the church, the body of believers, every single one, is to actively proclaim the gospel to those around us. Christ is the head of His body, and Ephesians 4:10-16, beautifully sums up our role as His body:

“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. . . . And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

### Application Questions

#### Unsearchable Riches of Christ

- 1) Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ in verse 9. Another word for unsearchable might be incalculable. In a world that seeks to quantify and to take ownership of its destiny by careful measurement, planning, and execution, how does this notion that we cannot calculate Christ leave you unsettled?

#### Jesus Does the Enlightening

- 1) Where do you mistakenly take credit for your understanding of the gospel?
- 2) How might this affect your witness to others as you share the gospel with them?
- 3) How instead can you give complete credit to the Lord for your ability to see His truth?
- 4) How will you share the gospel differently if you don't have to worry about being the one to enlighten others?

#### Sources

- Prayer
- Sailhamer
- Bible Speaks Today
- Pillar

- Bible Exposition Commentary
- ESV translation of the Bible