

**UNIT 5 EPHESIANS LESSON 5****"PAUL'S COMMISSION TO GENTILES"****STUDY PASSAGE: Ephesians 3:1-13**

As Paul's prayer unfolds, he delves deeper and deeper into the marvellous details of God's plan for the redemption of the human race. In this section, he interrupts himself in mid-sentence (v5) to give a discourse on the "mystery" or "secret" of Christ. He resumes his earlier thought in v14.

In the present passage we can extract teaching on three main themes, viz. "Paul", "the mystery" and "the Gospel".

**PAUL****1. "A prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles", (3:1)**

When Paul wrote this letter he was a prisoner, probably in Rome. Legally, he was the prisoner of the Romans, but he saw himself as the prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Paul saw everything he did as part of his service to Jesus Christ and thus even the basest circumstances were clothed with dignity and honour. With such a view of life, Paul could never be depressed. There is no doubt that this view of himself as the servant of Jesus Christ is the clue to his resilience.

He was a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles, because Christ had commissioned him to go to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15) and he was in prison as a result of carrying out that commission. The actual occasion that led to his arrest in Jerusalem, was when he was accused of taking a Gentile into the Temple (Acts 21:27-29). It was a false accusation, but nevertheless he was in prison directly because of his work among the Gentiles.

**2. Having the Commission of God's grace (3:2)**

"Grace" is the free, undeserved favour of God that brings men to salvation. This grace, which God had for the Gentiles, was Paul's to administer (his commission), in the sense that he knew about it, vv.3, 4, and had the task of making it known, v9.

This meant:

- (a) The mystery which had been made known to him by revelation and into which he had insight. God had told him of His grace to the Gentiles in some way, and having been told, he had gained insight or understanding into the meaning or implications of what he had been told (3:3).
- (b) Being a minister of the gospel. The word "minister" is the Greek word from which we get our word "deacon", and means, "a servant". This service involved the proclamation of the message concerning Jesus Christ and God's purpose for the Gentiles (3:7, 8).



As well as this being a commission OF grace, it was a commission BY grace, (v8). He regarded it as an unmerited favour of God that he was chosen to be the apostle to the Gentiles, even though, as well as knowing the mystery and preaching the gospel, this apostleship meant great suffering. It is such phrases as these that indicate the measure of the love that Paul, by this time in his life, had for the Lord Jesus, a love that had nothing to do with the circumstances of Paul's life, but with his insight into the salvation Christ had bought for him, and with the quality of the relationship he now enjoyed with Him.

### **THE MYSTERY**

As we indicated earlier, a "mystery" in the New Testament is not usually something that is mysterious, but something that was once hidden but has now been made known. Verse 5 indicates that this is so here. The mystery has been made known by revelation, (v3), and by the Spirit, (v5). We are not told here how the Spirit made this revelation. Perhaps it is a reference to Paul's conversion experience. Certainly, there he received his commission to go to the Gentiles, as we have seen. Or perhaps it refers to some other vision he had or to insight into the scriptures of the Old Testament that the Spirit gave to him. Anyhow, he was convinced that his conviction that the gospel was for the Gentiles was of divine origin. Note in v.5 that Paul made no claim to have a monopoly on this revelation.

The content of the mystery is similar to what he had told them in chapter two. It is that Jews and Gentiles are:

1. Fellow heirs of the inheritance God has for the saints (see 1:14, 18).
2. Members of the same (new) body (see 2:15, 16). Many believed that here Paul coined a new word to describe the fact that Jews and Gentiles are together incorporated into Christ. It's English equivalent would be "concorporate" - one body together. This body, of course, is the Church.
3. Partakers of the promise (see 2:12 and notes on the same).

All this is "in Christ by the Gospel". As Foulkes puts it (p95), "the Gospel, as it is preached and believed, is the effectual means, humanly speaking, by which men come to be in Christ."

### **THE GOSPEL**

"The Gospel, is God's word addressed to all men, everywhere, to bring them to repentance and thus to salvation by faith." In this passage, Paul speaks of the content of the gospel preaching as being:

1. The boundless riches of Christ (3:8).
2. The plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God (3:9).

It is often said that the gospel is a simple statement, as simple as "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." So it is, but behind this simple call of repentance and faith stands Christ Himself, and the gospel preacher sees as his task, not just the delivery of the simple statement, but the



presentation of Christ. To Paul, this was to present a personality whose depths could not be fathomed, whose powers could not be measured, whose limits could not be found.

In v9, Paul shows that he sees his task as a minister of the gospel to also involve bringing to light God's wonderful plan. The words "God who created all things" are to indicate that his plan is one as old as creation itself. This plan is spoken of in 1:10 to unite all things in Christ. For us, this plan includes all the blessings of 1:3-14. Read them over again. Verse 11 shows us that the plan also includes the church.

Verse 10 tells us that the gospel proclamation brings into being a Church which displays the wisdom of God, even to the beings of the spiritual world. The adjective used to describe the wisdom of God means "variegated". It is a word that would be used to describe the variety of colour in flowers, or an intricate embroidered pattern. Only a Church of 2:20-22, made up of people for whom the prayer of 3:14-19 has been answered, could be a church like this. Such a Church will be the Church of 1:23.

Finally, we can say that the gospel is a message of access to God. Even for the Jew there had been but limited access to God when they were under the law but now, in Christ, there is for both Jew and Gentile, access with boldness and confidence. This implies that our access is one in which we can speak to God freely about anything because our sins have been forgiven.

### **QUESTION 1:**

In what way was Paul a prisoner "of Jesus Christ" and a prisoner "for the sake of the Gentiles"?

### **QUESTION 2:**

Define what the "commission" or "work" was that Paul had to do in 3:2. (It is termed "stewardship of God's grace" in other versions).

### **QUESTION 3:**

Discuss the "mystery" or "secret of Christ" as expressed in 3:16. Why is this truth called a "mystery" or "secret"?

### **QUESTION 4:**

For what task did Paul receive grace? Why would he need particular grace for this?

### **QUESTION 5:**

What insights into the message of the gospel have you gained from 3:7-13?

### **QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

For what task did Paul receive grace? Why would he need particular grace for this? Do you think we need grace to accept that God wants to include everyone in his plan of salvation?