**THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST**

Ephesians 3:1-13

Key Verse 6

 “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

**Introduction**



 Paul was drastically changed from one of the most horrible persecutors of Christians to the most sacrificial servant of Christ and it is a very mysterious event. How could this happen to the Apostle Paul? What was the purpose of such a dramatic change in his life? In this chapter, Paul repeated the word “mystery”. He summarizes the mystery of Christ in plain terms. In addition, he shares his role in this mystery and prays for the Ephesians so that God would strengthen them with power through His Spirit and bless them to know the mysterious love of Christ. May God bless all of us to accept this mystery of Christ and become useful workers of God in His amazing plan. Amen.

1. Read verses 1-5. Why was Paul in prison? (1-2; Gal 2:12-14; Ac 19:21) How did Paul know the mystery of Christ? (3-5)

1-1, Read verses 1-5.

 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— **2** Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, **3** that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. **4** In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, **5** which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.

1-2, Why was Paul in prison? (1-2)

 ***For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— 2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you,***

* When Paul was writing this letter, he was in a prison in Rome. Since he was a prisoner, he did not have freedom to choose what to do or where to go.
* But Paul was not sorry about his situation because he was not a prisoner of Roman government but a voluntary prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles.
* He knew that Jesus was the Lord of his life, not the Roman government, so if he was a prisoner, he was Jesus' prisoner.
* The entire reason he was under arrest, awaiting trial was because of his missionary efforts on behalf of the Gentiles.
* Paul wanted his readers to realize that it is a benefit for them that he was a prisoner.
* One day, Paul was heading to Damascus with an approved letter by the high priest, dreaming of capturing all Christians in Damascus.
* On his journey, however, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him and he heard the voice of Jesus “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do”
* The risen Christ Jesus revealed himself to Paul. With His power, the Risen Christ could crush Paul, but out of His great mercy and grace, the risen Christ Jesus revealed himself so that Paul might truly know who Jesus was.
* Through this experience, Paul realized that he was completely wrong. He might have thought that persecuting Christians was doing God’s work but actually, he was working against God.
* Even if he knew scriptures very well, it was too mysterious for him to understand that Jesus was the Christ whom God promised to send us in the scriptures.
* But after having met the risen Jesus, he realized that Jesus was the Christ whom God sent for all the people!
* Jesus not only forgave his sins but also chose him as an instrument to carry Jesus’ name before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).
* Paul’s personal experience meeting the risen Christ Jesus, who is the source of God’s mystery, changed everything.
* The mystery of Christ was so powerful that Paul became a new creation before the Lord through this single revelation of this mystery in his life
* When Paul was seized in Jerusalem by the religious leaders, he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:12) so that he might come to Rome in order to preach the gospel in Rome.
* He knew very well the tough life in Jerusalem and Rome warned by the spirit several times (Acts 21:4, 11), but he chose this life in order to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus had given to him (Acts 20:24).
* This drastic change of life is still happening now. A UBF missionary desired to become a prime minister in a Korean government. This was also in line with his father’s desire.
* But he wandered in the darkness without knowing the meaning and purpose of his life. God sent him a Bible teacher and through Bible study, he found the purpose for his life in Genesis 1:31.
* God called him as a source of blessing for many wandering souls like him in the past. Although he did not become a prime minister according to his old name, he was blessed to live as a prisoner of Jesus and his world mission command.
* In Jesus we received the same grace so our lives share a different yet similar kind of dramatic story. What a wonderful blessing each of us have received from God.
* May God bless us to remember the mysterious grace of God revealed in our lives for the glory of God who called us from the darkness. Amen.

1-3, How did Paul know the mystery of Christ? (3-5)

 ***that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.***

* Paul wanted them to know, "I'm not making this up. This isn't a story that I invented.” Rather “God revealed this to me and I am only His messenger.”
* It cost Paul a lot to hold onto this mysterious revelation. It is indeed amazing that God would take a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, and a persecutor of the church to be the main minister of the mystery, the mystery of the work of the gospel in bringing Jew and Gentile together into one new body.
* The principle Paul will describe is a mystery, yet it is known. However, it would never be known if God did not make it known.

 *"In English a* ***'mystery'*** *is something dark, obscure, secret, puzzling. What is 'mysterious' is inexplicable, even incomprehensible.*

*However the Greek word* ***“mysterion”*** *is different. Although still a 'secret', it is no longer closely guarded but open … More simply, mysterion is a truth hidden from human knowledge or understanding but now disclosed by the revelation of God." (Stott)*

* He made known to me the mystery: Paul did not hesitate to claim that the mystery he will reveal was given to him by revelation.
* But it was not given to only him by revelation. It was also given to anyone who are able to understand his insight into the mystery of Christ.
* The nature of the union of Jews and Gentiles into this new body is the aspect that was not made known.
* In the Old Testament, the salvation of Gentiles in the Messiah is prophesied, the coming together of Jew and Gentile into the Church is yet spoken of.
* Paul repeats the word “mystery” four times (3,4,6,9). In fact the word mystery has deep historical meaning.
* When God gave his promise to Abraham, he said, “…and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). God said to the Israelites, his chosen people, “…you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6).
* God’s intention was to bless all peoples on earth through his chosen people. The Israelites received God’s blessings, but did not pass them on to the Gentiles.
* They made themselves the religious elite. This was because in the past, the mystery of Christ was hidden.

2. Read verse 6-9. What is this mystery that Paul wrote about? What happened to the Gentiles through the gospel? (6) How did Paul become a servant of this gospel? (7) What mission had God given him? (8-9)

2-1, Read verse 6-9.

**6** This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

**7** I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. **8** Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, **9** and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

2-2, What is this mystery that Paul wrote about?

 ***This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.***

2-3, What happened to the Gentiles through the gospel? (6)

 ***This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.***

* There are mainly three contents of the mystery.

**First, through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel.**

* In law, an heir is a person who is entitled to receive a share of the [decedent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decedent)’s property. An adopted child is the child in law.
* Originally we cannot be the heirs of God’s blessing because we had no relationship with him due to our sin.
* However, by accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior we became his adopted children. The Jews were upset with Paul, for they wanted to keep their privilege as God’s people alone.
* But now, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are heirs together with them. We now have access to the best blessings of being God’s holy people.
* Just as God blessed Abraham, we are also blessed (Ge 12:2,3). Just as Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, so are we (1Pe 2:9).

Romans 8:17 says,

 “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

**Second, through the gospel the Gentiles are members together of one body.**

* Once we were separate from others as a stranger, without hope and without God in the world. But now, through the gospel we are being made one.
* Therefore, with great responsibility and God’s love we love each other, take care of each other and share each other’s suffering as one body.
* Each of us is a very important part of the body of Christ. If a part of our body is sick or has some problems we should take care of it and work together until it is well.

1 Corinthians 12:12 says,

 “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.”

1 Corinthians 12:27 says,

 “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

**Third, through the gospel Gentiles are sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**

* God has blessed his people through the promise of his word. God had a covenant relationship with Israel.
* In the past, the Gentiles were strangers to God’s promise. But now in Christ Jesus they are sharers together in the promise of God.
* That means as they obey the word of God they can receive abundant blessings from God. Our God is so faithful all the time. He keeps his promise no matter what.
* Now we can live under the same blessings of God that Israel did.



* In this verse, the word “together” is repeated three times. The Gentiles are now equally included with the Jews without any segregation or distinction.
* Likewise in church there may be some barriers between young and old, man and woman, parents and children, Koreans and Americans, and White or non-White.
* But Jesus destroys all human barriers. Jesus had served and loved his disciples patiently to help them to grow as His co-workers.
* Here we learn that receiving the gospel means more than just having personal salvation.
* We need to accept and love all of God’s people through the gospel. This is the mystery of the gospel.

2-4, How did Paul become a servant of this gospel? (7)

 ***I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.***

* Paul was an active persecutor of Christ. But God forgave his sins and chose him as an instrument to carry His name among the people.
* Therefore, it was only by the gift of God’s grace and mercy and kindness in his life.

2-5, What mission had God given him? (8-9)

 ***Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.***

* The more Paul understood God’s grace, the more he realized that he was less than the least of all the Lord’s people. This was not false humility; it was his genuine understanding of God’s grace.
* Paul was not one of the Twelve. He did not follow Jesus while Jesus was serving his public messianic ministry.
* Therefore, he did not know much about the miraculous signs Jesus performed and what Jesus taught to his disciples.
* But he knew the scriptures very well because he was trained as a Pharisee from his youth.
* Even though he was a Jew, he was born as a roman citizen and was educated to know other languages and cultures of the Gentiles.
* After the mystery was made known to him by revelation, he could understand the true meaning of the scriptures in the relationship with Christ, which was very useful to explain about Jesus to those who did not have a chance to see Jesus.
* Even if he did not know, God had been preparing him for a position, that is, to explain the mystery and its administration plainly to everyone, especially to the Gentiles, just like us.
* It’s really amazing to know that he not only remembered the grace of God throughout his whole life, but he also understood his exact role in Christ clearly.
* He had no regrets about not being chosen as one of the Twelve. Rather, he accepted God’s calling, found his role in Christ, and used everything he had to fulfill God’s purpose in his life.
* God calls us as the administrators of this mystery for his world salvation work. Paul considered his life as a missionary to the Gentiles as God’s best gift.
* Let’s accept our calling as the administrators of the gospel so that this hidden mystery may be preached to people who do not know Jesus Christ.

3. Read verses 10-13. What is God’s intention and eternal purpose through the church? (10-11) What do we gain through faith in Jesus? (12) How did Paul encourage believers? (13)

3-1, Read verses 10-13.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, **11** according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. **12** In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**13** I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

3-2, What is God’s intention and eternal purpose through the church? (10-11)

 ***His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,***

* Paul explains God’s purpose for the church. Here the word the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms imply the angels of God.
* God doesn't use the angels to reveal His wisdom to the saints, but He does use the saints to reveal His wisdom to the angelic beings.
* We are called for something far greater than our own individual salvation. We are surrounded by invisible spiritual beings, and they intently look upon us.

1Peter 1:10-12 reads,

 “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, **11** trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. **12** It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”

* The church of Christ is the reflection of the work of God. Through the great work of God in the church, the angels can see the glory of God.
* Therefore, the mission of church is to carry out its God-given mission by keeping the word of God faithfully and teaching the gospel to people.
* The church should preach the word of God to perishing souls and rebuke the sins of our generation.

***11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

* This is not an accidental event, but according to God’s eternal purpose, has been prepared from a long time ago.

3-3, What do we gain through faith in Jesus? (12)

  ***In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.***

* Paul knew that the Ephesian Christians were very anxious about what would happen to him. They were worried and discouraged.
* When people are discouraged, they usually stop coming to God and become preoccupied with themselves.
* By faith we approach God boldly and freely. The word for confidence has the idea of "freedom of speech."
* We have the freedom to express ourselves before God, without fear or shame, that is, the blessed privilege of prayer.

3-4, How did Paul encourage believers? (13)

***I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.***

* So Paul encourages them to live in Christ and through faith in Christ. He urges them and us to approach God with freedom and confidence.

**Conclusion**

 Today we have learned of the mystery of Christ. As ones who have known this mystery, now let us become administrators of this mystery by working together for Jesus’ glory. May our church be one in this mystery and make it known to the world. Amen.

**One word: Mystery of Christ!**