

The Mystery of the Gospel

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:25-26).

Paul stated that his preaching of Christ is "**according to the revelation of the mystery.**" Mystery truths are related to the gospel we preach in this age. There are some elements of the mystery truth that are *for the saints*. (*Ye in me and I in you*). There are also elements of the mystery *for the unsaved* to hear: the mystery of the gospel. The message Paul preached was *in accordance with* New Testament revelation and the mystery truths in particular.

He did NOT preach a gospel that was in accordance with the Old Testament revelation. Of course in every age, salvation is always by grace through faith. However the *content* of that which is to be believed changes with the progress of revelation. Paul's gospel presentation was very different (in content) than the message Abraham believed (Gen. 15:6). Abraham believed the Lord when God told him that his seed would be as numerous as the stars of heaven... and was justified by faith because he believed. Paul did not command his listeners to believe that their seed would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. The content of his gospel message was very different from what Abraham believed.

It was also different from what Jews living under Mosaic Law believed. They too were justified by faith alone, but once saved they were expected to submit to the Mosaic Law in order to maintain their fellowship with God. It was difficult for first century Hebrew Christians to conceive of a message from God that did not require adherence to the Mosaic Law.

Almost immediately, the gospel of God's grace was confronted by Judaizers who attempted to put Gentile Christians under the yoke of the Law and insisted that "except ye be circumcised ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Paul was outraged when he heard this because he considered this to be "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). Judaizers also attempted to put believers under the law as a means of sanctification, which also drew equally harsh criticism from the apostle Paul (Gal. 3:1-5; 5:1-12).

Paul's gospel presentation was not in accordance with that Old Testament revelation because Paul's message was based upon *new revelation* about Christ, unknown and unknowable in the days of Abraham or Moses. Of course

justification has always been by faith apart from the works of the law (Gen. 15:6), but during the dispensation of Law, the believing Jew was expected to obey the Law.

Paul's gospel offered Gentiles a right relationship to God (justification and sanctification) totally apart from the Mosaic Law (Rom. 3:21; 10:4; Gal. 2:19-20; 3:1-4; Rom. 7:1-4). Paul's gospel was not *in accordance with* the dispensation of Law. The gospel Paul preached included truths NOT revealed in the Old Testament. Of course certain FACTS of the gospel *were* revealed in the Old Testament: the incarnation, death and resurrection of Messiah; etc. (Ps. 22; Isa. 53; etc.) The fact that Gentiles would partake of Millennial blessings was clearly revealed in the Old Testament (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 2:1-4; 61:5-6).

But Paul included *other* truths in his gospel presentation that were NOT revealed in the Old Testament: First and foremost is the fact that Jews and Gentiles are accepted on *equal footing in Christ*. This mystery truth is what the world needs to hear, and it is made known "by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). This truth was not "in the Old concealed" or even partially revealed. It was NOT revealed at all in ages past. According to Romans 16:26 this truth is to be made known to "*all nations*." Jews living under the Law were not sent with a message of good news to "all nations." Jews under the Law were separated from the Gentile nations by a "wall of partition," namely, the Law. The Law required Jews to remain separate from the Gentiles (Deut. 7:1-6). The gospel of God's grace is different.

Paul's gospel was also different in *scope and content* than the gospel of the Kingdom preached exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-7) during the earthly ministry of Christ.

Thus, during the dispensation of Law (including the gospel period) there was a huge difference between Jew and Gentile. In contrast to that, the message Paul preached was that "in Christ" there is no difference between Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, red, yellow, black, and white - a message for the whole world! All are equally accepted IN the Beloved on equal footing by faith. (Gal.3:28; Eph.1:6; 3:6). These previously unrevealed truths were included in Paul's gospel presentation, and hence called the "mystery of the gospel."

"My gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ." (Rom. 16:25) Paul links together his gospel message AND the preaching of Christ. "Preaching" in this passage is the word for a proclamation. When Paul's gospel was preached, it included a broader proclamation of Jesus Christ. Kenneth Wuest has translated this expression as follows: "according to my gospel, **even** the proclamation concerning Jesus Christ." In other words, in Paul's mind, the gospel he preached WAS a proclamation about Jesus Christ.

His gospel preaching included much more than the three simple facts recorded in I Corinthians 15:1-3: (1) Jesus died; (2) was buried; (3) and rose again. The Gentiles to whom Paul was sent needed to hear much more than three facts before they were ready to respond to the gospel. (Who was this Jesus? What is sin? Why should I care? What if I reject Him? What if I can't live up to God's holy standards? etc.) Boiling the gospel down to its lowest common denominator was not on Paul's radar screen. When he preached the gospel, he preached Christ. To him, Christ IS the good news. Everything about Christ is good news. To him the gospel "concerns His Son" (Rom. 1:2-3), and preaching Christ takes time.

"According to the revelation of the mystery." (Rom. 16:25)

Paul preached a gospel which included preaching many other truths about Christ... His Person and His finished work. His gospel preaching about Christ was "according to revelation of the mystery." In other words, as Paul preached the gospel, his preaching was "according to" new revelation he received from the Risen Lord - truths about Christ that were never revealed in ages past. This is not to say that the sinner is *required* to understand and to be able to articulate all these truths. Rather, Paul preached many things about Christ so that his hearers would be able to make a more *informed decision* with respect to the gospel.

The mystery of the gospel is God's message of salvation for the dispensation of the grace of God. The mystery of the gospel thus includes revelation concerning *positional truth* never revealed in ages past – a mystery element to the gospel. The gospel includes information about what the sinner is delivered FROM: his old position IN Adam (I Cor. 15:22) and thus delivered from Adam's sin and condemnation. There can be no good news until the sinner first understands the bad news of his sin and its consequences - eternal condemnation. The gospel includes information about what the sinner is delivered TO: the believing sinner of this age is delivered TO Christ and His Body. The believing sinner of this age is baptized *into the church*, the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13). The believing sinner of this age is brought into a *new relationship* to Christ (Col. 1:27). (Christ in you). The believing sinner of this age is brought into a *new position* in Christ (Eph. 2:6). The mystery of the gospel changes a man's position from IN Adam to IN Christ. Salvation also calls men OUT of the world system (Eph. 2:12) and places him IN Christ (Eph.2:13; John 17:16). The church (ἐκκλησία) is an assembly of "called out ones." According to Acts 15:14, today God is visiting the Gentiles to "take out" of them a people for His name. Gentiles are called *out of* the world system and *to* Christ – a change of position.

Of course the sinner isn't expected to know all about positional truth, but he must know about his position in sin and condemnation (which is not good news) and he must know the good news – that he can have a new position of deliverance through faith in Christ. Before a sinner is ready to respond to the

gospel of God's grace, it is essential that he first *understands* his position IN Adam, namely, in Adam's sin and condemnation. The gospel is all about being delivered from our old position IN Adam's sin and condemnation and to a new position IN Christ where there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Paul included these truths (sometimes referred to as positional truths) in his gospel presentation to Gentiles. To make an informed decision the sinner needs to know what he is being delivered FROM and what he is being delivered TO. Paul saw this truth as part of his gospel – the mystery of the gospel. To Paul, preaching the gospel was preaching Christ.

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Eph. 3:8)

The mystery of the gospel also included preaching the ***unsearchable riches of Christ*** among the Gentiles. (Eph. 3:8). Paul's gospel ministry included TEACHING many things about Christ. Most Gentiles knew virtually nothing about Him. Paul's proclamation of Christ and the unsearchable riches in Him included much more than the basic facts of the gospel as outlined in I Cor. 15:1-4. The word "preach" in Ephesians 3:8 is "εὐαγγελίζω" which means more than to make a proclamation. It means to announce the good news – which in this case is the good news about Christ and all that He accomplished on Calvary. When Paul evangelized the Gentiles, he included in his gospel presentation truth about the unsearchable riches IN Christ. He warned sinners that if they remained in unbelief they would be condemned to the Lake of Fire. The sinner needs to know *from what* he needs to be saved. But he also encouraged them to believe by presenting this glorious position IN Christ which could be theirs through faith: heaven and a taste of heaven on earth. The gospel is good news: sinners need to know *to what* they need to be saved.

These new riches IN Christ Jesus (a new position IN Christ) were never revealed before – but were included in Paul's evangelization of the Gentiles. Evidently when the apostle Paul evangelized the lost, he did much more than quote John 3:16 - immediately followed by an altar call. He wanted them to be *as informed as possible* about the all-important decision he was challenging them to make concerning the gospel - a decision which determines eternal destiny. He presented the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and taught many truths about Christ, the Body of Christ, and our riches in Christ as well. This is the good news Paul preached "among the Gentiles" (Eph.3:8)

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim. 3:15-16)

The mystery of the gospel included revelation referred to as the "**mystery of godliness**" (I Tim. 3:15-16). The gospel message is the good news of salvation. Keep in mind that salvation includes three tenses: past (justification) present (sanctification) and future (glorification). Of course the message of justification by faith is very different from the message of sanctification by faith. One relates to BECOMING a Christian, while the other relates to LIVING the Christian life. But both are part of God's overall plan of salvation from sin. The gospel includes truth about justification. But justification by faith *was* revealed in the Old Testament (Gen. 15:6). The *mystery* of the gospel also includes truths about sanctification which were previously unrevealed – namely the *mystery of godliness* – God's new plan of sanctification in the age of grace (I Tim.3:15-16). This is the truth of "God manifest in flesh." It speaks of Christ's unique *incarnation* in the Body of Christ and members in particular: **Christ in you**.

The mystery of the gospel *includes* the mystery of godliness which enables believing Jews and Gentiles to walk in a newness of life made possible because of the indwelling Christ and His Spirit. The good news of the gospel of God's grace in this age includes the fact that God delivers us from sin and condemnation and also begins a wonderful work of transforming us into His image the moment we are saved (Phil.1:6; II Cor. 3:18). The good news of the gospel is that all the work for our deliverance from sin is complete. It includes deliverance from sin – past, present, and future. Sinners (who are *enslaved* to their sin nature) hearing the gospel for the first time instinctively realize that they will never be able to live up to the heaven-high standards of holiness. "Lordship" folks exacerbate the problem by making the rigors of discipleship virtually a requirement for salvation, which potentially turns people away from the gospel. In fact, the requirements of discipleship *are* too hard for the sinner in his present position as a slave of sin. It is probably a healthy sign that the sinner acknowledges his INABILITY. That should cause him to realize his *need* for a Savior even more clearly.

Paul's method of dealing with this issue was to INFORM the sinner about the many things Christ has made available in this age. In presenting the gospel, it is good to let the sinner know that if he trusts in Christ, then Christ will *dwell IN him* and provide the *power of the resurrection* to live the Christian life. A realization of his inability should not turn the sinner away from the gospel; it should turn him TO Christ!

Thus, the sinner's response to the gospel is simple: Believe and be saved! The good news is that God saves us from the penalty of sin and (once saved) He continues to save us from indwelling power of sin moment by moment by faith. The sinner needs to know that the issue of "living the life" is a completely different issue than "what must I do to be saved." The gospel message is that *Christ is the Savior*. He will save you from the penalty of sin if you trust Him. Once saved He is still the Savior and will save you from the power of indwelling sin if you continue to trust Him (Col.2:6). Deliverance from the power of indwelling sin is possible because of the indwelling Christ. This is the mystery of godliness and is integrally related to the mystery of the gospel – good news of salvation from sin... past and present. William Gurnall noted that "Christ in you" enables the believer "to live by Another's spirit, to act from Another's strength, to live to Another's will, and aim at Another's glory." This is a new and unique heavenly lifestyle – unknown in ages past, but an integral part of the mystery of the gospel today. It is all *good news* related to deliverance from the power of sin.

Paul's gospel preaching was not one quick fiery sermon immediately followed by an emotional invitation. His method included detailed teaching about Christ – His Person and His work. This requires time, which explains why on several occasions after Paul preached Christ, the hearers wanted to hear MORE (Acts 13:42-44; 17:2-3, 32; 18:4).

The mystery of the gospel is the good news of *God's plan of salvation* for believers of this age. As members of the Body of Christ, both Jew and Gentile with equal privileges, are positioned IN Christ in heavenly places and thus equipped to walk in NEWNESS of life. It includes the good news of a new plan of godliness based on the fact that Christ is IN you. This is all part of the mystery of the gospel. It is the good news of what God has done to provide *deliverance from sin* (past, present, and future) for all who believe in the dispensation of the grace of God.

"And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel. For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." (Eph. 6:19-20)

Paul wanted believers to pray for him that he would have the right words and boldness to "**make known the mystery of the gospel.**" A few points should be noted here. First, Paul states that the good news that he wants to make known includes "mystery" truths... truths previously not revealed. Of course the basic facts of the gospel (death and resurrection of Christ) were revealed in the Old Testament. But there are other truths that are called "mysteries" and Paul considered them part of the good news he preached.

Secondly, Paul considered himself an ambassador of the mystery of the gospel. The term translated “ambassador” (πρεσβεύω) means an elder statesman or a senior delegate who serves as a representative or emissary. Paul spoke of himself and the other apostles as ambassadors of Christ also in II Cor. 5:20. In that passage he noted that as ambassadors they spoke for God, and yet at the same time, God was speaking *through* them! (“as though God did beseech *you* by us...”) As an ambassador for Christ, Paul wanted to be that vessel through whom God’s message (the mystery of the gospel) was proclaimed. He wanted to speak that message boldly too.

Also of note is the fact that Paul was an ambassador in BONDS because of this message: “for which I am in bonds”. It was because of this message that Paul was imprisoned. In Acts 22, Paul was given the opportunity to defend himself against false charges laid against him by the Jews in Jerusalem. The Jews gave him great liberty to present his case and they listened intently. He explained to them how he saw the Risen Savior on the road to Damascus and shared his own conversion to Christianity. But when he mentioned that God sent him to preach Messiah to the *Gentiles* (vs.21-22), the crowd shouted that he was not worthy to live. Paul was imprisoned (in part) because of the Jewish hatred of the Gentiles. Any message that put Jews and Gentiles on equal footing was anathema to them – and this is a major tenet of the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 3:6)! Paul was an ambassador to the Gentiles and preached new revelation he received from the Risen Christ concerning the church – a Body of believers in which there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Because of that, Paul was “an ambassador in bonds.” The mystery of the gospel for which Paul was in bonds included previously unrevealed truth that we do not always associated with the gospel message today – but Paul did. The desire of the apostle’s heart was that the mystery of the gospel not *remain* a mystery, but that it be MADE KNOWN. That should be our desire as well.

The mystery of the gospel includes preaching Christ – a theme much broader and more comprehensive than the quick gospel presentations we are accustomed to hearing today which pressure people into making an instant response. In part it is the “easy-believism” mentality that has driven many to the Lordship position today. We all agree that “easy-believism” is a problem. Their solution to the problem is to make the gospel *harder* by adding the rigors of discipleship as requirements to salvation and redefining faith to include submission, surrender, and even obedience.

A better solution to the easy-believism problem would be to stick to the simplicity of the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 16:30-31) and let the Lord separate the tares from the wheat (Matt. 13:27-30). In addition, when presenting the gospel to those who have absolutely no knowledge or background in the Bible, it may be necessary to take days, weeks, even months of teaching (as opposed

to minutes) before we expect a response. This suggestion will not be popular with the *altar call crowd*, where mystery truths are either ridiculed, ignored, or glossed over, but it takes time to accurately present the “mystery of the gospel.” Things that are really worthwhile always seem to take longer.

In summary, the mystery of the gospel Paul preached:

- ✓ included the essential facts of the gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4)
- ✓ was according to the new revelation of the mystery (Rom. 16:25-26)
- ✓ included a comprehensive proclamation of the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:25-26)
- ✓ included positional truth concerning our lost position in Adam and a new position in Christ (I Cor. 15:22; Rom. 8:1)
- ✓ included positional truth concerning the riches IN Christ (Eph.3:8)
- ✓ included teaching concerning the mystery of godliness – salvation from the power of sin (I Tim.3:15-16)
- ✓ included a much broader understanding of the gospel message than a few quick facts

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