

**Ephesians 3**  
**The Significance of the Mystery**  
**How dramatic is the New Life!**

So far we have seen that God has created an amazing life for the Christian. We are already blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3). The New Life has been created according to God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). By God's grace we are saved and we get hold of this by faith. Through the Cross God has reconciled Jew and Gentile and given us the ministry of reconciliation (2Cor 5:18).

**The Pagan World of Ephesus**

Paul confronts the paganism of the culture in Ephesus. I have been looking at a modern tourist booklet on ancient Ephesus. The remains of two streets and the associated buildings can be seen. The kinds of buildings include the marketplace, the fountains, the temples, the public toilets, the public baths, the theatre, the large amphitheatre, the brothel ...! This is the world into which Paul came. The brothel is treated as a normal and accepted part of the town life. There is still an etching on the stone road indicating where to find it. I do not deny that prostitution is a part of any city life but this normalisation of the use of women is anti-Christian. In our own society (as a result of the radical movement and the permissive society) there has been an attempt to normalise prostitutes as sex workers and the open advertisement of their services. In my opinion this is openly anti-Christian and Christians should oppose it. Otherwise we accept it as normal and OK. Prostitution represents the paganisation of women. Paul's Christian values would have denounced prostitution in Ephesus and anywhere else. Women need an emotional centre, just as men need a task centre. Usually for a woman, her husband forms her emotional centre around whom she builds her emotional life, home, children, relationships, safety and her future. A woman will work to maintain her emotional world. A woman can be stripped of her emotional centre by a husband who cannot or will not fulfil that role. A woman can also choose that emotional isolation under the lure of a career (the modern career woman). The bitterness of not maintaining (or not obtaining in the first place) an emotional centre makes a woman vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Prostitution, in any culture, is the denial of womanhood and God's purpose for it. The sexual purity of the Christian ethic fights against the collapse of the woman's emotional centre of the family. So Paul fights for the Christian view of marriage together with the place and value of women and the family in Eph 5:22-6:4. There are strongholds of prostitution, pornography and sexual violence entrenched in our society. It is our Christian task to denounce paganism in all its forms, including its use of women. The paganism of the culture is also revealed in the commercial clash over idolatry (Acts 19:21-41).

**Ephesians 3**

**Sentence 18 (3:1-7) For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles - if indeed you have heard of the dispensation (responsibility) of the grace of God which was given to me for you (Acts 26:15-18), how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already [above], by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through**

**the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.**

Because of the effectiveness of the power of God which makes possible the gift of grace from God, Paul has a message that is a mystery to the conventional wisdom. This message is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews (the chosen people of God). This was not revealed to or made known to other times and places. It is not something that God has suddenly made up; it is a mystery hidden for ages and now made known by the Spirit through the holy apostles and prophets.

Mystery is an aspect of the creation. Creation claims that God has finished all His works (Gen 2:1-3, Acts 15:18). This implies that God is not still making things. The creation is complete. (Things may change as they adapt to their environment but there is basically no new kind.) If it is not known then it is hidden. Everything created is knowable although it may not be known. It is hidden by the process of mystery but, at the appropriate time, is revealed or made known. This may be an object or a relation between objects, in this case, a relation between human beings (Jews and Gentiles). So a mystery is not suddenly producing something that previously did not exist, but is the revealing or uncovering of something that existed and was hidden.

Some examples of the Pauline use of 'mystery' are as follows:

Rom 16:25 of the mystery which was kept secret

1Cor 2:7 the wisdom of God in a mystery

1Cor 4:1 stewards of the mysteries of God

1Cor 15:51 behold I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep

Eph 1:9 having made known to us the mystery of His will

Eph 3:9 the fellowship of the mystery hidden in God

Eph 6:19 to make known the mystery of the gospel

Col 1:26 the mystery that has been hidden from ages

Col 2:2 to the knowledge of the mystery of God

Col 4:3 to speak the mystery of Christ

As Christians we can stand before mystery not perplexed or confounded but believing and trusting in God, who is the great revealer of the meaning of mystery.

**Sentence 19 (3:8-12) To me, who am less than the least of the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.**

God's intention which He purposed according to the good advice and pleasure God gives to Himself (Eph 1:5,9,11), was to make known His manifold, varied and multifaceted wisdom (part of the unsearchable riches in Christ) to the governing powers in the heavenly places. A role of the church is to be a means by which God makes things known. Hence the church has to be faithful to the message and the revelation given in Christ. The church bears heavenly data. What happens in the church is a source of spirit knowledge to the powers that are watching (1Cor 11:10). May we be found faithful! Not only is the wisdom of God immensely varied but we find and explore infinite riches and unfathomable treasures in Jesus Christ. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). As a human I have the capacity and as a Christian I have the privilege to explore untold wonders,

unbelievable experiences, incredible vistas and testing journeys. In principle it is conceivable because it is created, but in practice it is unfathomable. Like the haunting vistas of the 'Lord of the Rings' (which are only partly known and are inhabited by strange creatures), the extent of what God has created for us in Christ is awe-full and ultimately demanding of our soul. The very least Paul is doing is stretching our human imagination to the limit. And this is all a blessing in God (Eph 1:3). Let God blow our mind!

**Sentence 20 (3:13) Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

Tribulation is part of the Christian life. It is not a source of defeat but of victory (Mtt 5:11, Rom 5:3, James 1:2-4). Paul experienced many tribulations for the faith (2Cor 11:23-28). Yet his tribulations are a source of ministry (2Cor 6:4-10). They are a way of growing up in God. So Paul is asking the Ephesians not to be depressed about what he is suffering (in chains) as a Christian leader, because his spiritual struggle will result in spiritual advantage for them. There is a glory in defeating the enemy and the Accuser (and the accusers) of the brethren.

**Sentence 21 (3:14-19) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes all knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

At this point Paul goes into a worship space. He is bowing his knee and exalting Christ. Every lineage (family) in heaven and on earth is named or designated from God. God is the source of all patrimony (fatherhood blessing), which is the source of spirit authority. The spirit realm is an authority realm, sourced in the authority of God. Standing in this authority, Paul asks (prays) that God will do four things for the saints (believers):

- 1) That they will be strengthened with power (mightily empowered) in their inner man through the Spirit. ('Man' here means the inner human personality or identity. It is not sexist.)
- 2) That Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith
- 3) That they may be able to comprehend (grasp) the full extent (dimension) of the love of Christ. That is, to know the love of Christ which surpasses all attempts to understand it. When we understand love we carry it. But when we go deeper and love carries us, we neither understand nor control it. Paul wants us to move beyond our human attempts to control and manipulate our love experiences. When we move out into the love of Christ (which need not be surrender) we find that Christ carries us and we sense the deeper love. The pagan understanding of love is letting go and being awash in passivity. The Christian understanding of love is hanging on to God (actively) and letting go of experiences or our fear of them. The pagan wants (wallows in) experience; the Christian passes through experience both good and bad.
- 4) That they may be filled with all the fullness of God. Those that come to God in Christ do not experience emptiness. God fills. God completes. God satisfies. God answers. God perfects. Those things that God does not fill will drop out of our life. There are appetites that God will not satisfy and acquired needs that God will not recognise. As we abide in the vine may we be pruned by the gardener (John 15:1-8)!

**Sentence 22 (3:20-21) Now unto Him who, by the power at work in us, is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus from generation to generation for evermore. Amen.**

This is an amazing benediction (blessing) and doxology (praising) to the invincible power of God. In order to emphasise the depth and the layers of meaning implied in this passage, it may be re-written as follows:

God

God is

God is able

God is able to do

God is able to do what we ask

God is able to do what we ask or think

God is able to do all that we ask or think

God is able to do above all that we ask or think

God is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think

God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

This ability of God is brought about by the power of God that is already at work in us who believe. This power is the presence of the Holy Spirit. The power of God is beyond all measure. The ability of God is in His word. This means that we know the power but we do not know the extent of the power. The Spirit of God speaks His word into my heart and I learn it from the Scriptures. When I have the Word of God in my heart, I express what is in my heart by my words. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk 6:45). I then speak into being what I desire in my heart. I do and feel what I say. This is not positive thinking only. This is spiritual law: I get what I say (Mk 11:23), which is what I really desire (believe) in my heart. However, God 'blows my mind' with the extent of what He can do, if only I believe.