

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 men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.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.

⁷I 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 God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable 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.¹⁰ 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 which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. (NIV84)

Theme: Make Known the Mystery

1. It was revealed by Christ
2. It is shared by us.

Many people love to watch magic tricks. There is just something special about watching a magician seemingly accomplish something impossible, like catching a bullet in the mouth, or being sawed in two, or levitating. You are often left wondering, "how'd they do that?" You can watch shows, check out websites or read books that reveal how certain magic tricks were accomplished. But it seems that whenever you find out that mystery behind the magic trick you are let down. You realize that it was just a combination of misdirection, an expensive and fake props, and showmanship. To be honest, you're a bit disappointed and you start to think it would have been better if the secret wasn't revealed at all, but that it remained a mystery.

Four times in our verses Paul talks about a mystery. He tells us that now this mystery been revealed. At first glance it seems that this mystery is that the gospel is now for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, when before it had been reserved only for the Jews.

But that isn't really accurate. While the Old Testament focuses on the Jews and God's Word was first and foremost for them, there are instances scattered throughout the Old Testament of Gentiles hearing the Word and coming to faith. God's promise to Abraham was, **All nations on earth will be blessed through you.** In our first lesson we heard about Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon to see his wisdom first hand. She heard about the Lord and gave a great confession of faith; plus Jesus in Matthew 12 confirms that she believed and will be in heaven. There are many other instances like Naaman who was healed from leprosy or Ruth who was a Moabite. The Gospel has always been for the Gentiles, just as it was for the Jews. But truth be told, that's not really a mystery to us today; the script has been flipped. Most if not all of us here today are Gentiles; so it stands to reason that the gospel is for us too. If anything it seems that the gospel is no longer for the Jews since so many have rejected him.

So the point is the mystery is not that the gospel is now for the Gentiles, because it has always been. Rather the mystery is that is now revealed to the nations is that there is no longer a dividing wall of hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles—they are no longer separate from each other but are one together through faith in Christ by the gospel. No longer would the non-kosher diet of the Gentiles separate them from God's people. No longer would their uncircumcision make them "outsiders" from the Jews. They didn't have to refrain from work on Saturdays and offer up sacrifices day after day.

Instead they are one with the Jews. Paul puts it this way in verse six, **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.** Jews and Gentiles are heirs together. In the eyes of the Lord there is no longer Jew or Gentile—they are equal before him and through faith they become part of his family; brothers and sisters in Christ who will inherit the forgiveness

of sins and eternal life won for the whole world by Christ. Together we are part of the body of Christ. He is the head and together we form different parts of the same body working together for the common good. And finally we are fellow sharers in the promises of Christ. Together, we share everything the Lord promises us, especially the glory of Christ, which is promises in heaven.

For us Gentiles, this is especially good news. Because we aren't part of God's chosen children. We were not his people. Born into sin and were slaves of sin. And we were children of the devil on our way to join him for eternity.

Yet the Lord grafted us in and adopted us as if we were his own and makes us co-heirs along with all believers—Jew and Gentile alike. This is the manifold wisdom of God, the wisdom of God to save us by making us his own is so great and vast that it is far beyond our own wisdom. And this is the unsearchable riches of his grace. God is rich in mercy and love for us who do not deserve it. His grace is unsearchable because no one could have come up with on their own God's plan in saving us. And no one can completely understand why God sent his son into the world to die for us sinners. This manifold wisdom and unsearchable riches has been revealed to us through the gospel.

Paul knew this well. He was Jew—a Zealous Pharisee who strived to obey a whole list of man-made laws on top of God's Old Testament commands. He saw himself as better than most Jews and figured it was his job to snuff out Christianity. He hated Christ and hated anyone who professed Christ. He held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to death. He then went on a tour throughout the land arresting Christians and throwing them in jail. But once, while he was on his way to Damascus to arrest the Christians there, Jesus himself appeared to him. When Paul asked who he was Jesus simply replied, **I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.** At this moment Paul was converted—the Lord brought him to faith and made him his own dearth Jesus. Paul was an unbeliever who hated Christ but was made a believer who loved Christ.

And if this wasn't grace enough for Paul. Jesus didn't just bring him to faith, he made him an Apostle. Paul was the one Christ chose to

spread the gospel specifically to Gentiles. It was his job to reveal this mystery—that Jews and Gentiles are alike in the eyes of the Lord, something he vehemently fought against before.

When you think about it, we aren't that different than Paul was. Sure, most if not all of us are Jews; and as far as I know, none of us have persecuted Christians or thrown them in jail. But we were still hostile to God and his Word. We rejected him we wanted nothing to do with him or his followers. We were born as children of nature who could do nothing but sin.

And yet we are all here today worshiping Jesus as our one and only Savior. Through the gospel, whether it was at our baptisms or when someone shared the Word with us, the Holy Spirit brought us to faith. He converted us from an unbeliever who hated Christ to a believer who loves Christ. He sanctified us—he made us holy, and adopted us as his own. Despite who we were the Lord brought us to faith and kept us in that one true faith.

The point is, the gospel works. The gospel works because the Lord, who is wiser and more powerful than anyone, works through that gospel. And yet, we often act as if the gospel doesn't work. We think to ourselves that this person would never believe the gospel, so why waste your time in sharing the gospel with him? You are better off doing something else; plus, you wouldn't have to put yourself "out there" and open yourself up to criticism. So we don't share the gospel with that person we know and the Holy Spirit never has an opportunity to bring that person to faith.

Or we think that we must add to the gospel, or cover it up. That it's not good enough simply to proclaim the Word and let the Holy Spirit do his work. So we think we have to make the gospel more attractive so that people will want to hear it, or that we have to be more conscious of being entertaining in our worship services. Or that we have to get people in by some other means—a bait and switch type of evangelism. We can invite them for something else and when they least expect it, we can share God's Word with them. We have this idea that the gospel isn't good enough or powerful enough and that we must add to it.

Try telling that to Paul who spent the last years of his life either traveling around the world spreading the gospel among the Gentiles, or spent in jail for spreading the gospel. The gospel works because the Holy Spirit works through that gospel. We cannot add anything to it to make it more effective or attractive, we can only hinder it and distract from it.

There is another part of the mystery that Paul reveals in our text. We find in verse 12, **In him** (that is, in Christ) **and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.** Despite who we were and what we do, through the gospel the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Christ. It is Christ who took our sins upon himself and suffered their eternal punishment. It is Christ who gave us his perfect life. He made us pure and holy in the eyes of the Lord who declares us not guilty on account of Christ.

And so we don't have to be afraid of standing before the holy, almighty Lord. We can go before him like a child goes before his Dad and asks him for anything. We can be bold and confident when we pray to him knowing that he loves us and will always answer our prayers in a way that will be pleasing to us. Jews and Gentiles alike are all children of God through faith so we all can approach God in prayer. That is how powerful the gospel is—that sinners can approach the holy God!

The gospel works; it's as simple as that. It was Paul's ministry to spread the gospel among the Gentiles. Paul is no longer here; he is in heaven. That is where you and I come in. As Paul writes about the Lord, **His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.** Through faith in Christ, we are the Church. So we do whatever we can—whether it is through our offerings, by sharing the gospel with someone we know, or simply inviting them to worship—we do whatever we can to spread the gospel among all nations.

We do this so that the mystery of Christ may be revealed to people of all nations. That more and more people may believe in Christ as their one and only Savior. So that more and more people may join the all the believing Jews, The Queen of Sheba, the Magi, you and me, and every other believer in heaven with our Savior forever!

When the mystery of a magic trick is revealed you most likely have a feeling of disappointment and maybe even a little anger because of the deceptive methods used. Not so with the mystery that is revealed today. Instead of it being magic, it is very much real and yet far more spectacular. By his mighty power working through the gospel, the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith; he has made you his heir, a member of his body, and a sharer of his gracious promises, including his promise of forgiveness and eternal life. Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ. There is no disappointment, no being let-down; simply rejoicing in the grace of our Lord. And so as Paul was a minister to the Gentiles, may we serve the gospel by sharing it with others. Amen.