

## **Ephesians 3:2-12**

<sup>2</sup>Surely you have heard of the administration of God's grace given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation (as I have already written briefly). <sup>4</sup>When you read this, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. <sup>5</sup>This mystery was not made known to people in past generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup>This mystery is that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and people who also share in the promise through the gospel.

<sup>7</sup>I became a servant of this gospel, in keeping with the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup>To me—even though I am the very least of all the saints—was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ <sup>9</sup>and to enlighten everyone about the administration of this mystery. In past ages this mystery remained hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup>He did this so that, through the church, the multifaceted wisdom of God in the heavenly places might now be made known to the rulers and authorities. <sup>11</sup>This was done according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup>In him we can freely approach God with confidence through faith in him.

## **Mystery Unraveled**

### **I.**

The Children of Israel must have thought of God and his promises as mysterious. Abraham was given the promise of a Messiah to come, through whom God promised that he would bless all nations, but God gave no further details of how or when this would come to pass. The message of God's promise was passed down by word of mouth only for centuries. It was very mysterious.

God's mysterious promises began to take shape with the arrival of Moses on the scene. The people could see some evidence of their powerful, mysterious God with the plagues God brought to the Egyptians by the hand of Moses.

As the people left Egypt to set out toward the Promised Land, God's mysterious power became even more evident to the people. The seas parted in front of them to allow them to pass through on dry ground. Manna fell from the heavens and water poured out of a rock to bring food and water to the people in the wilderness. At the Mountain of God they saw thick clouds cover the mountain and lightning flash and thunder crash in unnatural ways; and they heard the very voice of God as he spoke to Moses.

The people recognized that their sin made it necessary to have a mediator. Moses had to go into the presence of God to speak with God, because none of them were worthy to come into his presence.

The mystery deepened as Moses received from God the Ceremonial Law, which would govern the worship of the People of Israel for many centuries to come. All of Israel's worship was to point ahead to the Messiah, but even much of their worship kept God shrouded in mystery.

The Ark of the Covenant was the holiest object in Israel's worship, for above the Ark hovered the presence of God. There God dwelled with his people. No one is worthy to enter the presence of God, so the Ark was kept behind a curtain in the tabernacle—and later the temple—where most of the people could never see it.

As the mediator of the people, the High Priest was allowed to go in to the Most Holy Place once a year. Before he could enter the presence of God, sacrifices must be made,

because his sin still separated him from God. Before he went in, an incense burner was shoved in, so that smoke would fill the room and obscure the Ark from his vision, because he was still not worthy to see God.

All of Old Testament worship pointed ahead to the coming Messiah. But the whole thing was very mysterious.

## II.

The curtain that separated worshipers from God's presence hovering over the Ark reminded them of their sin. Sin separates from God. That has always been the problem. From the time Adam and Eve plucked the fruit seeking to be wise like God, sin has always been the problem.

Does not *your* sin separate you from God, too?

In our lesson, Paul calls God's wisdom: "The multifaceted wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10, EHV). Just like a finely-cut gemstone, God's wisdom has many facets—many sides. God's wisdom is boundless—it is beyond our comprehension.

All too often we human beings tout our own wisdom ahead of the wisdom of God. We insist that God bend *his* decisions to fit our will, and in so doing we stretch for the same forbidden fruit that tempted Adam and Eve. Our own wisdom carries us away and we believe that *we* are wiser than God. All sin comes right down to that, doesn't it? Every time we sin we elevate ourselves above God and his wisdom.

Every sin is the sin of placing someone or something above God. Every sin creates false gods, just like the Golden Calf the Israelites fashioned out of their own wisdom.

And so God kept things shrouded in mystery, until he would bring his grand plan to fruition. It was all part of his multifaceted wisdom, a wisdom they could not understand.

## III.

As the years rolled on, God gave more and more information about the coming Messiah—where he would be born, names by which he would be called, and so on. But the mystery continued. The mystery deepened. The things they learned really only made the puzzle harder to understand.

Finally came the big reveal. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just as the prophets had foretold. Jesus lived a perfect life to prepare himself to be the ultimate sacrifice needed to cover our sins of thinking we have wisdom above that of God.

Eventually, Jesus went to the cross. From the cross he cried out: "It is finished!" (John 19:30, EHV). When he died, "The temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51, EHV). That curtain was the very curtain that had cut off the Most Holy Place from all but the High Priest for all those centuries. There was no longer a need for mystery.

Mystery unraveled. Jesus' death on the cross paid for all the misdeeds of everyone for all time. All the things that make us unholy and separate us from God. All the things that made it necessary for the people to *have* a High Priest who would bring their prayers and petitions to God for them. All the things that prevented people from being able to speak to God themselves.

"In him we can freely approach God with confidence through faith in him" (Ephesians 3:12, EHV). Jesus opened the way for the people of God to enter the presence of God unrestricted. There was no longer a need for a Ceremonial Law to govern worship life as people looked ahead to the promised Messiah. He had come. He had done what is necessary to restore mankind's relationship with God.

But wait, there's more. January 6<sup>th</sup> is the festival of the Epiphany in the Christian

Church. Epiphany is the day the church commemorates the Wise Men, or Magi, coming to Bethlehem to worship the Christ Child. The Wise Men were Gentiles, that is, non-Jews. Epiphany is the day we commemorate the mystery unraveled.

“This mystery is that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and people who also share in the promise through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6, EHV). Though the Jews were called God’s Chosen People, they *did* understand that Gentiles—non-Jews—could be believers in the true God. After all, the promise to Abraham said that *all* peoples would be blessed through this coming Messiah. There was even a place in the temple area for Gentiles to worship. But Gentiles were always assigned a lower place by the Jewish people. Gentiles were always considered a lower class of believers.

The mystery unraveled is more than the idea that the Messiah came to pay for the sins of Gentiles as well as Jews. The mystery unraveled is that Gentiles are no longer to be considered inferior believers. They are not to be shunted to the side or restricted to a different area for worship.

Gentiles are “fellow heirs.” That means that non-Jews inherit the same blessings from the Heavenly Father that Jews do. The blessings and promises that can only be found in the Messiah belong to both Jew and Gentile believers—the blessings of forgiveness of sins, everlasting life with Jesus in heaven, because of the salvation he won for all on the cross. Paul says: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16, EHV). The message of what Jesus has done is universal—it is there for all. Believe it, it is true, and you have the blessings of life in heaven with Jesus because your sins are forgiven.

#### IV.

<sup>8</sup>To me...was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ <sup>9</sup>and to enlighten everyone about the administration of this mystery. In past ages this mystery remained hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup>He did this so that, through the church, the multifaceted wisdom of God in the heavenly places might now be made known to the rulers and authorities (Ephesians 3:8-10, EHV).

The multifaceted wisdom of God is revealed in what Christ did for all people. Paul calls our salvation in Jesus “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

There are things in God’s Word that we will never fully understand on this side of heaven. Yet believers are given the privilege of sharing the message of the gospel—the message that Jesus has ripped the curtain that separated us from God in two. He has ripped in two the curtain that separated one class of believers from another and has made all of us members of the same body of Christ.

Some still don’t know the gospel. Paul rejoiced in the opportunity God had given him to be the messenger to the Gentiles. He had the privilege to show them how the mystery had been unraveled.

That privilege has been extended to Christ’s Church on earth. The sole reason we exist as a Christian congregation is to share this mystery unraveled with more and more people.

“In him we can freely approach God with confidence through faith in him” (Ephesians 3:12, EHV). We have unfettered access to the throne of God to bring our prayers and petitions to God with no mediator other than our Lord Jesus. Pray that he would use our lips and our lives to unravel the mystery for others. Amen.