

CHAPTER 3:1-13

Paul concludes his teaching on the people of God, those who “are near” (Jews) and those who are “far off” (Gentiles), are made from two peoples into one people in Christ, because of the blood of Jesus, by the working of the Holy Spirit and is now transitioning to a discussion of the gospel.

Specifically, the *mystery* of the gospel.

We have talked about the gospel before – the *good news* – that though we were dead in our sin, that though we were enemies of God, that though we hated Him and ran from Him, that He, because of His great love with which He loved us, saved us by His grace. The *good news* is that God defeated sin, Satan, and death through His Son on the cross and has sealed His people for eternity with His Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:1–4 (1) There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (3) For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, (4) in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (ESV)

And now that Paul has given us this *good news*, he shifts focus a little bit...still talking about the good news, but a different aspect of it...a scandalous aspect of it.

The *mystery* of this good news.

Remember the time this letter was written. Remember the *wall of hostility* that Paul talked about in the previous chapter. Remember the *to people* who have been made *one person*.

Remembering those things will help you to see why the *mystery* of the gospel was at that time, both mysterious and scandalous.

1. Ephesians 3:1 starts with “For this reason...” which is pretty much the same thing as a *therefore*.
 - a. What is the “for this reason” referring to?
 - b. Why do you suppose Paul would refer to that as he starts teaching about the “mystery of the gospel”?
2. In verses 1-3, Paul describes himself in a few different ways
 - a. In verse 1, what does Paul call himself and how does that inform your idea of “freedom”?
 - b. In verses 2 and 3, what does Paul call himself and what is entrusted to him?
 - i. Why was it given to him?
 - ii. How was it made known to him?
 - iii. What does that tell you about the value of the thing given to him?
 - iv. Paul says that he has written about this before
 1. Paul’s writings: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Galatians 1:11-16
 2. Luke’s account of Paul’s story: Acts 9:3-19, Acts 22:6-21, Acts 26:12-18
3. In verse 4 and 5, Paul again uses the term *mystery*. Even though we won’t find out what this mystery is until verse 6, think about the context of that word, and answer these questions as if you don’t know what the mystery is...

- a. Look up and define mystery. Why would Paul use that word here to describe something he has already told us about?
 - b. Read Colossians 1:24-29. Write down the similarities between that passage and Ephesians 3:4-5.
 - c. To whom was this mystery NOT made known? Why?
 - d. To whom was it made known? Why? (see Ephesians 2:19-20)
 - e. Who grants understanding of this mystery?
 - f. What implications does that have for you as you enter into an unbelieving, hostile world with the gospel?
4. In verse 6, Paul finally defines what this mystery is
- a. What is this mystery?
 - b. Why would this have been scandalous?
 - c. What comfort or encouragement could his readers at the time gotten from him using the word *mystery*?
 - d. Compare verse 6 with Ephesians 2:12-13; 18-19. Paul uses a specific word that he has not yet used to describe the people included in the community created by the gospel. What is that word?
 - i. Read Galatians 3:23-29, Romans 9:6-8; 30-33
 - ii. Why would this have been even more scandalous than when Paul said in Ephesians 2:11-22?
 - iii. How is the relationship specified by the word we see here even better than how Paul has described it to this point?
5. In verses 7-9, Paul tells us his mission
- a. What is his mission? To whom?
 - b. How was he put on this mission?
 - c. Who called him to it?
 - d. Compare the first verses of all of Paul's letters (Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1, Titus 1:1-3, Philemon 1:1). What stands out to you? How often does Paul tell his readers how he was sent on this mission of his?
 - e. Paul uses the word *gift* to describe his mission. Do you see your mission as a gift?
 - f. Paul also uses the word *grace*. Why is it important that Paul sees his mission as being a *gift of grace*? (verse 8 can help)
 - g. How does Paul consider himself in relation to "the other saints"? Why? (Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-11)
 - h. Why does Paul refer to the gospel as a mystery "hidden for ages in God"? (Read Colossians 1:24-29)
6. In verse 10, Paul tells us the purpose of his mission.
- a. He uses the word *church*. What is the church?
 - b. Who is God using to proclaim the victory found in the gospel?
 - c. What is God's purpose for the proclamation of the gospel?
 - d. Now do you see why that no matter how this news is received, it is good?
7. In verse 11, Paul gives us a glimpse into the mind of God regarding the gospel
- a. The gospel is *purposeful*. Look up the word purpose.
 - b. When was the gospel *purposed*? Was it a reaction or a plan?
 - c. How is this purpose realized (made effectual)?
8. Finally, in verses 12 and 13, Paul reminds us of the hope we have in the gospel
- a. List some encouraging words from verses 12 and 13

- b. What is the only way we can claim to have this hope?
- c. How is Paul's suffering related to our glory?

The hope we have in the gospel is not some nebulous hope. Not some "I hope the Cowboys win the Super Bowl" kind of hope. No...biblical hope is looking forward to receiving a promise that is guaranteed. Note the difference in the way the word *hope* is used in the following sentences:

- 1. I find hope in the gospel because my inheritance is guaranteed.
- 2. I sure hope the gospel is true so I can get my inheritance.

Worldly hope is like the second sentence – unsure, wishful.

Biblical hope is based in the promises of God – solid, firm, guaranteed.

Such hope should drive our lives to something better. If we are found *in Christ*, we *know* with certainty that God is guiding and guarding us, that He is holding our inheritance for us. And because of that, we not only *can*, but we *should* and *must*, approach this world with the boldness and confidence that Paul talks about in the closing verses of this passage, *even if we suffer for it*.

2 Corinthians 1:3–7 (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, (4) who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (5) For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (6) If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. (7) Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (ESV)

Our hope is not blind, it is not lazy. Paul bases his hope in the gospel. The gospel that doesn't just make salvation possible...no...the gospel that actually accomplishes salvation for His people, even when they were at enmity with Him, were running from Him, were blind and deaf and dead towards Him.

This gospel, this good news, that God has won, that we who were once far off are now near having been raised from death to life, and having been adopted into His family, having been made heirs...even counted as sons...all by God, through God, and for God, is all to the praise of His wondrous grace!

And we benefit.

It reminds me of the song we sing during worship sometimes...

*Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom.
- How Deep the Father's Love for Us (Stewart Townend)*

I should not gain from His reward. But I do. Why?

Because His wounds have paid my ransom.

This is the gospel - that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And his death and resurrection accomplished the salvation of His people.

Eternally.

The mystery of the gospel is that, from eternity past, it was never about who your earthly descendants were. It has always been about, not who your earthly father is, but who your heavenly father is. Jews and Gentiles both are promised the inheritance (made heirs) only if God is their father.

The scandal of grace, the scandal of the Gospel, is that it removes boasting of all kinds. It is by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, as revealed in Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

How often do we show up in that?

Yeah...nowhere.

The only thing we bring to salvation is the sin that makes it necessary.

And we are all sinners.

If there is no room at the cross for the worst of humanity, there is no room for any of us either.

Evan as Paul says of himself ...

Romans 7:21–24 (21)** So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. **(22)** For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, **(23)** but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. **(24)** Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **(ESV)

... he immediately proclaims ...

Romans 7:25–8:4 (25)** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. **(1)** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **(2)** For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **(3)** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **(4)** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **(ESV)

Thanks be to God indeed!