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Epistle to the Ephesians: The Mystery of Christ Revealed (3.1-6)

- Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church
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Sources:

James M. Boice, Ephesians, 94-100

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Unsearchable Riches of Christ, 39 - 51

Matthew Henry's Commentaries, 696-697

For further reading:

Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians

1. THE PRICE TO PAY (VERSE 1)
 - a. Paul, the Prisoner of Jesus Christ
 - i. He was in prison for the cause of Christ
 - ii. He was a prison because he preached that the Gentiles are now one with the Jews
 - iii. Cf. Acts 21.28ff
 - (1) The apostle's 3rd missionary journey
 - (2) Trouble began when the Jews from Asia saw Paul at the temple and they stirred up the people and took hold of him
 - (3) They charged him of "teaching all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place" & "brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place" (v28)
 - (4) And he was imprisoned
 - iv. He was imprisoned for preaching and teaching that the Gentiles share the same salvation blessings with the Jews
 - (1) The Jews maintained that salvation is only for the Jews
 - (2) The Jews considered the Gentiles as dogs and outside of God's blessings
 - (3) It is for this reason that he was imprisoned - for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles
 - b. Verses 2 - 13 a long digression or parenthesis¹
 - i. The content
 - (1) He gives an account of his own ministry - his calling and office as an explanation of his imprisonment
 - (a) He calls the gospel the grace of God because it is the gift of divine grace because it is the gift of divine grace to sinful men (Matthew Henry)
 - (b) He was authorised and commissioned by God to dispense the gospel chiefly to the Gentiles
 - (i) God called him and qualified him for office by a special revelation
 - (ii) This is the privilege of prophets

- (c) That as a minister of Christ he has been given a mystery by direct revelation
 - (i) Which was now revealed not as before by the Spirit
 - (ii) That the Gentiles should be made fellow heirs, fellow members and fellow partakers with the Jews
- (d) He views himself as least among all the saints
- (e) God has enabled him by His grace to the Gentiles to proclaim the unsearchable riches of the gospel
- (2) And its great object and purpose
 - (a) To make plain to all men the meaning of that fellowship of the mystery kept hidden since the beginning of this world
 - (b) That all the principalities and powers should now see the wisdom of God's plan being worked out through the church according to God's purpose in Jesus Christ
 - (c) In Christ we have boldness to enter into his presence with confidence by faith
- ii. The point of the digression (v13) - that the Ephesians do not lose heart at the apostles's suffering

2. THE MYSTERY REVEALED (v6)

- a. What is a "mystery" in the Scriptures?
 - i. The word, "mystery" is an important word; mentioned 6x in whole book
 - ii. "Mystery is not vague or indefinite, hazy, something which really cannot be defined at all, a form of mysticism" (Lloyd-Jones)
 - iii. The word "Mystery" in Greek.
 - (1) In Greek, this word refers to something only to the initiated. It is not that the thing itself is unknown. It is known - but only to those to whom it is revealed.
 - (2) The word used of the ancient mystery religions - the mysteries of Mirthrea, Isis and Osiris. People in general did not know what went on in these religious cults, but the "mysteries" were revealed to the initiates" (Boice)
 - iv. "Mystery is a truth because of its character, can never be attained unto, or arrived at, by the unaided human intellect or by mere human ability. The thing itself is clear but because man is what he is - finite and sinful - he cannot by his own unaided intellect arrive at it or understand it" (Boice)
- b. Mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6.19)
- c. Mystery of godliness (I Tim. 3.16)
 - i. That Jesus Christ is come in the flesh for us
 - ii. He came on behalf of sinners
 - iii. He died for our sins
 - iv. He gave us living hope in Him
- d. Particular Mystery

- i. What is the mystery? “The 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 (Eph. 3.2-6) or “the Gentiles should be made partakers along with the Jews of God’s greatest blessings in the church” (Boice)
- ii. “Three parallel composite expressions” (Boice)
 - (1) That the Gentiles should be “Fellow Heirs Together with Israel”
 - (a) Means that all the promises God had made to the Jews in the OT are now open to the Gentiles
 - (b) The Gentile is equal to the Jew
 - (i) The same place in God’s will
 - (ii) Receive the same benefits - the new covenant
 - (2) That the Gentiles should be “Fellow Members Together of One Body”
 - (a) A servant has become a son
 - (b) A stranger has become a citizen
 - (c) No more distinctions between Jews and Gentiles: no superiority and no inferiority
 - (3) That the Gentiles should be “Fellow Partakers Together in the Promise in Christ Jesus”

3. APPLICATION

- a. Pray for your pastors as they are obligated to preach the whole counsel of God
 - i. Not to hide it because others do not like to hear it or offensive
 - ii. The apostle could have prevented going to prison if he did not preach the mystery of Christ to the Gentiles
 - (1) He would be popular with the Jews
 - (2) God will be displeased with him for being unfaithful to his commission as a minister of God
 - iii. But be faithful to God’s truth
- b. We should preach or witness the gospel to all men
 - i. Even to those we may think that they are unlikely to believe or will not believe
 - ii. The gospel is not the monopoly of any one race

The Next Time: This mystery which is also called the unsearchable riches of Christ is given to the apostle Paul to preach to the Gentiles (v7)

¹A word or phrase inserted as an explanation or an afterthought