



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians

Chapter 3

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Introduction

- In Chapter 1, St. Paul explained the blessings that we received being in God's family (the Church)
- In Chapter 2, he explains the transition into God's family
- The objectives of chapter 3 are:
 - To understand the "mystery" so long hidden that is now revealed, and the role of the church
 - St. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians' enablement

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- St. Paul's thought is interrupted by verses 2 to 13.
- Verse 14 is a continuation of verse 1, with verses 2 to 13 in parentheses
- St. Paul is saying that because of the previous statements, he has cause to bow his knees in prayer for the Gentiles

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- So he begins this section with the intention of praying, but he pauses to write about two other subjects: the "mystery", and the "ministry"
- In this verse, St. Paul refers to his status as a prisoner - he wrote this epistle when he was incarcerated in Rome

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- "If you have heard" - this is one of the most important phrases in the Christian life
- God gave to St. Paul the knowledge of His grace so that St. Paul could communicate it to people
- St. Paul is saying, "If you have heard and understood the basic features of the grace of God that I have communicated to you before, you will be able to understand which I am about to describe and not to lose heart at my tribulations."

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- “By revelation he made known unto me” - the Lord communicated His thinking directly to St. Paul
- The first instance was during his desert experience shortly after his conversion
- The second was during his writing of the inspired epistles, during which the Holy Spirit was involved in communicating the "mind of Christ" so that St. Paul could communicate divine viewpoint accurately

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- The word "mystery" in the New Testament refers to the doctrine which is specific for the Church Age
- "As I have briefly written already" he refers to what he had already written earlier in the letter (chapter 2), namely that the Gentiles and the Jews were to be included in one Body and in the household of God

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- By which (what I wrote), when you read, you may understand my knowledge (that I will communicate to you regarding) in the mystery of Christ
- The importance of reading as well as hearing (v. 2)
- Christians must have the ability to understand. And understanding comes from "reading"

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- “In other ages“ This is another reference to the fact that many features of the Christian life, known as "mystery" doctrines, were not made known to people prior to the beginning of the New Testament church
- But now, God is making additional revelation available through the communicators of the inspired Scriptures

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- The Mystery: That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel
- St. Paul became a servant and a minister to this mystery
- “According to the gift of grace” i.e. there is no merit involved in St. Paul's becoming a minister

The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)



- If a minister is successful, it is because of who and what God is, not who and what he is
- The operating power for the ministry comes from the very omnipotence of God Himself!
- This verse takes the ministry out of the scope of the pastor's personality

The Purpose of the Mystery (3:8-13)



- “To me, who am less than the least of all saints, this grace was given” St. Paul refers to his gift of teaching
- He emphasizes that he is the product of God's grace, and he fully understands that, of all people, he is one of the least worthy to receive anything good from the Father

The Purpose of the Mystery (3:8-13)



- This gift of teaching was given to him to teach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ
- And to make all me see the fellowship of the mystery (fellowship with God, with one another, and with oneself.)
- Created all things including the new body of the Church

The Purpose of the Mystery (3:8-13)



- And to make known to the heavenly powers, by the church (when they see the mystery fulfilled in the Church), the manifold wisdom of God (St. Cyril Liturgy)
- The angels - whether they be fallen like the devil or heavenly - learn more about God through His interaction with mankind

The Purpose of the Mystery (3:8-13)



- We are part of an eternal, comprehensive program which God is accomplishing by means of Jesus Christ
- Everything that happens in the Plan of God and in the Christian life occurs "in Christ"
- By faith in Christ we have boldness, access, and confidence

The Purpose of the Mystery (3:8-13)



- There was no need for the Ephesians to be upset at what St. Paul was going through (his imprisonment)
- The better they understood this mystery, the less they would give way to weakness and discouragement
- Suffering is the way to glory

St. Paul's Second Prayer (3:14-21)



- In view of God's grace to the Gentiles, St. Paul bows his knees in prayer
- He addresses the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named
- The concept of the church as the family of God is in his mind while praying

St. Paul's Second Prayer (3:14-21)



- The first petition is that they would be strengthened with might in the inner man by the Spirit of God according to the riches of His glory (development of the faith)
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to teach us spiritual truth, to make spiritual things understandable
- The filling and control of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for this to take place

St. Paul's Second Prayer (3:14-21)



- The second petition is that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith (Revelation of God)
- When the person is strengthened by the spirit, he will become a place of rest for Christ
- When the person is filled with the Spirit and having Christ in the heart, he will be rooted and grounded in love

St. Paul's Second Prayer (3:14-21)



- The third petition is that they might comprehend the width, the length, the depth, and the height (enlightenment)
- To comprehend all the TRUTH (the mystery of the Cross - the love of Christ which passes knowledge)
- This enlightenment happens with all the saints (i.e. through the church)

St. Paul's Second Prayer (3:14-21)



- The fourth petition is to be filled with all the fullness of God (Transformation)
- This means to grow into the likeness of God
- Growing in faith → revelation of God → enlightenment → transformation

St. Paul's Second Prayer (3:14-21)



- God is able to do what we cannot do, beyond anything that we can imagine
- God's work to us is not according to our prayer or understanding but according to the power of the Holy Spirit working in us
- Glory to God, in the church (by executing His plan)! by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, from now until eternal ages, even beyond the end of time itself



Conclusion

- What is the Mystery?
- What is the focus of the ministry?
- What are the stages of the transformation?
- What are the four petitions of St. Paul?