

Ephesians 3:1-6, Part 2

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The biggest scandal of the New Testament was that by faith, those who were not the covenant people of God, those who were not the keepers of the law, were nevertheless by faith given all of the inheritance that God's people were given.

Assuming—verse two, again—that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me, for you, verse three, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation. So here, we'll stop here for a little while. And this will be the bulk of what we say today. This mystery that was given to me by revelation, so we see that word mystery. Maybe our ears sort of perk up, you probably have a subheading at the top of this section of your Bible that says probably something to the effect of the 'Mystery of the Gospel Revealed,' something like that. So we hear that word mystery, sort of gets our attention, because we like mysteries. mysteries are fun to read, fun to watch on TV and movies and that sort of thing. But when the New Testament talks about a mystery, it's talking about something categorically different than what we understand as a mystery in our present culture. Today, we think of a mystery as something that we don't know. But we got to figure it out, right?

So think: Agatha Christie, think Colombo, right? There's something that you don't know, but you got to sort of figure it out. And it's to coin a word here figure-out-able. That's the modern concept of a mystery. When the New Testament uses the word mystery, and it uses it frequently, 21 times in the New Testament, almost all of those by Paul, six times in Ephesians. When the New Testament talks about a mystery, it's not at all talking about something that is unknown, that you need to figure out. Instead is talking about something that was previously unknown, and could never have been figured out. But God has now told us. That is the definition: the understanding of mystery in the New Testament, something some truth of God that you couldn't know. You could never figure it out. But God has now shown it to us. So the scriptures will talk about a lot of mysteries that have now been revealed to us. The New Testament gonna talk about, for example, the mystery of how Christ was incarnated into Man. So that's something that the Old Testament saints didn't—there was no understanding in the Old Testament of the Incarnation of Christ. That was a mystery that was revealed in the New Testament, or, for example, the permanent, full indwelling of the believer by the spirit that also was something that was not understood in the Old Covenant scriptures, but was made plain, it was revealed in the New Covenant. So we've got a lot of these mysteries that come in the New Testament—things that are truths of God realities of God, we never could have known these things, but God has now revealed them.

So you see here the connection between 'mystery' and 'been revealed' or 'revelation.' Those two concepts always go together, they must go together, because neither one of them make sense without the other. So if there's a mystery, by definition, by New Testament definition, that mystery has been

revealed, if it's if it hasn't been revealed, it's not a mystery. It's just an unknown. So the revelation, the revealing, and the mystery are two things that must go hand in hand, if there's a mystery, there's also a revelation. If there's been a revelation, then there's a mystery.

So we see here, Paul says that there's this mystery how the mystery was made known to me, by way of Revelation. So let's think about this mystery that he's now going to talk about what is this mystery that was once unknown that has now been made known how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly now, I'm going to take 'that I have written briefly,' I'm going to take that to mean, what he said earlier in the letter. Some people speculate maybe there was another letter that he had written to the church in Ephesus, I think, undoubtedly, there were many other letters that he wrote. But I don't necessarily think that's what he's talking about. I think he's talking about what he said earlier. We'll talk more about that next week.

As I've written to you briefly, verse four, when you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of man and other generations, it has been revealed to me by His Holy, (I'm sorry), it has been now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. So there's affirmation there of the definition that we just mentioned that this this mystery is a thing that we couldn't know, but has now been revealed. Paul just stated that much right there that God has now revealed this to his apostles and prophets, and the revelation has come by the Spirit. Always, revelation always comes by the Spirit. The Spirit is the instrument of revelation. The Spirit is the person of the Godhead that does the revealing. So this revealing has come by way of the Spirit.

Now verse six is going to tell us what the mystery is: This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs are members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. So that's the mystery. It shouldn't surprise us, because he's already told us this. In fact, that's been the theme of the letter. Remember, all those times we talked about the pronouns? Paul says, we were the people of promise, we were the ones who received the Scriptures, this was our inheritance. "But you, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believe you two were sealed with the same spirit, the same promise the same inheritance." And this really was the theme, especially the theme of the second half of chapter two that we talked about last week.

So this shouldn't surprise us. But at the same time, we don't yet have a good grasp of what Paul is saying to us yet. So that's how we're going to spend our time this morning is just to really understand this profound mystery. This mystery that the Gentiles are complete, full heirs with the Jews, the believing Jews in the kingdom of God.

So just one quick thing here to say about the word revelation. This word—revelation, apocalypsin in the Greek, from apocalipsis—we know we know that word. So this word, the cultural context of revealing, or revelation, the Hebrew cultural context of that word, is the context of a Jewish wedding. You may not have heard this before. But that's, that's what it was called. There was the revealing, there was the revealing in a Jewish wedding and you know, what the revealing was?

Yeah, it was the veil being lifted. So that was called the revealing. So do you know when the veil was lifted? You might not. We lift the veil...when the thing's done, don't we? At the end, you know, now pronounce you man and wife, and you lift the veil to then reveal the bride or, or present the bride.

In a Jewish wedding that revealing doesn't take place at the end of the ceremony, the revealing takes place at the beginning. Can anybody take a guess why. If you think about this, if you know your Bible, and you think about it, you can figure it out. Rachel and Leah, Leah and Jacob remember the whole wedding thing? I mean, that's a pretty darn good reason to change your your wedding chronology there, right? That whole story about Jacob and how he worked for seven years for Rachel. And then there was the swap. And he lifts the veil and goes, No, this wasn't what I thought I was getting into!

So after that, there developed the custom that they were going to lift the veil at the beginning. And we all in the room see exactly why, right? So that was the custom that a Jewish wedding there was this revealing. And the revealing was done at the beginning so that the two people being married, knew who they were married. You see the connection? There's a wedding coming. And we are the bride. And there's a Bridegroom. And there's a revealing of who we are prior to the ceremony. So there's this beautiful connection. So whenever Paul is going to use this word revelation, it might not be something at the front of his mind. But in the back of his mind, he is a Jew. And he has this cultural context in his mind. Now you do, too. Every time you read that story of Jacob and Leah, you can think Jesus knows me. Jesus knows me, not like Jacob didn't know who he was getting. Jesus knows who's he who he's getting. And he has revealed me to him.

So this cultural context was always in the back of Paul's mind. John will use the word of course, about four times in the Revelation, it's always in the back of their mind, this context of there's a bride and a Bridegroom, and there's a revealing. So this mystery that's revealed is also along the same lines, it's a revealing of who the bride is. And this is the mystery of who the bride is—the bride, verse six, is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

So this, again, has been the theme all along. We could go look back at chapter one, verse nine and 10, where Paul says, you know, that he made known to this mystery of his will according to His purpose, which is set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to do what unite all things in him things in heaven and things on Earth. So now that's making even more sense to us as we see how this is the mystery. This is the point. This is the whole crux of the matter is that all things are being united in Christ. But specifically, this New Humanity is being united in Christ, the new man, from the old man, the new man, the New Humanity, who are the believing Gentiles in the believing Jews who aren't just entering into this relationship of friendship. They're not just entering into this relationship in which they get along. Now, you know, you don't go to the, to the, to this church that Paul's writing to, and the Jews sit on one side and the Gentiles sit on the other, but they all sort of get along. That's not what Paul's talking about. What Paul's talking about is there is a New Man, a New Humanity, that's now one. And this is how Christ has brought together his bride. That's the mystery that he's talking about here.

So this is what has not been seen, not been understood, not been understood, (sorry), prior to, of course, the age of the New Testament church when this is revealed, and Paul now reveals it here. This is in true form, the mystery that was not known prior.

So let's just think carefully about what it is what it was that the Jewish believers believed about Gentiles prior to the revealing of this mystery. Sometimes we can, I think, oversimplify how it was that Old Testament Jews thought of Gentiles. And we can kind of oversimplify that by saying, you know that the Jews didn't believe that the Gentiles can be saved, they weren't the people of God were the people of God. And it's really an oversimplification of how they understood the Gentile world, because God had revealed to them a number of truths that told them without mistake, that the Gentiles, in fact, could have a place in the Kingdom of God, and could be part of God's people. However, that revelation to God's people in the Old Covenant was incomplete.

And it was not full, we should say, but we understand that God began in Genesis four times there in Genesis to tell as he's speaking of his covenant, that there will come blessing to all people by way of the descendants of Abraham, by way of the people, the people, the Hebrew people, the Jewish people, their descendants, by way of their descendants, all people will be blessed, all nations will be blessed. So they at least first of all understood that God somehow had in mind a blessing for the Gentiles, by way of the Jewish people. So they understood at least that much God made that plain four times to them. But then they also understood that the Gentiles would in some way, they would come to a place of blessing God of acknowledging God, of in fact, blessing God. We won't go back to talk about how we talked about 'blessing God' back in chapter one, verse three. But suffice to say that blessing God has more to do than just acknowledging God—blessing God speaks of a heart, that's glad that he's God. That is praising Him that He is God, right?

And so the Gentiles will have that heart, Psalm 72, in verse 17, "May people be blessed in him, all nations, call him blessed."

We see, furthermore, that there was an understanding in the Old Testament Scriptures that the Messiah would be the One that would, in some way, bring salvation to the Gentiles. Look at Isaiah 49, it's a well known passage, Isaiah 49, God says, God, the Father says to God the Son, "It's too light of a thing, that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserve of Israel, I will make you as a light for the nations." Now, light is a metaphor for salvation. And so in some way, God the Father is saying to the God the Son, you will be a saving...a saving event. And maybe I should use that word, you this saving event for the Gentiles in some way you will be made a light for the nations, a light for the Gentiles. Or take a look at this: Isaiah chapter 60." And nations shall come to Your light."

So in some way, there was this Old Testament understanding that Messiah would also be the vehicle for salvation to come to the Gentiles as well. Then we see in Joel chapter two and verse 28. We're all familiar with this one because Peter quoted this after the Pentecost event, in which Joel prophesies that God says, I will put My Spirit I will pour my spirit out upon not just believing Jews, but all people, all nations, Gentiles, will be the ones upon whom I pour out My Spirit.

So that's some information that an Old Testament Saint would have known about the Gentiles as they relate to salvation, as they relate to becoming a people of God. We also know that there were examples remember, of course, Rahab, or you remember, Ruth, both of those were Gentiles who were in incorporated into the people of God.

So, there was precedent that the Jews could understand that just being a Gentile did not mean that you were untouchable, that you were unsavable. But in fact, God did not care about you at all. But instead, there was this definite understanding that you were on God's radar. And God does have a way of salvation. And that way of salvation has something to do with Messiah. But that's all that was understood.

So now this mystery comes and is revealed to Paul, and the mystery that's unreal, this revealed to him was not, of course revealed until the time of the New Testament Church and the revelation of the mystery, the unfolding of the mystery is that: not just will Gentiles be saved, but that they will by faith, and here's the kicker, this is the crux of the whole matter. This is where the spiritual rubber meets the road. The crux is: not only will they be saved, but by faith, they will have the full place in the kingdom right alongside you. That's what stuck in their craw.

In fact, that was the greatest scandal of the New Testament. The New Testament also, of course, knows of the scandal of a Messiah who suffered and died. And that was scandalous. And certainly, that was a stumbling block for a lot of people. Paul talks about that to the Corinthians, he talks about that to the Galatians, the stumbling block of how our Savior was made to be a curse.

However, that was not the biggest stumbling block. That was not the biggest scandal. The biggest scandal of the New Testament was that by faith, those who were not the covenant people of God, those who were not the recipients of the scriptures, those who were not the keepers of the law, those who were not the givers of the sacrifice, those who were not the guardians of the tabernacle in the temple, those who were not the people to whom the prophets came, those who were not the people to whom the Messiah came—were nevertheless, by faith, given all of the inheritance that God's people were given.

Now, let me just show you from the Scriptures how it is that we can be confident that that was, that was what rocked the boat. We remember of course, the story from...remember Stephen, let me start with Stephen. So Stephen—Acts chapter seven—they're about to stone him, and He gives that long sermon basically takes up most all chapter seven. And have you ever looked at Stephen's sermon and tried to follow his train of thought, what Stevens point, it's kind of a hard one to follow, because it kind of sounds like, well, it kind of sounds like he's stalling for time. I've read that before and thought, kind of sounds like he's, he's going to this long history of God's people. So it sounds like he's stalling for time. Actually, what Stephen is doing is he is delivering a poignant sermon. And the point of that sermon is: God's work is not only in the land of Israel. God's work has been outside the land of Israel, more than it's been inside the land of Israel. That's the whole point of his sermon. I won't go through it all, but that's what, that's what, that's what Steven is saying. And remember the reaction when Peter concludes, and he says, You stiff-necked people, you never understand that God is not confined to the

Temple. They get his point. His point is, God loves Gentiles. And they grind their teeth. And they're so enraged that they kill him with rocks.

So that's the story of Steven. But then fast forward a couple of chapters. Now the story of Peter, we're talking about Peter last week in Acts chapter 10, the vision of the sheet comes down, there's the unclean animals, right. Ten years after Pentecost, not a single Gentile convert in the church, still made up of only a believing Jews. And so here's Peter, and the sheet comes down to the unclean animals three times, Peter gets it. Peter understands this is telling me to go to the Gentiles. And so right then, you know, there's a knock on the door, and there what do you know, God set this up? Like he always does. And there's the people there this envoy from Cornelius, the Gentile Centurion, who believes in YAHWAH. And he sent word he says, "His angel told me to come and fetch you." And so Peter gets some other witnesses, some other Jewish witnesses and it goes to Cornelius his house and remember what happens when it gets there. He opens the door. And Peter says, You will know how illegal it is for me to step foot in there, you will know that I cannot step foot in there, because we're not on the same spiritual footing. Nevertheless, God has shown me that within God, there is no partiality. There is no favoritism. And so therefore, I'm here.

Now remember what Cornelius was doing that whole time. He was bowing, before Peter. What did the Jews think of the Gentiles. They thought of them as dogs. And here's Cornelius behaving like people would behave like one who believed in Yahweh, yet was not a Jew. He's behaving just like they would behave before a Jew, he's bowing before him. And Peter says, Get up. For God has shown me that this is all wrong. God has shown me that we are not on a spiritually more higher footing than you. And so then he goes in and he shares with him and the Holy Spirit falls on them. And remember what the Jews, that were there, Peter and his friends—they were speechless. They couldn't believe, God has come upon the Gentiles. Just like he came upon us. God is pleased to come to a Gentile in the same way that he's come to me. That was staggering.

Now few chapters later, Acts 15. Remember the whole story next 15? There was there was just we said last week, the book of Acts is the story of two worlds colliding. And in that collision, is this turmoil, turmoil over Gentiles who are believing. And they just don't know what to do with this. And so then there's this big ruckus in chapter 15. You remember, at the beginning of chapter 15, it's described as no small dissension. That's Luke's way of saying this was a massive argument because they couldn't understand how to process this, that the Holy Spirit was coming to people in the same way who weren't Jews as he was coming to those who were Jews.

So they had this big meeting. And James's was presiding over the meeting. Finally, Peter stands up. And Peter says, listen, brothers, we saw with our own eyes, the Holy Spirit was pleased to fall upon Gentiles, in the same way that he fell upon us. And they, too, were speechless. And they said, What can we say? Other than God is pleased to now save the Gentiles by faith, as he has saved us.

But the problem wasn't over the problem was just getting started. Every single church that Paul planted, every single one, struggled with the same problem. If you think back to years to when we were studying Philippians, you might remember the whole Judaizers remember that thing? Where every single church that Paul planted, the same thing happened, these believing Jews who believed in Jesus, they would

come to this church to Paul started and start teaching them: listen, if you want salvation, Jesus is the Savior, and He wants to save you. But he can't save you until you do the things that we've been doing. Because we're God's favorite people. And what makes us God's favorite people are all these things that we do, the ordinances that we keep the dietary laws that we keep the sacrifices that we make. That's what makes us God's favorite people, something about us makes us his favorite. And we want you to be too. So all you need to do is circumcision, and three times a year ago to give the sacrifices in Jerusalem.

Remember Paul's response to that whole thing? Paul did not say, you know that that's really deficient theology. Let me, I'll come back around and another mountain. Let me work that out with you—no. Paul said that's a denial of the gospel. Paul didn't say, we need to straighten out your theology. Paul said that is a denial of the gospel because Paul understood that salvation by faith necessarily puts all of those who have saving faith on the same footing with God.

This is why he says to the Gentiles, there is neither Greek nor slave, barbarian, nor Scythian, man nor woman, we are all one in Christ. This was the major issue of the entire early church period. This issue of well, in case this sounds foreign to us, does it sound a little bit foreign? Are you sort-of thinking in your mind: this kind of interesting, but no, I don't know any believing Jews. So it's really just sort of theoretical. If it sounds that way, here's the crux of the issue. The crux of the issue is the nature of grace. The crux of the issue is really: is it really true that by grace, you have been saved through faith? And this is not your own doing that is the gift of God not a result of work so that no one may boast? Is that really true? If it is, then all are one in Christ, necessarily so. And so this is really a struggle with grace, isn't it? Which is the defining attribute of the kingdom of God? Why did Jesus tell so many parables about grace do you think? Remember the parable of the prodigal son? The parable of the prodigal son is a parable about grace. It is a parable about those who think that they have despite what Paul says in Ephesians eight, verse Ephesians, two verses eight through 10. Despite that, they think that they do have reason for boasting. So you remember the older brother, right? The younger the younger son takes the money and goes and squanders it, the older son stays home and works. The younger son comes home, the father welcomes him home, and the older brothers peevd.

I was here the whole time. I never left. In other words, I deserve more than him. Now you've welcomed him back with full sonship. I never left. I deserve more than he. Do you see what Jesus is saying? Even before that became the issue, Jesus is telling us, this is what the issue is. There will be those who feel as though their obedience to the law, their keeping of the ordinances, their ritualistic practices, their ethnic identity, all of those things, put them in a place where they're just a little bit above some others in the Body.

Or remember the Parable of the Vineyard, the workers in the vineyard? Some work all day, some work just the last hour of the day when the temperatures are cool. And then the owner comes and gives them all the same payment. And then the whole point is the ones who worked all day said, "Wait a minute, you gave us the same, same as you gave them." And the owner says, "Well, I paid you what I told you, I'd pay you. I've not, I've not done—I've kept my word. And the point is, they felt like they deserved more. Yet, Jesus's point is, this is the nature of the kingdom. That's how he said—that's how he introduces the parable, the kingdom of heaven may be thought of in this way. The Kingdom of

Heaven is a kingdom of grace. And grace is not a comfortable thing. And so there will be these who do feel like that their standing their position is higher or more privileged. And this is kind of the whole, the whole point. This is the most offensive aspect of the gospel of the new humanity.