Ephesians 3:1-6

Prisoners, Mysteries, and the Church

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

Paul has been covering the topic of the union of the Jews and gentiles in the church since chapter 2 verse 11. He has covered it from the angle of Gentiles being called close in 2:11-15 through identification, but then quoted the Old Testament so that Jewish readers would see that this shocking (for some) message would approach the problem in ways that are accessible to his readers. Building upon this Paul is prepared for them to see it in the light of an even larger scope: new revelation has come to prophets and the Apostles that nobody had anticipated.

*How does this theme time into the rest of the book such as family, church body building, Christ and His bride the church, and the military unit?*

# Paul, the Prisoner for the Sake of the Gentiles

*What happened to Noah’s children when they got off the ark?*

Taking a moment to discuss Noah and his children in light of this discussion is important. We have two problems: one with how spiritual truth was passed along, and the other with how to preach the gospel to a people who have wandered off and continued that pattern with their children. The Law allowed for the adoption of Judaism by gentiles, but there was a lot of world out there that God loved. Noah’s sons had not carried God’s message of salvation clearly to their children and that spread out across the planet with spiritual death and bondage resulting.

Paul’s ministry led him to the Jews, and then the Greeks in many of his missionary stops, but this pattern was rooted in a way to reach the Gentile by way of Jewish connections. Go to those who know the prophecies of the Messiah, and then reach out to their community. Paul’s calling was through the very specific direction of God to reach the people he would not have associated too willingly with in his prior life as a Jewish zealot. Now Paul was motivated by what he knew as a Jew to reach the gentiles with the precious truth of Jesus Christ.

## A Stewardship of God’s Grace

*What is a stewardship?*

Paul had once been a steward of the Law. It was a Law that he guarded to the point of wanting the followers of Christ imprisoned and killed. The stewardship that God gave him for grace asked more of his life than a typical student of the Law would have expected. The grace extended beyond Israel, beyond Rome, and to the world, but Paul’s stewardship seems to have been given to reach out to the predominantly gentile world of Rome.

## A Revelation of a Mystery

Rome had cultic mystery religions that would have their secret religious beliefs. These religions would not share those mysteries until you joined them. It is Paul’s loud proclamation of these mysteries that made him stand out in the gentile world. He preached a mystery publicly and that got attention.

There are key doctrines to the church that were not understood prior to the New Testament. Jews were not expecting the church, they didn’t anticipate a second coming, and they didn’t understand the mystery of Christ in us (Colossians 1:26-27)

## Wrote to You Before in Brief

While this statement sounds like he may have written another letter it’s reasonable to believe that Paul was referring here to his earlier writing in this letter. This is due, in part, because he has already been writing on this topic.

### By Referring to This, you can Understand My Insight into the Mystery of Christ

Paul’s clarifications on the unity of the two groups into the church, as well as his earlier statements about identification and our rich inheritance in Christ, were life changing truths for Ephesian readers as well as everyone else who has read and understood them since.

## Other Generations

Prior generations were anticipating a Messiah to come and rule and reign. They wanted Christ to arrive ready to unseat Rome. When Jesus came in an unexpected way they rejected Him. The prior generations didn’t understand the mystery of the ministry of Christ, nor did they understand how Christ would bless the world.

## It Has Now Been Revealed to His Holy Apostles and Prophets in the Spirit

In Acts 2 the Apostles are given special revelation and church is taking it in and learning and growing in it. They begin seeking more understanding. What seems to take a bit of time is the actual evangelistic expansion outside of Israel. God commissions Paul to do this, but also reveals this truth to Peter and then through Peter the rest of the church leadership begins to understand this truth. God has confirmed it, but the newborn church was slow to understand it at first.

## The Gentiles are Fellow Heirs, Fellow Members of the Body, and Fellow Partakers of the Promise in Christ Jesus Through the Gospel

### Fellow Heirs

Paul has already outlined previously in chapter 1 about our inheritance in Christ. If you were coming from a Jewish perspective about being God’s people and being a descendent of Abraham and his covenant then you might have stopped short of associating these truths with the new group, the church. Being an heir of Abraham is earthly, being an heir of God is eternal and heavenly and includes so much more.

### Fellow Members of the Body

It is one thing to be somehow grafted into being an heir, but it is entirely different to be expected to join in unity with formerly strange people. Foods, clothing, and parts of culture? Not something to divide on. Instead be one body! This mystery was one that certainly ruffled feathers and the book of Galatians shows that these issues lingered for some time into the church age.

### Fellow Partakers of the Promise

We should start by noting that this is not the New Covenant. Paul does not say that these people are just recipients of the New Covenant, a special church only New Covenant, but instead they are partakers of the promise of Jesus. Abraham was promised a descendent (the seed) that would bless all the nations. This was fulfilled in Christ and the church partakes in the blessings of that promise.

## Through the Gospel

All of this togetherness is, of course, through the gospel. That the truth of who we are in Adam is unsatisfactory to God, so we are redeemed through faith, saved unto Him, and our belief changes our eternal state. If our eternal state is changed then our earthly condition is not the first priority. It isn’t the place where we divide because we know we’re one, eternally, in Christ through the gospel.

# Conclusion

There are no more boundaries between the Jews and gentiles due to the Law’s being done away with, but the further consequences of ministry within the body spans several chapters starting about 3:15