

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: The Mystery Revealed in Christ, Ephesians 3

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**INTRODUCTION:** The four points to my message are:

1. Previous generations had a limited knowledge of the mystery.
2. New Testament believers have more knowledge of the mystery.
3. God's revelation to Paul helps us understand the mystery.
4. Paul's summary statement included the purpose of the church.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:1-5 *<sup>1</sup>For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—*

*<sup>2</sup>Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup>In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** Most everyone knows the story of Paul, but for those who don't, here's a summary. Paul's name was originally Saul. He was a devout Jew, and he believed Christians were a threat to him and to Judaism. He persecuted Christians and had them put to death. Paul was actually a terrorist. And, one day, a great light knocked him down, and Jesus said, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul was converted, and his name became Paul. He went into the wilderness for a long time and received divine revelation. From there, Paul reentered society and became a fervent preacher and teacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of our New Testament is letters written by Paul. These letters were compiled, and it was decided by a council of Christian leaders that Paul's letters were inspired by God.

**EXPLANATION:** In today's scripture, Paul talks about the mystery being made known to him, and recently I preached about how we all need to become more accepting of the mysteries of God. We tend to not like mysteries we cannot understand. And, while I believe it's OK to ponder mysteries, we must realize there are many mysteries about God we cannot understand unless he reveals them to us.

As I was preparing this message, it came to me that a mystery indicates lack of complete knowledge. Knowledge has three phases. The first phase is the *introduction*. In this phase, we learn just enough about a topic to become curious for more information. The second phase is *discovery*. In the discovery phase, we gather information and sort through what is relevant and what is not. At some point our curiosity is satisfied. We've learned enough, and then we enter the third phase, which is *understanding*.

Introduction, discovery, and understanding are the three parts of knowledge. Let me go a step further. If we only have a general introduction and go no further, then the rest is a mystery to us.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Some topics are mysteries to me because I've chosen not to learn any more. Let me give you an example: Chemistry is a mystery to me. I had chemistry in high school and learned just enough to have a general introduction, but I decided not to learn any more. I chose not to pursue the discovery phase and the understanding phase.

People who are subject matter experts have moved beyond the introduction phase. They've mastered the discovery phase and the understanding phase. They've conquered enough knowledge, so any topic is no longer a mystery to them. Let me summarize this introduction so no one is confused. There are some mysteries we cannot understand because we choose not to learn more. Other mysteries we cannot know because God has only given us the introduction and has hidden the rest.

**First, PREVIOUS GENERATIONS HAD A LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF THE MYSTERY.**

**EXPLANATION:** In Ephesians 3, Paul told the people to get ready because God's direct revelation to him solved the mystery of Christ, and he was about to explain it. Look again at verse 5.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:5 [This mystery] <sup>5</sup> *which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.*

**EXPLANATION:** Previous generations only had glimpses of the mystery. They only had the introduction, which made the rest a mystery. God hid the rest from them.

One example of the foreshadowing of Christ is in the Book of Genesis. Abel, a shepherd, sacrificed from his flock as an act of worship.

Another example is the Passover. When the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt, Moses told them if they painted the blood of a lamb around their doors, their firstborn would be spared when the death angel came. They did just as he instructed, and their firstborn lived. But, the Egyptians did not do it, and their firstborn died.

That's just two examples of the foreshadowing of Christ. The people knew a Messiah would come someday; they just didn't know the details. It was a mystery to them. God purposely kept them from knowing the details. He kept the rest of the information veiled. This is what Paul meant when he said previous generations did not know. Previous generations had a limited knowledge of the mystery.

## **Second, NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS HAVE MORE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MYSTERY.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:6 <sup>6</sup> *This 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.*

**EXPLANATION:** Before Christ, there was a clear division— Jews and Gentiles. After Christ, there was no division; instead, there was a merge of the two groups.

Those in the merger were called followers of Christ—or better known as Christians, which means “little Christs.”

If there's a good verse to memorize, it's verse 6. By writing Gentiles are heirs with Israel, Paul meant there are no favorites with God. All people are equal. We share the inheritance of Christ equally. If there's one thing we must learn it is this truth. I've approached this particular truth from different angles during my time here as pastor because the Bible approaches it from different angles. In Romans Chapter 11, Paul used the image of being grafted in. He called the Gentiles a wild olive shoot which had been grafted onto the main tree and is now sharing the nourishing root of the olive tree.

**APPLICATION:** New Testament believers include us. We are part of the group. We are the group on this side of the cross. The truth of the Gospel is for us.

Review—

- Previous generations had a limited knowledge of the mystery,
- New Testament believers have more knowledge of the mystery, and—

### **Third, GOD'S REVELATION TO PAUL HELPS US UNDERSTAND THE MYSTERY.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:7-9 <sup>7</sup> *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.* <sup>8</sup> *Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,* <sup>9</sup> *and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul's humility comes through here. He knows it was only because of God's grace he became an apostle. He declared he was the least among people and unworthy to have the grace of God as a previous murderer of Christians. His mission was to preach to the Gentiles—something he would have never imagined because before his conversion, he considered Gentiles to be the scum of the earth.

In verse 9, he said he wanted to make plain the “administration of this mystery.” The word administration comes from the Greek word *oikonomia* (oy-kon-om-ee'-ah), which means “stewardship” or “management.” Another form of the word is *oikonoméo* (oy-kon-om-ee'-o), which is a steward who manages another’s resources. Paul didn’t see himself as merely a hired hand. No, he was more than that. He was a servant entrusted with stewardship.

Look at verse 9 again.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:9 <sup>9</sup> *and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God.*

This verse doesn’t translate well into English. Brother Eddie is translating the Bible into the Zomi language, and I am sure he understands what I am talking about. I looked at several different English translations.

The King James Version says, *And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in Go (KJV).* Other translations had a similar rendering, but listen to the English Standard Version.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:9 <sup>9</sup> *and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God (ESV).*

**APPLICATION:** What Paul meant here, if we were to put it into twenty-first century English expression, is God called him to explain in plain language God’s plan of salvation through Christ, which God had hidden from previous generations.

Review—

- Previous generations had a limited knowledge of the mystery.
- New Testament believers have more knowledge of the mystery.
- God’s revelation to Paul helps us understand the mystery.

**Fourth, PAUL’S SUMMARY STATEMENT INCLUDED THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH.**

The purpose of the church is not a mystery! Read with me in verse 10.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:10-13 <sup>10</sup> *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,* <sup>11</sup> *according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.* <sup>12</sup> *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.* <sup>13</sup> *I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

**EXPLANATION:** Notice how Paul indicates the Church is the conduit through which God's plan is carried out. The word "manifold" means "many expressions of," so we can say, "Through the Church, the many expressions of God's wisdoms should be made known."

The Church serves a purpose. You know I am not talking about a brick and mortar building but a community of unified believers.

**ILLUSTRATION:** You may remember me telling you about a man who told me and another preacher he was not into organized religion and would rather study the Bible on his own. The other preacher said, "Then what are you into, *disorganized religion?*"

The purpose the Church serves is sharing this plan of salvation. We should be working together as a body of believers, staying unified, and sharing this wonderful plan of salvation with others. The Church could not have existed before Christ. There was a form of worship through the temple, but it was different than today's Christian worship. It was all a foreshadowing of the coming of Christ. The Old Testament people would have never sung the song *Jesus Saves* because they did not know Jesus. They did not know he saved people. They just had a glimpse of what was coming down the road. So, they worshiped the only way they knew how to worship.

In today's Church, we have the Gospel, which was hidden to the previous generations Paul talked about. We know something they did not know. Just as things were hidden from those in earlier generations, we have the Book of Revelation, which gives us images of the future even though the details to us are

mysteries. We are, in a very real sense, a sandwich generation. We are the generation between those who did not know Christ as we now know him now and the not-yet future we see glimpses of in the Book of Revelation.

I'll say it another way: The previous generations Paul talked about knew all they needed to know, even though they had glimpses of the future. Today, in Christ, we know all we need to know, even though we have glimpses of the future. God accomplished his will through the previous generations, God is accomplishing his will through us—the Church generation—and God will accomplish his will after the Church age is over.

Let us be about our purpose in this generation, which Paul tells us is to make known the mystery of God, which is the plan of salvation and that the multifaceted wisdom of God be made known.

We could go deeper with all of these scriptures, but we must stop somewhere. In verse 13, Paul said they should feel honored because of his sufferings for them. We believe he was in a Roman prison when he wrote his letter to the church at Ephesus.

## **CONCLUSION: PAUL CLOSED WITH A POWERFUL PRAYER.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 3:14-21 <sup>14</sup> *For this reason I kneel before the Father,* <sup>15</sup> *from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* <sup>16</sup> *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,* <sup>17</sup> *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,* <sup>18</sup> *may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,* <sup>19</sup> *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

<sup>20</sup> *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,* <sup>21</sup> *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Thanks to Judy Andrews and Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA