

Paul's Dispensation Of Grace

"... if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward; how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery" (Eph. 3:2f).

Paul often mentions the "dispensation of grace" which was given to him; if not in those exact words, at least in the same thought. He was humbled by it, as verse 8 reveals: *"Unto me who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given."* He told Corinthians he was a steward of the mysteries of Christ and, as we shall see, he asked both the Ephesians and Colossians to pray for him that he might continue to speak with boldness the mysteries of Christ (1 Cor. 4:11; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3). This dispensation of grace was his call to the apostleship of the Gentiles. That call brought him pain, privation, rejection and faintly, death. But, still Paul regarded it to be a blessing!

In conjunction with his apostleship to the Gentiles was the message Paul bore to Gentiles (and all others). This, too was called a "mystery." The word "mystery" carries the thought of something not understood or comprehended, and while that thought may obtain with a few instances where the word appears in the scriptures, most times it means something which was once concealed, but now revealed. That was the tenor of its meaning in Ephesians three. Paul wrote, *"Whereby, when ye ready (i.e., of the mystery), ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed by his holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:14f).* What was this mystery which Paul revealed to the Gentiles? *"... to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the gospel" (Eph. 3:6).* Added to that must be an earlier statement from chapter two which emphasized that Gentiles now are *"fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God" (2:19).* This mystery then, involved the grand truth of the impartiality of God; that the Gentiles and Jews are equal shares of the same grace: they are fellow citizens, heirs, members and partakers.

The phrase *"fellow-citizens"* necessarily implies: 1) God's promised kingdom exists; and 2) that Jew and Gentile equally share in it. Paul actually mentions the kingdom only once in Ephesians (5:5) but the word *"citizen"* clearly indicates it for just as a sheep implies a flock and a child implies a family; so citizen implies a kingdom.

The mystery was not only that Gentiles and Jews were fellow-citizens in God's promised kingdom (Dan. 2:44); it entailed that they were fellow heirs

of God. All can be heirs, Jew or Gentile, for the promise to be a heir is offered to those who believe. "*Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ*" (Gal. 3:26f). Furthermore, the mystery included the truth that Gentile and Jews were fellow members of the body; fellow partakers of the promise: the promise God made Abraham, "*In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*"

Had Paul been unable to look beyond this life, he would likely have regarded his apostleship a curse in view of the trials it brought him. But because he said, "*we look not at things which are seen but at things that are not seen*" and "*we walk by faith and not by sight*" he was able to view that his apostleship was a precious gift (2 Cor. 4:16; 5:7). Today, every Gentile who hears and obeys the gospel owes a debt of gratitude to Paul for faithfully fulfilling the ministry God gave him!

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