

The Church, The Manifold Wisdom Of God

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord ..." (Eph. 3:8-11).

Here Paul speaks of different beings who were enlightened by the preaching of the grace which had been given to him: first there were the Gentiles (3:8). Paul in another place gloried in this work of his (Gal. 6:15). He was a tireless preacher. Reading of his labors from both day by day and place to place makes the modern preacher's head swim. No preacher today is worthy to be compared with Paul because his labors were unceasing.

However, despite the fact he was the apostle to the uncircumcision, his first action wherever he went was to preach to Jews. The theme of his Roman epistle is stated in this familiar passage, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16). Paul did not shirk his call: he did go first to the Jews for he was appointed to *"make all men see"* what the dispensation of grace was which had been given to him.

By Paul's preaching of the gospel a third group of beings were enlightened: *"principalities and powers in the heavenly places"* (Eph. 3:10). This was, I believe, reference to angels who were interested in the mystery of the gospel for Peter wrote *"... which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven, which things angels desire to look into"* (1 Pet. 1:12). It is true that the gospel was neither designed for nor benefited angels (the Hebrew writer wrote, *"for verily not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham,"* Heb. 2:12); nevertheless because angels were God's messengers to man (*"are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation,"* Heb. 1:14); it was but natural they should desire to know what good things God planned for men who were made lower than they. The gospel revealed that blessing to them.

Notice something else. Although three different groups of beings were enlightened by the gospel; viz, Gentiles, Jews and angels; one message was revealed to them all although represented in a different way. To Gentiles was

revealed "*the unsearchable wisdom of Christ;*" to Jews (all men) was preached the mystery which for ages had been hidden in Christ; to principalities and powers in the heavenly places was made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. Thus, the "*unsearchable riches of Christ;*" the "*mystery hidden for ages in the mind of God*" and "*the church, the manifold wisdom of God*" are all one and the same. The church reveals the unsearchable riches of Christ; the church is the revelation of the mystery hidden for ages in God. The church reveals God's manifold wisdom.

When it is said, "*through the church is made known the manifold wisdom of God,*" we are not to understand the apostle as saying that the church is God's only missionary society (although it is that); we are to understand that through the church is revealed the means by which all men, Jew and Gentile, are gathered together in one body; in which body they are called of God; of which body Christ is the Savior (Eph. 2:13-16; Col. 3:15; Eph. 5:23). We understand (again we repeat) that it is the revelation of God's manifold (many-sided) wisdom. If one can improve on the wisdom of God, he can improve on the church; if he cannot improve upon the wisdom of God, he cannot improve upon the church. The conclusion to this latter equation must be obvious: man cannot improve upon the church revealed by God for no man can improve upon God's manifold wisdom!

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