

## Ephesians 3:8-21 (Frank Binford Hole) 158047

Ephesians: Briefly Expounded, Ephesians 3

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HAVING PRESENTED US with this great unfolding of truth, Paul commences to exhort us to walk in a way that shall be worthy of such an exalted vocation. This may be seen if the first verses of chapters 3 and 4 are read together. The whole of chapter 3 excepting verse 1, is a parenthesis, in which he points out how definitely the Lord had entrusted to him the ministry of all this truth-which he calls, "the mystery"-and in which he again puts on record that which he prayed for the Ephesian believers.

He evidently felt that his exhortation to walk worthy would come with greater force if we realized how fully the authority of the Lord was behind it. A "dispensation" or "administration," of the grace of God towards such as ourselves had been committed to him, inasmuch as "the mystery" had been specially revealed to him, and he had just previously written concerning it in brief fashion. He alludes evidently to what he had written in chapter 1:19-2:22. An even briefer summary of it is given in verse 6 of chapter 3 where again the wonderful place given to Gentiles is emphasized. The three words in that verse have been translated, "Joint-heirs, a joint-body and joint-partakers" (ch. 3:6). This may be clumsy English, but it has the merit of making us see the main thought of the Spirit of God in the verse. Now that was a feature, of God's purpose in blessing, wholly unknown in earlier ages: necessarily unknown, of course; for once known the order of things established in connection with the law and Israel was destroyed. It was therefore a secret hid in God until Christ was exalted on high and the Holy Spirit given below.

Now however it is revealed, and the apostle Paul was made the minister of it. It was not only revealed to him but to the other apostles and prophets also. Thus the fact of it was placed beyond all doubt or dispute. Yet the ministry of it was given to Paul, as verse 7 clearly states. In keeping with this we do not find any allusion to the mystery in any of the epistles save Paul's.

How great a theme it is, we can realize if we have at all taken in the things we have just been superficially surveying. Paul himself was so impressed with its greatness that he alludes to his ministry of it as, evangelizing "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (ch. 3:8).

If we read this expression, "the unsearchable riches of Christ," (ch. 3:8) in its context, we perceive that it refers, not to all the wealth that is personally His, but rather to all that which is in Him for His saints. Scanning chapter i, we find that the term, "in Christ," (or its equivalents, "in the Beloved," "in Him," "in whom") occurs about twelve times. In chapter ii, it occurs about six times, and in chapter iii, about three. Let us take one item only, "Blessed... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (ch. 1:3). Can we search or trace those blessings out, so that we are thoroughly masters of the whole subject? We can do no such thing. They are too big for our little grasp. They are unsearchable; and so too is all that which we have in Christ. Yet though unsearchable they may be known by us, and so they were the subject of the Apostle's ministry.

A second thing was covered by his ministry. He was commissioned to make all see, not only what the mystery is, but what is the "fellowship of the mystery," (ch. 3:9) or, "the administration of the mystery." (N. Tr.). The mystery is concerning Christ and the church, and particularly concerning the place that Gentiles occupy in it, as has already been explained by Paul. The administration concerns the practical arrangements for assembly life and order and testimony, which Paul everywhere established. These arrangements were ordered by the Lord that there might be a representation, even today in the church's time condition, of those things which are true and established concerning it in God's eternal counsel.

The mystery itself was something entirely new, for from the beginning of the world up to that moment it had been hid in God. Consequently the administration of the mystery was entirely new. Previously God had been dealing with one special nation on the basis of law. Now God was calling out an election from all nations according to grace, and that which was merely national was submerged in this larger and fuller purpose. In the church of God everything has to be ordered or administrated according to these present purposes of God. The Apostle does not stop in this epistle to instruct us in the details of this divinely ordered administration; he does this in writing his first epistle to the Corinthians.

The assembly at Corinth was not walking in an orderly way, as were those at Ephesus and Colosse. There was a good deal of ignorance, error and disorder in their midst, and this furnished the occasion for the Spirit of God to enforce upon them the administration of the mystery, at least in a good many of its details, dealing with matters of a public nature which an ordinary onlooker might observe. That the point of this may not be missed we take up one detail out of the many, to serve as an illustration.

Our epistle lays it down that we, whether Jews or Gentiles, "are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (ch. 2:22). This is one of the great items included in the mystery. We turn to the Corinthian epistle and we discover that this is not a mere doctrine, an idea divorced from any practical effect in the present ordering of church life and behavior. The very opposite. Paul declares that consequently the Spirit is supreme in that house where He dwells. He dwells there in order that He may operate to the glory of God-"All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12:11). In chapter 14 of the same epistle we find the Spirit ordering and energizing in the exercise of the various gifts, and we are bidden to acknowledge that the instructions given are "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). The Lord, you see, is the great Administrator in the church of God, and Paul was the chosen servant to make known His administration to us.

The administration of the mystery is, we fear, very lightly brushed aside by many Christians today, even by good and earnest ones, but we are assured that they do so to their own great loss, both now and in the coming age. If we neglect any part of the truth we become undeveloped as to that part and like "a cake not turned," (Hos. 7:8) as Hosea puts it. Also we have to take into consideration verses 10 and 11 of our chapter, which tell us that the administration of the mystery, as worked out in the assembly, is a kind of lesson book before the eyes of angels. The lesson book of today on which the eyes of angels look down, is very sadly blotted and obscured. Yet, since angels do not die, those same eyes once looked down and saw the beauty of the manifold wisdom of God, when the excellence of the Divine administration, ministered through Paul, was first seen in the church's earliest days.

Then for a brief moment things were "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (ch. 3:11). Now for many a long day they have mainly been according to the disconnected desires and arrangements of men, though many of the men who made the arrangements were doubtless godly and well-meaning people. May we have grace to adhere, as far as in us lies, to the administration as ordered by God, for it is evidently intended that what was "hid in God" should now be made "known by the church" (ch. 3:10). At the same time let us not expect to do so without opposition and trouble, for Paul was face to face with tribulation enough, as he hints in verse 13.

Moreover we do not very easily or speedily enter into the power and enjoyment of these things. Hence again at this point the Apostle betakes himself to prayer, and is led to record his prayer that we may be stirred up by it. The prayer is addressed to the Father, and it is concerned with the operations of the Spirit with a view to Christ having His due place in our hearts. Father, Son and Holy Ghost are thus involved in it.

The Father is addressed as imparting His own Name and character to every family that will ultimately fill the heavens and the earth. The Lord Jesus is our Head, and He is also in some sense the Head and Leader of every one of these different families. It should be "every family" and not "the whole family" (ch. 3:15). God will have many families, some for heaven and some for earth. Amongst the heavenly families will be the church and "the spirits of just men made perfect," (Heb. 12:23) i.e. Old Testament saints. For the earth there will be Israel, redeemed Gentiles, and so on. Now amongst men every family takes its name from the one who is father to it, the one from whom it derives its origin. But fatherhood amongst men is only a reflection of the divine Fatherhood.

The main burden of the prayer is that Christ may dwell by faith in our hearts, that He may be abidingly the controlling center of our deepest affections. This can only be as we are strengthened by the Spirit's mighty power in the inner man, for naturally that which is selfish controls us, and we are fickle and uncertain. Christ dwelling in our hearts, we become rooted and grounded in love, His love not ours. Only as rooted and grounded in love can we proceed to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge.

Verse 17 speaks of that which lies at the very center of all, the indwelling Christ and the consequent rooting and grounding in love. Verses 18 and 19 pass on to the widest possible circle of blessing, love and glory. A pair of compasses may serve as an illustration. It is not easy to draw a circle except one leg be firmly fixed. With one leg fixed the circle can easily be described. So it is here. Fixed and rooted in love, the mighty sweep of verse 18 becomes possible.

If verse 19 tells us we are to know that which passes all knowledge, verse 18 infers we are to apprehend that which eludes all proper definition.

Four dimensions are enumerated, but we are not told to what they refer. The dimensions of what? Doubtless of all the great truth which Paul had been unfolding, the dimensions of the unsearchable riches of Christ. These things are only to be apprehended with all saints. We need one another as we begin to learn them. All saints should be keen to apprehend them, and they are only to be apprehended as all saints are kept in view. In these days of brokenness and division in the church of God we cannot bring all saints together, nor can we incite all saints to apprehend these things, but we can cling very tenaciously to the divine thought of all saints, and, as far as in us lies, live and act in view of all saints. They who do this are more likely than others to apprehend the mighty scope of the unsearchable riches of Christ, to know His love which is centered upon all saints, and to be filled with all the fullness of God.

The contemplation, in prayer, of such heights of spiritual light and affections and blessing moved the heart of the Apostle to worship, and the chapter closes with a doxology ascribing glory to the Father. That which he had desired in his prayer would be impossible of accomplishment were it not that there is power that worketh in us, the Holy Spirit of God. By that Power the Father can accomplish that which overwhelmingly surpasses all our thoughts or desires. Many of us, reading the Apostle's desires for us, may have said to ourselves-Very wonderful, but altogether beyond me. Yet, be it remembered, not beyond the Power that works in us. All this blessing may be really and consciously ours: ours in present possession.

The glory which the last verse ascribes to God will certainly be His. Throughout all ages the church will irradiate His glory. As the bride, the Lamb's wife, it will be said of her, "Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:11). And all that the church is, and all that she ever will be, is by and in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus is the most glorious Minister of the glory of God. He has wrought out the glory, and covered Himself with glory in doing it. Thus it is that we can so happily sing,

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