

## 7. Learning How God Makes Us Equal in the Body of Christ

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how the Lord is building His church. We saw that He is building His church in our lives because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. This is true whether we are Jews or Gentiles. As a result, everywhere that we go as Christians the temple of the Holy Spirit is present because we are that temple. In our topic today, we are going to learn how God makes each of us equal in the body of Christ. This means that no Christian is any greater than any other Christian.

In Ephesians 3:1-5, we read, “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles- if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” In these verses, we see that God revealed to Paul as well as the other apostles and prophets a mystery that had not previously been known. We will see that this is an extremely important mystery to help our children understand.

Paul had just pointed out in the verses in chapter two, as we saw in the previous topic, that the Jews and Gentiles had been made one because Christ had broken down the wall of separation that had previously divided the Jews and the Gentiles. That is the reason why Paul is going to make known this mystery that God has revealed to Paul and the other apostles and prophets. Paul begins this explanation by saying that He is the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles. Paul had spent two years in prison in Caesarea and now had been a prisoner in Rome for almost two more years as he wrote this letter. We see in the last part of Acts chapter 21 through the end of Acts 28 that this imprisonment was due to the fact that Paul had been faithful in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. As a result, Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of any man. Instead, he said that he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus because Christ had allowed his imprisonment to carry out the will of God.

This ministry to the Gentiles had been given to Paul by God when God first called Him. As God sent Ananias to Paul in Acts 9:15, God told Ananias, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’” Paul said that he was given this ministry to the Gentiles by the grace of God. In order to carry out this ministry, God had given him direct revelation of the mystery of how Christ had made the Jews and Gentiles one in the church. In Galatians 1:15-17, Paul told where he received that revelation when we read, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Here, we see that Christ gave Paul special instruction of the mystery of Christ so that he was equipped to go to the Gentiles.

This mystery had not been revealed in the Old Testament. In fact, it was not even revealed through

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men. Instead, we see that this mystery was revealed to Paul and the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. That mystery is summarized in Ephesians 3:6-7 where we read, “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.” Here, we are reminded that the first part of the mystery of the church is the fact that Jews and Gentiles have become fellow heirs. The word translated “fellow heirs” means *those who have become joint participants*. Jews and Gentiles who have become Christians are joint participants in the body of Christ and neither is more important than the other.

These verses also show that the Gentiles are of the same body. 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” As Christians, we are all part of the body of Christ whether we are Jews or Gentiles. As a result, we have also been made partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel. Here, we see that as Gentiles we share with the Jews the promise of salvation that God made available in Christ. This means that each one of us as Gentiles who has become a Christian will be a part of the kingdom of God.

God had called Paul to take the message of salvation to the Gentiles and he was thankful to God as he carried out this ministry. Paul had been given this ministry by the grace of God. Paul said when he spoke before Agrippa about his salvation in Acts 26:15-18, ““So I said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”” Paul had been faithful in taking this message to the Gentiles. Paul realized that it was God who gave him the power to carry out this ministry.

Ephesians 3:8-12 goes on to say, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” Paul said that God had given him this ministry even though he was the least of all the saints. He felt that he was the least of the saints because he had formerly persecuted the church.

Paul thanked God that God had shown His grace by giving Paul the opportunity to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles. In Colossians 1:27-28, we read, “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Paul loved to preach the riches of Christ so that he could present every person mature in Christ Jesus. Paul also wanted the

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Ephesians and all Christians to understand the fellowship of the mystery. As we saw in chapter two, this fellowship is the result of the fact that Jews and Gentiles are made one in Christ in the church. This mystery was hidden throughout the Old Testament but was revealed through Christ.

The reason why this mystery was revealed was so that the church could understand the greatness of the variety of the wisdom of God. Romans 11:33 says, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!” The planning of God for the church from eternity is one of the ways that God reveals the greatness of His wisdom. Not only was this great wisdom unknown to mankind, it was also unknown by the angels including both the faithful angels and the fallen angels who had followed Satan in his rebellion against God. As a result, even Satan knew nothing of the church until Christ brought the church into existence. However, it was the plan of God from eternity so that He could show this part of His wisdom at the time that He brought the church into existence.

The church was part of the eternal purpose of God. God had planned to make Jews and Gentiles one by bringing the church into existence once Christ had paid the penalty for sin. Romans 15:5-7 says, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” Whether we are strong or weak, Christians or Jews and Gentiles, we are made one in the church. This causes the angels to glorify God for the way that He has brought this unity between Jews and Gentiles.

In addition to bringing glory to God, we also see that as both Jews and Gentiles we now have boldness and access to God through Christ. Hebrews 4:16 tells us that the Jews have boldness to come to God through Christ. That verse says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Here, we see that the Jews have boldness and access to come to God. Then, Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Here, we see that the Gentiles have boldness and access to come to God. As Jews and Gentiles, we all have this confidence through faith.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that as Jews and Gentiles we are equal in the body of Christ. We also want to help them understand that we all have boldness and access to God through Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand that we are all equal in the body of Christ.