

Episode #1019 Ephesians 3 Part 4-Truths God Calls Secret

I. The purpose of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is to tell us what God's present purpose is in all His work today. This includes His work in the world and in the individual believer. Ephesians is the book of God's present purpose, the book of being "in Christ," and the book of God's grace.

II. I have called the book of Ephesians "the book of God's present purpose." Even more specifically, chapter 3 is the chapter of God's present purpose. We learn here what it is that God is doing today. Verse 2 tells us that we live in the dispensation of the grace of God.

III. A dispensation is an administration, a management, a method of dealing, a policy. The great truth of the dispensation of grace is that God is dealing graciously with us! Since God keeping a promise would be an act of justice, all promises except the promise to be gracious are inoperative and suspended today. Grace works hand-in-hand with faith, since faith earns nothing, and yet God chooses to pour out His blessings graciously on those who believe in Jesus Christ through faith. Faith today is without seeing, meaning we are greatly blessed. Grace changes prayer. In Acts, prayer would miraculously and powerfully give people what they asked for. Prayer in the dispensation of grace is on a different basis. We can demand nothing of God. We know only that when we make our requests to God, He hears them. We are free to bring our concerns before Him and leave them in His hands.

IV. Facts About the Dispensation of Grace.

- A. In the dispensation of the grace of God, all our blessings from God come by means of His grace.
- B. God's every act is an act of grace. If God cannot act in grace, He will not act at all.
- C. Isaiah 26:10. The wicked do not turn from their wickedness because of God's grace. Yet this does not discourage Him from dealing graciously.
- D. Isaiah 26:9. Only God's judgments (justice) will teach the world righteousness. But God is determined to act graciously regardless.
- E. This dispensation is also one in which we are shut up to faith alone, and God is silent. We do not dream dreams, see visions, hear the voice of God, etc. Only the Word of God is the basis for our faith.
- F. God's dispensation now is totally grace! If God is working totally in grace, that means that righteousness is not rewarded just as much as it means wickedness is not punished. This world brings us good things and suffering. God adds His grace to the good we receive, but does not take away the suffering and evil. Every day and in every situation, God's goal is to administer His grace, and every day and in every situation, He does this.
- G. The revelation of this new administration of God was given to Paul to pass on to us. It was not given to Paul as if he was going to be the administrator, for that would mean God's grace stopped being administered when Paul died!
- H. In the dispensation of grace, God deals graciously with us. Ephesians 4:32.
- I. Grace appeared to all mankind when this dispensation began. Titus 2:11-13.
- J. The current record of God's grace will teach all ages to come! Ephesians 2:7.

V. Ephesians 3:3. The mystery made known to Paul.

- A. Revelation = Greek *apokalupsis*, means unveiling.
- B. Mystery = *musterion*. This has been transliterated to English, not translated.
 1. Some try to build a theology on the word "mystery." They talk about "the dispensation of the mystery," "the church of the mystery" or "the gospel of the

mystery.” Yet we talk with them in vain to find something Biblically solid in their teaching we can embrace.

2. A mystery is something that has not been or cannot be explained, something incomprehensible or uncomprehended. There are no such ideas in any occurrence of the word *musterion* in the New Testament.
3. All students of God’s Word should admit that *musterion* has been mistranslated in every occurrence. Some will be loath to do this, however, for then they can no longer mystify and indulge in mysteriosophy.
4. *Musterion* is found twenty-seven times in the New Testament. It means “secret” in every occurrence. The Bible calls a thing a “secret” if it was unknown previously, but now is revealed. In the past, these truths had been hidden in God and could not be known. Once they were made known, they could be understood by all who had ears to hear.

C. The truths God calls secret.

1. Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10. Truths about the kingdom not revealed before. But they were now understood by the disciples, Matthew 13:16.
2. Romans 11:25. A hardness in part had happened to Israel until the full number of the nations had come in. Acts 15:14, God was visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His name. Romans 9:28, this was to be a short work. It was completed in the twenty-five years between Acts 10 and Acts 28:28.
3. Romans 16:25. **“Now to Him Who is able to establish you in accord with my gospel and the heralding of Christ Jesus, in accord with the revelation of a secret, hushed in eonian times, yet, manifested now through prophetic Scriptures also, in accord with the command of the eonian God, being made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”** As the gospel was shared in Acts, it was shared in inspired messages, each a new and fresh revelation to the herald. Consider Peter's message in Acts 2, and compare it with his second message in Acts 3. Then, compare these two messages with that of Stephen in Acts 7, and with Philip's to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Follow on through Peter's message in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), and Paul's messages to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13), to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, to the Thessalonians (Acts 17), on Mars' hill (Acts 17:22-33), to the multitude (Acts 22), to the Sanhedrin (Acts 23), to Felix (Acts 24), to Festus (Acts 25), and to Agrippa (Acts 26). Careful examination of all these messages will reveal that in each one, the gospel was preached, Jesus Christ was proclaimed, and that each one was a divine communication. Yet, they are all different in scope and content. They met with exactitude the needs of the hearers; each one of them was inspired by God (1 Thess. 2:13); and all of them were the revelation of a secret. These messages had never been heard by any man before. However, at the time Paul wrote Romans, the gospel of Jesus Christ was beginning to shine forth through prophetic Scriptures, of which the Roman epistle became another one. Romans 10:14-15.
4. We lack time to examine every occurrence of the word *musterion*, so let us return to Ephesians 3.

D. He had already written of this mystery briefly in Ephesians 1:7-11.

E. He doesn’t say what the mystery is yet, so we must continue to find out.

VI. Conclusion: God's present purpose is to demonstrate the greatness of His grace for all time to come. God knows this will not convert the world, but He is determined to be gracious nevertheless. We can count on God to deal graciously with us. This means not only not punishing us when we behave poorly, but also not rewarding us when we behave well. God is writing a record of grace that will stand for all time to come. Now Paul speaks of a mystery. Many mystify about the word mystery and do not give us solid truth regarding it, but the solid truth is that it means a secret, formerly hidden in God, but now revealed so all can know and understand it. We will go on through the passage to consider just what secret Paul is talking about.