

Intro: Lewis Sperry Chafer writes, “Christians are ambassadors for Christ and are commissioned to preach the Gospel to every person. This ministry does not consist in either the education or the moral improvement of lost men while they are on their way to hell; it is the proclamation of the mighty, redeeming, transforming grace of God which offers eternal life and eternal glory to all who will *believe*.”

The Gospel is not a self-help rule of life whereby one can earn blessing and make life easy. Paul writes from prison, where he has been for *years*, having endured and enduring suffering and loss in this world. His desires is not that the life of the believers to whom he writes would be easy, but rather joyful in the midst of suffering for they are near to Jesus. His message is the gospel, not the system of self-work or self-righteousness, but the system of humble dependence and grateful obedience to the One who has graciously redeemed them from sin and the righteous wrath of God and is bringing all things together under Christ for the glory of God. This is the message that bears proclamation. There is Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ!

What we see in this new chapter is the calling of the Christian to reveal, as humble servants, the message of the Master, particularly in racial reconciliation. Christians are **restrained** and **responsible** by the power of the Spirit to **reveal** and **remind** all peoples of the good news of the grace of God shown in Jesus Christ as the catalyst of relational reconciliation (racial, social, cultural, familial, etc.).

1. **Restrained**: Christians are constrained by the Spirit to reveal the mystery of relational reconciliation through God’s grace to others.
 - a. Remember that Paul writes this letter from prison (most likely Rome), so his chains remind him of a deeper imprisonment
 - i. One commentator: “Paul’s chain rattled and brought him back to his current situation.”
 - ii. But Paul does not consider his imprisonment to these chains, or these walls, or to Rome itself.
 - b. Paul was a *prisoner* of Christ Jesus by God's choice AND a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles.
 - i. It was his mission to the *Gentiles* that led him to imprisonment (all of them: Acts 16:20-24; 21:28; 22:21-22; 28:28).
 - ii. The pharisaical Jews sought to destroy Paul because he made the promises available to Gentiles by God's grace, not based upon obedience to the standard of the law
 1. In earlier times it was assumed that a Gentile had to become a Jew in order to relate to God (so circumcision became a huge issue in the early church)
 2. The revelation of God’s grace in Jesus means that Gentiles remain culturally Gentiles and Jews remain culturally Jews, but all are made into one new person in Christ: Christians.
 3. Do we make laws which other races, cultures, economic classes must adhere to in order to be OK with God? Does it appear that way to the world? How can we change this perception?
 - iii. Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Jesus, unable to do anything but obey Christ in the calling given to him. He was constrained by the Spirit to endure sufferings for the sake of the name of Jesus.
 1. “A slave is not greater than his master” – John 15:20
 - a. We are NOT *absolutely* free, as the world sees freedom, for we are “slaves to righteousness” (Rom 6:18), but not “slaves to sin.”
 - i. Freed *from sin*, not freed *to sin*
 - ii. Not freed *from* righteousness, but freed *for* righteousness (Titus 2:14)
 - b. We are slaves to the one whom we obey
 2. His sufferings were for Jesus and also for the Gentiles (“for you”).
 3. Our efforts are also for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of others

4. The Gospel of Grace must pervade our mind, souls, and hearts in all things, taking us captive under the control of the Holy Spirit until we live boldly humble lives of its proclamation

- a. Humble because the gospel reveals that: God is so holy and my sin is so great that I deserve His wrath and judgment.
- b. Bold because the gospel reveals that: God is so gracious that He has provided the way of my redemption from sin and wrath by offering His perfect Son in my place of judgment
- c. Repent of your sins and humbly trust in Jesus Christ!

2. Responsible: We are all gifted and graced to accomplish the revelation of this mystery of grace.

- a. Paul assumes that the Ephesians had heard of His calling and gifting to reveal the mystery of God's grace to them.
 - i. It was more than a mission, it was an administration, a **stewardship** of God
 1. A stewardship is the responsibility of taking care of another's property: fulfilling the desire of the owner.
 2. This goes along with Paul seeing himself as a prisoner. He was constrained to fulfill the desire of His Master and reveal the mystery that was given to him.
 - ii. He was graced to accomplish it
 1. Paul continually focuses all of His salvation, calling, ministry, gifting, and success upon the grace of God, not his own doing at all.
 2. Paul was given what he needed to accomplish the declaration and revelation of this new mystery: the reconciliation of races under Christ and before God.
 - iii. It was a message of grace to the Gentiles, not law
 1. This is a new thing, even today for most people: God wants you to give up your effort to save yourself and humbly receive the work of Jesus Christ on your behalf. You will be saved by God's grace, not your work.
 2. People today still assume that you can earn God's favor by your obedience, sacrifices, or gifts.
 - a. These bases are the foundation of their exclusion and demeaning of other peoples, races, cultures, etc.
 - b. Big sins vs. little sins
 - i. Rather than seeing every sin as a "little" sin, we see all sins as "big" sins
 - ii. For which we need a gracious and powerful Redeemer

3. To Reveal: The mystery of relational reconciliation because of the grace of God has now been revealed in Christ and explained through the apostles and prophets, i.e. the Scriptures.

- a. The Gospel of grace, and the subsequent outcome of the reconciliation and racial/economical/social equalization brought by the Gospel, was a mystery that had to be revealed by God to Paul.
 - i. Mystery is a hidden thing that cannot be discovered but must be revealed
 1. Used in the OT only in Daniel referring to Nebuchadnezzar's dreams
 - a. important to note that these dreams had *contents* and interpretations that only God could reveal
 - b. Source is from God and meaning is from God

2. Usually, in cults, the mysteries are only revealed to the initiates or the ones with “special knowledge” (Gnostic), but here the mystery is revealed for all to know (9-10),
 - a. Paul and the apostles/prophets are merely the bearers of this mystery
 - b. The world still requires the exclusive note of mystery, cutting off outsiders who don’t “get it”
 - c. From the knowledge of the mysteries
 - i. Only by rite or sacrifice can one gain the knowledge of the mysteries
 - ii. Only few are actually given the mysteries
- ii. Paul actually viewed himself as the “least of God’s people”, seeing the Gentiles as greater than himself
 1. Humility and graciousness are key characteristics of walking in the Spirit
 2. This mystery is for all people to know, not merely for a select few
 3. “Gospel” is actually a word used by a herald, a proclamation, not a set of rules or moral distinctive
- iii. The Scriptures are the recording of the promises revealed to humanity by God and that find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ particularly. We must ask ourselves what do we depend on to give us hope and joy? Is it the revelation of God’s grace in the gospel in Christ?
 1. If so, how do we read the Bible: as
 - a. a set of moral principles primarily about me?
 - b. a record of God’s glory in what Jesus has done, a story about Him and His desires?

4. **To Remind:** We all need reminded over and over about the mystery of relational reconciliation by God’s grace.

- a. Paul wrote about the revelation of this mystery to them before in brief.
 - i. most likely he is referring to earlier in his letter: 2:11-22 “one new man” in Christ
 - ii. Reconciliation of peoples in Christ was the *particular* mystery revealed to Paul for the sake of all (vss. 9-10)
 1. Before, Gentiles had to become Jewish to partake of the promises of Abraham
 2. In the Gospel, Gentiles as Gentiles now partake in the promises *in Christ*.
 - a. Three “sun-prefix” words, which means “with” or “together”
 - b. Fellow heirs (συνκληρονομία) – “*heirs-together*” all inheritance together, familial
 - c. Fellow members of the body (συνσωμα) – lit. “*body-together*”, a new word Paul coined found nowhere else: the new humanity
 - d. Fellow partakers of the promise (συν-μετοχα) – “*sharers-together*” the promises of Jesus are for all in Jesus
 3. It is not about being Jew or Gentile, religious or irreligious, it is about Jesus and Him alone as the source and standard for our standing before God.
 4. All things are “summed up” in Christ
 - a. This was the purpose of God from the beginning, therefore hidden from the beginning until it was to be revealed through the apostles, prophets, and finally the church
 - b. The “handwriting on the wall” is illegible to the world, and we, like Daniel, have been called to reveal the mystery of God’s grace to those outside our covenantal community

Conclusion:

Paul and the apostles were given this mystery to reveal to all peoples: God has reconciled humanity to himself, regardless of race, culture, or socio-economic status, in His Son, Jesus Christ, by His grace alone, through faith in JC alone. This mystery has been given to the church to reveal to all peoples: God makes one new person out of natural enemies because all peoples are saved by His grace, not based upon some inherent value within one's bloodline, culture, or demonstrated ability to succeed in some standard of perceived perfection. Because we are all saved by grace, we are all equally in need of a Redeemer and equally placed into the family of God by God and for God, having our hearts transformed into the likeness of Christ. We all, by faith in Jesus Christ alone to make us acceptable to God, are citizens of heaven, sons and daughters of God, and the very temple of God. This mystery is unknown to the world, which bases its value upon temporary and illegitimate standards which cannot save and will not fulfill. We, like Paul, have to pass on the meaning of this mystery which has been revealed to us, for the sake of all people and for the sake of God's glory.