

**RCC in the Word**  
**Week of February 18**  
**Ephesians 3**

In studying this next chapter in our weekly reading, I've been drawn to the word *mystery*. Having read Paul's letters to the churches many times through the years, I've noticed that he uses this word in multiple letters, but I've tended to pass it by without giving it much thought. Besides here in Ephesians 3, Paul uses the word in a similar sense in Romans 11:25 and in Colossians 1:26-27. Our English word *mystery* is a direct transliteration from the Greek word *musterion* which translates as "secret or mystery, specifically of something formerly unknown but now revealed".

Before we say more about what this mystery is, let's get into the context of Ephesians. When studying Paul's letters, I always like to find out what I can about the particular church that Paul is writing to. Here are a few facts about Ephesus. Ephesus was a Gentile city in Western Asia near the Aegean Sea. It was a deeply religious city, being primarily devoted to Diana (Artemis), the goddess of fertility and was the home of a great temple devoted to her worship. Paul spent two years engaging in a very successful ministry in Ephesus. It was here where there was a great book burning (scrolls on pagan sorcery, magic, etc), and it was here where Demetrius the silversmith incited a riot because of Paul's gospel work and the resultant decline in the worship of Artemis (Acts 19).

So now Paul is writing a letter to this beloved church where he spent two years and invested so much, even at the risk of his own life. We get another little glimpse of the mutual love between Paul and the Gentile Ephesians in the latter part of Acts 20 (vv. 17ff) when Paul was hurrying back to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. You should take a minute to read about that brief visit that he had with the Ephesian elders on the beach. Sweet visit, but very sad. In this letter, Paul enunciates more clearly than anywhere else what this mystery is that he has often referred to. It is in 3:6 where he says:

"This mystery is that the Gentiles are **fellow heirs**, members of the **same** body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel".

Paul indicates that this revolutionary idea (paradigm shift?) has been revealed to himself and the other apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. Remember that the New Testament had not yet been written at this point (actually, a lot of it was *being* written by Paul who likely had no idea that this is what he was doing (imagine that!)). At any rate, this inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation is evidence that God is always doing more than we think He is. His plan is always bigger and more comprehensive than we realize. He is always much beyond where we are. God always planned to save a people for Himself from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. We're not living under plan B, as if plan A to save Israel didn't work out. It is true that Israel was a rebellious and stiff-necked people, but don't think for a minute that this was a surprise to God. He has always known what He is doing. There is great hope in this for all of us. It is good for us to think about this when our life circumstances don't make sense to us. God is using them for His purposes, and He is always doing more than we think He is.

These paragraphs are intended only to be musings on the subject matter of Ephesians 3 and by no means a thorough treatment of the passage. But one other thing that I think is worth mentioning in closing is this. The fact that God intended from before the foundation of the world to use a person like Paul to break ground in evangelizing the Gentile world is one of the most delightfully ironic circumstances in the New Testament. Paul gives us a list of his worldly credentials in his letter to the Philippians (3:4-6), having been raised not only a devout Jew, but trained as a Pharisee. His record of law keeping was impeccable. His testimony before King Agrippa in Acts 26 further bears this out (vv. 4-5). Paul would have been amongst the **least** likely candidates for becoming a champion for evangelizing the Gentiles. This is such a great example of how our God delights in the unlikely. He does things with people and works circumstances in such a way that we in our earthly minds would never guess. Think about the crude circumstances surrounding Jesus' coming into the world (virgin birth, no room in the inn, manger, shepherds, etc). It's a good thing that the Lord is not as concerned with doing things that make sense to us as He is with His ultimate glory. Heaven is going to be pretty amazing as we're coming to understand all of these things.

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then shall I know fully, even as I have been fully known”.  
~1 Corinthians 13:12~

-Written by Eddie Lyrene