

Living with New Eyes

St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Study 6 | Ephesians 3:1-13

- 1. Speaking generally, what do you think of as a “mystery”? What does our culture consider mysterious? What does Paul mean by “mystery” in this passage?**

Start by getting your group to broadly discuss what they consider ‘mysterious’ in this life. How do we use the word ‘mystery,’ for example? This should lay some good groundwork toward beginning to understand what Christians mean when they talk about mystery. To sum Paul’s use of ‘mystery’ we turn to verse 4, in which he uses the phrase “the mystery of Christ.” So Jesus himself is the mystery of the world, according to Paul. And the mystery of the person and work of Jesus was revealed to Paul by Christ himself in direct revelation. This revelation is spoken of as a ‘grace,’ and the content of the mystery is also spoken of as God’s manifold ‘wisdom’ (v. 10). So Jesus is the mystery, and this mystery is a surprise. In fact, perhaps ‘unforeseen surprise’ is a decent interpretation of ‘mystery’ in Paul’s usage. And yet, an unforeseen surprise that still needs to be made known to people and that contains ‘unsearchable riches’ (v. 8) which might never be fully comprehended or exhausted.

- 2. What is the substance of the mystery that is the gospel? What is so surprising about this unforeseen turn of events in God’s story? How has God surprised you in your life with the gospel?**

Verse 6: “The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Why is this so surprising? Amongst other things, think back to all God did in the Old Testament to distinguish and separate his people from the nations. Then think of the sinful ways that his people twisted those unique, God-given traits into means by which to pridefully discriminate against the Gentiles. Could anyone have seen this coming? That God would do away with circumcision and food laws in due time and create one new, equal family out of Jew and Gentile? All by grace through faith, apart from Jewish identity markers? This is a surprise indeed. How has God made similar surprises in your life? Perhaps even in the surprise of those to whom he has chosen to show mercy by including them in his family?

- 3. The mystery is now to be made public, so that all are given ‘insider knowledge’ into God’s plans. From this passage, how are we, with Paul, to make it public? How is this passage meant to be a comfort? A challenge?**

Verse 7-13 includes many answers and implications to these questions. For one, Paul was called to go and preach to those who were previously discriminated against by God’s people. He was called to reveal the good-

news mystery to the marginalized, the very ones who would receive his message with joy. He 'makes known' the mystery-surprise to 'everyone', 'bringing to light' what had been hidden. In this, people will see God's hidden wisdom *in the church!* They will see it not only in the church's message, but in the church's life as God overcomes division (Jew/Gentile, etc.) and makes a new family in himself. And the mystery is to be made known to all the rulers and authorities in the material and spiritual world. How could you follow Paul more faithfully? How are you comforted and/or challenged by God's mystery in Christ and the resulting call to make it known?