

Notes: *The Secret that Must Be Told* (Ephesians 3:1-6)

Intro: “Mystery” (appearing four times in most English translations) is basic to the meaning of this passage. In the NT this technical term means a truth once hidden from us but now revealed by God. What is God’s now open secret? Verse 6 tells us. Jesus came to save both believing Jew and Gentile in one church. Why this should be called a “mystery” has sometimes puzzled Bible students since the OT did foresee the salvation of the Gentiles (Gen.12: 1-3; Ps. 2:8; etc.). Also Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations. But what neither the OT nor Jesus revealed was the radical nature of God’s plan which was to replace the Jewish nation with an international community, the church, and incorporate the Gentiles into this community without them having to become Jews first. Nineteen and a half centuries have come and gone since the apostles first revealed God’s secret. What is its significance for us? Preach the gospel to all indiscriminately! God’s once guarded secret must be shared. Two great themes offer encouragement.

#1: God has revealed himself to us. In verses 3-5, Paul speaks of the mystery made known to him by “revelation” and “revealed” to God’s holy apostles and prophets. In chapter 1:17, Paul prayed that God would give the Ephesian believers “a spirit of wisdom and of *revelation* in the knowledge of him.” The great watershed moment in human history came when God revealed himself to both Jew and Gentile in Jesus Christ the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). What an astonishing example Paul was of one to whom God has revealed himself! He is content to be a “prisoner” for Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles. Even as he wrote those words the significance of what he now was dawned on him all over again! He had been Saul of Tarsus, rabid persecutor of the infant church, the man whose hands were tainted with the blood of martyrs (Acts 7:58ff.; 22:4). How eloquently his sufferings spoke about his new love for Jesus and the Gentiles. What made the difference? Knowing God through Jesus Christ. How easily we take this privilege for granted! Jesus said on the eve of his crucifixion that eternal life, real life if you will, consists of knowing God through Jesus (Jn. 17:3). This is what Christianity is—knowing God through Jesus. Such personal knowledge of God rests upon “revelation” since no one could know God unless he first took the initiative to reveal himself to us (1 Cor. 2:11ff.). For example, suppose we wanted to know someone we considered above us (status, intelligence, skill, etc.). Even if we wanted to get to know this exalted person we also know that this is a matter for him to decide. If he politely holds us at arm’s length, we might be disappointed but we can’t complain since we had no claim on his friendship. But if instead he took us into his confidence and revealed himself to us on a personal level, we would feel greatly privileged. But that is what it means to know God before whom the nations are a drop in a bucket (Jer. 9:24). This is a relationship calculated to thrill a man’s heart! According to this letter, God’s revelation of himself is known in two basic ways: Through faith in his Son (Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20). God may be known only by faith in Christ’s blood by which we have peace with God. The blood of Christ has atoning power. By it our sins, no matter how black, are atoned for (Col. 2:14). The blood of Christ has cleansing power. The blood of the God/man cleanses from *all* sin (1 Jn 1:7). Through faith in God’s Word. As an “apostle” God uniquely revealed the good news about Jesus to Paul (3, 5). “Apostle” means “emissary” or “representative.” Christ uniquely chose the apostles as his ambassadors and anointed them with his Spirit to teach authoritatively about him (Matt 10:40). Jesus promised he would give the NT Scriptures to us through them (Jn 14:26; 15:26-27; 16: 13-15). Would Paul have been shocked to see us study his letters as

authoritative in the church? No. He insisted that he had seen the resurrected Christ and been commissioned by him. God affirmed his apostleship by miraculous signs (2 Cor. 12:12). During his life his letters were being collected and treated as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16). But our point is we know God through his word.

#2: We must reveal Jesus Christ to the world. Paul had received a “stewardship” from God. He had been given a responsibility by the Master of God’s house, Jesus. He was to “serve” the gospel of Jesus to the world as a man under authority and accountable to his Master. In a more general sense God has given this stewardship to the church too through the apostles (Mt. 28:18ff.). If we have experienced new birth by God’s Spirit don’t we want this blessing of God’s grace for others? What encourages us? Consider God’s sovereignty (Eph. 1:4-5; Acts 18:9-10). If the heart of sinners is as opposed to God as the Bible says (2:1-3) then what success could we expect without God’s sovereign grace? But if he is sovereign, we can pray and speak with confidence knowing God saves and not us. Consider Christ’s cross. Once we were orphans and sons of disobedience. Now we are God’s sons because he condemned his Son in our place to save us. Have you fathomed God’s love for you in his Son? This news can’t be kept a secret. This secret must be told.