

Sermon or Lesson: Colossians 1:25-27 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: The Mystery, With Its Accompanying Glorious Spiritual Riches

READ: Colossians 1:25-27, with vv.24 and 28-29 for context

BACKGROUND:

- - Jesus is Jehovah God Himself, in fullness and in physical bodily form, which qualifies Him to "redeem" or buy "the forgiveness of sins" for humans through His suffering and death on the cross. (vv.19,14)
 - - Through that torturous self-sacrificing physical death of Christ, God has provided a way for humans to be reconciled to Him, even though we humans are born automatically alienated from Him and officially are an enemy of His. (vv.21-22)
 - - This way that God has provided for humans to be reconciled to Himself is called the "gospel" or 'good news'. (vv.22-23)
 - - God desires that every person hears the "gospel" message and responds in faith, followed by being firmly grounded in the doctrines that comprise the "gospel" and the faith. (v.23)
 - - By God's design, servants of the gospel are expected to endure the afflictions that accompany their activities of spreading the gospel and the word of God. (v.24)
 - - But, there is tremendous joy within sharing the gospel with unbelievers, even if suffering is incurred. (v.24)
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v.25 - READ

[Lesson Question: What was Paul tasked to do, and what role did that play in God's program historically?]

SECTION POINT: God commissioned Paul to disclose and establish among the Gentiles a new institution called the "church", which God had kept as a "hidden" "mystery" up until that point in time.

- - "By the commission God gave [him]", Paul became a "servant" of the "church". (vv.25,24)
- - Paul has been designated with the duty of serving and ministering to the church, Christ's body. (Strong's #1249)
- - To be more specific, Paul was given the task of "fulfilling" "the word of God" in the sense of "abundantly supplying" it or "presenting [it]... in its fullness". (from Strong's #4137 - 'replete' (AHD))
- - On a practical level, then, Paul was given the functions of disclosing the gospel to the Gentiles and abundantly supplying the word of God to them, through which he then started, established, and nurtured churches among them. (v.23; cf. vv.28-29)
- - In the midst of his work to accomplish this task that was given to him personally by God, Paul encountered and willingly "suffered... afflictions", all of which were for the sake of the church. (v.24)

v.26 - READ

- - The "church", which is a gathering or assembly of Gentile believers in Christ, was a new religious institution in God's program, and was initially started primarily by this commissioned ministry work of Paul.
 - - Previous to this point in time, God's program was implemented through synagogues, which were comprised of Hebrews, of the Jewish faith (Judaism).
 - - Up to this point in time, this radical change in God's program was a "mystery" - information that God kept unknown, and undisclosed, and unrevealed, and undiscoverable by humans.
 - - God deliberately "kept [this information] hidden, for ages and generations", until this time in which Paul was commissioned to "disclose" and implement it "among the Gentiles". (v.27)
 - - So, as Paul, along with Timothy and Epaphras, were leading Gentiles like the Colossians to place their faith in Christ and become true believers or "saints", this information about the "church" institution that God was newly establishing among them "was revealed and rendered apparent" to them through the teaching. (Strong's #5319)
 - - Essentially, through the functioning of the "church", God's kingdom was being opened up to reach, bring in, and "now" include Gentile believers, whereas formerly the people being brought into God's kingdom were mostly only Hebrew Jews. (cf. Ephesians 3:6)
 - - This new institution, the "church", is designated and tasked to carry on what Paul and other servants of God have been commissioned to do: to proclaim the gospel (v.23), "to present" and abundantly supply "the word of God" (v.25) to the Gentiles in the world (v.27), to "proclaim Christ", and to "admonish and teach everyone with all [spiritual] wisdom", so that everyone becomes comprehensively spiritually mature (v.28). (cf. Ephesians 3:1-13)
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v.27 - READ

[Lesson Question: What (2) other main aspects are specifically named in the New Testament as being a likewise and corresponding "mystery", and what "glorious riches" do these mysteries contain and for whom? Hint: see Ephesians 3:4 and 6:19.]

SECTION POINT: In addition to God now blessing Gentiles with the establishing of the "church" among them, God includes "glorious [spiritual] riches" for those persons who respond properly to God and to what He has done and is doing.

- In addition to the "mystery" that is the "church", there are two other corresponding or companion mysteries that are "now disclosed":
 - - - - the "mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4) - who Christ is, what He is, and what He did to provide a way for humans to be reconciled to God. (Colossians 1:15-22)
 - - - - and the "mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:19) - the 'good news' message that God has reconciled believers "by Christ's physical body through death [on the cross] to present them holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22-23a).

- - Contained within the disclosing and implementation of this new program that God has for the Gentiles, there are "glorious riches" awaiting those persons who hear the gospel and properly respond in faith.
- - One of the "glorious riches" is that upon hearing the gospel and believing in Christ for the payment of one's own sins, each believing person then receives "Christ in you", which is the Holy Spirit living in and residing in that believing person. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
- - By implication, this phenomenon of having Christ living in believers includes the dynamic that believers now have direct and internal access to God's power "in [their] mind" to individually empower each believer to be and live "holy in [God's] sight". (Colossians 1:21,22)
- - Another of the "glorious riches" is that with the receiving of "Christ in you", each believing person also thereupon receives "the hope of glory", which is the "confidence and expectation" that spring forth from the guarantee of one day being taken up into heaven to live forever with God. (Colossians 1:27, Strong's #1680; cf. Ephesians 1:13-14)
- - These mysteries of Christ living in and empowering a believer by means of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying guarantee that the believer cannot lose his/her salvation during any of the remainder of his/her life on earth are new dynamics that God has now implemented, starting at that point in time and human history.
- - All of these new dynamics are "glorious riches", which are now available to us Gentiles, who previously had been essentially excluded from the program of God. Thank you, Jesus!! :)

QUESTION: Why did God disclose this 'mystery' about the 'church' "to the saints" and not to everyone? (vv.26-27)

- - God's purpose is that when individual persons put their faith in Christ in response to hearing the gospel, they each need to become a member within a group of other believers in order to grow spiritually and to then implement the various aspects of God's program for them.
- - Unbelievers do not have like-mindedness with believers in these spiritual matters, therefore in this regard unbelievers essentially have no need to grow spiritually as a believer in a church community with other believers until the unbelievers each actually become a believer themselves.
- - The 'church' is an extension of Christ, His body of those persons who properly believe in Him (v.24), and therefore it is an integral part of God's program specifically and especially designed for the healthy functioning of His believers.
- - Note, though, that the church can and should be an environment and means through which unbelievers can be brought in to hear the gospel and invited to respond by placing their faith in Jesus Christ.
- - But for unbelievers, a lesser degree of mystery still remains upon the realities about Christ, the gospel, and the church, because as stated in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."
- - Therefore by God's design and for His purposes, the lesser degree of mystery surrounding Christ, the gospel, and the church requires that these must be presented

and repeatedly explained to unbelieving people before they can gain a minimally sufficient understanding of these doctrinal matters that will move them towards placing their faith in Christ.

- - Logically, then, it is the responsibility of true believers to spiritually discern, understand, guard, teach, and pass along to the next generation the basic doctrines and tenets of the faith.

- - Otherwise, from their innate non-comprehension, pagans and unbelievers will just outright reject, mock, trample, and distort these mysteries - the Word of God, the realities about Christ, the gospel, and the purpose of the church, which are holy, sacred, righteous, "glorious", "valuable", and precious before God. (Matthew 7:6; Colossians 1:27 - Strong's #4149)

BIG IDEA: Gentile believers are now extremely blessed that God has disclosed and implemented new dynamics that greatly benefit them spiritually, such as "the church", "Christ in you", and "the hope of glory".

APPLICATIONS:

- - Does this church genuinely and distinctly focus on and strive to accomplish all that the "church" was originally designated, commissioned, and tasked to be and to do?

- - As an institution, does this church distinctly proclaim the gospel, and by extension, lead people to saving faith in Christ (v.23)? Specifically, how? And who exactly is doing this? Name them. And how did they get the training to lead people to Christ?

- - In the last year, have any people been genuinely led to faith in Christ by someone in this church?

- - Does this church distinctly present and abundantly supply the word of God (vv.25,27)? Is the word of God actually being taught verse-by-verse and phrase-by-phrase? Or instead, in the sermons, lessons, and studies, is it merely being read once, and then vaguely referred to after that in the remainder of the sermon or lesson?

- - Does this church distinctly "make known... the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v.27)? And does this church explain and teach its believers how to properly and effectively draw on this empowering from God that is available within them?

- - Does this church distinctly identify, directly train, abundantly equip, and supportively send out servants of the gospel, servants of the church, and servants of Christ? (vv.23-27)

- - What specific programs or seminars has this church been conducting that solely focus on training people to do ministry? Name them and how frequently they are held. How many can you count for the last 5 years? Hold up your fingers.

- - Who has this church trained and sent out into ministry in the last 5 years? Name them. How many do you count? Hold up your fingers.

- - Is this church off track in any of these areas, not pursuing or accomplishing some of these important tasks that God has designated churches to do, and to be?

- - What can you do to contribute to this church getting on track in any of these areas?

[Additional Lesson Questions to ponder (optional, if time allows):

- - In our modern times, does God commission people to be a servant of the church without them going through an official commissioning or ordination ceremony conducted by a church?
- - Should a person be commissioned as a pastor of a church if he has not been thoroughly academically trained in the Word of God in a Bible college and a seminary, and has not subsequently proven himself able and consistent in effectively teaching the Word of God? Hint: see 1 Timothy 3:1-7, particularly the last phrase in verse 2; see 1 Timothy 1:3,7; and see Titus 1:6-9, particularly verse 9.

- What would be the likely results in a church if the Word of God is not being presented or is not being abundantly supplied?
 - - - - Either that church will wither and die;
 - - - - or that church will take on a distorted, unhealthy, or improper form;
 - - - - and the ministries of that church risk becoming ineffectual and superficial;
 - - - - and most of the people of that church will not significantly grow spiritually, and will remain spiritually shallow, immature, or worse - even though they may think they are growing.
 - - - - Thereby, the only people in that church who will significantly grow spiritually are those who are self-disciplined, self-motivated, and proficient at feeding themselves the Word of God.

- - If this information about God's activities to reconcile humans to Himself was a mystery in the past, then what was understood in this regard prior to the disclosure of this mystery? Answer: Essentially, an Anointed One from God would come one day and save or deliver humans. (Daniel 9:25,26; Isaiah 53:5)
- - Does this mean that God intentionally hid this information, and perhaps even disguised it within the Old Testament? Answer: Yes, definitely. (Colossians 1:26)
- - Why did God exclude the Gentiles during all of the time and centuries before this coming of Christ? Hint: see Genesis 12:1-3.]

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