

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MYSTERIES

Part XIII

by Thomas Ice

*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the **mystery** which has been kept **secret** for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.*

—Romans 16:25–27

Paul again uses the term “mystery” as he closes out his theological masterpiece in Romans. Here “mystery” is associated with the gospel that Paul has grounded the Roman believers in. Interestingly, these final three verses in Romans have been totally excluded from the Majority Text.¹ Textual critic Bruce Metzger and his committee of textual scholars believe these three verses are part of the original and almost all manuscripts include them as genuine.² Following the flow of the text, it is likely that Paul would end this great Epistle with a doxological prayer in which he praises God for His magnificent plan of the gospel.

This passage is the first of a cluster of passages that speak of the mysteries revealed to Paul about God’s current revelation of His plan through Christ, the gospel, and for the church (Eph. 1:9–12; 3:1–13; Col. 1:25—2:3; 2 Tim. 1:8–12; Titus 1:2–3). This mystery theme in Paul is of major emphasis in his writings but often neglected when theologians build their theology. William Newell believes “that in verses 25 to 27 preparation is made by the Apostle Paul for the unfolding in his further epistles of that great secret of God called “The Mystery,—kept silenced through the times of ages”; the Special revelator of which Paul is.”³ S. Lewis Johnson notes, “The paragraph is one of Paul’s most carefully constructed and characteristic benedictions in all his letters. It is the longest of his doxologies, and it is certainly the most important from a theological standpoint.”⁴

PAUL’S GOSPEL

Paul refers to the gospel as “my gospel” in verse 25 and also earlier in Romans 2:16 when he says, “on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.” He also uses that phrase in 2 Timothy 2:8, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel.” Does Paul have a special gospel different from the other Apostles? I do not think that is what he means by “my” gospel. I think tied up in Paul’s presentation of the gospel are the mysteries that he was chosen to reveal about the gospel. In this context it is “that God was going to receive Jew and Gentile into the same body, the church of Jesus Christ.”⁵ The basis for the forgiveness of sin has always been on the basis of faith in God’s substitutionally provided sacrifice, revealed as the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is also interesting that the Apostle Paul specifically says he received the gospel directly from the Lord Himself. “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man,

nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11–12). The focus of his ministry was to the Gentiles: "seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised" (Gal. 2:7). When Paul speak of "my gospel" it appears it refers to the good news of grace through faith in Christ, but with a focus on the secret that in Christ Jews and Gentiles are co-equal in His body. Such an emphasis explains why he includes the phrase, "has been made known to all the nations" in this passage. The gospel is specifically for all humanity, not just the Jews.

The Greek word "establish," means "to fix firmly in a place, to cause to be inwardly firm or committed, confirm, establish, strengthen."⁶ Here we see the purpose of the revelation of the mystery that Paul is making known to the Roman believers in preparation for his later visit. "The structure of the Greek word which is translated 'is able' in verse 25 is such that it states the truth that it is the Holy Spirit who is able to establish the believer in the Gospel."⁷

THE MYSTERY

What is the mystery in this passage? The Messiah was known in the Old Testament, but now that He has come onto the scene, accomplished His ministry and returned to the right-hand of the Father, God has revealed to Paul previously hidden truths about Him. Ernest Campbell explains:

Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in the heavenlies in resurrection-body form (8:34; Col. 3:1). In this position He is the *Spiritual Head* of the spiritual organism, the Church, which is designated as His body (Eph. 1:22–23). In other words, the Jesus Christ Paul was preaching gives to Him a *new role* in God's present manner of bringing men into a relationship with Himself.⁸

Further, there is nothing in the Old Testament about Jewish and Gentile believers being co-equal in Christ. Yes, Gentiles were to be saved, but these Old Testament passages speak of Israel ruling over the nations during the millennium, which is certainly true. Only in the New Testament mysteries given primarily to Paul is there a body of Christ with co-equal Jewish and Gentile believers in it. Sanford Mills says,

It is all in accord with God's eternal plan and program that this message must not be kept within the confines of Israel but is to be made known unto "all the Gentiles" and many shall render submissive faith (Romans 1:5) in this Person and plan which is now revealed (Romans 1:2; 3:21; Hebrews 1:1, 2).

What then is this mystery? It is salvation and it is centered in one Person, "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).⁹

KEPT SECRET FOR LONG AGES PAST

God's revelation of Christ and the church, even though it was always part of God's eternal plan, was nevertheless kept secret until revealed through the Lord's Apostle to the Gentiles—Paul. "The Divine plan of man's Redemption through Jesus Christ, had been kept in silence through the whole duration of a past eternity," according to H. P. Liddon. "No human being, of himself, could anticipate God's method of redeeming His

creatures.”¹⁰ God’s plan had to be revealed and this passage says just that. Had it not been revealed, we would not have a clue as to what God was doing in history and the true purpose for the church. This passage, along with Ephesians 3:1–13 and Colossians 1:25—2:3 makes it crystal clear that the church, the church age, Gentile involvement in God’s plan, and the nature of God’s redemption were not mentioned at all in the Old Testament Scripture. The broader notion of salvation of all people groups was noted in the Older Testament.

CONCLUSION

We find out in verse 26 the purpose for the mystery revelation to be “made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.” Paul’s gospel was to induce faith among the Gentiles, which he says is the only hope for glory among the Gentiles (Col. 1:27). Thus, in God’s great wisdom, His progress of revelation in which He gradually revealed His Word, was to lead to a time in which there would be a great ingathering of Gentiles who were to come into a right relationship with the God of Israel. This He is accomplishing through Paul’s gospel. This is seen in Acts 15 where James addresses the early church during the Jerusalem Council. “And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, ‘Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name’” (Acts 15:12–14).

Among other things, the current church age is a time of Gentile blessing where we share with believing Jews the benefits of God’s great blessings through adoption into Christ. God’s plan of salvation through Christ to the church is said by Paul to be a product of God the Father’s great plan. “To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 16:27). Thus concludes Paul great teaching doxology to God, which is a fitting way to end this great epistle in which he explains the great plan of salvation found in Christ. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Zane C. Hodges & Arthur L. Farstad, editors, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), p. 511.

² Bruce Metzger, editor, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), pp. 533–36, 540–41.

³ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Grace Publications, 1938), p. 564.

⁴ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., adapted by Mike Abendroth, *Discovering Romans: Spiritual Revival for the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), p. 242.

⁵ Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p. 252.

⁶ Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 945.

⁷ Sanford C. Mills, *A Hebrew Christian looks at Romans* (New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971), p. 490.

⁸ (emphasis original) Ernest R. Campbell, *A Commentary of Romans*, 2 vols. (Silverton, OR: Canyonview Press, 1988), vol. 2, p. 219.

⁹ Mills, *Romans*, p. 491.

¹⁰ H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), p. 308.