

• Paul almost returns to his prayer...

• But digresses again to explain his phrase 'prisoner for you gentiles'

Paul's special ministry among the gentiles

• God's steward of the revelation of the good news of Jesus

• A special person for a particular ministry

• God's word is self-authenticating

• The Spirit and the Bible reveal the message

• The Spirit enlightens

Paul was praying for the Ephesians <sup>¶1</sup>, but turned aside to speak of the exceeding greatness of God's power <sup>¶2</sup>. Now he **almost** comes back to his prayer. *'For this reason I, Paul, Christ's prisoner for you gentiles...'* <sup>¶3</sup>. And then he digresses again! He was going to say 'For this reason I, Paul, Christ's prisoner for you gentiles ... bow my knees before the Father...' – and continue with his prayer. This is what he does say when he gets back to his thought in Ephesians 3:14. But he knows that the phrase 'prisoner for you gentiles' needs some explaining. So he turns aside in Ephesians 3:2–13 before continuing with his thought. At Ephesians 3:1 he almost returns to his prayer – but not quite!

*'For this reason I, Paul, Christ's prisoner for you gentiles* <sup>¶1</sup> – *I assume you have heard of my stewardship of the grace of God for you'* <sup>¶2</sup>. Paul has been called by God to have a special ministry among gentile Christians. He has a 'stewardship' – a work of distributing the gospel to others. The Greek word is *oikonomia*; it is related to *oikonomos* ('steward', 'person in charge of the household', 'estate manager'). Paul used this idea as a picture of his ministry. He was an 'estate manager' responsible for distributing to others the supplies of God's kingdom. In this case, the supplies of God's kingdom is his revelation of the good news about Jesus. Paul is a steward of the mysteries of God <sup>¶3</sup>. He is entrusted with the treasures of the gospel. He has a knowledge of God's plan of salvation. Other preachers have a similar responsibility <sup>¶4</sup> but he does this work as a first-generation apostle. Paul's word 'stewardship', *oikonomia*, means 'the administration of salvation', 'the work of giving out God's gospel-supplies'. We have the word in Ephesians 1:10 and it comes again in 1 Corinthians 9:17, Colossians 1:25 and 1 Timothy 1:4.

Paul says, 'You know of course how God called me to this special work of preaching this gospel of grace to you gentiles, all over the Mediterranean world'. God raises up special people for particular ministries in the story of His church. Paul hopes that they recognise that God has given Paul this work.

*'By revelation, the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote above briefly* <sup>¶1</sup>. *Looking at what I said you will be able to perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ.* <sup>¶2</sup> Paul is confident that as they study what he has said 'above' (that is, in Ephesians chapters 1–2), they will recognise that what he has said truly is a revelation from God. **The word of God is self-authenticating.** The Christian knows the truth of God, for himself, by the Spirit. When he reads the word of God it corresponds to what he almost knows already. 'You have an anointing ... and you all have knowledge' said John <sup>¶3</sup>. The 'word of God is in you' said Paul and James <sup>¶4</sup>. When a person becomes a Christian 'the word' – the entire message of the gospel – takes up residence in that person's life. Within the Christian's heart there is an instinctive sensitivity to the message of the gospel. So Paul says 'you will be able to perceive my insight'. He is confident that they will recognise him as a channel of revelation to them from God. The Spirit reveals certain things, and the Bible reveals them as well. It is as if the Christian is seeing the truth twice, once by the Spirit and again in written form. The written form is stronger, clearer. When the Christian reads it under the enlightenment of the Spirit he or she sees that what is being read comes from God.

¶1 1:15–19a

¶2 1:19b-2:2

¶3 3:1

¶1 3:1

¶2 3:2

¶3 1 Cor. 4:1, 2

¶4 see Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10, 11

¶1 3:3

¶2 3:4

¶3 1 John 2:20

¶4 see 1 Thessalonians 2:13; James 1:21

**A fuller and clearer revelation**

• **The Old Testament pointed to the future blessing of the gentiles**

• **The first apostles and prophets laid the foundations that later ones built on**

• **“The full equality of the gentiles” – a revelation of new clarity**

• **Paul’s special preaching work**

Paul continues: ‘The mystery was not revealed to the sons of men in other generations as it is now revealed to the saints by His apostles and by prophets, by means of the Holy Spirit’ <sup>□1</sup>. What Paul is about to speak of is a revelation which had only recently (that is recently to Paul in the first century) been made specially clear. It was not totally un-revealed before, but it had never been revealed in the fullness in which it was revealed to Paul and the apostles and prophets of the first century. It is **not** true to say that the church is **not** found in the vision of the Old Testament prophets, but it became **clearer** later, in the teaching of the apostles. The Old Testament said quite clearly that gentiles would be blessed; Abraham was given that promise. Passages like Ezekiel 36, Amos 9 and Hosea 3 refer to the church (as the quotations in Acts 15 and Romans 10 make clear). But the matter became immensely clearer in the first century.

□1 3:5

Again we notice that there are different kinds of prophets. Although apostles and their prophetic colleagues must continue until the full maturity of the church, yet the first generation gave the ‘foundational’ revelation to the church. It was embodied in the New Testament documents. A modern apostle does not lay a foundation working from zero; he has to lay the **same** foundation as the first-generation apostles. It was the first apostles and prophets who were, personally and in their teaching, the foundation of Christ’s worldwide church. Modern apostles can only do the same thing again. They do not start from zero with their **own** doctrines.

What was this revelation that came with new clarity? ‘The gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel’ <sup>□1</sup>. What came with new clarity was the revelation that when the gentiles came into the body of Christ, the church, they would come in with full equality. The abolition of the Mosaic law, and the abolition of the special position of Israel, enabled gentile Christians to be fellow-heirs (people lined up for the inheritance God wants to give His people), fellow-members of the body, and sharers in the promises. God has an abundance of gifts He has promised to give His people. The promises are wide open to all believers, Jews and gentiles alike. It was the preaching of this revelation that was specially the work of the apostle Paul.

□1 3:6

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