

Looking into the mystery: Paul's Gospel

Paul: called to reveal the mystery:

Acts 9:3-6:

And as he (Saul) journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined around about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Acts 9:5-6

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! 6 Now get up and go into the city and await my further instructions."

TLB

Paul's further instructions are given in Acts 26:16-18:

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Acts 26:16-18

16 Now stand up! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and my witness. You are to tell the world about this experience and about the many other occasions when I shall appear to you. 17 And I will protect you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am going to send you to the Gentiles 18 to open their eyes to their true condition so that they may repent and live in the light of God instead of in Satan's darkness, so that they may receive forgiveness for their sins and God's inheritance along with all people everywhere whose sins are cleansed away, who are set apart by faith in me.'

TLB

Acts 26:16-18 (MsgB)

But now, up on your feet—I have a job for you. I've handpicked you to be a servant and witness to what's happened today, and to what I am going to show

you. 'I'm sending you off [18] to open the eyes of the outsiders so they can see the difference between dark and light, and choose light, see the difference between Satan and God, and choose God. I'm sending you off to present my offer of sins forgiven, and a place in the family, inviting them into the company of those who begin real living by believing in me.'

The Source of the Revelation of the Mystery:

Galatians 1:11-12:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Gal 1:11-12

11 Dear friends, I solemnly swear that the way to heaven that I preach is not based on some mere human whim or dream. 12 For my message comes from no less a person than Jesus Christ himself, who told me what to say. No one else has taught me.

TLB

Galatians 1:11-12 (MsgB)

Know this—I am most emphatic here, friends—this great Message I delivered to you is not mere human optimism. [12] I didn't receive it through the traditions, and I wasn't taught it in some school. I got it straight from God, received the Message directly from Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:15-2:2

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ: but they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.

Then fourteen years afterward I went up again to Jerusalem with Baranabas and took Titus with me also, and I went up by revelation and communicatd unto that THAT GOSPEL which I preach among the Gentiles.....

Gal 1:15-2:3

15 But then something happened! For even before I was born, God had chosen me to be his and called me-what kindness and grace- 16 to reveal his Son within me so that I could go to the Gentiles and show them the Good News about Jesus.

When all this happened to me I didn't go at once and talk it over with anyone else; 17 I didn't go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. No, I went away into the deserts of Arabia and then came back to the city of Damascus. 18 It was not until three years later that I finally went to Jerusalem for a visit with Peter and stayed there with him for fifteen days. 19 And the only other apostle I met at that time was James, our Lord's brother. 20(Listen to what I am saying, for I am telling you this in the very presence of God. This is exactly what happened-I am not lying to you.) 21 Then after this visit I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22 And still the Christians in Judea didn't even know what I looked like. 23 All they knew was what people were saying, that "our former enemy is now preaching the very faith he tried to wreck." 24 And they gave glory to God because of me.

Galatians 2

2:1 Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas; and Titus came along too. 2 I went there with definite orders from God to confer with the brothers there about the message I was preaching to the Gentiles. I talked privately to the leaders of the church so that they would all understand just what I had been teaching and, I hoped, agree that it was right. 3 And they did agree; they did not even demand that Titus, my companion, should be circumcised, though he was a Gentile.

TLB

Galatians 1:15-2:3 (MsgB)

Even then God had designs on me. Why, when I was still in my mother's womb he chose and called me out of sheer generosity! [16] Now he has intervened and revealed his Son to me so that I might joyfully tell non-Jews about him.

Immediately after my calling—without consulting anyone around me [17] and without going up to Jerusalem to confer with those who were apostles long before I was—I got away to Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus, [18] but it

was three years before I went up to Jerusalem to compare stories with Peter. I was there only fifteen days—but what days they were! [19] Except for our Master's brother James, I saw no other apostles. [20] (I'm telling you the absolute truth in this.)

[21] Then I began my ministry in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. [22] After all that time and activity I was still unknown by face among the Christian churches in Judea. [23] There was only this report: "That man who once persecuted us is now preaching the very message he used to try to destroy." [24] Their response was to recognize and worship God because of me!

[2:1] Fourteen years after that first visit, Barnabas and I went up to Jerusalem and took Titus with us. [2] I went to clarify with them what had been revealed to me. At that time I placed before them exactly what I was preaching to the non-Jews. I did this in private with the leaders, those held in esteem by the church, so that our concern would not become a controversial public issue, marred by ethnic tensions, exposing my years of work to denigration and endangering my present ministry. [3] Significantly, Titus, non-Jewish though he was, was not required to be circumcised.

Only Through Paul's Ministry the Mystery is made known:

Ephesians 3:1-12:

For this cause (because you are built together, Jew & Gentile, into a habitation of God through the Spirit (2:22), I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery: (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and power in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord; in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by faith of him.

Eph 3:1-12

3:1 I, Paul, the servant of Christ, am here in jail because of you-for preaching that you Gentiles are a part of God's house. 2 No doubt you already know that God has given me this special work of showing God's favor to you Gentiles, as I briefly mentioned before in one of my letters. God himself showed me this secret plan of his, that the Gentiles, too, are included in his kindness. 4 I say this to explain to you how I know about these things. 5 In olden times God did not share this plan with his people, but now he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to his apostles and prophets.

6 And this is the secret: that the Gentiles will have their full share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God's sons; both are invited to belong to his Church, and all of God's promises of mighty blessings through Christ apply to them both when they accept the Good News about Christ and what he has done for them. 7 God has given me the wonderful privilege of telling everyone about this plan of his; and he has given me his power and special ability to do it well.

8 Just think! Though I did nothing to deserve it, and though I am the most useless Christian there is, yet I was the one chosen for this special joy of telling the Gentiles the Glad News of the endless treasures available to them in Christ; 9 and to explain to everyone that God is the Savior of the Gentiles too, just as he who made all things had secretly planned from the very beginning.

10 And his reason? To show to all the rulers in heaven how perfectly wise he is when all of his family-Jews and Gentiles alike-are seen to be joined together in his Church 11 in just the way he had always planned it through Jesus Christ our Lord.

12 Now we can come fearlessly right into God's presence, assured of his glad welcome when we come with Christ and trust in him.

TLB

Ephes. 3:1-11 (MsgB)

This is why I, Paul, am in jail for Christ, having taken up the cause of you outsiders, so-called. [2] I take it that you're familiar with the part I was given in God's plan for including everybody. [3] I got the inside story on this from God himself, as I just wrote you in brief.

[4] As you read over what I have written to you, you'll be able to see for yourselves into the mystery of Christ. [5] None of our ancestors understood this. Only in our time has it been made clear by God's Spirit through his holy apostles and prophets of this new order. [6] The mystery is that people who have never heard of God and those who have heard of him all their lives (what I've been calling outsiders and insiders) stand on the same ground before God. They get

the same offer, same help, same promises in Christ Jesus. The Message is accessible and welcoming to everyone, across the board.

[7] This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to this Message. It came as a sheer gift to me, a real surprise, God handling all the details. [8] When it came to presenting the Message to people who had no background in God's way, I was the least qualified of any of the available Christians. God saw to it that I was equipped, but you can be sure that it had nothing to do with my natural abilities.

And so here I am, preaching and writing about things that are way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ. [9] My task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along. [10] Through Christians like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels!

[11] All this is proceeding along lines planned all along by God and then executed in Christ Jesus.

The Mystery: Christ in you, the hope of glory!

Colossians 1:23-29

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; whoc now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Col 1:22-29

23 the only condition is that you fully believe the Truth, standing in it steadfast and firm, strong in the Lord, convinced of the Good News that Jesus died for you, and never shifting from trusting him to save you. This is the wonderful news that came to each of you and is now spreading all over the world. And I, Paul, have the joy of telling it to others.

24 But part of my work is to suffer for you; and I am glad, for I am helping to finish up the remainder of Christ's sufferings for his body, the Church.

25 God has sent me to help his Church and to tell his secret plan to you Gentiles. 26 He has kept this secret for centuries and generations past, but now at last it has pleased him to tell it to those who love him and live for him, and the riches and glory of his plan are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ in your hearts is your only hope of glory.

28 So everywhere we go we talk about Christ to all who will listen, warning them and teaching them as well as we know how. We want to be able to present each one to God, perfect because of what Christ has done for each of them. 29 This is my work, and I can do it only because Christ's mighty energy is at work within me.

TLB

Col. 1:23-29 (MsgB)

You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted. There is no other Message—just this one. Every creature under heaven gets this same Message. I, Paul, am a messenger of this Message.

[24] I want you to know how glad I am that it's me sitting here in this jail and not you. There's a lot of suffering to be entered into in this world—the kind of suffering Christ takes on. I welcome the chance to take my share in the church's part of that suffering. [25] When I became a servant in this church, I experienced this suffering as a sheer gift, God's way of helping me serve you, laying out the whole truth.

[26] This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it's out in the open. [27] God wanted everyone, not just Jews, to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you, therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple. That is the substance of our Message. [28] We preach Christ, warning people not to add to the Message. We teach in a spirit of profound common sense so that we can bring each person to maturity. To be mature is to be basic. Christ! No more, no less. [29] That's what I'm working so hard at day after day, year after year, doing my best with the energy God so generously gives me.

Committed to & obedient to Paul's gospel:

Romans 6:17:

But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Rom 6:17

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted
NIV

Rom 6:17

17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,
RSV

Rom 6:17

17 Thank God that though you once chose to be slaves of sin, now you have obeyed with all your heart the teaching to which God has committed you.
TLB

...Thank God! Your thralldom to sin is a thing of the past: you have rendered allegiance – from the heart you have rendered it – to the New Teaching, the mold into which you have let your nature be run. (Way)

...you have now yielded a hearty obedience to that system of truth in which you have been instructed. (Waym)

...you have rendered obedience out of the heart unto that mold of teaching into which you were delivered up.

...the model of doctrine into which you were delivered as into a mold.

The world to be judged by the mystery revealed in Paul's gospel:

Romans 2:16:

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.