

## God's Wisdom In The Church

Eph. 3:1-13

If you weren't here last week, let me get you up to speed on where we're at in our discussion of how God is working to unite everything in Christ. In chapter 2 verses 1-10, we saw how Jesus, through his life and death has united us individually to himself through faith. And this is what gets most the press when we talk about Jesus' work—personal salvation. But, Jesus died not only to unite us to himself. It's extremely important for us to realize, and we looked at it last week, that Jesus died to unite us to one another and by us I mean the Jews and the Gentiles. Who are they. The Jews were God's people that he made for himself. He chose a man named Abraham, and through his offspring produced the nation of Israel, ethnic Jews. They were distinct from every other nation, ethnicity, and people-group all of whom were called "Gentiles".

And that's who he's addressing right here, "for this reason, I Paul a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles," but he immediately digresses and discusses something else. Now he's not being ADD, he didn't just get distracted, he wants to explain a little bit more about his role in advancing the Gospel and why it is he is a prisoner for Christ specially on behalf of the Gentiles and he's going to resume his train of thought in vs 14 but for now he begins explaining, "assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation as I have written briefly."

So Paul is saying that God has revealed a mystery to him, he uses that word mystery, 3 times in 4 verses and he's saying that it was not made known to folks to people before him in the same way that God has now revealed it to him. God has revealed to Paul specifically what he only revealed to previous generations generally and he did it through revelation.

And I feel like I need to address this idea of revelation...Jesse Duplantis, a New Orleans based televangelist, "[God] said, 'I want you to believe me for a Falcon 7X.'" Falcon 7x is a 54 million dollar luxury plane. He assures folks that he's not doing it for the luxury but simply to be more effective in his ministry and defending the importance of the Falcon 7x he said, "I really believe that if Jesus was physically on the Earth today, he wouldn't be riding a donkey..."

Paul is saying that God revealed this to him, Jesse Duplantis is saying God revealed to him that he needs a Falcon 7x. So, does God still reveal things to people *in the same way* that he revealed them to Paul here. I'll say it another way, is God still giving people new Scripture-quality messages on par with the authority of the Bible? Are there people that literally start their sentences with "thus says the Lord" and then say something that's not in the Bible? No...bc of the way that the NT talks about prophecy—speaking on behalf of God.

OT the prophet was a formal designation for someone who God has chosen as his mouthpiece literally to give divinely authoritative messages to his people...And in the NT, the idea of prophecy—speaking the words of God—is very different most notably now prophecy is no longer authoritative in itself. Prophecy now is a function of the Spirit whereby he works in a through someone to give godly counsel or biblical instruction or even warning. But it's not infallible subject to error... and so it's not authoritative in itself. We could talk a lot about this but look at 1 Cor. 14:29 says, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said."

It needs peer review. God does not reveal authoritative private messages that aren't subject to the scrutiny of the word and other believers. Even if someone was "led by the Spirit" to say something that doesn't mean that it carries the weight of divine command. Paul clearly doesn't think that's legitimate... In fact in Acts 21:4, "We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem... vs 15 After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem." So clearly, Paul didn't see this as somehow binding...because as far as speaking new words—extra-biblical words on behalf of God starting with the words, "Thus sayeth the Lord" it's just not a thing anymore. You shouldn't believe anything I say from this pulpit if I can't support it with Scripture.

You say, well Chase doesn't still speak to us? He very much does speak to us by the Spirit through the Word. The Word of God is the means by which he intends to guide you with His Spirit (Ps 119:105)—Your Word is lamp...) This is how he guides us... And I hear folks say "God told me to do this or that" what they really mean was, "based on my knowledge of the word, I felt like obedience in this moment, looked like this... or the wisest thing to do was..."

For example "God told me to break up with him" and I ask "why" "because he's doesn't love Jesus and isn't respecting my physical boundaries." Imagine if I said, "so" "bc it's in the word" oh so what you meant what you know what God says in the word and in light of what you now know about this guy you think this most biblical wisest things is to separate from him." "Yes." "Then let's use that language and not the God revealed it to me language." You see someone to needs help, you've read the parable of the good Samaritan, you feel moved to go help them" the way you report that is not God gave me a revelation but the Spirit moved me to obey and act in love in accordance with the Scriptures. 2 Tim 3:16-17 You have everything you need...there is a danger—even a popular devotion a—built on this this idea that God's revelation in the word isn't enough that we should be seeking "something more" some personal private revelation that has validity apart from the Word...but it's not true. Folks if you heard an audible voice from heaven, it would be a certain or reliable as the Word...that's what Peter says look at this... 2 Pet. 1:17-19. "For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain, And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place."

And so, with respect to Sarah Clark, when it comes to private revelations from God and personal word outside of Scripture, Jesus is not calling. Are there instances in which chooses to work supernaturally in a very unique ways yes, but they're rare and happen because God chooses to do it not because we're called to expect that kind of experience. So what would I say to this guy, "No he didn't".

So to review, (1) strictly speaking, there is no more divine revelation happening in the kind of infallible authoritative sense that we see in the pages of the new testament. (2) The idea of being lead by the Spirit to speak god's word to folks—what the NT calls prophecy—does not carry any authority in itself, and is only legitimate inasmuch as it communicates something that's biblical. (3) Last God still speaks to believers and leads them in his Word. We need to be careful about using language like "God told me to" when what we really mean is that we felt in that moment that doing this or saying that soul be most pleasing to God based on what we know in His Word. So that's a quick theology of revelation...let's talk about what God revealed to Paul...

When you read this, you can perceive my insight in to the mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men in previous generations as it has now been revealed by his holy apostles and prophets by

the Spirit.” The mystery is that the “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise, in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”

This is the mystery! Not only has Christ united us to himself as individuals bringing salvation, he has he’s destroyed the ethnic barrier that used to set Israel apart from all the other nations and given to everyone else what used to only be available to Israel—access to him.

And he’s done it by creating a new people. So if you weren’t here you can’t watch the sermon video or read my sermon manuscript from last week, both are available on our website roanokechurch.com. but we learned that prior to Jesus coming, there were two groups of people Jews and Gentiles. You were a Jew or Gentile by your ethnicity. So there was team Jew and Team Gentiles and Christ came to make a new team—Team Jesus—the church.

And so no longer are you born into the people of God to blessings you enjoy because of your ethnicity. Now you are born again into the people of God through blessings you enjoy through union with Christ through faith. This is God’s new people...

Now, I want you to notice that Paul doesn’t talk about this new community of faith like it’s a community wholly apart from Israel. Look at the language, “fellow heirs” members of the “same body”. ~~And this is part of the mystery, you notice he didn’t say the mystery had been revealed at all to sons of men in former generations, he said it wasn’t revealed as it has now been revealed... In fact in Gen. 22 God tells Abraham that he’s going to bless the nations through him and so Israel knew God was going to bless the Gentiles but they didn’t know how...~~ Pauls’ not teaching at all that God is getting rid of Israel what he’s saying is that new people Christ has created are the fulfillment of Israel—Israel as it was always meant to be—the Israel god had planned from the beginning.

Draw a line down your paper...

Physical offspring of Abraham    Spiritual offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:29)

Physical Jews                      Spiritual Jews (Rom. 2:28-29)

Physically circumcised    Spiritual circumcised (Rom. 2:28-29) You say well what about the ethnic Jew living in Jerusalem who doesn’t know Christ—he’s not Jewish enough.

Ethnic Israel                      Spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16)

Ethnic Nation                      Spiritual nation (1 Pet. 2:9)

Ethnic Israel promised land    Spiritual Israel inheriting world (Rev. 5:9-10)

If you are in Christ, you are a part of the people that God planned to form for himself when he came to Abraham so many years ago. You a part of the Israel that he always had in mind— multi-ethnic, spirit-filled, worshipping, witnessing community as it was always meant to be...now why is this important. Vs 10 tells us and this is where we’re going to camp out for a little bit.

So in vss. 7-9, Paul restates that God gave him grace as someone who was the least of the saints—someone who formerly persecuted believers—God in his amazing grace gave him the task of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles—and we’ll talk more about those unsearchable riches next week—but the point what God has done in his church and why Paul is spending his life advancing the church vs. 10, “so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

This word manifold the “manifold” wisdom of God it’s interesting...it’s the only time the Bible it’s used. It means many colors or very complex or super intricate...Now the rulers and authorities represent demonic forces and Paul clarifies that for us in 6:12, ‘For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.’”

So here rulers and authorities represent evil spiritual beings who exercise power over the unbelieving world. Don’t miss this: God has designed his manifold wisdom to be displayed to the demonic forces. And he has designed to display it through the church. We talk a lot about our witness personally. We talk a lot about our personal witness to the world—I’ve never heard a sermon on our corporate witness to the spiritual realm. ~~There is a real spiritual realm. This is so foreign to us but it’s not foreign to the Bible. I think of Job...2 Kings 6:15-17. Jude 9, 1 Cor. 14.~~ What we do here has significant impact in ways we can’t see. Job is a perfect example.

And this is where we have to realize that the significance of what we do here. The church plays a significant role in a world that we don’t know a whole lot about...but it’s really important. God demonstrates his power in raising Jesus from the dead. He demonstrates his creativity and artistic brilliance in creation. And when it comes to displaying his wisdom...he created the church.

If God has designed to display his wisdom to the spiritual powers of darkness through the church, the wisest thing you could do is be a part of the church—the church is God’s wisdom demonstration plan. Which means that it’s not only important that we participate in it, but that we do church correctly.

This is something folks don’t often think about...For those of you who don’t know, God has some very definite opinions about how the church should be structured, who should lead the church, who should be able to teach in the church, who should serve the church, who should be able to join the church, who should be able to take the Lord’s supper, who should be baptized...and this is why it matters...because the way we do church testifies to the wisdom of God to a watching world. If God has chosen the church to display his wisdom, what does it say about wise God is when churches set up and go about church simply in a way that works for them?

I remember talking to a pastor of a church in GA and I was asking him questions about their church structure...now in light of this verse that the church demonstrates God’s wisdom...the church is a witness to God’s wisdom! You are jeopardizing the display manifold wisdom of God by saying that you and your leadership team can come up with a better way to do this, than what God said. This bothers me. It should bother you. Are you passionate about guarding the display of God’s wisdom by making sure your church is healthy and functioning according to Scripture? If you’re only interested in your personal relationship with God, probably not. If you’re interested in guarding the manifest display of God’s wisdom and glory, then yes.

We’re reworking our elders, deacons, discipleship, church covenant, membership, community outreach...I want you to know that I am relentlessly committed to doing everything I can to ensure that this church lines up with this book and we proclaim God’s wisdom in his master plan for the church...

Which is how Paul talks about it in vs. 11, “this was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.” Again don’t miss the blessings of Israel that we’re now seeing, whereas only Israel used to have access to God and only one man, and now all who have the Spirit, now we all have access to God and watch this, with boldness and confidence. One commentator said, “Because Christ place before God is

unchallengeable, so is ours because we are in Him. that because we are ‘in him’ Contrary to what some folks might say, this is telling us clearly that we don’t need a priest or anyone else in order to have access to God, that as the New Israel the privileges of God’s people are now yours in Christ. And it’s because of all of this—God’s incredible plan and Paul’s part in it that he says, “So, I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.” This phrase here “your glory” means their salvation there eventual glorification. Paul believes that his ministry is serving to bring people into a glorious future with Christ. And of course he’s right.

But notice how he characterizes his ministry...it’s a ministry marked by suffering. At the beginning of this passage, Paul called himself a prisoner for Christ, Paul is literally writing this letter from prison in Rome. But when you read about the role he is playing in the advancement of the Gospel, you don’t at all get the impression that he’s really upset about his sufferings...it seems like he’s overjoyed that he gets to be the point man for announcing this Gospel...

And it’s hear that we need to learn something from Paul about suffering. And it’s this: when are caught up in a grand story of Scripture and are playing your God assigned role, it completely changes our perspective on suffering. Notice he doesn’t say a prisoner of Rome but a prisoner for Christ. He didn’t define himself by his circumstances he defined himself by his mission and when you define yourself by your mission, then it changes the way you look at your circumstances. 2 Co. 11:24-45. “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. 2 Cor. 4:17, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” He’s so wrapped up in his calling that he can call those things light and momentary.

Football player who gets a scratch. People who’s goal is comfort and personal dreams see suffering as a huge setback. People who’s goal is the mission, see suffering as a part of the game. And doesn’t define them it refines them and allows God get glory from their obedience.

David Livingstone was a missionary to Africa in the 1800s, first European to travel it’s width and he also worked to abolish the Eastern African slave trade. “For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. . . . Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice.”

We’re supposed to live on mission. If you don’t have any scars, you may not be in the battle.