

Be Rich: I Know a Secret

by Warren Wiersbe

The mystery of the church is that believing Jews and Gentiles are one in Jesus Christ and make up the body of Christ.

Duration: 37:29

Scripture: Acts 26:16, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 3:1-13

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the mystery in the teachings of the apostle Paul. The mystery refers to the fact that when a person is saved, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile, they become part of the body of Christ. This concept is beautifully expressed in Galatians, where it is stated that believers are all one in Jesus Christ. The speaker also highlights the significance of knowing both the gospel and the mystery, as the gospel leads to salvation while the mystery brings a deeper understanding and experience of heaven. The sermon concludes by emphasizing that the gospel is the most important message in the world, as it offers forgiveness and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

We read the Word of God from Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1 through 13. Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1 through 13. In the previous chapter, Paul has been talking about the temple which is the church that we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom ye also are built together for inhabitation of God through the Spirit.

For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me toward you, how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, by which when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, the mystery 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, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel, of which 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 ages hath been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent

that now unto the principalities and powers 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 the faith of him. Wherefore, I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. The message of the gospel and the message of the mystery, and when you know both messages, you can receive the blessing of God.

The most important message in the world today is the message of the gospel, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the scriptures. Someone asked Prime Minister Gladstone one day what is the news of the day, and he said there only is one news, and that's the good news of the gospel. And this is true, because the word gospel means good news, and this good news is that you and I can be forgiven.

Now I say that's the most important message in the world because it meets the greatest need, the need for forgiveness and salvation. It costs the greatest price. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

It involved the greatest miracle. He arose again the third day according to the scriptures, and it produces the greatest results. When you believe Jesus Christ, when you open your heart to him, then tremendous things begin to happen in your heart.

But the next most important message in the world is the message of the mystery. Three times in this passage, in Ephesians 3, 1 through 13, Paul uses the word mystery. Verse 3, he made known unto me the mystery.

Verse 4, my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. Verse 9, what is the fellowship of the mystery? Now to you and me today, a mystery is something you can't understand. We used to have a radio program on years ago called I Love a Mystery, and I can still see myself as a youngster sitting by my radio storing up nightmares for that night.

Maybe you did the same thing. In the Bible, a mystery is not something you can't understand. It's something you can't understand unless you're in the family.

Someone has called a mystery a sacred secret. The word mystery simply means a truth that God hid in past ages, but now he is revealing it through his Holy Spirit. He tells us this in verse 5, 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.

There are a number of mysteries in the New Testament. There's the mystery of the kingdom. You won't find anything about this in the Old Testament scriptures.

There's the mystery of Christ. There's the mystery of Babylon. And here we have the mystery of the church, the sacred secret concerning the church.

Now what is this mystery? He tells us in verse 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. The mystery was that God would take the Jews believing and believing Gentiles and put them together into one new creation, the church. Now there are types of the church.

There are pictures of the church in Old Testament scripture. When you take the flashlight of the New Testament and you walk through the art gallery of the Old Testament, you'll find pictures and symbols of

the church. But until the Holy Spirit had revealed the mystery through Paul and the other apostles, you would not have found this.

The mystery is that believing Jews and believing Gentiles today are one in Jesus Christ and they make up that body, that temple, called the church. Now many Christians are ignorant of this mystery. And because they are ignorant of this mystery, they have certain deficiencies in their lives.

That's why I began this message by saying the most important message in all the world is the gospel. You start there. Christ died for my sins.

He was buried. He arose again for my justification. I can trust Jesus Christ and believe and be saved and he will save you.

Someone has said the gospel is the good news that nobody has to stay the way he is. And there's a lot of truth to that. But my friend, after you've accepted Jesus Christ, you don't stand still.

The gospel is an individual message. It says Christ died for me. I can come and I can be saved.

But the Christian life is not an individual life. The mystery now moves in and says, wait a minute, something more happened to you than simply being saved. You have now become a part of the body of Christ.

You Christians belong to each other. My friend, if all you know is the gospel, you will be a sanctified individualist. And that's what kills churches and that's what wrecks Christians.

But if you know the mystery, then you become a part of all that God is doing and your life is enriched and you have experiences in the Lord you could never have all by yourself. I know that here at Moody Church there are people who slip in and sit down and slip out again and never want a thing to do with anybody else. Don't bother me.

Don't visit me. Don't even talk to me. My friend, I say to you, you're missing so much.

And there are those who have their own little click. This is true in every church. They have their own little fellowship and they don't want anyone to penetrate that.

And I say to you, you're missing so much. Let's talk today about the mystery. The Apostle Paul is telling us how important the mystery is.

And for Paul to show us the importance of the mystery, he does it by relating the mystery to four different persons. In verses 1 through 13, you're going to find four different persons related to the mystery. And because these persons are related to the mystery, it shows how important the mystery is.

May I repeat once again, the mystery is that when you were saved, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, you were made a part of the body of Christ, you are all one in Jesus Christ. Paul puts it so beautifully back in Galatians. I don't suppose we can improve upon this at all.

Galatians chapter 3 verse 28, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. First he relates the mystery to Paul himself, verses 1 through 5. And there are three words that Paul uses, one of them is over in another section, verse 13, but there are three words that Paul uses that explain to us Paul's relationship to the mystery. Let

me give them to you.

Verse 3, revelation. Verse 2, dispensation. And verse 13, tribulation.

Now these three words explain Paul's relationship to the message of the mystery. First, revelation. God revealed to Paul this tremendous truth that now Jew and Gentile were one in Jesus Christ.

There was a time when all the Apostle Paul knew was the Old Testament law, that's all he knew. He was zealous of the law, he promoted the law so much that he persecuted the church. Then one day he saw Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ saved him.

That was the gospel. He said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord told him, I've got a ministry for you to perform. The Lord Jesus Christ saved Paul by means of his own power.

Jesus Christ was revealed to Paul, but that was only the beginning. You see, the Apostle Paul had many other experiences yet to go through. I'd like you to notice a little statement over in Acts chapter 26.

Acts chapter 26 and verse 16. The Lord is speaking to Paul and he says, 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, that's the gospel, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee. That's the mystery.

You see, my friend, when you trusted Christ as your Savior and you were born into the family of God, this ushered you into the school of faith. It's not enough just to know the gospel. That'll get you into heaven.

That's the beginning. But if you know the mystery, that'll bring heaven down to you. You'll discover you're already in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

Revelation. God revealed the mystery to Paul. Now the next word is dispensation, verse 2. If ye have heard of the dispensation or the stewardship of the grace of God given unto me.

Dispensation. Now this word simply means stewardship. God said to Paul, I'm going to hand to you this truth about the mystery.

Now I would be interested in going into a little detour here, which I will not do, to contrast the ministry of the 12 apostles and of the one apostle. The 12 apostles in the New Testament primarily ministered to Israel. 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles.

They were called on earth. They saw Jesus Christ on earth. Paul ministered to the Gentiles.

One apostle, he was a Jew ministering to the Gentiles. Just as the 12 are a picture of Israel, 12 tribes, 12 apostles, God's earthly people, so Paul is a picture of the church. A Jew with Gentile background and training ministering to the one body.

One apostle, one body. 12 disciples, 12 tribes of Israel. And Paul saw Jesus Christ up in heaven.

Paul was not called by Jesus Christ on earth. He was called from heaven when he saw the Lord because Paul was given the stewardship of the mystery which has to do with the heavenly things. You'll remember that God said to Abraham, Abraham, your seed, your descendants are going to be like the sands of the sea.

That's his earthly people, Israel, and like the stars of the heavens, that's his heavenly people, the church. And so the apostle Paul had a stewardship, a dispensation, and he was faithful to it. May I say to you that down through the years, many pastors and Christians were not faithful to this stewardship.

There came a dark period in the church when people didn't even understand what the church was. Paul was faithful in his stewardship. And because of this, it led to the third word, verse 13, tribulation.

You see, he begins this chapter, for this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles. Well, if you're a good Christian, you'll stay out of prison. Paul was in prison because he was a good Christian.

It was because he was faithful to his stewardship of the mystery that they threw him in prison. Now, you remember the story. It's recorded back in Acts chapter 22.

Paul was in the temple and they arrested him. They thought he had defiled the temple by bringing in some Gentiles. He hadn't.

But you know, most fusses by religious people are over nothing. And this was really nothing, but they arrested Paul, almost killed him. A centurion came down and rescued Paul.

And Paul stood there on the steps and he gave his testimony. It's a beautiful thing there in Acts chapter 22. And he said, I was raised in Tarsus and I was taught here in Jerusalem.

And he goes on to tell how he saw the Lord. And they listened. The silence was just tremendous.

They listened until he got to one word. He was quoting the Lord Jesus who said, I'm going to send you to the Gentiles. And the book of Acts says when he got to that one word, Gentiles, that Jewish mob tore their clothes and threw up the dust and said, off with this man.

He's not fit to live. Gentiles. That's why Paul was a prisoner.

You see, Paul could have compromised like some people do and say, well, the gospel is a Jewish thing. But he didn't. You see, Paul believed the mystery.

He believed that believing Jews and believing Gentiles were one in Jesus Christ. There was no prejudice in Paul, no bigotry in Paul. He believed that the gospel was for all.

And when people believe, they share in the blessings of the mystery. That's why he was a prisoner. I wonder how many truths you and I believe we would be willing to go to prison for.

You say, well, what difference does it make? It made a great deal of difference to Paul because he was a prisoner for the truth of the mystery. Now let's relate this mystery to the Gentiles, verses six through eight. We've related the mystery to Paul himself.

Now it's related to the Gentiles. The old position of the Gentiles was given by Paul back in chapter two, verses 11 and 12. Wherefore, remember that ye, being in time past, Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision in the flesh made by hands, that at that time, before you were saved, ye were without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

That's an awful position to be in. We won't go into detail on this, but just take that first phrase, without Christ, outside of Christ. The mystery says when you are in Christ, you belong to His body, and all that He is is yours, and all that He will be will be yours.

You are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. But here's the dear unsaved Gentile without Christ, outside Christ, outside the commonwealth of Israel, no citizenship, outside the covenants of promise, no hope, without God in the world. Now, says Paul, because you are now a part of the mystery, here's what you have.

Look at verse six of chapter three. That the Gentiles should be, one, fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel. A new relationship, a new position.

Now, in each of these, fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the same promise, each of these has a little word in it that means together. Whereas before, the Gentiles were over here, the Jews were over here, and never the twain could meet, now in Jesus Christ, there's togetherness. You see, the whole theme of the mystery is that God is putting things together.

I have told you many times from this pulpit that there are two forces at work in this world. There is the satanic force of sin that is tearing things apart, and there is the spiritual force of God that is putting things together. You see, this takes us back to chapter one, where he tells us that God is going to put everything together again.

Verse 10 of chapter one, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ. And so, the Gentiles have a whole new relationship. They are fellow heirs, and they are fellow members of the body, and they are partakers of the promises.

Now, if you'll just use your imagination a little bit, you can see a devout Jew taunting his Gentile neighbor. He would say to his Gentile neighbor, do you know the true God? Oh, we have many gods, there's but one true God. Has your God made any covenants with you? No.

Now, you can read through Greek and Roman mythology, and you won't find the gods making covenants with the people. You find the people making bargains with the gods. And the Jew says, we have covenants, and we have God, and we have sacrifices, and we have a temple, we have all of these things.

What do you have? And then the Gentile gets saved, and he comes back to his Orthodox Jewish neighbor, and he says, you know, everything you think you've got, I have more of in Jesus Christ. And you know, if you'd get saved, Mr. Neighbor, we'd be one in Jesus Christ. You see, Galatians tells us that the solution to the divisions in the world today is the mystery.

I'll read it to you again. There is neither Jew nor Greek. Here's the solution to all racial problems.

Neither bond nor free. Here's the solution to social and economic problems. Neither male nor female.

You know the problems we're facing with that today. Ye are all one in Christ Jesus. That's why in chapter 4 of Ephesians, the first admonition Paul gives is unity.

Get together. Stop fussing. Stop criticizing.

Stop fighting. Work together. Live together.

Why? You're all one in Christ Jesus. And so the Gentiles have a new relationship. Verse 7 tells me they have a new power.

Of which I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Now there was no power in Gentile religion. Zeus couldn't do anything for anybody.

Jupiter couldn't help anybody. Nor could Diana or any of the other thousands of deities they worshipped. Nor can money or muscle or mind some of the deities that people are worshipping in Chicago today.

But he says when you know Jesus Christ is your savior and you have been united to him, then there is a wonderful power that goes to work. The effectual working of his power. For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

And so you and I who have been made a part of the mystery, we are a part of the body of Christ. We have a wonderful relationship. Everything he is, we have.

John says as he is, so are we in this world. Paul says we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. And so the Jew is not way up high and the Gentile way down low or vice versa.

We are all one in Jesus Christ. And no one can come to the assembly of God's people and say I am more important because of my race. Or I am better because of my income.

Or I am to have more recognition because of my gifts. No, no. All one in Jesus Christ.

A new relationship and a new power and new riches. Verse 8. Unto me who am less than the least of all saints. You Greek students will have a bit of difficulty with verse 8 because Paul invents a word.

He likes to do this every once in a while. The Holy Spirit said, Paul, we are going to invent a brand new word, lesser. Unto me who am lesser.

That's not good Greek. It's not even good English, but it's good theology. 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.

Unsearchable riches. The riches of His grace. The riches of His glory.

The riches of His wisdom. The riches of His power. Paul writes from prison and says, my God shall supply all your need according to, not out of, but according to His riches in Christ Jesus.

And my friend, no matter what may be in your wallet or your purse, you are rich in Jesus Christ. And so to the Gentiles, the mystery was important. To Paul, the mystery was important.

But now he gets a little different in his approach. And in verses 9 and 10, he relates the mystery to a third group of persons, the angels. To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, that means the angels, the good angels, the bad angels, the holy angels, the fallen angels, might be known through the church, the manifold wisdom of God.

I have to smile when I read verse 10 because verse 10 says God is educating the angels through the church. I wonder what they're learning. I'm sure the angels must have a great time watching some business meetings.

I'm sure the angels must have a great time watching some elections. God is using the church to educate the angels. Now Paul talks about this back in 1 Corinthians.

He said, we apostles are made a spectacle to angels. He said to the women in Corinth, don't go around acting like the street walkers. You put a veil over your head because of the angels.

The angels watch the services. I wonder if it would change our behavior in the house of God if we'd walk in and realize that we're educating the angels. When the angels worship, there is solemnity.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. I think sometimes people come to church with the same attitude. They go to a basketball game.

It's unfortunate. We're educating the angels. You know, the angels are watching.

Jesus said when a sinner gets saved, there's joy in the presence of the angels. Over in 1 Peter chapter 1, Peter said that the angels were looking in to these Old Testament prophecies, trying to figure out what they're all about. Just like those two cherubim in the mercy seat, peeking down and looking into the law of God.

Throughout the entire Old Testament, the angels were watching what God was doing and they couldn't quite figure it out. And now they're watching the church to learn what God was doing. God is using the church to educate the angels.

Now the angels know how powerful God is. They've seen Him do miracles. They've seen Him create.

The angels know how wise God is. They can see His wisdom out in creation. This is His wisdom in redemption.

What's Paul talking about? He's revealing a wonderful truth to us, and it's this. In the Old Testament, God did not reveal the truth of the church. You know why? He didn't want the devil to know it.

See, the devil could read the Old Testament and find out how Christ would come, where Christ would come, when Christ would come, and why Christ would come. He'd come to die on the cross. He'd come to save people.

But he could never read in the Old Testament that through the death of Jesus Christ, something new would come, Jews and Gentiles in the church. Because you see, if Satan could get the Jews to reject Jesus and have Him crucified, this would be the end of the Jewish nation. Their city would be destroyed, their temple would be destroyed, and that would be the end.

But it wasn't the end. God did not reveal this in the Old Testament. He kept it a secret.

In fact, in the early chapters of the book of Acts, the apostles didn't quite understand it all just yet. But then God revealed to them, and Satan found out that Calvary, instead of being his greatest victory, was his greatest defeat. It was like Pharaoh in the Old Testament trying to persecute the Jews, and everything he did turned out backwards.

It only made them stronger. And so God kept this mystery hidden, so Satan couldn't find it out. And now the angels of God, the holy angels marvel at God's wise plan of salvation.

And the fallen angels rage at God's wisdom, and they hate the church. And so the mystery must be very important, because the angels are taking care of watching it. Finally, he relates the mystery in verses 11 through 13 to believers today.

The mystery was important to Paul, and the mystery was important to the Gentiles, and the mystery is important to the angels. And Paul is saying, the mystery is important to you. You say, I've never even thought about it.

Then start thinking about it. It might change your Christian life. You see, if you know the mystery, then you understand the Word of God.

It's really sad when people get a hold of some little narrow corner of the truth, be it sanctification, or missions, or tithing, or whatever it may be, and they make that their whole crusade. That's too bad. The mystery is the very heart of Paul's ministry.

It was so important to him, he went to prison to defend it. And Paul is saying, friends, if you understand the mystery, you're going to understand the Word of God. You'll see what God is doing.

God's not building denominations. We don't criticize them, but God's not building denominations. I'm glad that here at Moody Church, we don't have people walking around saying, I'm a Baptist, are you a Presbyterian? We're just all one in Jesus Christ.

My ordination happens to be Baptist, and last week I ministered to a group of Presbyterians. But you know why we were able to do this? Because the most important thing is not that we're Baptist, or Presbyterian, or Lutheran, or Anglican. We're Christians.

We're all one in Jesus Christ. God's not cleaning up the world, although we're the salt of the earth. What's he doing? He's building a body.

He's building a temple. He's taking Jewish bricks and Gentile bricks and cementing them by His grace onto the foundation of Jesus Christ. And when you understand this, your Bible opens up.

You say, I understand what God's doing. He also tells us here in verse 11 that this eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, we understand that. He's putting things together.

This eternal purpose gives us boldness and confidence. And a conductor got on a train and began to collect tickets. He took the first ticket and he punched it, and he said to the passenger, you're on the wrong train.

The passenger said, well, the brakeman told me to get on here, and the conductor took another ticket, and he said, you're on the wrong train. We said, the brakeman told me to get on here. He said, I'll check.

The conductor was on the wrong train. Now, I'm afraid there are many conductors in our pulpits who are on the wrong train. They don't know what God's doing, and they've got their churches involved in everything but what God is doing.

Now, what's God doing? He's putting things together. He's saving souls. He's building a church.

He's not building a Sunday school class. That Sunday school class is helping to build a church. Not just building individual lives.

He's building lives. He might build a church. And when you and I understand His purpose, we have boldness and confidence.

We can come and pray and say, Lord, I'm helping you get your work done. I'm not wasting my time on some religious detour. I'm doing the thing you're trying to do.

Campbell Morgan used to say, find out which way God is going and go that way. We have boldness and we have confidence. In verse 13, we have courage.

He said, don't you faint at my trials. The very fact that I'm in prison is proof that our gospel is the right gospel and the mystery is hated by the devil. The devil hates the mystery.

The devil wants to divide Christians. The mystery unites Christians. The devil wants to get believers on detours doing all sorts of good little things, none of which contributes to the thing God is doing.

And so I end where I began. The most important message in the world is the gospel. If you've never trusted Jesus Christ, that's the message you need.

You can trust Christ and be saved. Then when you are saved, you find out you're a part of something so much bigger than yourself, bigger than your Sunday school class, bigger than Moody Church. We're all a part of that marvelous mystery.

God is building His church, His body. When you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you said, He belongs to me. When you came to realize the mystery, you said, I belong to Him.

The gospel says, He did the work for you. The mystery says, now get to be a part of His work, this eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus. And what is it? To bring things together.

If in my life I am tearing things apart, I'm not cooperating with God's program. I'm on the wrong train. And God has made available to you and me the knowledge in His Word, the power through His Spirit, to be able to be a part of the mystery.

We're a part of something the world doesn't even understand. We're a part of something that the devil hates. He doesn't want you to know you can draw upon the riches of grace in Christ Jesus.

He doesn't want you to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit. You're saved. You're going to heaven.

The devil can't stop that. But he can make you limp and limp and fall because you're not a part of something bigger than yourself. I'm glad you're saved.

I'm glad I'm saved. But there's something beyond that. Being a part of each other and working together, putting together, building together.

That's the work God's doing. Is that the work you're doing? Father in heaven, as ignorant as we are by your spirit, you have taught us your truth. I give thanks, Father, that you have helped us understand what you're doing today.

Please, Father, keep us from going off on detours. There's so many good things we can do with our lives these days, but this is the one thing you're doing. You're gathering together all things in Christ.

Now, I pray for those who are outside of Christ that they might believe and be saved. And Lord, for those of us who are in Christ, take away our prejudices, our bigotry, our narrow mindedness. Help us not to build walls.

Help us to build bridges. Help us, Heavenly Father, to be gathering and not scattering, to be building and not tearing down. It's hard, Father.

It's so hard. But we have the effectual working of your power. And we're going to believe you to work in and through us, in our own lives, in our homes, our jobs, in the Moody Church, and wherever we may be.

Help us to be builders for eternity. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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