

The Mystery of Christ

According To God's Eternal Purpose

by Elder Bob Allgood

"Whereby, when ye read, ye 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 fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel 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. " (The full text is Ephesians 3:1-12).

We sincerely hope that our readers will reference their Bibles (KJV) in conjunction with reading this article. I believe that we have quoted sufficient Scripture to show that the text for our subject is not taken out of context. A text taken out of context leaves a pretext. A pretext leads to false reasoning and unsound doctrine. There is enough of that going on without the need for any additional contributions. There would be much more sound doctrine taught if God's people would take the time to read, reason and rightly divide the word of truth, instead of being satisfied with the nice sounding rhetoric's of man's preaching. Words may sound good, but if they leave you without understanding, what good are they? I remember a dear sister once saying to me, "You sure preached a good sermon. I didn't understand what it was about, but it sure was good". Her kind words cut to my heart! I would rather teach the word of God with understanding than to preach a sermon that just sounds good. This is why Paul said, "I would rather speak five words with my understanding, .. that I might teach others also .." (I Cor. 14:19). "Whereby, when you read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ ...".

Our text takes us back to the beginning. Paul teaches us that "the eternal purpose which he (God) purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" was a "mystery,

which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God". I have learned that if I really want to understand a particular doctrine I must go to the beginning and follow it through to the end. When we go back to the beginning we find only GOD; we find the ALMIGHTY, we find the I AM THAT I AM, we find the CREATOR who created all things by the WORD of his mouth. When we go back to the beginning we find the WORD, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All thing were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

When we go back to the beginning we find GOD who said "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". The plural pronouns us and our tells me that when we go back to the beginning we find the GODHEAD; the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three ARE ONE. God is one God. The Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one. Jesus tells us that "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). Before the WORD was made flesh and dwelt among us as the man Christ Jesus, he was in the form of God, he was with God, he was equal with God, he was God. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit". Paul wrote, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (I Tim. 3:16). But, when we go back to the beginning we find that the WORD was not yet made flesh. John tells us "The WORD was made flesh, and dwelt among us". Paul said, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men --" (Phil. 2:5-7).

The Bible teaches us in many places that "God is holy" (Ps. 99:5, 9). Since God is a Spirit, we must conclude then that God is a Holy Spirit. The virgin Mary "was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1:18) and the angels said to her "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of the shall be called the Son of God " (Luke 1:35). Therefore, when the WORD, who was with God and was God, was made flesh, He was called "The Only Begotten Son of God" (Luke 1:35, John 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, Heb. 11:17, I John 4:9).

When we go back to the beginning we find that God "created all things by Jesus Christ". When we go back to the beginning we find that God chose a people in Christ before the foundation of the world. When we go back to the beginning we find "the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began". If we go back to the beginning we find God's eternal purpose which He, being a Holy Spirit, purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, who was in the form of God and was God. In as much as "these three are one", we must conclude that the mystery of Christ, according to God's eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus, was the same as "the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Himself" (Eph. 1:9).

It seems evident to me that the scriptures teach that God (i.e. the Godhead) purposed in Himself to predestinate, call, justify and glorify a particular

people In Christ before the foundation of the world (i.e. before God created man). It is also evident that God (the Godhead) swore by Himself (Heb. 6:17-18) that Christ would take upon himself the form of man and die for the sins of his elect people and that God the Father would raise him from the grave by the power of his Spirit. BUT, scripture does not teach that it was necessary for the Godhead to convene a conference to "make a decision or reach an agreement" about the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus.

With all due respect, I fear that some attempt to "pigeon hole" the work of the Godhead by having the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit agree to perform certain functions independently of the other. While the figment of man's imagination may give rise to such an agreement, in my opinion Scripture does not support it. There is an abundance of Scripture to prove that God purposed His eternal purpose in Himself and by Himself. God told Abraham "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee --- And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ---" (Gen. 22:16-18). Paul tells us, "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself -- " (Heb. 6:13-20). While it may appear to be so in the mind of man, there are not three separate minds in the Godhead! God's people who have the mind of Christ should understand this (I Cor. 2:9-16, Phil. 2:1-8).

The mystery of Christ according to God's eternal purpose is clearly taught to be that both elect Jews and elect Gentiles are reconciled unto God in the body of Christ, "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us ... And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, And cam and preached peace to you that were afar off (i.e. Gentiles), and to them that were nigh (i.e. Jews). For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father " (Eph. 2:14-18).

The Ephesians letter is addressed to "the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus --". While it was written specifically to the saints in the church at Ephesus, it is applicable to the faithful in Christ Jesus for all ages, past, present and future (Eph. 3:21). This would include both Jews and Gentiles without making distinction, for "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" (Gal. 3:28). "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:28-29).

Paul, who was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, was the chosen vessel to bear the name of Christ to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). However, Peter preached the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10) before Paul did (Acts 13). Paul began his ministry by preaching first to the Jews (Acts 9:20-22), but when the unbelieving Jews rejected the gospel, he turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46), but he never excluded the Jews from his preaching (Acts 18:4, 19:10, 20:21, Rom. 1:14-16).

Much of the Ephesians letter was directed primarily to the elect Gentiles (2:11-13) who had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise - but now in Christ Jesus" they have been "circumcised with the circumcision made without hands" (Col. 2:11) and "made nigh by the blood of Christ". Chapter 3 begins, "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 to you-ward". The 'dispensation of the grace of God' is not as the "Dispensationalist" claim, the N.T. period of time when God began to eternally save people by grace in contrast to eternally saving the Jews by their works under the Law. Eternal life, for all of God's elect, Jews and Gentiles, has always been and will always be by the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus according to his eternal purpose. None have ever been eternally saved apart from the mercy and grace of God according to His eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. God has never had but one way of bestowing eternal life (I John 5:11-12).

Paul explained that this dispensation is the time period "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" (Col. 1:25-27). Paul said, "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 (i.e. both Jews and Gentiles who are the called according to his purpose) see what is the fellowship of the mystery (of Christ).

Paul mentions the mystery of Christ no less than five times (Eph. 1:9, 3:3, 3:19, 5:32, and 6:11). The Lord willing I may expand the scope of this subject at another time and take in the other references Paul makes about the mystery of Christ (Rom. 11:25 and 16:25, Col. 1:26, 1:27, 2:2 and 4:3, I Tim. 3:16). Even though he may call the mystery by another name, in my opinion these are all the mystery of Christ, or related to the mystery of Christ and to the Church of Christ.