

Opening Words

You and I are stewards. God has given us money and time and spiritual gifts to use for the advance of his cause in the world.

139 Eph Paul the Steward of God's Mysteries 2

Paul was a good steward of the mystery that God revealed to him. The mystery that God revealed to Paul is that Gentiles would come into the commonwealth of Israel *as Gentiles* with full rights and citizenship. This was God's doing. It was not something Paul figured out. It was an act of grace.

But what was Paul going to do with this new knowledge? What was Paul going to do with this revelation? We must think about the very strong likelihood that when God revealed this to Paul, it was a shocker! Gentiles are equal with Jews? What about all those hundreds of years of suffering the Jews endured at the hands of the Gentiles? What about the privilege of receiving the Law of Moses? Weren't the promises for the Jews? What about all that training Paul went through to be a scholar in Israel to lead the nation of Israel? And now, the Gentiles, just by an act of God's grace, can catch up and be on an equal footing with the Jews?

How long did it take Paul to process this? Remember, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a Pharisee. He was advancing beyond his countrymen in Judaism. He was the #1 Jew in the world and he was ready to die for his country and his people. I'm sure he did not like the Romans any more than any other Jewish man at that time.

And now, suddenly, he must give up that position of privilege and welcome Gentiles as fellow heirs of the promises? And the answer is, "yes!" And if Paul asked "Why?" I am sure God's answer was that he was the God of all grace for all people and that he wanted a worldwide family and not just a family of one race.

How long did it take Paul to process this startling revelation, this mystery that was hidden for generations but was now being revealed through the apostles and prophets? But he did process it and he became a good steward of this grace. He humbly accepted the revelation. He studied the Scriptures, he wrote his epistles, he preached his sermons, he taught his lessons, and he worked hard even when it got him into trouble with his countrymen over his message.

But he stayed on course. And he wrote letters like this one in Ephesians which clearly explains the mystery and like the book of Romans which goes into great depth over how God worked in history and how he was working in his generation.

And I want to say this as well – this is so much more than making a theological point. Paul's teaching of reconciliation of all races through Jesus Christ provides the foundation for peace in every nation. Think of the conflicts in the world. Think of the wars in the world. What would happen if the nations and all the ethnic groups and languages would embrace the gospel of reconciliation with God and one another?

You say that won't happen until Christ returns? You say there will not be peace until then? Yes, I agree – the ultimate day of peace will not happen until Christ returns and makes all things new. But ... but ... that does not mean we cannot have a measure of peace until he returns! We don't have to have wars all the time in every place, do we? God has told us to take the Gospel of peace to the world. Some people and nations will reject it, but some will not, and if the gospel of peace is properly taught could there not be peace among warring tribes and nations?

A couple of years ago I read James Michener's massive and fascinating historical novel on South Africa called *Covenant*. What a delight to read. What an adventure of this hundreds-of-years story of people settling into this land. He finished his novel in the 1980s when the system of apartheid was still in force. In the novel, he created realistic and heartbreaking scenes of suffering that were imposed upon people because of their race. And in the novel, he predicted that change would come but only through great bloodshed.

But we who live today know what happened and what did not happen. There wasn't bloodshed. Apartheid was abolished and peace came to the land because the oppressed forgave their oppressors and sought reconciliation. They put Ephesians 2 into practice! And Christian pastors were heavily involved in this process.

I shared with you a few broadcasts ago about the horrific bloodshed in Rwanda in 1994. This genocide could trace its roots back to many sources but one of them was the lack of biblical teaching such as Ephesians 2 and 3. Christian pastors have been involved in reconciliation efforts among the primary tribal groups and we can hope and pray for a work of the Spirit of God to bring peace and healing to this troubled land.

Why can we do this? We can do this because we have the clear teaching of the word of God, and the reason we have the clear teaching of the word of God is that Paul was a good steward of the mystery that God revealed to him. Paul was a good steward because he humbled himself as a Jew and became a servant to the Gentiles – you and me – that we might come into the family. Paul was a good steward because he faithfully proclaimed this message even though it cost him dearly and eventually cost him his life.

So that's my point and Paul's point. We are not just talking about some obscure theological issue but we are talking about preserving the message of grace that the world desperately needs to hear.

You and I are stewards. God has given us money and time and spiritual gifts to use for the advance of his cause in the world. In 1 Peter 4:10 we find these words, “¹⁰ As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” There's that word – steward. God has given gifts to you and me to bless the Church. Each one has received a special gift, Peter said. Use it to serve others. This is being a good steward of God's grace given to you.

Just as Paul's good stewardship of the mystery resulted in the advance of the Gospel among the Gentiles and laid the foundation for the launching of the Gospel in the world, so our good stewardship will have implications far wider than we can imagine. I have to jump ahead to the last verses of this great chapter at this point where Paul said, “Now to Him who is able to do far more

abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen

Do you believe that? Do you believe God is able to do far more abundantly beyond what you ask him to do or think he can do? You know, that encourages me right now – at this moment. Do you know what I am asking God to do through this ministry? I am asking God to use this ministry to reach one billion people all over the world and for a work that will last long after you and I are finished with this phase of our earthly work. And so, as I read that verse it encourages me that God can do that and even more! I'm encouraged right now! I hope you are too! And I hope you will join us in this great vision and dream for the sake of the nations of the world.

God will use you in ways you would never dream, and in ways that you may not know about until eternity. Just think of how one little seed can produce a plant that will yield scores of pieces of fruit each with its own seeds. God can use your one seed, your one act, your one gift, your one life that he has given you to bless the Church and will cause a ripple effect that will bless the world and that will last for generations and even into eternity.

I think it is time to pray right now, don't you?

“Heavenly Father, open our eyes to your amazing grace. Help us to see that the surpassing greatness of the power comes from you and not from us. Help us to see that you can take our small, daily contributions and work something amazing and wonderful and beautiful in this world. Father, our passage today teaches us about being a good steward. We thank you for Paul's example. How we thank you that he did not proudly reject the mystery but he humbly accepted it – that he should welcome gentiles. How we thank you that he guarded the mystery and taught it and applied it to the world in his time even though it cost him everything. Oh God, help us to follow in those steps of humility and commitment.

Father, now, your word says we have received grace to bless the Church and in blessing the Church we can bless the world. Show us how to employ our gift in this way. We will trust you with the results, and whatever they are we pray that the results would bring you glory and great joy to others. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen!”

I hope you joined me in that prayer and I hope you will keep us informed how God leads you and uses you to serve the Church and the world. Write to us, call us, put a note on our Facebook page and let us and others know how God is working in your life.

Paul was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles. Paul was a faithful steward of God's grace for the sake of the Gentiles. What he did affected the world and that effect has come to you and me. May God bless us as we seek to be a blessing to the world.