

SATAN'S GREATEST SURPRISE

Theme: "The Unsearchable Riches of Christ in the Dispensation of the Secret"

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TEXT: Ephesians 3:1-13

INTRO:

1. Ephesians 3:2-13 is a preface or a parenthetical addition. Note verses one and fourteen begin with "for this cause", - *toutou charin*. Paul evidently intended to go immediately to prayer at verse one but felt he must give more information concerning the revelation of the secret.

2. It must have been Satan's greatest surprise when the Apostle Paul revealed the "Dispensation of the Secret". In it he revealed the secret that had been hid in God from all the ages of the past. This little pharisaic Jew had been "a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious" (I Timothy 1:13); but on the road to Damascus one day, God changed his whole life and subsequently gave him the revelation concerning this secret, the Body of Christ.

3. Two words in these verses need some special attention: the words, oikonomia, translated "dispensation" (vs. 2) and "fellowship" (vs. 9); and musterion, translated "mystery" (vs. 3, 4 & 9). The word oikonomia is a compound word made up of two expressions – oikos or house and nemo or to dispense; hence to deal out as a steward or housekeeper, an economist. It is a "way of dealing" an administration. The Greek is preserved in the words "economy", and "economics". There are nine (9) occurrences of the word in the New Testament (Luke 16:2, 3 & 4; I Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10, 3:2, 3:9; Colossians 1:25; I Timothy 1:4).

The word musterion, translated "mystery" is found some twenty-seven times in the New Testament, in the Gospels 3 times, in Revelation 4 times and in Paul's Epistles 20 times. It occurs 10 times in Ephesians and Colossians. The word "mystery" is not an English word but a Greek word which has been transliterated. Its current meaning is not its Biblical meaning. In its Biblical use it means "a secret" which cannot be understood until one is initiated into the revelation of its meaning. In the LXX version of the Old Testament, it occurs nine (9) times as the equivalent of the Hebrew word *ratz*, which means "to conceal, hence a secret". Paul tells us that he is the revelator of this secret.

4. Some of the other Secrets revealed in the New Testament are:
- a. The Secrets of the Kingdom (Matthew chapter 13)
 - b. The Secret of the Duration of Israel's Blindness (Romans 11:25)
 - c. The Secret of Iniquity (II Thessalonians 2:7)
 - d. The Secret of Godliness (I Timothy 3:16)
 - e. The Secret of Babylon (Revelation 17:5)

5. From the days of Paul the revelator of this Secret until the nineteenth century, this truth seems to have been entirely lost. The earliest indication of any understanding of this truth comes from England in the writings of two men. In 1850 Charles Henry Mackintosh wrote a book entitled "Practical Reflections on the life and Times of Elijah the Tishbite". The closing chapter is entitled, Concluding Remarks. From this chapter we glean the following: "The thought of a church composed of Jew and Gentile, "seated together in the heavenlies", lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony. Isaiah, no doubt, speaks in very elevated strains of Jerusalem's glory in the latter day, he speaks of Gentiles coming to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising; but he never rises higher than the kingdom, and, as a consequence, never brings out anything beyond the covenant with Abraham, which secures everlasting blessedness to his seed, and through them to the Gentiles. We may range through the inspired pages of the Law and the Prophets, from one end to the other, and find no solution of "the great mystery of the church. Peter received the keys of the kingdom and he used those keys, first to open the kingdom to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. But Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the church. Even in his Epistles we find nothing of the mystery. We infer therefore that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the mouth of Peter was not the development of the great mystery of the church but simply the opening of the kingdom, agreeably to the words of the prophets, and also to Peter's commission in Matthew 16. It was reserved for the great Apostle of the Gentiles to bring out, in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of which we now speak." Mackintosh then follows Paul in his last visit to Jerusalem, His voyage to Rome and his meeting with the elders at Rome. He then continues, "There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose; and our apostle, with a reluctant heart, shuts them up under the power of that judicial blindness which was the natural result of their rejection of the salvation of God. Thus every obstacle to the clear and full development of Paul's gospel was removed. He found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world. A prisoner at Rome and rejected of Israel. He had done his utmost to tarry amongst them; his affectionate heart led him to delay as long as possible ere he would reiterate the prophet's verdict; but now all was over – every expectation was blasted – all human institutions and associations present, to his view, nothing but ruin and disappointment, he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God, from ages and generations – the mystery of the church as the body of Christ, united to its living head by the Holy Ghost."

In 1870 A.D. Richard Holden wrote a book entitled "The Mystery, The Special Mission of the Apostle Paul". The key to the present Dispensation he writes, "To make all see what is the dispensation or in other words, to be divinely appointed instructor in the character and order of the present time, as Moses was in the dispensation of Law, is that special feature in the commission of Paul in which it was distinct from that of the other apostles. If then it shall appear that far from seeing 'what is the dispensation of the mystery' the mass of Christians have entirely missed it and as the natural consequences have almost completely misunderstood Christianity, importing into it the things proper to another dispensation and so confounding Judaism and Christianity in an inexpressible jumble, surely it is a matter for deep humiliation before God and for earnest prayerful effort to retrieve with God's help this important and neglected teaching. The present dispensation is then, an interregnum or parenthetical period, contemplated indeed in the counsels of God, but not revealed til 'given' to Paul. Once this truth is seen, it becomes the key to the interpretation of Scripture and to the 'rightly dividing the word of truth' in the sundering of things Jewish from things Christian. Until it is seen, neither Testament can be understood aright; and Christianity instead of having its proper and distinctive character is degraded into a sort of bastard Judaism. As those whose lot is cast in 'the dispensation of

the mystery' it clearly behooves us not only to inform our minds as to its true character and objects but also to fashion our conduct in accordance with its order and aims."

6. As Moses initiated his people into the Dispensation of the Law, so now Paul initiates us into the Dispensation of the Secret. Ignatius called the Ephesian believers "fellow initiates with Paul". They were instructed and initiated into the secret of the Body. Kenneth Wuest put it thus: "Gentile and Jew are amalgamated in one body in Christ". All share alike in the riches of His grace and His glory.

I. T H E H I S T O R I C A L S E T T I N G

From the time of Adam to Abraham God dealt with the whole human race. There were during these times outstanding men both in the Godly as well as the ungodly lines. There were Abel, Seth, Enoch and Noah in the Godly line; and Cain, Lamech, Canaan and Nimrod in the ungodly line. God dealt in judgment with the race at the Flood and at the Confusion of Tongues. But with Abraham God began to deal with one man, his descendants and the nation that finally emerged from him. Israel went through three stages in which they were first, in the Patriarchal Stage, then in the Tribal Stage and finally in the National Stage. From Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph she emerged into the Twelve Tribes, headed by the sons of Jacob; then into the National Stage with Saul, David and Solomon as the first three kings, then the divided kingdom of Israel had 19 kings and Judah 19 kings and one queen. Israel finally went into captivity under Assyria to be followed by Judah under Babylon. When the N.T. opens Israel is under the dominion of Rome.

1. Israel's Final Rejection

The prophet Moses makes it abundantly clear that:

- a. A time would come when Israel would temporarily cease to be God's people and when God would cease to be their God openly. "Then said God, call his name Lo-ammi, for ye are not my people and I will not be your God" (1:9).
- b. This condition is likened by the prophet to a woman who is to be divorced from her husband because of her unfaithfulness; however the woman is to abide many days belonging to no other man and the Lord also saying: "so will I also be for thee" (3:3).
- c. This interpretation of Israel's condition is from the time of her rejection until the Lord shall come again and enter into relationship with His people.
"For the children of Israel shall abide many days:
(1) Without a king and without a prince.
(2) Without a sacrifice and without an image.
(3) Without an ephod and without teraphim.

Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God and David their King and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days: (Hos. 3:4-5).

When Christ was hanging on the tree his first recorded words were a prayer: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Christ had told His people that all manner of sin and blasphemy would be forgiven them except that against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32).

The Day of Pentecost offered to Israel another opportunity to accept the Gospel of the Kingdom as proclaimed by Peter: “But Peter standing up with the eleven lifted up his voice and said unto them, Ye man of Judea and all that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you and hearken to my words: (2:14 – see also 2:22,29, 3:17; 4:8; 7:2).

Stephan’s Message was directed to his people Israel (Acts 7:2). He spoke to them as a man “full of the Holy Spirit” (7:55). He rehearsed before his people their history from Abraham down to Christ. But they rejected the message and stoned him to death. So here they committed open rebellion and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Peter is put in prison and James, the brother of John, is killed with the sword (Acts chapt. 12).

Saul of Tarsus is converted on the road to Damascus. He is also commissioned by the Lord as “a chosen vessel” to proclaim the message of the Lord “before the Gentiles, Kings and to the children of Israel”. His ministry was “to the Jew first and also to the Greek: (or Hellenist, which is no doubt a Greek-speaking Jew) (Rom 1:16). Paul during his Acts Ministry was “an able minister of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), which was a ministry to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. Paul’s ministry was always first to the Jew in the synagogue (Acts 9:20; 13:5,14,42; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8; 24:12). Paul sums up his Acts Ministry to King Agrippa in Acts 26:19-23, a summary which should be carefully compared with Ephesians 3:1-13. This ministry of Paul to his people during the Acts period was finally rejected by the Jews in the land at Jerusalem (Acts 21:30-36; 22:22-23; 23:10-14) and then by the Jews in dispersion at Rome (Acts 28:23-24).

2. Israel’s Final Retribution

This came about at Rome from the mouth and pen of Paul (Acts 28:17,25-28). Israel continued to reject the message of the Twelve Apostles and Paul all through the Acts’ period – forty years of the Pentecostal Church. Paul now makes his final stand both at Jerusalem and at Rome; but is rejected, almost killed and taken prisoner. He is rescued by the Roman guard at Jerusalem and sent at his own wish to Rome to be tried, having first spent some time at Caesarea.

It is now at Rome that Paul addresses a representation of his countrymen and persuaded them. It says “to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the Law of Moses and out of the prophets from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). But they disagreed and departed from him.

So there is now only one recourse for Paul. He pronounces the final judgment upon them in the words of Isaiah 6:9-10 and of the Lord in Matt. 13:14-15. Here is the pronouncement of judgment from which the Jews to this day as a nation have never recovered and will not until they see Him “whom they have pierced, ... and shall be in bitterness for Him” (Zech. 12:10).

This pronouncement of judgment took place at Rome sometime around the year 66 A.D. and by 70 A.D. the Romans under Titus had destroyed the temple and the city and scattered most of the Jews into other lands. Israel’s opportunity as a nation is now over. Since that day they have been “LO-ammi, not my people”.

Now then what is God going to do? Will He give up entirely and call it quits with the human race? In all the O.T., the Gospels and the Acts there is no hint as to the exact message God would send forth by Paul if Israel did not repent and accept. The Gospel of the Kingdom with its ordinances and signs presupposed the repentance and acceptance of it by Israel as a nation.

What God did will now be the purpose of our further study together in Ephesians chapter three.

II. T H E D I S P E N S A T I O N A L S U B S T A N C E

God is never caught in a dilemma without a program. When Israel as a nation became “Lo-ammi – not my people” God revealed a secret purpose that had been hid from all the past ages. This was now to be revealed for the faith and obedience of all (3:9).

1. Revealed By A Special Minister (3:1-4, 7-8)

“I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ.”

“By revelation he made known unto me the mystery.”

“I was made a minister, ... who am less than the least.”

“Who then is Paul?” (1 Cor. 3:5) “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7). It is impossible to exalt the message of the mystery and think and speak lightly of the messenger that the Lord used to reveal this message. Both the vessel and its content are important. Paul is not unduly exalting himself in these verses and also in Col. 1:23-25 when he speaks of himself and the revelation God gave him. The purpose is to show the special apostle God used, distinct from the Twelve Apostles, to bring forth this message. Paul is magnified because of the message.

What would our N.T. be without the fourteen Epistles penned by the messenger? The great doctrines of Justification, Sanctification and Glorification would not be adequately discussed. The why and how of Israel’s blindness and subsequent rejection would not be known. And of course the glorious new revelation of our Scripture would never have been known. It was Paul who received this treasure in an earthen vessel and communicated it to us.

The word “pattern” in 1 Tim. 1:16 is the same word in the original that is translated “form” in 2 Tim. 1:13. It is the word hupotuposin. We get our word type from this. It has the idea of striking something to form it; a mold for metal. So not only is Paul himself a pattern, his words are likewise a pattern. So we are to “hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard of me”. No finer phrasing of this pattern Apostle can be found than in Phil. 4:8-9. Don’t miss the point in verse nine.

Paul is designated as a “prophet, preacher, apostle and teacher” (Acts 13:1; 2 Tim. 1:11). Paul was not a member of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. He was appointed by the risen Christ as a member of a new college of apostles (Eph. 4:11; 3:5).

a. His Initial Power

“Who art thou Lord? What wilt thou have me to do? (Acts 9:5-6).

It was the Sovereign God who called him and revealed His sovereign power in him. “He is a chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15) and “Called me by His grace” (Gal. 1:15). Grace precludes any ability of man to do anything regarding his initial salvation and calling. It is all in the sovereign power of God. “For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12). Every blessing in salvation and service stems from God who worketh all by His sovereign will and power.

This was also a separating power. “But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother’s womb” (Gal. 1:15). The Greek word for “separated” is *aporidzo*. The word for “Pharisee” is *pharisaios*. It comes from the Hebrew word *perushim*, meaning “the separated”. Paul says of himself: “As touching the Law, a Pharisee” (Phil. 3:5); “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6) and “After the strictest Sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” (Acts 26:5). So he who was “separated” (a Pharisee) unto the Law is now “separated unto the Gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1); unto a missionary ministry in the New Covenant (Acts 13:2; 2 Cor. 3:6) and now as a minister of the mystery (Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:25).

Paul was not only zealous for the Law of Moses but also for the traditions of the Jewish fathers (Gal. 1:14). Moses Maimonides says that there were 613 traditions added by the Pharisees to the written Law. All these traditions made the legal system a terrible burden to the one who tried to live up to them. It was these that Jesus condemned among His people (Matt. 15:3,6; Mark 7:3,5,8,9,13). He said that “touching the righteousness which is in the Law blameless” (Phil. 3:6).

So this bigoted Pharisee is now a separated vessel unto the Lord. There were some 14 different types of Pharisees in the days of Paul. Some of the more prominent ones are: (1) The Shechemite – He kept the Law for what profit there was in so doing. See Gen. 34:19 where Shechem submitted to circumcision to obtain Dinah the daughter of Jacob. (2) The Tumbling Pharisee – to appear humble he would hang his head down, never lifting it up, so that he constantly stumbled. (3) The Bleeding Pharisee – he was so holy that he must never look on a woman, walking with his eyes closed and constantly bumping his head against a wall until he bled. (4) The Mortar Pharisee – He wore a cap in the form of a mortar to cover his eyes that he may not see any impurities and indecencies. (5) The Pharisee from Fear – he keeps the Law because he is afraid of future punishment. (6) The Pharisee from Love – He obeys the Law because he loves it with all his heart. (7) The What-am-I-to-do Pharisee – This Pharisee as soon as he had done one thing, asks “What is my duty now and I will do it”. This is the all-out Pharisee. Paul is thought to have been of this class. The Pharisees may have come into being as a separated group in the days of Ezra (9:1; 10:11-12).

There was also Saving Power manifested in the life of Paul (see 1 Tim. 1:15). He speaks of himself as the “chief of sinners”. He was a “blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious” (1 Tim. 1:13). But he obtained mercy from God because he did it ignorantly in unbelief. But “the grace of God was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14). This was the man who towered above his contemporaries as an intellectual, moral and religious giant, yet unsaved. He had been brought up at Tarsus (Acts 21:39; 22:3). There were three provinces in Paul’s day all spelled with a capital “K” – Kilikia, Kppadocia and Krete. A heathen philosopher had spoken of them as being “unspeakably infamous”. Paul had no doubt often stood before the statue of Sardanapulus in the city of Tarsus and read the inscription at its base: “Drink, enjoy thyself, the rest is nothing”. This reminds of 1 Cor. 15:32 – “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die”. But the Lord saved this man and he became just as enthusiastic for the Lord as he had been against Him.

b. His Indwelling Person

“To reveal His Son in Me.” “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 1:16; 2:20). “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Paul lived the Christ Life. He knew it was only possible by the grace of Christ. Man's sin cannot hinder grace and man's merit cannot produce it. Paul is a pattern of what religion cannot do and what grace can do. Only the grace of God can bring the life of Christ within. So the grace life is the Christ life.

The indwelling life of Christ in grace is a Sanctifying Life (Titus 2:12). It causes one to live soberly within (personally); righteously without (socially); and Godly above (spiritually). And all this in the present world.

Paul had been called to the greatest vocation, that of making known the "unsearchable riches of Christ" in the "dispensation of the mystery" (Eph. 3:8-9). He is therefore the greatest example of one who follows his admonition in Eph. 4:1 – "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called". Paul has a lot to say about walking. "Walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). "Walk not after the flesh" (Rom 8:1). "Walk honestly" (Rom. 13:13). "Walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7). "Walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16). "Walk in good works" (Eph. 2:10). "Walk worthy of the vocation: (Eph. 4:1). "Walk in love" (Eph. 5:2). "Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). "Walk circumspectly" (Eph. 5:15). "Walk worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:10). "Walk in wisdom" (Col. 4:5).

This indwelling life in Christ is also a Sustaining Life. 2 Cor. 12:9 – "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness". Paul had some "thorn in the flesh, some messenger of Satan to buffet him" but he could be more than a conqueror through Christ (Rom. 8:37). This life is also the most Serene Life (Heb. 2:15). This Christ life removes all fear and gives overwhelming peace. No fear and all peace must make for the most happy joyous and satisfying life.

c. His Inevitable Passion

"That I might preach Him among the nations" (Gal. 1:16). "To make all see what is the fellowship of the secret" (Eph. 3:9). But also "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10).

Personally his dominant purpose was "That I may know Him". To adequately represent his Master he wanted to know Him intimately, accurately and fully. His dynamic power was "the power of the resurrection". Death is the common denominator of all life. No power was able to conquer death until Christ arose from the grave. This power Paul wanted to know. He knew no greater power. He also had a great passion for a Desired Prospect. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:11). The Greek reads: "ten exanastasin ten ek nekron" – the out-resurrection the out from dead ones. This is without a doubt a prior resurrection to "the first resurrection" of Revelation 20:5-6. This resurrection guarantees for the Church which is His Body the manifestation with Christ in glory (Col. 3:4).

When Saul entered the synagogue as a Pharisee on the Sabbath he prayed and thanked God that he was not a Gentile, nor a slave, nor a woman. See how far he had come now according to Gal. 3:28-29. It is this man who bids us three times: "Be ye followers of me" (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17).

Let us emulate Paul's implicit obedience (Acts 9:6; 26:19); his inflexible determination (Acts 20:24); and his instructed contentment (Phil. 4:11-12). Paul was a master of arts in the experiences of life: hungry without murmuring, full without boasting, suffering without impatience, and abounding without setting his affections on the things of this world. The inevitable conclusion is: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Paul was mighty through Christ.

2. Revealed By A Special Message

This ministry had a special message to the nations (Vr.1). Before this, a Gentile had to become a proselyte to Judaism in order to receive any blessing from God. Now a Jew in order to be a member of this church must renounce his Judaism. He can no longer claim any blessing in Abraham, nor in any covenant. He becomes a covenantless Jew as the Gentile becomes a covenantless Gentile. Both Jew and Gentile are now united in one body in Christ and made “one new man”.

a. Its Dispensation (vs. 2,9)

The word translated “dispensation” is the word oikonomia which means “the administration of a household, a stewardship, a means of dispensing”.

It is a Dispensation of Sovereign Grace” (vs. 2). There was grace before, but never a “dispensation of grace”. The Gospel of the Kingdom had grace but also works. Throughout the ages of the past, God revealed His purpose in many ways, many economies; but today it is the greatest of all. Even the ages to follow will not know this sovereign greatness. This dispensation brings a complete identification with Christ in all His works – “dead with Him, buried with Him, risen with Him, made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus” (Col. 2:20; Eph. 2:6). It is also a complete incorporation. Our “life is hid with Christ in God” and “Christ is our life” (Col. 4:3-4). The word “hid” is kekruptai and means both secrecy and safety. Christ is thus hidden in us in this world. It is up to us to diffuse the fragrance of His character and conduct (2 Cor. 2:14-15). It is as Wilkinson says: “The hidden violets proclaim their presence in every passing breeze; the lark, hidden in the light, fills all the landscape with music and the vivid freshness of grass and flower betray the secret windings of the meadow brook.” So we have a new program as we shall see in a new dispensation.

It is a Dispensation of A Supreme Secret (Vr. 9) – The word translated “mystery” is musterion and can better be translated “secret”. This secret was “hid in God” from all the ages of the past and is only now revealed by the Apostle Paul. The word “fellowship” here is oikonomia, better translated “dispensation”. The revelation given us in Ephesians and Colossians could never in any other age have been known; it is that new and distinct.

b. Its Distinction (Vr. 6) – Here we have a stewardship of equality. The believers are fellow-members of the body, fellow-heirs and fellow-partakers in the Gospel. Peers in blessing. The three distinctive elements of this secret and all associated with the preposition “sun” in Greek and best translated “joint with”.

A Joint-Body – sussoma. This is the only occurrence of this word in the N.T. We have been made “one new man” (2:15). Both Jew and Gentile on equal basis in this Body. As a contrast with the Kingdom note the place of Jew and Gentile – Psa. 72:10-11; Isa. 2:2-3; 11:1, 11, 12; Zech. 14:9, 16.

A Joint-Heir – sunqkleronoma. All will share alike in Christ. What He has we will have; where He is we are. See Isa. 54:3; 60:3; 61:5-6. This heirship is greater than heirs of Abram (Gal. 3:29).

A Joint-Partaker – summetoxa. The Gentiles had long been left to themselves without Christ, without God and without hope. The Gentiles are now joint-partakers in the “untrackable riches of Christ. In Rom. 15:27 it says that “the Gentiles have been made partakers” of Israel’s spiritual blessings. Here there is a different word and minus the preposition “sun” or joint.

c. It's Declaration (vs. 8-10). There are two spheres in which this church is to declare its message, "the unsearchable riches of Christ", - the earth and the heavens. All nations of the earth are to know "the unsearchable riches of Christ", and "The Dispensation of the Secret" (8-9). Also "the principalities and powers in the heavenlies" are to know this "manifold wisdom of God" (10). Our ministry is as far and wide as the universe. We are monuments of God's grace, and we are to be witnesses to "the unsearchable riches of Christ". This evangel is a sevenfold presentation of our identification with Christ:

- (1) "Died with Christ" (apethanete sun Christo) Col. 2:20;
- (2) "Buried with Christ" (suntaphentes auto) Col. 2:12;
- (3) "Raised with Christ" (sunezoopoisen to Christo) Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:12-13;
- (4) "Ascended with Christ" (sunegeiren) Eph. 2:6;
- (5) "Seated with Christ" (sunekathisen en tois epouraniois en Christo) Eph. 2:6;
- (6) "Hidden with Christ" (kekruptai sun to Christo) Col. 3:3;
- (7) "Manifested with Him" (phanerotesesthe sun auto) Col. 3:4.

This is the glorious Gospel we have to proclaim. In it we stand "complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10). So there is nothing we can do but believe in Him and live in its glorious reality. "For by grace are we saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

What a contrast this Evangel is to "The Gospel of the Kingdom" (See Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-18; Acts 2:38). Here there is repentance, baptism in water and sign gifts following.

Before we could ever know or experience the blessed complete identification with Christ there must be the removal of sin and death. These awesome facts in human life must be dealt with fully and finally and indeed they have been in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has dealt with the penalty of sin and death when He identified Himself with us in His suffering, His crucifixion, His death and burial. He dealt with the power of sin and death when He identified Himself with us in His quickening (being made alive) so that we might live in newness of life. He dealt with the place of sin and death when He identified Himself with us in His resurrection from the bondage of the tomb. And finally, He dealt with the presence of sin and death when He identified Himself with us in His exalted position at the Father's right hand and caused us to be seated and glorified with Him.

d. Its Destination

Our hope and destination are connected with Christ where He is. Concerning Christ we read: "When He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:20-21). "The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" said Solomon to the Lord (1 Kgs. 8:27). God is seated on top of the heavens. When Christ ascended He passed through the heavens (Heb. 4:14). He "ascended up far above all heavens (Eph. 4:10). Amos 9:6 says: "It is He that buildeth His stories (ascensions, chambers, spheres) in the heavens.

The Assembly, the Body of Christ is to receive "The inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). It could mean "The inheritance of the Holiest of all in the Light". This is none other than the unapproachable light of 1 Tim. 6:16. So our place of manifestation be above and beyond the heavens. Thus we are seated together in the super-heavenlies with Christ (Eph. 2:6).

Ephesians 3:1-13

As sure as crucifixion led to resurrection and resurrection to ascension, so ascension will lead to manifestation.

“The veil which shrouds your higher life from others and even partly from yourselves, will then be withdrawn. The world which persecutes, despises, ignores now, will then be blinded with the dazzling glory of His revelation” – Lightfoot.

In Colossians 3:4, Paul says: “appear with Him in glory.” The word “appear” is phaneroo and means “to make apparent, to make openly known. It is used in Col. 1:26 with reference to the manifestation of the mystery. In Phil. 3:14 Paul says: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”. The words translated “the high calling” are tes ano kleseos and can better be translated “calling above, or on high”. Ano is an adverb, not an adjective modifying the word “calling”. (See John 8:23).

The Bible sets forth three spheres of future blessing – the Earth, the Heavenly City and the Heavenly Places. The first sphere has to do with the earth. See Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11-12. This has to do with restored Israel as a nation among the sheep nations of the Gentiles. The second sphere has to do with the Heavenly City or the New Jerusalem. This will be inherited by Abraham and all the overcomers who with him have entered into the blessings of the New Covenant. See Heb. 11:10; 12:22; Rev. 21:2; 1 Thess 4:16; 2 Thess 2:1-3. These are the Bridal Company who will inherit the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2; 22:17). The third sphere has to do with The Church, the Body of Christ. Their hope is in the Heavenlies where all their blessings are to be found (Eph. 1:3; 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). This is the place Paul speaks of in Col. 3:4. At the moment of His manifestation we shall be manifested “in glory”. The word “glory” is a “rainbow colored word” and represents both the sphere and substance of our future hope in Christ. In Colossians and Ephesians it is associated with the fullness and completeness or Pleroma.

With reference to our manifestation in glory we are: (1) To long for it (see Titus 2:13). The word translated “looking for” is the word prosdecomai and means to “receive to oneself, expectant, eager and ardently wait for”. (2) To love it (see 2 Tim. 4:8. The word “love” is agapao – to acquiesce with satisfaction, cherish with reverence. (3) To live for it (see again Phil. 3:14).

With Him in glory! O, wonderful word!
Eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard,
Mind hath not fathomed the future in store
Reserved for the children of God evermore,
Suffering over and failure and sin;
Like Him without and like Him within;
Bodies made perfect and spirits set free
We'll share in His glory, whose glory we see.
With Him in glory! Beholding His face!
With Him in glory! O marvelous grace!
Holy and happy and reigning in bliss,
Can there be anything greater than this?

III. T H E E X P E R I E N T I A L S E Q U E L

“To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us ACCEPTED in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

“In whom we have boldness and ACCESS with confidence by the faith of Him” (Eph. 3:12).

“That He might PRESENT it to himself a glorified church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).

The Greek word translated “accepted” is charitoo, “to make lovely or acceptable”. It occurs also in Luke 1:28 translated “highly favored” or “graciously accepted or much graced”. Mary was “highly favored or much graced”.

The Greek word translated “access” is prosagoge, “a leading or bringing to the presence of anyone; freedom of access”. It occurs also in Rom. 5:2 and Eph. 2:18.

The Greek word translated “present” is paristemi. It is made up of two words – istemi which means “to cause to stand, place, and para, “beside” so the combination word means “to stand beside”. This word occurs eight times: first in Luke 2:22 and also in Col. 1:22,28.

Paul admonishes us to “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). Bishop Lightfoot has said: “If you were translated into heaven, what follows? Why you must realize the change. All your aims must center in Heaven where reigns the Christ who has thus exalted you, enthroned on God’s right hand. All your thoughts must abide in heaven, not on the earth. For, I say it once again, you have nothing to do with mundane things: you died, died once for all to the world; you are living another life.”

We have in these three word the three tenses of our relationship to the Secret:

1. Our Past Position – “accepted in the Beloved” (1:6).

Several things took place when we were thus graciously accepted in the Beloved. We passed from

Death into life (Eph. 2:1,5). We were “dead in sins” and needed life. We were “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). We also passed from bondage into liberty. We were “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). Sin had brought two things which caused bondage – defilement and distance. We were like the leper, a walking symbol of disease and death. The leper living in abject, shameful bondage. He had to walk with bowed head, have distinct garments, long staff and cry: “unclean, unclean”. He had to dwell outside the city. But when cleansed of his leprosy he had free access again to society. We were also like the Queen of Sheba who came from afar to see and hear the wisdom and wealth of Solomon. We also came from darkness into light (Eph. 5:8). We were “delivered from the power of darkness” (Col. 1:13). We were blind men groping for something tangible to hold to or to lean on. But with Christ, Who is the light of the world, came light out of darkness for us sinners.

2. Our Present Provision – “We have boldness and access with confidence.”

We have this access because we are adopted as sons of God (Eph. 1:5). The word “adoption” is *huiothesia*, - the making or constituting of a son, a setting or placing. It is used five times in the N.T. (Rom. 8:15,23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). And because we are “sons”, we are also “heirs”, “fellowheirs” (3:6). “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance” (Eph. 1:11). In Christ we have not only the universe He created, but He Himself; for we are members of His body, the Church. To make this inheritance sure here and now, we read, “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph. 1:13-14). The seal of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the earnest of our inheritance.

So as sons and inheritors we can have great boldness and assurance and confidence in our access to God. Our access brings the most marvelous revelation of God’s purpose - “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 2:7).

3. Our Prospective Potential – “Present it to Himself a glorious church.”

Look at Eph. 5:27 and also Col. 1:22 and 28. Paul also says in Col. 1:27 – “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.”

“He will welcome all His people,
He will diadem His own;
He will show to them His glory,
And will share with them His throne;
Then forever in His presence,
They shall see Him face to face,
While they chant His matchless wisdom,
And extoll His wondrous grace.”

We are “looking for that blessed hope” (Tit. 2:13). This will include a new body – “Who shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:20).

CONCLUSION: This marvelous section in Ephesians presents:

- (1) Unknown Records – (Eph. 3:1-5). It was not revealed to prophets or priests or potentates of old, nor even hinted of in the Scriptures. It was hid in God and revealed to Paul.
- (2) Unsearchable Riches - (Eph. 3:6-11). “Joint-heirs, joint-body, and joint-partakers.” “The manifold wisdom of God.” It is the purpose of the ages which he purposed in Christ Jesus.
- (3) Unlimited Resources – (Eph. 3:12). Boldness in Him, Access in Him, Confidence in assurance through Him and Faith in Him.

Joined to Christ in mystic union,
We thy members, Thou our head,
Sealed by deep and true communion,
Risen with Thee, Who once was dead;
Savior, we would humbly claim
All the power of this Thy name.