



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Valley in the Mountains (Ephesians 3:1-13)

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BIBLE STUDY

Ephesians

Location:

122 CAP

Time:

TUESDAYS @ 7:15 AM

Introduction

Lookout Mountain and Pigeon Mountain form a V, similar to the thumb and index finger of a person's left hand held with the palm aimed downward. Lookout Mountain would be the index finger of the hand, and Pigeon Mountain would be the thumb. Nestled in the V shape is the splendid McLemore Cove of the Chickamauga Valley, which divides the "thumb" of Pigeon Mountain from Lookout Mountain. The scenery in the Chickamauga Valley between Lookout Mountain and Pigeon Mountain is a hidden treasure.

From the easterly side of Lookout Mountain, there is a large projection that separates, and bends sharply to the north for approximately 10-12 miles in an almost unbroken ridge. The last ridge is Pigeon Mountain. The valley in the mountains is a cul-de-sac; as a blind alley, it is imperceptible until one is there. The church is also like a valley between two mountains.

The church was not foreseen in the Old Testament; it was a mystery (something previously unrevealed). The "valley of the church" was hidden between Messiah's first coming and second coming (cf. Heb 9:24-28). In Ephesians 3:3, the Apostle Paul referred to the church as a mystery now made known by revelation. Paul began chapter 3 with a prayer for enablement (3:1, 14-21), but his mention of "Gentiles" compelled him to relate the message (mystery) that God revealed. In verses 2-13, the Apostle recalled how ministry to Gentiles became a prominent aspect of His stewardship.

Paul was responsible to preach and teach "the gift of God's grace" which is manifested in the new society (composed of both Jews and Gentiles who have trusted in Christ alone for salvation). The nature of the church, which is "the mystery" explained further in Ephesians 3,

is the union of two groups—Jew and Gentile—"into a dwelling [body] of God in the Spirit" (2:22).

"Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body" (3:6), that is, they inherit equality with the Jews. "In Christ Jesus through the gospel," Gentiles are part of the same body and have the same promise of the Savior's coming. The working of God's power is evident in the ministry and salvation of Paul. Consequently, there are "unfathomable riches" of Christ that are the possession of believers. Some of these riches include salvation, forgiveness of sins, inheritance, and "confident access" to God. One of the purposes of the church is to bring glory to God, and to demonstrate the gift of His grace and the working of His power "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."

THE STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S GRACE

(3:1-5) Paul began the chapter with a prayer for enablement, but before he actually prayed for the believers (3:14-21), he interrupted himself to include a parenthetical explanation with regard to the mystery of both Jews and Gentiles being united as one body in Christ. The primary argument of the Apostle is that God revealed the mystery of the church to him, and that God made him responsible for communicating that message. The reason for this new society was already explained in 2:13-22. Jews and Gentiles "have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Christ abolished "the barrier of the dividing wall" between Jew and Gentile, and they are brought "together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

[THE] SIMPLE (ALBEIT PROFOUND) STATEMENT INDICATES COMPLETE TRUST IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

God abolished "the barrier" between Jew and Gentile and made them a new society. Paul was called by God to be a minister of that message. It is assumed that the church had "heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to" Paul, and understood that Gentiles are "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." The emphasis of chapter 3 is upon the Gentiles (i.e. the primary people to whom he wrote).

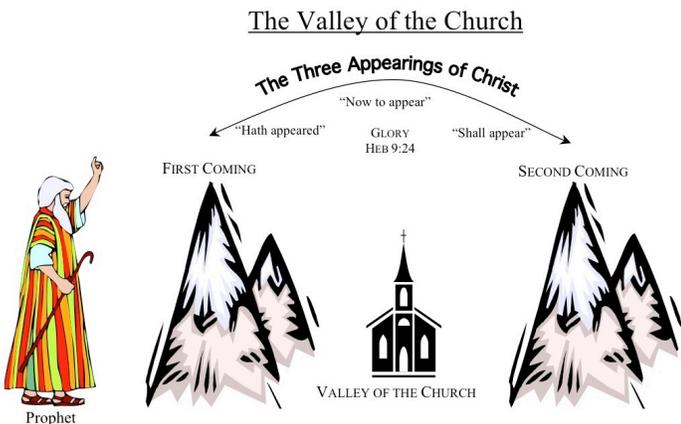
Paul confessed that he was a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles. Although he was imprisoned in Rome at this time,

Paul stated that he was “the prisoner of Christ Jesus” because it was obedience to God that was the reason for his imprisonment. His simple (albeit profound) statement indicates complete trust in the sovereignty of God. Paul regarded his circumstances as favorable for the gospel message. Wherever the Apostle found himself, he knew that God wanted him to proclaim the gospel.

It is noteworthy that Paul acknowledged the limitations of his stewardship: “of God’s grace.” The responsibility that God gave to him was a stewardship of grace (not works). God has also granted a stewardship to elected officials (cf. Dan 2:21; John 19:11; Rom 13:1; Tit 3:1-2), and it is indispensable to understand that God’s stewardship is a trust granted by Him to be administered on His behalf. The only requirement for a steward is to be trustworthy (1 Cor 4:2).

THE ONLY REQUIREMENT FOR A STEWARD IS TO BE TRUSTWORTHY (1 COR 4:2).

The truth that Gentiles are united with Jews, as one body in Christ, was made known “by revelation.” All the apostles and prophets of the New Testament also received this revelation. God’s revelation was essential and foundational until the New Testament was completed. The Spirit now continues to work through that same revelation.



THE MYSTERY OF GOD’S GRACE

(3:6-13) The mystery of God’s grace toward both Jews and Gentiles is good news (i.e. “gospel”). Salvation comes by God’s grace (2:8), and the mission of communicating the gospel mystery was given to Paul as a result of God’s grace. It was God’s grace that allowed Paul to be “a minister.” Paul considered himself as not possessing any qualifications for the mission that God gave him. For this reason, he referred to the message to the Gentiles as God’s “unfathomable riches.”

The church was a mystery in accord with “the manifold wisdom of God.” The universe itself is witness to this wisdom now made known through the church. There are many folks who live only for self. We are reminded that our lives are part of a divine drama that is on public display before the universe (viz. “the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places”).

THE UNIVERSE ITSELF IS WITNESS TO [“THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD”] NOW MADE KNOWN THROUGH THE CHURCH. . . . WE ARE REMINDED THAT OUR LIVES ARE PART OF A DIVINE DRAMA THAT IS ON PUBLIC DISPLAY BEFORE THE UNIVERSE (VIZ. “THE RULERS AND THE AUTHORITIES IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES”).

“In accordance with the eternal purpose,” God planned to display His grace and wisdom before other beings that He created by demonstrating the accomplishments “which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.” By grace through faith in Christ Jesus, believers have “boldness and confident access” to God. Believers can come boldly and confidently before the throne of grace in time of need (cf. Heb. 4:16). Access to God through faith is an integral competent of the remarkable demonstration of His mercy and grace.

It is because believing Jews and Gentiles have equal access to God that Paul encouraged the church “not to lose heart” because he was suffering in prison. God’s grace enabled Paul to proclaim the gospel, which also resulted in suffering. The sufferings, however, were evidence of God’s goodness. The tribulations were a task to which he had been called, and the believers should glory in the tribulations with him as trophies of God’s grace. Through Paul’s sufferings, others came to know the Lord Jesus more intimately and experienced salvation more completely. God is always sovereignly working!

ABOUT CAPITOL COMMISSION

Capitol Commission state directors are pastors/missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with a heartfelt compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and it is our desire to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come.

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God’s great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and to pray for their eternal salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). The desire of Capitol Commission is to witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.