

Thus, when Paul speaks of “this grace was given to me,” he may be specifically telling us that by God’s grace he was given specific spiritual gifts to accomplish the mission to which he was sent. Such spiritual gifts (*charismata*) are recognizable by those to whom the one gifted ministers, and this was the case with Paul.

But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Gal 2:7–9)

Those to whom spiritual gifts are given demonstrate the reality of such gifting through the service they undertake for the Lord, a service that is in clear agreement with what God Himself has revealed. There may be men who claim to be endowed with spiritual gifts but who do not act or teach in accordance with God’s revealed truth, and as such, prove that their claim to be recipients of God’s grace in giving them spiritual gifts is spurious.

There are always fellow men who benefit from the gift or gifts of grace. If there be inspired men who cannot communicate and share with others (as in the case of Corinthian enthusiasts), then Paul urges that they be muzzled (1Cor 14).¹

1Cor. 14:27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; 1Cor. 14:28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. (1Cor 14:27–28)

... to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Messiah – The specifics of the “grace” given to Paul are now enumerated as consisting of two things. First, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and second, to make known the mystery revealed to the apostles and prophets which

1 Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3* in the *Anchor Bible Commentary* (Doubleday, 1974), vol. 34, p. 340.

was previously not fully disclosed.

Paul was directly commissioned by God “to proclaim to the Gentiles the good news,” i.e., the gospel message centered in the death and resurrection of Yeshua. The NASB “to preach” translates the Greek *τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαι*, “to proclaim the good news (i.e., the gospel) to the Gentiles.” It is in the gospel that reconciliation of the sinner to God is proclaimed, and such reconciliation brings about the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. Thus, the gospel message encompasses not only eternal realities, i.e., the forgiveness of sins and the possession of eternal life. It also proclaims this-world realities, namely, that all who are believers in Yeshua have entered into a community in which all stand as equals as those whom God has declared as righteous, who are all indwelt by the Ruach, endowed by the Spirit to serve one another, and are given a common identity as brothers and sisters together in the family of God.

Moreover, Paul knew that God would use the message of the gospel to bring about His sovereign will in bringing all of the elect to faith in Yeshua, and that he was chosen by the Almighty as one who would open the doors of the gospel to the Gentiles through the gospel message. Paul writes of the power of the gospel in his epistle to the Romans:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom 1:16)

... *the unfathomable riches of Messiah* – The Greek word translated “unfathomable” by the NASB is *ἀνεξιχνίαστος* (*anexichniastos*) and is found only here and in Rom 11:33.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable (*anexichniastos*) His ways! (Rom 11:33)

The Greek word itself is simply the negative particle (*ἀν*) put on the verb *ἐξιχνιάζω* (*echzixniázō*), “to track out,” as when a hunter is tracking an animal by the footprints it leaves. Thus, with the negative attached, the word carries the sense of “not able to be tracked.” We are helped by the fact that Paul uses this word in Rom 11:33 and pairs it with the word “unsearchable” (*ἀνεξεραύνητος*, *anechzeraunētos*), used only here. The word carries the sense of that which is beyond human understanding or ability to fully comprehend.

We are also helped in our understanding of what Paul means when he uses the phrase “the unfathomable riches of Messiah,” since this same word, *anexichniastos*, is found three times in the LXX of the canonical books, all in the book of Job (5:9; 9:10; 34:24), which describe the “unsearchable” or “untraceable” majesty, power, and sovereignty of God.

Thus, when Paul writes of “the unfathomable riches of Messiah,” there are several ways to understand his meaning. First, that the “riches” of which Paul speaks are the manifold blessings of salvation itself gained for the elect by the work of Yeshua, which Paul has already enumerated (1:7, 18; 2:4, 11–22; 3:6). Or, secondly, we could understand Paul to be speaking of the “blessings which belong to Messiah Himself,” i.e., the manner in which He omnipotently is able to meet every individual need of those who are “in Him,” and to provide them with everything necessary for their perseverance and their eventual reigning with Him forever. In reality, both are combined in the fact that Yeshua Himself is the eternal One Whose very being and works are known to us but exceed our ability to comprehend fully, not the least of which is why He would love us in such an eternal and infinite way! And this is all the more wonderful when we recognize that Paul’s primary emphasis in this context is that God in Messiah has manifested His eternal and infinite love to each of those He has determined to save, not based upon anything in them which attracted His love, but purely because He determined, of His own sovereign and free will, to save His chosen ones even at the cost of giving His own Son for them.

and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; – Not only was Paul commissioned and equipped by God’s grace to proclaim the good news, i.e., the gospel, to the Gentiles, but he was also given the revelation of the mystery contained in the Gospel, that “all the nations/families of the earth would be blessed” (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8). It was this aspect of the gospel that he was to “bring to light” as he evangelized the Gentiles, but not only the Gentiles, but also all those to whom his message would make known what God had revealed to him and to his fellow apostles and prophets. This universal aspect corresponds to a variant reading in the text,¹ which gives rise to different readings in some of the English translations of this opening phrase of v. 9.

1 Note that in a number of the early manuscripts (P⁴⁶ N² A B D²), the word *πάντας*, “all” is found, thus giving the reading “to bring light to all.”

and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, (ESV)

and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. (NIV)

and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; (RSV)

Whether or not the word “all” (*pantas*) is original in our text is difficult to decide,¹ given the extant manuscript evidence. But given the fact that Paul is emphasizing the inclusive aspect of the gospel as going to all people, Jew and Gentile alike, it seems warranted to see that same emphasis in our current verse.

... *what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God* – By using the word “administration” (*οἰκονομία, oikonomia*), Paul is speaking about the method by which God, in His sovereignty, would reveal this aspect of the Gospel promise, which was given in “seed form” from the beginning but not fully explained as it would be by the apostles and prophets who were given the fuller revelation by divine revelation. It was God’s will that the full ingathering of the elect from the nations would take place in the last days with the appearance of the promised Messiah, His death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Ruach to accomplish this task. What is more, even though the salvation and blessing of the nations was promised to Abraham, the method by which the nations would be blessed was not fully disclosed by Israel’s prophets. This method was that the elect of the nations would not be blessed by God with a separate and distinct blessing, but would be blessed together with the remnant of Israel to form one unified body, the *ekklesia*, as a witness to the whole universe of God’s faithfulness, power, and love.

Here, in this verse, we have an excellent example of “progressive revelation.” God’s method of divine revelation in the written Scriptures is in full concert with His divine attributes, by which we affirm that the inspired Scriptures cannot be self-contradictory, for God is Himself not self-contradictory. All that He does and all that He reveals is true, and therefore in fully harmony together as a whole. However, in God’s

1 See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Edition, p. 534, where he states that the UBS committee included the word in brackets.

omniscient and sovereign plan, it is clear that He has not always given the full revelation at the beginning but that at times and in specific situations, He reveals His plan and purpose in general and then gives further revelation giving more and more details and information of how He will bring about His plan and purposes in the course of human history.

In our Ephesians text, we see that the timing, method, and plan for how the elect from the nations would be brought to faith and how they would be united into one body of believers with the believing remnant of Israel, was “for ages hidden.” Since Greek *αἰών* (*aiōn*) was sometimes used to describe a “cosmic power,” some have suggested that Paul means God’s plan for blessing the nations was hidden specifically from demonic forces. But elsewhere in Ephesians Paul uses this word to describe “ages” (1:21; 2:2–3; 6:12) and this is how we should understand it here as well as in the following verse (v. 10).

Thus, it was in the time of the apostles that the “administration” by which the ancient promise would be fulfilled was divinely ordered. And the fact that Paul tells us that it “was hidden” in past ages, only to be revealed in connection with the coming of the promised Messiah, is now known to be God’s plan from the very beginning.

This is what Paul means by the phrase “hidden in God,” where the Greek has the word *ἀποκρύπτω* (*apokruptō*), which carries the sense of “to hide, conceal, keep secret.”¹ To be “hidden in God” means to be hidden as part of God’s eternal plan and providence. Here, once again, we see the complete sovereignty of God revealed in both the means and the method by which His eternal plan of redemption unfolds and is brought to full completion.

And this is likewise emphasized by the fact that Paul completes v. 9 with the words “Who created all things.” When we recognize the God we worship to be the Creator of all things, we likewise must acknowledge that He is the eternal, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-knowing God Who has both the right and the ability to act in accordance with His own sovereign plan. The attempts by the enemy of our souls to diminish or deny the fact that God created all things is likewise an attempt to diminish His sovereignty and thus His right to accomplish all things according the counsel of His own will. Paul has emphasized this from the beginning of this epistle, for in 1:11 he highlights the sovereignty of God in our salvation:

1 BDAG, “ἀποκρύπτω,” p. 114. Our English word “apocrypha” is based upon this Greek word.

...we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Messiah would be to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:11–12)

10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the ekklesia to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

Here we see that the *ekklesia* which Yeshua promised to build does not exist for itself, but rather it exists for God and for His glory. Indeed, we glorify God in the *ekklesia* when Yeshua receives first place in everything (Col 1:18), which means we strive to have our individual as well as our corporate life in accordance with His righteous ways.

...so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the *ekklesia* – The wisdom of God in hiding the “how” and “when” that He would fulfill the promise of the gospel given to Abraham encompasses “the mystery.” But the very fact that a massive ingathering of the Gentiles in Paul’s day, as well as in the millennia following, shows the perfect wisdom of God in bringing to fruition His redemptive plan. Further, the Greek word translated “manifold” is πολυποικίλος (*polupoi-kilos*) can have the sense of “multicolored” or “many-sided,” offering the idea of superbly fitted for every possible situation. Here again, Paul is reminding us that while we are enabled to participate in the wisdom of God since He has revealed His wisdom to us in the creation, the Scriptures, and most certainly in His Son, Yeshua, ultimately we will come to the point where we can only stand in awe of His wisdom, for His greatness exceeds our ability to fully comprehend.

One of the aspects of His wisdom as now made known through His apostles and prophets, and forever established in the inspired Scriptures, is that God’s wisdom is to be “made known through the *ekklesia*.” This means that the gathered people of God, Jew and Gentile who have confess Yeshua to be Lord, Messiah, Savior and eternal God in the flesh, are to live with each other and to work together so that a watching world will see the greatness of their God.

But it is not only the watching world that is educated by the success of the *ekklesia*, but also “the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.” Some have understood “rulers and authorities” (ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις) to be “hostile forces,” i.e., demonic spirits, but there is no need to limit these terms to evil forces. Rather, “rulers and authorities”

encompasses all intelligent beings in the universe.¹ The idea that the ultimate success of the *ekklesia*, as promised by Yeshua Himself (Matt 16:18), is the very means by which the wisdom and glory of God is made known to the entire universe, parallels what Peter writes in his first epistle.

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Messiah within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Messiah and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look. (1Pet 1:10–12)

We see, then, that God's plan to hide the manner in which the promise would come to fruition and to unveil what was hidden through the apostles and prophets following the victory of Yeshua's death, resurrection and ascension, had universal dimensions. Even the powers in the heavenly places would only discover God's unfolding plan as they observe the building of the *ekklesia* and its life and success in this world.

1 See F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, p. 321.