

Ephesians 3:9—and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;

and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery (3:9a)

Paul was called “to bring to light...the administration” (plan or dispensation) “of the mystery” (Ephesians 3:9). The *Phillips Translation* renders verse 9 as:

and to make plain to all men the meaning of that divine secret which he who created everything has kept hidden from the creation until now. (Ephesians 3:9 Phillips)ⁱ

Paul’s goal was to “make plain” (*Phillips*) the mystery which, until his day, had been hidden in God. The fact that Jews and Gentiles can become new creations in Christ (2Corinthians 5:17) and, in God’s economy, live with no racial distinction (Galatians 3:28), was a truth that consumed Paul’s thought processes. He desired that all Jews and Gentiles know the profoundness of this truth. Thus, he was energized (by God’s grace) to share “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1Timothy 1:11), a message which attracted persecution from the unbelieving Jews. (Note: Although Paul’s ministry was to the Gentiles, he first visited the Jewish synagogues when entering a new city (Acts 17:1, 10-12). Why? The gospel was to be presented “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; (3:9b)

The mystery that Paul preached, “which for ages had been hidden in God,” was revealed at a strategic time in the history of mankind—“when the fullness of the time came”:

But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, (Galatians 4:4)

The Greeks had earlier, under the leadership of Alexander the Great, united Europe, Asia, and Africa. In the process they established the Greek language as the universal language. The Romans, who ruled after the Greeks, kept the “then known world” as one empire, but created a network of roads to make the whole of the empire accessible. Considering too that the Jews had been dispersed throughout the world, the stage was set for the mystery to be revealed to the masses—Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul was to teach this mystery to anyone who would listen, regardless of the degree to which the unbelieving Jews resisted its validity.

God, in Whom the mystery had been “hidden,” “created all things” (Ephesians 3:9b). He did so through His Son (Colossians 1:15-16), Who is “the Word” of God (John 1:1-3). Therefore, when the Father spoke (Genesis 1:3), all things came into existence “by” the Son (1Corinthians 8:6).

yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1Corinthians 8:6)

Ephesians 3:10—in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

Paul has been addressing the “mystery”—the fact that God makes unredeemed Jews and Gentiles into new creations (once they repent and believe while depraved), places them into one body (the body of Christ), and empowers them to function as a unified army for the cause of the kingdom. God exercised “*manifold*

wisdom” while implementing this glorious plan, a “*wisdom*” being communicated “*through the church*” to the angels “*in the heavenly places.*” What an amazing God we serve!

The church is to make known “*the manifold wisdom of God*” to “*the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*” Coupling the phrase, “*rulers and authorities*” (Ephesians 3:12), with Ephesians 6:12, Paul is possibly referencing holy and unholy angels alike:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

(Also read Ephesians 1:21 and Colossians 1:16). The holy angels worship God (Revelation 5:11-12) and minister to the saints (Hebrews 1:14), while the unholy angels (demons) scheme to disrupt God’s work within the church, the body of Christ. Revelation 12:7-10 confirms that an army of angels (demons) fell with Satan.

Angels understand little about redemption, for once they fall they can never be redeemed (Hebrews 2:16). So, the holy angels are mesmerized with salvation and how it relates to man (1Peter 1:12):

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. (1Peter 1:12)

Because the ministry of the church goes far beyond what we see in the realm of the physical, each member of Christ’s body ministers to the holy angels. The holy angels enjoy worshipping God (Revelation 5:11-12), but their worship is greatly enhanced as God’s “*manifold wisdom*” is revealed through “*the church*” (Ephesians 3:10).

“*Manifold*” (Ephesians 3:10) means “exceedingly various, immense, infinite,” confirming the vastness of God’s “*wisdom.*” As the church (functioning as teacher) explains God’s wisdom to the holy angels (the students), they are brought to a deeper understanding of Calvary—resulting in enhanced praise. Just imagine the sense of awe experienced by the angels through their heightened understanding of Jesus’ sacrifice. How rebellious Jews and Gentiles can be placed into one body and made new (after repenting and believing while depraved), functioning as the vehicle through which Christ expresses Himself to the world, must be awe-inspiring to beings incapable of experiencing the same. Yes, salvation enhances the praise offered to our God, even among the holy angels.

The church reveals God’s wisdom to the fallen angels as well (Ephesians 3:10). When the church wields its spiritual weaponry (“*the word of God*”—Ephesians 6:17), empowered by God’s Spirit, the unholy angels (demons) witness the enormity of God’s wisdom and retreat in defeat. How could they fail to observe God’s wisdom after suffering humiliation at the hands of Jews and Gentiles who formerly hated each other and blatantly disobeyed God’s commands? Only God could rectify such hostility between two groups of polarized individuals and mold them into a war machine capable of defeating any foe—even Satan himself. As God empowers the church to defeat Satan and his demons, the holy angels witness an additional aspect of God’s infinite wisdom—resulting in enhanced praise.

Paul, in 1Corinthians 11:3-16, addresses women wearing long hair to display submission to their husbands. Note his words in 1Corinthians 11:10:

Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (1Corinthians 11:10)

Paul is evidently referencing the holy angels' observance of the wife's submission to the husband—a picture of the church's submission to Christ. Through this observance, the holy angels' submission to God is heightened—resulting in greater praise. The unholy angels (demons) may be observing as well, hoping to somehow disrupt the husband-wife relationship and, in turn, the unity within the church.

Paul's instruction to Timothy should also be considered:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. (1 Timothy 5:21)

Angels are extremely interested in the correlation between proper leadership within the church and proper behavior among the members of the church body. Why shouldn't they be if they are called to minister to and serve the members of Christ's body (Hebrews 1:14)? You and I, therefore, have "*entertained angels without knowing it*" (Hebrews 13:2). The holy angels are continually observing the saints for additional insight into God's limitless wisdom. By the way, angels always appear as men, for they are male in gender.

¹ Phillips, J.B. (1996). *The New Testament In Modern Language*. Touchstone Books, a division of Simon & Schuster. Used by permission.