

“Heavenly Privileges for the Earthly Church”

Ephesians 3:7-13

Dr. Cliff McManis

Paul explains in chapter 3 that God is working now on earth through His Church (3:10). By “Church” we mean the group of individual people who have been redeemed through a personal relationship with Christ, including local assemblies of believers from the time of Christ right up to the one here at GBF. So the Church is a living spiritual organism, animated by the Holy Spirit, with Christ as the Head—it is not an organization or buildings. Some of the privileges that every Christian has by virtue of being a member of Christ’s Church are mentioned in this passage. Consider the following:

1. God gives gifts of service and enabling power to those in the Church (7)
“I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace”
2. God works through those who are not worthy in the Church (8)
“To me, the very least of all saints”
3. God displays His mysteries through the Church (9)
“to bring to light...the mystery”
4. God teaches the angels through the unity of the Church (10-11)
“to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies”
5. God provides direct access to heaven through the Church (12)
“we have boldness and confident access”

What is Dispensationalism?

Have you ever heard of “dispensationalism”? Many people are scared by it, and others are confused by it, but we shouldn’t be. Some people say dispensationalism was invented by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in the early 1800’s. But technically, that’s not true. True dispensationalism was invented by God in eternity past, and revealed to Paul and the other apostles after Jesus ascended into heaven.

We get the word “dispensation” from Ephesians 3:2 (among other verses). Paul refers to the *“dispensation of the grace of God which is given me”* (KJV). The Greek word for ‘dispensation’ is *oikonomia* (οικονομία) which when pronounced, sounds like our English word “economy” and that is exactly where “economy” comes from.

A dispensation refers to a stewardship responsibility of administering over something, like the manager of a store, or someone who is entrusted with the valuables of someone else. Paul and the apostles were stewards over the new truth, or mystery, of the Church which did not exist, nor was even mentioned in the Old Testament. And the main truth about the Church that Paul references in Ephesians 3 is the mystery that Jews and Gentiles now make up one new humanity, or body in Christ.

The main distinctive of dispensationalism depends on one’s view of the Church. Do you believe the Church is a brand new truth introduced for the first time by Paul and the apostles, and did not exist in the Old Testament at all? Then you are dispensational in your theology and hermeneutic. But if you believe that the Church existed in the Old Testament or was referred to in some small way—or if you believe the Church is the new Israel and that God is not going to deal with Israel again—then you are not dispensational...you hold to Covenant Theology.

Paul clearly states that the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile, did not exist in the Old Testament:

“the mystery...which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men” (3:5); and

“the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God” (3:9).

Paul was dispensational.

Legitimate literal renderings:

“the dispensation of the grace of God” (King James)

“the stewardship of God’s grace” (New American Standard; New King James)

“the administration of God’s grace” (New International Version)