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Main Idea: Christianity is all about the grace we received that we did not deserve. This was the prime factor for Paul; it must be ours, too--that we be filled with the presence of Christ, His Truth and Love. Consider that Paul was in prison--a heinous place--yet all he can do and think about is how he can be a better steward of God's grace and spread the Good News! God gave Paul special revelation of His plan, how the Scriptures foretold Christ and understanding what was a mystery--a mystery that countless Priests and Prophets desperately wanted to know; the mystery is solved for us, and it is plain for us to see and know. The Gospel is for all people! This was a great shift in worldview--that salvation was now not only for those of Abraham's lineage, but for all people. With this Good News, there is a duty to go out and spread God's Word. Now, no one is ever excluded who does not reject God's saving grace. God's promise is for all who will receive in faith Christ and His work on the cross.

Contexts and Background:

This passage continues into the "why" of our salvation, love. This is the Love and power to reconcile us who do not deserve to be in His family; yet, He does. God loves you and accepts you more powerfully, passionately, purposefully, and deeply than you could ever fathom! You are secure. God "guarantees" you with a clear, powerful, loving, impacting, and lasting relationship with Him. When you are in Christ, God is pleased with you! You have no need to fear; you are a person of deep value and worth before our Lord! You are forgiven because of Christ and His righteousness that covers you—not because of your deeds or performance. You are unique and complete in Him; and because of this, you are a special person whom God loves and will use to further impact His kingdom (John 6:37, 44, 65; 13:1; 15:16; Rom. 5:1-8; Eph. 1:4-5; Phil. 1:6; Col. 1:21-22; 2:10; 1 John 4:9-11)!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Prisoner of Christ.* Paul writes this letter from prison, either in a dungeon or transferred to house arrest, because he was falsely charged by Jewish authorities for taking a non-Jew inside of the Temple. This did not slow him down. Paul reminds us all there is no barrier, as Christ shattered it; Paul cannot wait to tell the world about it no matter what may happen to him (Acts 21:27-28; 28:16-30).
- *Administration/steward of God's grace.* This is a responsibility to manage what is someone else's. We are entrusted with responsibility with our salvation. In context, Grace is for all nations, all peoples. God's call is an open invitation, but the invitation must be accepted; our faith and trust are the requirements. We cannot enter on our own effort; however, we still need to put in the effort of our response and determination. This is equivalent to Atonement and how we need to be clothed in Christ; His covering makes us secure in God's sight (Micah 5:5; Zach. 3:3-5; Matt. 22:13-15; Rom. 1:1-7; 2 Thess. 2:14; Rev. 3:18; 19:8).
- *Mystery.* God's plan for history is revealed in Scripture; however, it was/is often ignored or overlooked by the Jewish echelon over the centuries. The Greek word "*mysterion*" means "secret insights" or something that is yet to be revealed or initiated. For us, it is what was formerly hidden, such as the unity of Jew to Gentile to the Church, which is now fully revealed to us by God to understand and to proclaim. In Jewish thought, wisdom referred to the deeper things of God that only a pious, faithful, "spiritually enlightened" person could understand. However, for the Christian, the mystery is made known; thus, the purpose of God is made known for us to make known. Yes, much is still unrevealed, not because it is hidden, but because we have not matured so we can understand it. As we grow, we understand much more; Christ is the Light and He gives

us the enlightenment so that no secret understanding is available or needed. Some people say this verse teaches a rapture or secret rapture, and this is just nonsense, because *all eyes* will see Him (Psalm 42:7; Dan. 2; Matt. 13:11; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-6, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:9, 12, 26-27; 2:2, 18; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16).

- *Revelation.* The greatest, most incredible news in the history of the universe is revealed to us--the unfolding plan of God in His Word! Our salvation is purchased and secured by Christ! God's promise from the Old Testament is fulfilled by Christ. Jesus Christ came to us as a man, one of us, to live a perfect life on our behalf and as God to take God's wrath for our sin. He takes our place, the punishment we deserved. He does this by love and by grace. Then, He offers His grace to all of us who are willing to accept it by trusting in Him. The contrast was that Jews thought they were entitled; God makes it clear: His grace is totally unmerited and not deserved.
- *Understand my insight.* The revelation that Paul receives that God is in the midst of and within His people, He is personal and knowable (Gen. 41:38; Num. 27:18; 35:34; Dan. 4:8, 18; 5:11, 14; Col. 2:12; 3:4, 16; 1 Pet. 1:11).
- *Mystery of Christ, which was not made known.* God's redemptive plan was a mystery, hidden from most who did not dig into the Scriptures, and also from the Gentiles. Now, God's plan is in full view; Gentiles and Jews are now united under God. Yet, we can still hide God through our own misdirection, political power plays, and pride (Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 19:25; Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 9:9-10; John 3:5; Acts 26:22-23; Rom. 5:4-5; 8:14, 26-27; Gal. 4:6; 5:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 3:5-6; Col. 1:24-29).
- *Revealed by the Spirit.* God reveals Himself to us by the Work of the Holy Spirit and His Word. God's divine empowerment is within us; we have the Holy Spirit's enabling as we work out our faith and strive, even agonize for Christian living (Jer. 12:5; Matt. 28:20; Luke 11:13; John 14:17; Acts 1:8; 4:3; 10:45; 19:1-2; Rom. 8:1-11; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 15:10, 58; Gal. 5:13-26, Eph. 3:16-17; Heb. 13:5-6; Rev. 3:20)!
- *Holy.* This means set apart for God's exclusive use. God has declared you holy, set apart for Him--the pleasures and wondrous opportunities to be used by Him. We cannot earn nor do we deserve our grace or gifts from Him. Jesus has to empower us--not only to save us, but also so that we can trust in Him for holy living. With the understanding of what Christ did for us, we can have the hope and confidence to trust and obey Him. Therefore, let us treat others as He has treated us (John 3:16; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:32; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; Gal. 2:20-21; Col. 1:2; 3:1-17; Titus 3:4; 1 John 4:9-19).
- *Apostles and prophets.* *Apostle* means one who is sent with authority; in Paul's case, by the Holy Spirit.
- *Through the gospel.* God's sovereignty is the means He chose to further His gospel. God does not need us, nor does He have to use us; He chooses to use us. God works through the gospel message, through His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. The power is not us; it is Him. We are merely responding to His service (Psalm 90:1-2; Psalm 119:9-12; 1 Cori. 10:31; 11:1).
- *Gentiles are heirs/joint heirs.* The Promised Land was considered for the Jews only, not realizing it was for stewardship to uphold and make known God's Light and Word. This was considered heresy by the Jews, yet Biblical. Now, by Christ' work and sacrifice, the enmity between God and humanity is removed. God seeks out us, Jews and non-Jews, to be His people. In context, this means to make sure the Word gets out to the Gentiles, too (Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 6:10-11; 8:18; 15:18-22; 18:2; 20:23; 24:18-24; 1 Chron. 11:41-46; 18:17; Isa. 19:25; 66:19; Rom. 11:11-24; 16:26; Eph. 2:14-18).
- *One body.* A colloquialism for the Church, a "corporate" union with Christ. It is not a building; rather, it is a "spiritual house of the people" in relationship of unity, deriving life in and from Him. Being of His membership means our identity is in Him; thus, we are affected personally and publicly, synergizing as a community that is formed, indwelt, and empowered by the Spirit. We are all precious, important, and have

a job to do as a moving, living temple, reflecting His love and holiness. The Church is God's dwelling place and legacy, His training and worship center where people are empowered by Him to worship Him (Ex. 19:6; 2 Sam. 7:5-7, 12-16; Matt. 16:18; Mark 12:10-11; John 2:19; Acts 2:33; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 3:16; 15:45; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; Col. 3:15-17; Heb. 3:6; 7:26; 10:10; 1 Pet. 2: 4-10).

- *Promise.* The promise has arrived. Isaiah prophesizes that remnant from among the nations would return to God. God's Word was given to the Jews for the purpose of evangelizing the world. Their responsibility was to reach all the people groups on earth; all people and cultures traveled through Israel from up north as far as Europe and the Far East into Egypt and Arica for trading. The responsibility, especially for the Levites, was to be teachers of God, both to their fellow Jews and also to the Gentiles. However, the Bible rarely records the Levite's adherence to their call. So, the people were not properly instructed in the faith, and they easily fell into idolatry because they did not know better. They did not have faith. The Jewish leadership failed in their responsibility for education and modeling faith. Do not fail to teach and model faith! (Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 52:15).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Perhaps there is nothing more significant for us personally in the universe than who we are in Christ. We have a God who is all-knowing, all-loving and has a purpose for you; He knows you more deeply than you can ever imagine. Because of Christ, we have His grace. Thus, we are deeply loved and have meaning. We have redemption and an eternal inheritance. You matter and are complete in Christ. We are a new creation of infinite worth. We are completely forgiven and accepted by God. So, who we are is not what we do to earn a living in this world, it is our identity in Christ. Therefore, we can be a reflection of His redemption.

Church Leadership Tip: Our task in the church is to understand holiness so we can proclaim Christ-His Lordship as well as His character, righteousness, peace, and joy, all by the Holy Spirit. This will effectively be the catalyst for building a quality, lasting, and effective church.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions, see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that we have a God who is all knowing, all loving and has a purpose for you? He knows you more deeply than you can ever imagine!
2. How is Christianity about the grace we received that we did not deserve? How have you communicated that? How can we do a better job?
3. What does it mean to you that God loves you and accepts you more powerfully, passionately, purposefully, and deeply than you could ever fathom?

4. How have you and your church shown God's love and power to reconcile?
5. What would happen if the Church was a better steward of God's grace to spread the good news?
6. Why was this so revolutionary, that no one is ever excluded who does not reject God's saving grace?
7. What can you do to take the Gospel message and proclaimed it so others have a chance to receive this by faith alone, as you have?
8. If the Church is God's dwelling place and legacy, why do so few equip, train and to be empowered by Christ to worship Him?
9. What blocks you from your growth in Christ and your character towards others?
10. How do your desires easily distract you from holy living and your call?
11. How can you live in response to what Christ has done for you and be of help to others?
12. How can your churches prime motivating factor that its people must be filled with the presence of Christ, His Truth and Love?