

## Article of the Month – October 2011

### Missiological Observations in the NT (5) – Ephesians

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Few passages in Paul's letters describe the beauty of God's character and His salvation plan in Christ as exhaustively as the first two chapters of Ephesians do.<sup>1</sup> The new life that believers receive contrasts strongly with their former lives.<sup>2</sup> This should be a major motivation to preach the good news everywhere. It is no coincidence that the verse about us being 'God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do'<sup>3</sup> is placed between this contrast in life-styles

and the revelation that Jews and Gentiles have both become partakers in the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> In other words: as bridging text, 2:10 is of missiological significance: God's beauty and His message (1:3-22; 2:4-9) as in contrast to the gentile way of life (2:1-3; 4:17-19) must be preached (2:10) to Jew and Gentile alike (2:11–3:9).

The Church must make this message known to all generations.<sup>5</sup> That is World Missions. God's wisdom finds manifold expression in the Church. This many-colored outlook should be celebrated rather than cause division. God's wisdom must not only be made known to all people of all places and all times, but even the rulers and authorities in heavenly places must learn of the width, length, height and depth of Christ's love<sup>6</sup> by perceiving it from the Church. They watch and learn from what they see among us.

Christ does not only break down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary missiological interpretation sees Him also as breaking down barriers between genders, races, tribes, social and educational classes as well as of walls between church denominations. The latter is summarized in the sevenfold 'one' (body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father).<sup>8</sup>

There seems to be little scriptural support for the thought that Christ led *hostile* spiritual prisoners of war on his way to heaven.<sup>9</sup> More consistent with the rest of Scripture is that He, Who came to set the captives free,<sup>10</sup> also led those He had liberated from bondage to Satan and death, with Him to heaven.<sup>11</sup> This is consistent with what David said in one of his Psalms: 'He

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. 1:3-22 & 2:4-9

<sup>2</sup> 2:1-3 & 4:17-19

<sup>3</sup> 2:10

<sup>4</sup> 2:11 – 3:9

<sup>5</sup> 3:10,21

<sup>6</sup> 3:18,19

<sup>7</sup> 2:14

<sup>8</sup> 4:4-6

<sup>9</sup> 4:8, see comments from Reid, in Hawthorne, Martin & Reid, *Dictionary of St. Paul and his Letters*, 1993:754

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 61:1 as quoted in Luke 4:18

<sup>11</sup> Compare e.g. Matt. 27:52,53

leads forth the prisoners with singing' and the verse quoted in Ephesians a little further.<sup>12</sup> They are Satan's captives, now liberated, seen on their way to heaven with their Redeemer. Similarly, we as His people received the same commission: to liberate people by the Gospel message and take them with us to heaven. This is World Evangelization, in line with what the Great Missionary did Himself.

Evangelism and Missions is the initiative of Christ Who instituted the ministries of evangelists and apostles.<sup>13</sup> They are to equip the saints for ministry;<sup>14</sup> in other words: they have to train other evangelists and apostles to carry the Gospel farther.<sup>15</sup> This grossly neglected truth is similar to the generally accepted principle that pastors are needed to train other pastors and that teachers are usually trained by other teachers. Why then is it that evangelistic and even more so specialized apostolic cross-cultural missionary training, has almost entirely disappeared from most of our theological training institutions?

Missions will never function well without intercession for missionaries: they need to speak the right words and have an attitude of fearlessness.<sup>16</sup> More than this will not be said about the use of the spiritual armor in missions, because the topic of spiritual warfare surpasses the disciplines of evangelism and missions. As such its treatise can be found in many theological study books.

One specific term that we do need to look at, and that occurs seven times in the epistle to the Ephesians – out of a total of 21 times in all of Paul's letters – is the word *mystery*. The Greek word *μυστηριον* (*musterion*) means a hidden thing, a secret, a mystery. In the NT it means: what is not understood until revealed by God. This is how Paul uses the word: it was hidden in the past, but has now been revealed. The seven occurrences (footnotes 17-23) of this word we see in:

The *mystery of His will*, namely to bring everything in heaven and on earth together under one head, Christ,<sup>17</sup> was made known to Paul by revelation<sup>18</sup> and therefore he got insight into that *mystery of Christ*,<sup>19</sup> namely that Gentiles are heirs with Israel, members of one body and sharers in the promise of Christ Jesus<sup>20</sup> of which Paul was an administrator<sup>21</sup> and which he had to make known without fear.<sup>22</sup> The *mystery of unity between Jews and Gentiles* in one church, and *Christ*, is pictured by the *unity between husband and wife*.<sup>23</sup>

The use of the mystery concept is of missiological significance: unity among all men in Christ under His Lordship, is the basic message of God that has to be preached as far as the ends of the earth.

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<sup>12</sup> Ps. 68:6,18; Eph. 4:8

<sup>13</sup> 4:11

<sup>14</sup> 4:12

<sup>15</sup> Compare e.g. with 2 Tim. 2:2

<sup>16</sup> Eph. 6:19,20

<sup>17</sup> 1:9,10

<sup>18</sup> 3:3

<sup>19</sup> 3:4

<sup>20</sup> 3:6

<sup>21</sup> 3:9

<sup>22</sup> 6:19

<sup>23</sup> 5:32

