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Vaught Sermon Notes: Ephesians

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### The Function of the Ministry

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## THE FUNCTION OF THE MINISTRY

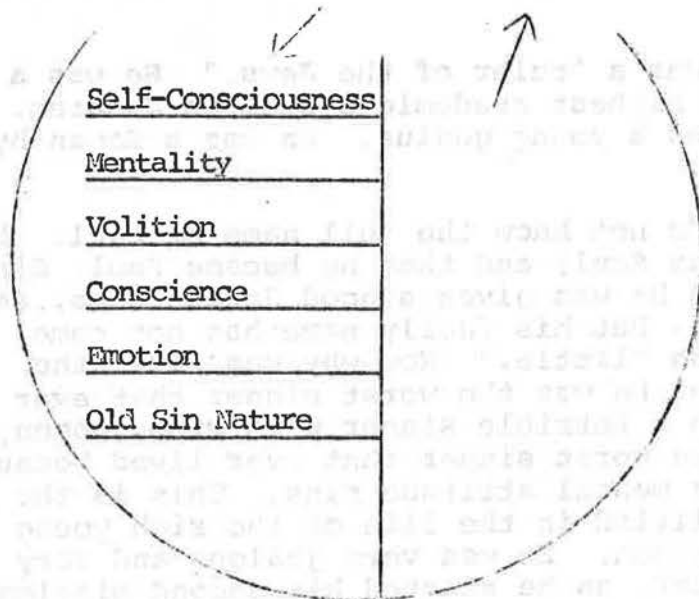
A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS  
NUMBER 28  
EPHESIANS 3:8-9

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EPHESIANS 3:8-9 "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:"

Ever so often I want to remind you of the significant thing which really happens when you take doctrine into your mind. I am convinced that this is the most important thing that ever happens in this church. Music is very important, and we emphasize it. Giving our young people attractive and inspiring things to do is important, and we give much attention to this phase of our program. Missionary education is a vital part of our worldwide emphasis, and throughout missionary education, our prayers, and our giving we reach out and touch the whole world. Winning people to Christ and to church membership must continue to be a vital part of our every day program, and we must never relax on the conquest part of our promotion. But when all is said and done, the most important thing of all is the categorical teaching of Bible doctrine. You grow or fail to grow as a Christian just to the extent of the Bible doctrine you take into your mind.

So take a good look at your soul again, and realize the importance of taking doctrine into your mind.



*You breathe in doctrinal truth into each area and then you can breathe out faith and obedience and trust in God. There is no other way to spiritual growth.*

As doctrinal truth flows into your soul, then you have capacity to love God and to love others. If this truth doesn't flow in, then mental attitude sins flow in and you become a dwarfed Christian.

The only way you can be conscious of God in all things is for doctrinal truth to flow into your self-consciousness. Bible truth must flow into your mind, if you are going to keep your thoughts pure and centered on God. This truth must flow into your volition if you are going to know and do the will of God. This truth must flow into your conscience if

the norms and standards of your life are going to be the norms and standards of God's plan for you. If you are to stay balanced emotionally then you must keep Bible truth flowing into your emotional nature. And the only way to overcome the old sin nature is to bathe your mind in Bible doctrine.

Bible doctrine is the key to your life as a Christian, and you can't have a relaxed mental attitude aside from this. Jesus said, "Man cannot live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

EPHESIANS 3:8 "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;" The pastor-teacher is to communicate doctrine. In this particular verse Paul was teaching the doctrine of the mystery, which is Church Age doctrine. In verse 9 he will teach the meaning of dispensations. Paul also taught doctrine to angels. In the Old Testament angels taught doctrine to people. Angels helped teach Moses in the Mosaic Law and in the Book of Daniel we read that angels taught Daniel. Now in New Testament the process is reversed and Paul taught angels.

In this 8th verse Paul called himself "the leastest of the least." That may not be good English but it is perfect Greek. Paul never would have qualified for any success story for any of our Christian magazines. Paul was the greatest believer of all times, but he said, "I am the leastest of the least." Let's take a good look at Paul to realize what he meant by that.

By the time Paul was twenty, he was a "ruler of the Jews." He was a Pharisee. He graduated from the highest academic system in Judaism. From the human viewpoint, Paul was a young genius. He was a Roman by birth. He was a Jew by race.

It is quite interesting that we do not know the full name of Paul. He was known before his conversion as Saul, and then he became Paul. Since he was from the tribe of Benjamin he was given a good Jewish name, Saul. This was the great warrior tribe. But his family name has not come down to us. The word Paulus means "little." Now why was Paul "the leastest?" When he was an unbeliever he was the worst sinner that ever lived. Was this because Saul was a terrible sinner with wine, women, and song? Not at all. He was the worst sinner that ever lived because of his self-righteousness and his mental attitude sins. This is the same kind of sinner we see exemplified in the life of the rich young ruler. Paul was just oozing religion. He was very jealous and very bitter and very vindictive. Later, as he started his second missionary tour we will see this characteristic in Paul by his attitude toward John Mark. Paul would not forgive him and would not take him on the second missionary journey.

Many people in our time think that immortality is the worst sin of all. Well, immortality is bad, but it isn't the worst sin by any means. Paul's sin was much more terrible. On the Damascus Road, Jesus reached down and saved the worst sinner that ever lived. Since he was at the bottom, there wasn't any way for him to go but up, so up he went and very quickly became acclimated to the grace of God. By the time Paul hit the Arabian desert he was a grace man and only made one bad legalistic blunder in his long and amazing career.

From the day of his conversion Paul had no illusions about himself. The most terrible malady in the ministry is for a man to be fatheaded and believe he is an important man. Just after his conversion Paul quickly turned from his vicious malady of self-righteousness and became a relaxed individual. He started on an amazing mental journey and before he died Christ had mastered his mind.

Now let's develop this idea "the leastest of the least" from some other passages of Scripture. Turn to 2 Timothy 1:11-13.

2 TIMOTHY 1:11 "Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles." "I am appointed" is an aorist, passive, indicative and this means that Paul didn't appoint himself, but he was appointed by God. He was appointed a preacher--apostle--teacher of the Gentiles.

2 TIMOTHY 1:12 "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." This may well be the greatest verse in the New Testament on human conduct. Paul said here, "I know." He came to know doctrine and on the basis of doctrinal knowledge he made the commitment of his life to God.

2 TIMOTHY 1:13 "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Timothy is not the great strong man most of us have built him up to be. He was weak and Paul was constantly reminding him to become strong. He was to become strong by learning Bible doctrine, doctrine categorically taught and learned.

Now turn to 1 Timothy 1:11-15.

1 TIMOTHY 1:11 "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust." Paul told Timothy that the gospel had been given him, had been trusted to him, so he could pass it on to others.

1 TIMOTHY 1:12 "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;" Faithfulness is the key to a successful ministry. "Putting me into the ministry." In other words, the first part of Paul's life was of his own doing, and then one day the Lord arrested him on the Damascus Road and by grace redeemed him and turned him around and "Put him in the ministry."

1 TIMOTHY 1:13 "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" This is a photograph of Paul before his Damascus Road experience.

1 TIMOTHY 1:14 "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Please notice that his transformation was a grace transformation. God did it.

1 TIMOTHY 1:15 "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." This is one of the verses where we learn that Paul was the worst sinner that ever lived. It really means "of whom I am the worst."

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 15:9-10.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:9 "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." "I am the least of the Apostles." Paul had no illusions about himself. He knew he was the least of all.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." It really reads, "By the grace of God I keep on being what I keep on being." "Grace" was Paul's secret. Grace made the difference. And this is not only true of Paul, it is true of us. What is grace? Grace is divine provision, grace is what God provides. He provides divine operating assets unlimited.

We now turn back to Ephesians 3:8.

This 8th verse says, "Is this grace given." This is an aorist, passive, indicative of "ginomai."

The aorist tense here means that millions of years ago God knew all the needs Paul would have and he provided for all those needs. The passive voice means that God did this for Paul on a grace basis, and Paul didn't achieve this on his own. The indicative mood means the reality of this great fact. "That" introduces a purpose clause. And that purpose was "that I should preach among the Gentiles." The Jews had become legalistic and God was forced to pass them by, so God sent Paul out to the Gentiles. But when Paul went back to Jerusalem with that big offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, they didn't even have a pastors' conference and they didn't invite Paul into their churches to preach. They were so tied up with legalism and self-righteousness that they were afraid of his message. In order to get that message out to a needy world God had to slam the Jewish door and open the Gentile door. The one big legalistic error of Paul's life was at this point and Paul went into the temple and sponsored some of those young men in a vow. As a result, Paul had to be rescued from a mob by Roman soldiers and he spent four years in prison before he got back into the full program God had outlined for him. Paul's mission was the Gentiles, and when he went back to the Jews, because of his personal involvement with them and his personal love for them, he found himself out of the geographical will of God. The Lord knew that the Jews at that time were on negative volition toward Bible doctrine and that he would have to get Paul out of there and get him out to the Gentile world. This was necessary so Paul could develop this super grace. Paul never would have written these epistles we have in the New Testament if he had stayed with those Jerusalem Jews.

Now God knew what he was doing when he thrust Paul out to the Gentile world and Paul became "The apostle to the Gentiles."

Now we come to one of the amazing thoughts in the New Testament.

"That I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." Now what does that word "unsearchable" mean? The word really is "untrackable."

Illustration

Just imagine back in Old Testament times we had a spiritual radar screen and that screen picked up everything we have in the Old Testament. But when you look to find anything about the Church Age on that Old Testament radar screen, it is a complete blank. Now that screen showed the age of innocence of man, the fall in the Garden of Eden, the flood, the family and life of Abraham, the building of the nation of Israel, and all the facts about the life and death and resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Then the radar screen became an absolute blank, and there was nothing there at all about the Church Age. The radar screen in the Old Testament picked up in the Tribulation, and gave all the end-time facts, including the Second Coming of Christ. But that Old Testament radar screen was completely blank as far as the Church Age doctrine was concerned. Not one word about the Church Age doctrine in the Old Testament. So Paul came along and he preached the "unsearchable" or the "untrackable" riches of Christ, those "untrackable" riches not known in the Old Testament. These were riches that belonged to the Church Age and were untrackable in Old Testament times.

So Paul was brought in to fill in that place where the Old Testament radar screen was empty. When the Church Age began the angelic conflict shifted gears. God raised up Paul to fill that gap and give the doctrine that had not been delineated before.

Another Illustration

Just suppose that no one had ever discovered oil in Oklahoma City, and suppose one day a man wrecked his car and as his car left the road it hit a tree, and up from the roots of that tree a gusher of black oil poured forth. You would call that "untrackable riches." All those years they had been sitting on the wealth of oil and didn't know it. (We need oil now in this country and before all this search for oil is over, someone will come up with something that will be a substitute for oil, and probably it will be something that we had at our fingertips all the time, but just didn't know about it.)

Paul burst into his gold mine and revealed to the world the "unsearchable" and "untrackable" riches, and we have been the recipients of the blessing ever since.

That's why I ask you to open the Bible and study and think when I open the Scriptures to you--these are the "unsearchable" riches of his grace.