

The Church God's Mystery

Ephesians 3:1-13

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The book of Ephesians has as its central theme the glory of the Church. So many times it's broken down, understandably, the wealth, walk, and the warfare of the believer; and those divisions do exist in the book of Ephesians, but it's really not the overarching central theme of the book. The book of Ephesians is actually about the glory of the Church. If I were going to give one title to the book of Ephesians, it would be just that: The Glory of the Church.

The book of Colossians is a parallel book that was written by Paul while under house arrest in Rome, his first imprisonment, and it focuses on the head of the body. The book of Ephesians focuses on the body of which Christ is the head. Both books are Christ exalting, but the focus in Ephesians is more in the body of Christ. The focus of Colossians is on the head of the body, which is Christ.

We've seen the glory of the church in Ephesians 1 with its calling and in Ephesians 2 its formation. Ephesians 1 is the calling of the Church—before we were ever born, He called us by His grace. Ephesians 2 is the formation. At the end of Ephesians 2:19, we saw that we are formed into a fellow-citizen body of Christ, we are part of a new city. In Ephesians 2:19, we're a new family, the household of God. In Ephesians 2:20-22, we are a new building, a temple, as Paul said, not made with hands that is eternal in the heavens. In Ephesians 3, we now focus on the mystery of the body of Christ. In Ephesians 1, the glory of our calling, the Church; Ephesians 2, the glory of the formation of the body, the Church; Ephesians 3, we see the mystery.

We're going to be dealing with the subject of the mystery that is spoken of here. The word is used in verses 3, 4, and 9. What is the mystery? The mystery in the New Testament is something which was beyond natural knowledge and ability to know but has been revealed and opened to us by divine revelation. We're going to see the classic passage in the New Testament describing what a mystery is.

There are several different mysteries in the New Testament. To name a couple real quick, there's the mystery of godliness, God was manifested in the flesh. It's called the incarnation, where God became a man in the Person of Jesus Christ. The second one is that of the rapture of the Church. A lot of people don't realize that, but the rapture is actually designated as a mystery, and it's spoken of that way in 1 Corinthians 15:51 where Paul says, "Behold, I shew you a," here's our word, "mystery;" and goes on to say, "We shall not all sleep," which means die, "but we shall all be changed," or made alive. When the Lord comes we will be awakened in that rapture, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." The basic definition, and we're going to see it in just a moment, is that it's something that could not be known unless revealed by God. In our natural ability and knowledge, we can't discover it. It has to be revealed.

One of my favorite doctrines in the Bible is the doctrine of revelation, that is, God revealing to us

what we could not know apart from revelation. Actually, man cannot know God on his own ability. There's nothing you can do to find God, discover God, know God, or understand God. The only way that you as a human being can understand or know God is if God comes to us, if God chooses to reveal Himself to us. God must reveal this doctrine to us, and we're going to see that something that in the ages past was not made known, that's the Old Testament, but now is made known to the sons of men.

Let me point out to you, we'll get there in just a moment, verse 6. Look at it with me, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." In verse 5, Paul mentions the mystery and then mentions the fact that it's something hidden in ages past but is now revealed to the sons of men. The mystery is revealed, verse 6, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." As I said, the mystery as mentioned in verses 3, 4, and 9, is the Old Testament, ages past, the Church is not revealed, which is interesting. If you're studying the Bible, you might conclude that you see the Church in the Old Testament, but the Church is concealed—it's not revealed, it's not understood, it's not explained.

The rapture is not in the Old Testament. It's pictured, but not, I don't believe, intentionally purposed by God saying, "This is the rapture." It's something that is revealed in the New Testament. It's something in the Old Testament that is concealed and revealed in the New Testament. Actually, believe it or not, if you understand that, it will clarify, when it comes to the area of Bible prophecy. Finding the Church or the rapture in the Old Testament is something that is revealed specifically to Paul the Apostle, so it's in the Pauline epistles as God revealed it to him and given to us in God's holy, inspired Word.

In Colossians 1:26, Paul mentions the mystery. He says, "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints." The mystery is that of the Church in Ephesians 3, that Jews and Gentiles become one in Christ, and we become one body with equal footing, equally sharing in the blessings and promises of God.

In Ephesians 3, I want you to note again before we begin to unpack these verses, verses 1-13 bring us to the end of the doctrinal section of the book of Ephesians. I've said that it's chapters 1-3, but actually it stops a little early in chapter 3 because in verses 14-21 Paul closes with the second prayer or petition for the Ephesians. When you start Ephesians 4, Paul tells us to "... walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," so we come to the end of the doctrinal section tonight of the book of Ephesians and finish with a prayer in verses 14-21. First we need to understand this mystery as Paul has closed Ephesians 2 and talked about the Church. There's really no break between Ephesians 2 and 3. He's still talking about the Church, which is this New Testament mystery.

I want to give you five aspects of this divine mystery. It's a challenge to break down this section, but if you're taking notes, you can write them down. The first is the person of the mystery, verses 1-4, as it involved Paul the Apostle and his ministry. Go back to verse 1. Paul says, "For this cause I Paul," there it is, "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, 2 If ye

have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in a few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)." Notice Paul starts in verse 1 and uses the expression, "For this cause." As I said, there's no break between Ephesians 2 and 3. Many times, when they created the chapter divisions, they weren't really the best places because there's really no break there in the text. Paul is continuing and, "For this cause," is a reference to the Church in Ephesians 2, that we, as Gentiles, were away from the covenant promises, we didn't have the blessings of God as Israel did, but now we've been included, the wall of partition is broken down, and we become one in Christ. Then, he says, because of this, "For this cause," takes us back to the end of Ephesians 2, "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles," again, he's particularly and specifically referring to the Gentiles and the part that God's purpose and plan for the Church plays in bringing them in and making them one with the Jews in their standing before God in the body of Christ. This was the cause that motivated Paul.

It's interesting, verse 14, as I pointed out, Paul opens with the same phrase, "For this cause I bow my knees," so many believe, and I think rightfully so, that Paul was actually going to start praying in verse 1, and when he began to think again about Jesus Christ and him in prison and that he was called to preach to the Gentiles, and God revealed the mystery to him, he kind of just exploded again and went off on the things of the Church and then comes back to them to his prayer in verse 14. Some view verses 2-13 a parenthetical section. I don't really think it's intended to be parenthetical, but Paul many times would take off this way or take off that way; and when he begins to think about Christ and the Church, instead of praying, he wanted to just kind of repeat what he had taught them about the body of Christ.

In teaching, one of the important things for learning is that there's repetition. So many times Paul comes back and hammers harder and goes deeper into the things that he wanted to instruct or teach them. He doesn't really bow his knee until he gets to verse 14. In the interim, he wants to talk to us again about the mystery being the Church.

Notice, again, a footnote in verse 1. Paul mentions again the fact he's "...the prisoner of Jesus Christ," and it's because of his ministry to the Gentiles. Ephesians is a prison epistle, so during Paul's first imprisonment when he was technically under house arrest, he wasn't in the Mamertine Prison in Rome awaiting execution but was in Rome waiting for his first trial under house arrest. He had his arms and hands in chains, but he could receive people, talk to people, and he paid his own rent, had his own food, and kind of lived under house arrest with a Roman guard. He wrote this at the same time he also wrote Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. Those are known as the prison epistles of Paul the Apostle.

Notice Paul doesn't say that he was a prisoner of Rome. He doesn't get angry at his circumstances. He doesn't get mad at the Jews who falsely accused him and had him thrown in jail. That's what I would have done, if I were in jail wrongfully like Paul, "Lousy chains, lousy Roman government. We need to vote for a new leader," and stuff like that. I would have been all upset, but Paul said, "Look, I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Paul the Apostle, as we should,

filtered everything through God's sovereign control and that what he was doing, he was doing for the Lord, in the name of the Lord, and that God was in control. So, I'm in the hospital because God planned it. I lost my job because God planned it. I'm going through this difficulty because it's in the purpose and plan and design of God. I've been speaking lately in some of my messages about the providence of God. It was the providential plan and purpose of God for Paul to be in chains, and by this time he's been in chains for about five years. He's been under house arrest for five years. You think the Covid lockdown has been a real bummer. But he doesn't complain, he doesn't gripe, he doesn't freak out, "I'm a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's for you Gentiles because of my ministry toward you as Gentiles." We need to see our circumstances under the providential plan and purpose and care of God.

I do know that it kind of blesses me to think that if Paul couldn't be traveling and preaching, he was welcoming people into his home, even in chains, and preaching; but he also picked up his pen when he was in prison. No doubt he prayed, but he also picked up the pen. Could it be—I don't know, you can't second guess God's providence—we wouldn't have Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or Philemon if it weren't for the prison arrest of Paul during this time. I'm thankful that God put Paul in chains so he could pick up the pen and we could have these epistles for our help and for our benefit. Paul sees himself as under the control of God.

Notice it was, "...for you Gentiles." Primarily, Paul's ministry was not to the Jew but to the Gentile. He would go to the synagogue first and would preach, but he was known as the apostle to the Gentiles. When he went to Jerusalem with the offering and was taking the vow and it caused a riot, he was arrested, he spoke on the steps of the fortress there in Jerusalem, and they heard him say the word Gentile, "God called me to the Gentiles," they started tearing their clothes, throwing dirt in the air, screaming and yelling, "Away with him!" He actually appealed to Caesar which started a five-year arrest kind of period in Paul's life as he was taken from Jerusalem all the way to Rome. That imprisonment, by the way, he did have a trial before Nero and was released for a short period of time. Then, he was arrested a second time, this time as a political prisoner, and was put in a dungeon or prison where he wrote 2 Timothy and talked about, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course...there is laid up for me a crown," and "I'm being poured out." He knew he was going to die. That time he was executed by the Roman government. That was his second imprisonment, and it was in a dungeon or a prison that he was in.

Notice in verses 2-4, Paul says, "If ye have heard of the dispensation," that word ("dispensation," translated thus in my King James Bible means management or stewardship. It has the idea of God entrusting this ministry to Paul, and his ministry was during this time of preaching Christ and preaching the formation of the Church, the body of Christ. A "dispensation" is merely a management or a stewardship that was given or entrusted to Paul by God. It came to him from "...the grace of God which is given me to you-ward," for you, "God entrusted this ministry to me, and it was given to me to minister to you."

Verse 3, "How that by revelation," there it is, "he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in a few words," he wrote about it in Ephesians 2, and now he's writing about it again in

Ephesians 3. God revealed this to him, that there would be one new humanity—Jew and Gentile, one in Christ in the body of Christ. Verse 4, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),” so the blessing that Paul was given as the one who was to reveal this mystery, explain this mystery, and primarily preach Christ to the Gentiles that they might become one with other believers that were Jewish.

A little application here before we move to the next point is that Paul understood the purpose of the Church, and it motivated him to pray and to serve. I think, as I mentioned last week, that it's important for us to have a high view of the Church. One of the things that has happened in Evangelical Christianity today is that there is a lacking of a high view of the Church or the importance of the Church. Many Christians have kind of a take-it or leave-it attitude toward the Church—Jesus, yes; the Church, no. “Well, I can be a Christian, but I don't need to go to church,” or “I don't need to be a part of a church,” and we just have kind of a low view of the Church. I think it starts with a high view of Scripture, and that leads us to a high view of God, and that leads us to a high view of the Church. I think in modern Evangelicalism we have a low view of Scripture, a low view of God, a low view of the Church, and the Church is weak and anemic because of that. All of us as Christians need to understand the Church, what it is, and we also need to be committed to and involved in praying for and serving to help strengthen the Church—it's growth and its expansion. No one has ever been mightily used of God independent of the Church of God, so you can't just say, “I don't need the Church. I don't want to be a part of the Church. I'll just be a lone-ranger Christian and do my own thing.”

The Church, universal, is all those who are believers and part of the body of Christ, but the church, local, is the individual fellowships made up of believers in a particular place and area. Paul is writing to the believers there in Ephesus, many of them met in different homes, but it was the local church expression there that he's addressing here that, “I gave myself to the building of the Church, universal, and serving and ministering in the local church.” If you say, “I'm a Christian,” and you haven't committed to a church, then you are not practicing what the Bible teaches. The hand cannot say to the eye, “I do not need you;” the foot can't say to the body, “I don't need you.” We can't make it on our own. We're all part of one body. We all have different gifts, and God wants to use us collectively to be an expression of God's grace to reach the world, so we all need to be part of a local fellowship and be committed to that. The Lord uses people to build His church, so we need to get busy saying, “Here am I, use me.”

I thank the Lord that He called me to pastoral ministry. It's something that I've been doing for a long time because I can't think of any more glorious calling than to be an undershepherd of God's sheep, to be committed to teaching the Word, preaching the Word, praying for people, counseling people, discipling people, leading people to Christ, and doing all I can to use my gifts, my calling, to strengthen and advance the Church that is so precious to God. Someone called the Church, “The apple of God's eye.” Obviously, it's the bride of Christ, so we should love the Church and be devoted to serving the Church.

The second point I want to bring out in verses 5-6 is the plan of this mystery. God wants us to be involved as Paul was, we're not apostles but involved in building the Church. The Church is

also God's mystery, and the purpose and plan for it, verses 5-6, "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That," we read this earlier, "the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." If I don't do anything else tonight but point out to you that in verses 5-6: This is the classic verse in the New Testament on the doctrine of the mystery of the Church. It defines "mystery," and tells us what the mystery is. Look at verse 5. A mystery is something "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men," that's the Old Testament. If the Church is a mystery, in this sense, it is not in the Old Testament. If the rapture is a mystery, then it is not in the Old Testament. This is what we call progressive revelation—that God doesn't make everything known in the Old Testament but is progressively revealing truth. That doesn't mean that it's going to continue beyond the closing of the canon of Scripture, I don't believe that, but it does mean that in the Old Testament there were things concealed that in the New Testament are now revealed.

Do you realize how blessed and privileged we are to have the entire Bible? To have Genesis to Revelation? To have the whole counsel of God? To be able to compare Scripture with Scripture? What a blessing that is! A mystery is defined as something that in "...ages past was not made known unto the sons of men," but notice in verse 5, "as it is now revealed," there's revelation, "unto his holy apostles and prophets," and he did so "by the Spirit." That's a reference to the Holy Spirit. Back in Ephesians 2:20, we read about the apostles and the prophets being the foundation of the church, so God revealed this to them, they taught, and the church is built upon their teaching.

What is this mystery? Verse 6, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." Paul talks about the salvation blessings that come to the Church. Now, I want you to note verse 6. First of all we are fellow heirs, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs," and that's the idea that we're all joining together—Jews and Gentiles—and that we're one family in the body of Christ. We all have the same legal status as Jews, so do Gentiles, inheriting the promises of God.

This is not teaching what is known as replacement theology—that the Church takes Israel's place in God's purpose, plan, and program. God has a role and a purpose and a plan for Israel. If you want to go into more depth on that, read Romans 9, 10, 11, which covers Israel's election, rejection, and restoration. It is to say that in the Church Age, this period of grace right now, this unique dispensation that Jews and Gentiles are one, there's no distinction in the body of Christ. God doesn't love Jews any more than Gentiles. God doesn't save them because of their race or their religion. We all come to the foot of the cross and are saved by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ. We all become fellow heirs. Remember in Ephesians 2, they were strangers from the covenants and the promises of God—we were without God, without hope, and now we're fellow heirs.

Then, verse 6, we are fellow members. My King James translates that "same body," which means we're one body and all fellow members. Gentiles and Jews are equal participants in the new life we have in Christ.

Thirdly, notice in verse 6, we are fellow partakers. So, we are fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers. The King James Bible has that we are "...partakers of his promise," the promise was given in the Old Testament that God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, that would include Gentiles, and we know that's part of the promise. It's interesting that in Acts 10 Peter was called to go down to Caesarea from Joppa, and I'm kind of making a long story short, to share the gospel with Cornelius, who was a Gentile, a Roman centurion. This was totally groundbreaking for the early church. The early church was made up of Jews, and the church was in danger of becoming a Jewish sect. They had a hard time accepting the fact that God could save Gentiles. They didn't understand the things that God revealed to Paul later. They were still kind of lacking revelation and understanding even though God hinted at it in the Old Testament that through Abraham all the world would be blessed.

When God let down the sheet and gave Peter a vision of all the creepy animals that were unclean to eat and said, "Rise, Peter. Kill and eat," what did Peter say? "No! I've never eaten anything common or unclean." Three times God said, "What I've called clean, that call not unclean." No sooner had he went through these three visions, he heard a knock at the door (I don't think they had doorbells in those days). He opened the door, and there was a Gentile servant of Cornelius at the house where Peter was. Peter just had a vision that God told him to rise and eat things that are common or unclean, He said, "Don't call them common or unclean." Now, there's a Gentile on his front doorstep telling him that a guy named Cornelius saw a vision of an angel who told him to come to Joppa, and find this guy named Peter. "You're Peter, aren't you?" "Yeah, I'm Peter." "Well, okay. You're to come to Caesarea and tell us all the words of life." Peter was convinced that God was leading him. He gets to Cornelius' house, and what a way to open a sermon. He says, "I want you all to know that you're unclean and I shouldn't be here. I'm going to get cooties talking to you." He didn't quite go that far, but said, "God just showed me that I shouldn't call anything common or unclean." I'm sure the Gentiles say, "Oh, yeah, great. We're glad you're here because you don't want to be."

Peter went into his little message talking about Jesus. I'm just joking, but I think Peter got too long, as I sometimes go too long, and so the Holy Spirit just fell. He couldn't wait for the end of the sermon. He just says, "Peter, you're getting too longwinded," WHOOO! the Holy Spirit fell, and all those in the house of Cornelius were saved. They started praising God and actually worshiping and speaking in tongues. They said, "Wow!" Peter said, "This is amazing that God has saved you just like He saved us!" On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell. It became a bone of contention in the early church. Peter is called in on the carpet by the leadership in Jerusalem, "We understand you went to Gentiles and preached to them, you ate with them, and hung out with them." He says, "Wait a minute. It's not my fault. God made me do it." He told them about the vision and what happened. They said, "Okay, that's cool." It was very difficult for them to understand that they were fellow members of the same body, and that they were fellow partakers of the same promise, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Galatians 3:14 we are called the sons of Abraham, and that we are justified by faith just like Abraham was. Notice in verse 6, as well, it says, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel," so it's always Christ is

the center of Paul's message and the center of bringing the Church together.

I want you to note the third fact about the mystery, and that's the preaching of the mystery. It was part of Paul's proclamation in Paul's preaching the mystery of the body of Christ, verses 7-9. He says, "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 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," what a beautiful statement. The riches of Christ are unsearchable. "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." Paul's special calling was to preach the mystery of Jew and Gentile (now I know this is repetitious, but this is what the text is talking about) becoming one in Christ, one new humanity. He talks about his own personal ministry involvement as a minister.

This passage, verse 7, is very near and dear to my heart because you see Paul's preaching and ministering. Notice it in verse 7. He said, "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power." No minister should ever be self-appointed. No body of any men can call you to the ministry, it must be a divine call from God. Paul speaks about his calling to the ministry. The word means servant, to be a servant. He was made a minister, and it was something that was given to him by the gift God gave him, and it was based on the grace of God. So, God's calling, God's gifting is all by God's grace. You don't earn, merit, or deserve it. It's not of yourself. You see God using an individual that God has called and gifted to build up the body of Christ, it's not because of who that person is, it's because of the grace of God. All we can do is thank God for the gifted individuals He gives to the Church to build up and strengthen the Church. We're going to get to that in Ephesians 4 when Paul says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets... pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." I love that Paul says, "Whereof I was made a minister," that is, God called me, and God's gifting for me—God's calling is God's enabling—and "according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power."

Sometimes young men will ask me about pastoral ministry and, "How did you become a pastor? How do I know if I'm called to be a pastor?" One of those indications God has called you to be a pastor is God will give you the gifts and the ability to do what He's called you to do. I've had people come up to me and say, "God's called me to sing." It's a great example. "Well, let me hear you sing," and they just can't carry a tune in a bucket, but they're convinced God called them to sing. I have to say, "You know what? God has not called you to sing." "Well, yes He has!" "Well, if He had, He would give you a voice. If you do sing, then sing in the shower, or make a joyful noise, to the Lord," right? Or men who feel called to the ministry but don't have the gift of teaching. I believe if God calls you to pastoral ministry, God will give you the gift of teaching because that's your primary function is to teach the Word of God. It's so important.

Verse 8, "Unto me," and you see Paul's humility. You see Paul's calling in verse 7, and Paul's humility in verses 8-9, "who am less than the least of all saints," how can you be less than the

least? He just piles it on. You take the least, and I'm the less of the least. He talked about himself in 1 Timothy 1:15. He said, "...that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief," I'm Chief Big Sinner. Paul, though a very gifted Pharisee, was also a very humbled man when he was called by God's grace to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. He said, "...who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach," kerusso, it means to herald or proclaim, "among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

The center and core of Paul's preaching was Christ, who is the head of the Church, the body of Christ, "And to make all men see what is the fellowship," the Greek word koinonia, "of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." He sees that God, through and in Christ, created the whole universe.

Now, in verse 7, we see that God called Paul; in verse 8, we see Paul's humility and his message was the unsearchable riches of Christ, so he preached and proclaimed Christ. Paul's real genuine humility, how important that is to be used by God.

Let me continue. Notice in verse 8, Paul begins to talk about his preaching in specific, "...that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Paul's preaching centered on Christ to the Gentiles. These "unsearchable riches" are the riches of His grace in saving us, sanctifying us, of eternal riches in Heaven for all eternity.

Notice in verse 9, Paul preached to the whole world. "And to make all men," it goes from specifically preaching to Gentiles to preaching to all men, "see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God." God's purpose, God's plan, God's design actually involves the Church. I'm going to come to this in just a moment in conclusion, but you cannot understand the Bible, you cannot understand salvation, you cannot understand prophecy, you cannot understand God's purpose and plan without seeing the role that plays the Church. You take the Church out of the equation, then you don't have God's divine purpose and plan. Paul preached to the whole world about God's Church, the new humanity. God created the old earth, notice at the end of verse 9, the old creation was for His glory; then He created the new creation, the Church, which brought glory to His grace. We should live out before the watching world that we are the Church to the glory of God.

I want you to notice, fourthly, verses 10-11, the purpose of the mystery. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose," there's the word, "which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is a reference to these principalities and powers in heavenly places, verse 10. It's referring to angels, and the Bible indicates that angels actually are interested in God's redemption plan and purpose of the Church. Do you know the Bible actually indicates that when we gather like we have tonight that angels show up to watch us worship, to listen to the teaching of His Word, to just be in awe of God can save people and humans, that angels are actually watching what's going on in the Church. These angels are amazed at God's purpose and plan in taking Jew and Gentile and saving human beings and forming this new humanity called the Church, the body of Christ. The Church is an object

lesson of the wisdom of God and an object lesson to the whole universe of God's purpose and plan.

Let me wrap this up, verses 12-13. We see lastly, and fifthly, the privilege of the mystery. "In whom," referring to Christ Jesus our Lord, "we have boldness and access," those of us who are part of the Church, this hidden mystery that is now revealed, "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him," that is, Christ. "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."

I want you to notice these three privileges in verse 12, boldness, access to God, and confidence. In the Church, as God's people, forming this new humanity, the building of God, the bride of Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit, we all have boldness. That means plainness or boldness of speech to pray. Do you know that when you pray, you can actually go right into the presence of the God of all the universe? You don't have to go through a priest or a pope or bishop. You don't have to go through saints. As a matter of fact, you can't get to God through any of those things. We don't pray to saints. We pray to our Savior, directly to God. Any time, day or night, you can go immediately into the presence of God. That's the privilege of the access we have. How marvelous that is!

Secondly, we have access to God, we can enter into God's presence; and, thirdly, we have confidence to come in the merits of Christ, and we do that, verse 12, "...by the faith of him," that is, the faith that we have in Jesus Christ. Paul spells out in verse 12 the privileges, confidence, and courage, that we have because we come in Christ.

Notice, in closing, verse 13, that we go to the courage that Paul wanted them to have because of his suffering for them. This is the conclusion, the wrap-up, "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." Paul wanted them to have courage. That phrase, "faint not," means don't be discouraged, don't be disheartened. They heard about Paul being in prison, and they were tempted to be discouraged and to be bummed out. He says, "No, don't be discouraged," "...faint not at my tribulations," Paul was going through a time of testing and trial under house arrest in Rome. This is how the New Living Translation renders that, "So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored." He says, "Don't get discouraged. Don't lose heart. Don't faint. I'm suffering because I preach that Gentiles can be saved and that God has put us all with the Jews on equal footing." Paul was being persecuted because he preached that Gentiles could go to heaven by faith in Christ. He was one who persecuted the church earlier, so God can take a persecutor, make him a preacher for His glory, and he said, "I don't want you to be discouraged," but notice that Paul did suffer.

There are some end lessons that I want to wrap up with. In this section that we just covered, verses 1-13, there are three important lessons. First, the Church is central to history. All history is leading up to the day when the Church is triumphantly raptured, caught up to be with Christ, and then comes back in the Second Coming to reign with Christ on earth for one thousand years. It's called the revealing of the sons of God. The Church is central to that. All

of God's revelation, this mega-narrative plan of God, was to create this Church. We like to think of the different images of the Church—the building, the body—but one of my favorites, and one we know and love in the Bible, is that we're the bride. Amen? We're the bride of Christ. We're the blood-bought bride of Christ! What a marvelous thing is the Church of Jesus Christ and that we will be caught up to meet Him in the air—the manifestation of the sons of God—the whole redemptive purpose and plan of God which ushers us into the Lord's table so that we might be His bride, that we might be washed in His blood, that we might be the blood-washed people of God.

Secondly, we learn that the Church is central to the gospel. It's central to God's purpose and plan in history, and it's also central to the gospel. Ephesians teaches us that the complete gospel involves both the preaching of Christ and the mystery of the Church. Jesus died, Jesus rose, not only to save us but to create a single new humanity.

Thirdly, the Church is central to Christian living. This is where the rubber meets the road. Paul was willing to pray and pay any price to see the Church move forward. He saw his suffering as the Church's glory, that he was allowed to suffer for, with Christ, and for His bride, the body, so that it might advance.

Listen to what John R.W. Stott said. He said, "The church is not an option for believers nor is supporting it an option." It's not something you can take or leave, it's an important integral part of the Christian life. Someone used the analogy of being married. You know, sometimes people say to me, "Well, I'm a Christian, but I don't go to church." The analogy is in saying, "Well, I'm married, but I never go home and talk to my wife. I got married five years ago, but I haven't seen her since." Now, I know it's a little funny, but it's not really funny because I actually have to deal with stuff that's really like that. "Excuse me, you're married?" "Yeah." "But you don't live together?" "No." "You haven't talked in years?" "No." You're married, but it's not a very good marriage. So you tell me that you're a Christian, but you don't go to church. You're a Christian, but not a very good one. You're not very close to the Lord. How are you going to be used of God when God wants to use you as part of the body of Christ? It's important for your life and growth.

I'm not just saying this because I'm a pastor and I want you to be committed to the church, I'm saying this because I care for your spiritual health and life. Divorce yourself from the Church, and it'll destroy your walk with God. You can't grow and be vital as a Christian apart from the body of Christ. We need one another. There are no vestigial organs in the body of Christ. There are no independent believers. We're all one in the body of Christ. If you say that you are a Christian, then you need to be part of a local fellowship and be praying, serving, giving, and using your gifts for the building up of the body for the glory of God. Amen? Let's pray.