

Ephesians 14-01-05b

We pick up our study now in Ephesians chapter 3, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which was given to me for you, how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery, as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. And what is this mystery? Verse 6, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel. It was a pre-existing promise, but they are partakers of that promise now.

Of which I, Paul, became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of his power. To me who am less than the least of all the saints this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery. What do you think that is? The fellowship of the mystery.

What did we just see in chapter 2? You who were dead in trespasses, you who were afar off, aliens from the commonwealth, you who were afar off have been brought near, we who were dead in trespasses and sins and caught up in the lust of the flesh and were children of wrath just like the others, he has brought together, he has made peace, he has united and made whole and made one in Christ. So what is the fellowship of the mystery? Jews and Gentiles together in Christ. There is no boo on you Gentiles, there are no Gentiles saying boo on you Jews, there are no Pharisees saying boo on you Saul of Tarsus, there is no in the body, in Christ, there is fellowship with one another horizontally and vertically.

Remember 1 John 1.7, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with him and he with us, one with the other, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son keeps on cleansing us from all sin. So this grace was given Paul says, that I should preach among the Gentiles these unsearchable riches in Christ, and to make all see this fellowship, to make all see the fellowship, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ, to the intent for the purpose that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by means of the church. That Sophia that he talked about in chapter 1, I pray that you might have a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge, the epinosis of him.

This is the Sophia, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by means of the church. That's you. That's me.

That's us. That's we. God has a purpose for you.

You think, well, I'm here because my family's here. I'm here because I'm always here. I do this,

and I know it's a good idea, but pretty soon I'm going to be getting on with my life.

There is a purpose to every single thing we do. When you walk over to the sink and turn on the faucet, when you pick up a broom and a dustpan, or your little electric handy vac to clean up a mess, when you put something on the stove to cook, when you wash a dish, when you take care of the dog, when you make the bed, when you do laundry, when you get in your car and go to run errands or fulfill your job, when you sit down at the computer and work, whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God. We do it as a believer.

There is a way we do it. There is an attitude we have when we do it. It isn't the thing that we do.

It's how we do it. It's who we are when we do it. That's the purpose, that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known.

Now, in practice, how does this work? The manifold wisdom of God. Was God wise in including us in His plan and purpose? Was He wise in bringing us into the fellowship of the mystery? The promise, partakers of the promise? Because you say, if I'm the demonstration of God's wisdom, He messed up. That wasn't very smart.

Making me the means by which He's going to make His wisdom known. Because I'm too fallible. I'm too unreliable.

I'm not visible enough. It's the Billy Grahams and the Charles Stanleys and the Chris Wells and the prominent people that are in the media. It's the Charles Swindolls and the John MacArthur's and the authors, the notable people.

You get your witch in the wardrobe guy and your Christian authors and so on. This is where God is making His wisdom known. It's these skyline people.

Well, keep reading. To whom is God revealing His wisdom? Who is the audience? Who is the target demographic for this wisdom? This manifold wisdom is being made known to whom by the church? The principalities and powers in the heavenlies. Uh-oh.

It doesn't matter what human beings are watching. It doesn't matter how private it is. It doesn't matter how many doors are closed between us and the outside world.

It doesn't even matter how impassive and sphinx-like we are. Because our souls are a giant 60-inch flat screen 3D with 5.1 surround sound in heaven. Don't you crave one of those? Wouldn't you just like to have a wall that was nothing but flat screen TV? That's what I want.

I don't want one you hang on the wall. I want it to be the wall. When I see football, I want the guy's life size.

I want him up there, 3D, my size. It's just like, well, lookie there. My house just butts up to the

football field, and there they are, tackling each other, and the referee blowing the whistle.

Why? It ought to crack the window in the back room. Right there. It's a flat wall of 3D visionary, and it's coming.

It's going to be like Ray Bradbury in *The Veldt* or whatever that deal was where the kids come in and the lions are munching on something. Remember that story? It's coming. We are on display.

Cameras are everywhere. Hear me now. We are viewed.

There is an audience. People have played with this notion. I don't know that I've seen it, but I think there are movies and maybe even, quote, unquote, reality series televisions where people are just monitored all the time.

I think they used to put a bunch of people in a house. I saw a few episodes of that. I forget the name of it, but they're just watched everywhere.

They all have to wear a microphone wherever they go. All of their conversations, how am I going to win the game and who am I going to vote out of the house and that, but they're just monitored. People would just watch this thing by the hour.

People just wandering around doing stuff. I'm thinking, what kind of lack of life do you have? I find my own life far more interesting than sitting there gazing at somebody else wandering around gossiping. But be aware, this passage tells us that God is making his wisdom known to the principalities and powers.

It's really a misnomer. We use it. I was trying to think of the name of a power saw on the break, and we call it a skill saw because that was the brand that my dad had.

We say, well, grab the skill saw. Well, it's kind of like Kleenex, any old facial tissue, you call it a Kleenex whether Kleenex made it or not. We call any of the heavenly beings angels, and it's really a misnomer.

Angel is only one facet and one function fulfilled by the principalities and powers. They are the heavenly civilization. There is a whole realm of creatures of various ranks and capabilities assigned various functions, both unfallen and fallen, that are invisible to us, but it's a huge civilization.

They have a history. They have their own relationship with God. They have their own problems when it comes to disobedience or rejection of God.

It's a whole other world, and God is using us to teach them about Himself. He is revealing His manifold wisdom. Now, this isn't a theory.

This isn't a hypothesis. Ask yourself this question. Are you church? Are you part of the church,

yes or no? You need to be a little more definite.

Are you church? Are you a church-age believer? Are you body of Jesus Christ when the voice of the archangel and the trump of God happens? Are you going up? Yes. Yes, you are church. No ifs, ands, or buts.

You're not a little bit church. You're not part church. You're not part-time church.

You're not church on Sundays. You are through and through, 24-7, every molecule of you, every part of your soul and spirit is church. You are nothing but church.

Spiritually speaking, you are identified as part of Jesus Christ. It is inalienable. It is unchangeable.

It is eternal. You are church. You can't escape it.

You can't opt out. You are church, right? This passage says the manifold wisdom of God. God's purpose is that that wisdom might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies by the church.

That means by you. One of the primary purposes of your life and my life is for God to teach His wisdom to the invisible beings that are watching us, gazing at us, learning the truth of God. How do we learn truth? How do we learn about God? We, in a very dark glass kind of way, look at God's dealings with people in the past.

I began this morning talking about memory and about history and about how definitional it is. How do we know God? We look at the way He interacted with people that lived before our time. The angels are learning about God in part by the way God deals with us now and our response and our obedience and our level of faith.

The situations that you face in many cases are quite unique. No one has had exactly the mix of heredity and environment that you have. No one has lived in exactly the situation that you are in.

God is thorough. God is perfect. God leaves no gaps, no loose threads, no loose ends, no unfinished business.

And there are unique lessons. Just as when you look at the Old Testament, you say there are things about Daniel that we only learn looking at Daniel. There are things about David we only learn looking at the life of David.

There are things that we learn only looking at Moses, only looking at Joseph, only looking at Abel, only looking at Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, only looking at Caleb, only looking at Joshua. There are unique things in every Old Testament story that we have studied that can only be derived there. They partake.

They interleave. They interweave. They are connected.

They are part of a thread. But that part of the fabric is unique. That part of the tapestry is unique.

That piece of the puzzle has something in it, even though it's interconnected, that nothing else has. You and I are part of this fabric. And our assigned life, our assigned circumstance, our assigned functions, our assigned heredity, and genetic makeup, and family, and relationships, and job, and location, and everything else has been designed by God.

It's not an accident. It's not a happenstance. God foresaw it.

God wove it into His plan. And there are unique observational lessons that the angels learn looking at you and me. That's what this passage says.

This mystery that we are studying in this letter has been revealed so that God can teach the angels, and by extension us, His manifold wisdom in, through, and by the church, which is us, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. This purpose has been known in eternity past, and it continues into eternity future. If it's an eternal purpose, guess what? It is still going to be God's purpose in the kingdom of the Father.

People who are living in Old Testament days might have thought, well, you know, it's thumbs up or thumbs down, evaluation-wise, depending on how faithful I am, how obedient I am today. But, you know, one of these days I'll be gone. History will pass.

It will all be over. Do you think any of them had any idea that their lives would be recorded and that you and I, 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, 4,500 years later, would be studying the details of their lives and their interaction with God and benefiting from it? Do you think he walked up to Caleb and said, Caleb, guess what? 3,400 years from now, there are going to be people who know all about your life, who are going to know how you dealt with your daughter and your son-in-law, who are going to know which portion of the land you were assigned and how vigorous you were in taking it, your faithfulness over the 40 years. This is going to be a signpost and a lesson learned for people all down through history.

I would bet shekels that Caleb didn't have the first clue that his life was going to go on record. He didn't live his life to be put on record. He lived it because he believed God and believed His promises.

He was committed and he was faithful. He had no notion of what a Bible was, much less that he would be in it by name. If God's eternal purpose is that the invisible principalities and powers learn His wisdom in and through the Church, how likely do you think it is that this record, which is going to be reviewed at the Bema, at the judgment seat of Christ, will persist and will be studied and looked at in the eternal future? How does it make you feel knowing that there could be the book of Phil in your name here, maybe first and second, to be studied? I would like to be the

editor for that book.

I would like to get a chance to review and amend and excise and make sure that thing only has what I want in it, and it'll be a real thin book. By the time I get done editing, Sam was born, Sam lived, Sam died, blessed be the name of the Lord, next book, please. But that's what this tells us.

Our lives count. We think we're down in the crowd. We think we're just a face in the other sea of faces.

Do you ever go to school and they put the yearbook out or something, and you say, well, are there any pictures of me in here? When you're in the military, they do cruise books. I found a book that they gave out after we finished at Quantico when I was a second lieutenant, and my particular company, F Troop or whatever it was, Fox Company, and I remember seeing guys around snapping pictures, and then they put this cruise book together, and here's my buddy and fellow alumni from the Navy doing one thing and another, all the way through alumnus. You see these guys, but you can go through that entire book.

I am nowhere to be found. And I think, well, maybe in one of the crowd shots. Here's a shot in the mess hall.

Maybe I'm in there somewhere. At Annapolis, just before they throw the caps in the air, you've got the Herndon Monument and all these endless sea of people trying to climb up it and swap the covers on top. And you think, well, surely I'm in there somewhere.

And you strain to see, am I a part of history in some way in this picture? And we tend to think of ourselves in those terms in Christianity, like, well, at best I'm going to be a tiny face, unlabeled and safely anonymous. This passage says otherwise. God, this is not just the corporate, look at what He did with this big group called the church.

The manifold wisdom of God is being made known by the church, by means of, to the principalities and powers of the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. That's a great string of prepositions. We have boldness and access.

We have nothing to fear. And we have no obstacles. Remember in the previous chapter, you who were far off, you were aliens, you were outside the commonwealth, you had no hope, you were without God, you were strangers.

You had nothing. You were swamped in trespasses and sins and so on. We all now have boldness and access.

And look at these three prepositions. With confidence, through faith, in Him. In Him.

Through faith, with confidence, we can go to God. Why? Because it doesn't depend on us. You

think, wow, I'll get my whole life recorded, it's being looked at, I'm on camera, this is too much.

If I could opt out, I would. You don't have to. It's all in Him.

Through faith. And we can live this life with confidence. Because it doesn't depend on us.

Only in the sense that we are willing and able and motivated to lay hold of what God has given us. To just exploit it, to just use it. If you went to a place to stay temporarily, God says, I need you to go to Milwaukee.

So you go to Milwaukee. And He says, go to this house. So you go to the house and you walk in.

You say, well, how am I going to live? Well, you walk over to the refrigerator and open it and it's fully stocked. You walk over and it's got a full complement of appliances in the kitchen. You go to the cupboard and open it up and there's all the linens.

You go pull out a bureau drawer and there's all the clothing. You walk into the walk-in closet and here's a full set of clothing. And you think, well, isn't it going to be too tough to live in Milwaukee? Everything's here.

I've got food, I've got clothing, I've got linens. I've got all the supplies I need. There's a car parked out in the driveway.

I'm all set. Now, you do have to cook the food. You do have to put on the clothes and wash the dirty ones.

You do have to go out and start the car. But it's all been provided. How hard is it? Same thing with us.

Everything we need has been provided. That's one of the lines in the song, Great is Thy Faithfulness. You remember that, right? All I have needed, thy hand hath provided.

That's what he's done. That's why we can have confidence. Because it doesn't depend on us for the wherewithal.

It just depends on us for the attitude. For this reason, Paul says, I have been writing to you to reveal this mystery. I, Paul, a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, steward of this mystery, to me, less than the least of all saints, this grace was given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

As with so many things, and this is our last main thought for the morning, but it's a powerful one, so many things are what you make them. I have had real difficulty comprehending. I think one of the first times I heard this was when I saw a guy that had been in Vietnam and was in the middle of a firefight and was going to throw an incendiary grenade.

And he pulled the pin and he reared back to throw it and something happened. I forget if he got shot or some other unavoidable delay happened and that incendiary grenade went off in his hand. Maybe the grenade got hit by a bullet or something, but it went off before he could throw it.

And it melted him. It destroyed his hand and arm and one whole side of his face and his body. The guy barely survived.

It was miraculous that he survived, but he was horribly disfigured. The worst you could imagine of a burn victim, had to have rubber appendages stuck on his face just so he would look halfway human. Didn't have any fingers or any use of his arm and hand.

He had one good hand, which I think was his off hand, his non-strong hand. But in his recovery, he had become a believer and his faith sustained him and he went around and he was talking about his life with Christ. And the guy said repeatedly, and I saw him several times, he said, I thank God for that episode.

I thank him that that grenade went off in my hand. I thank him that I was horribly burned. I thank him that I was disfigured because I would never have had the relationship with him that I have if not for that.

And he said it was way worth it. And he said, I would do it again because I appreciate God in ways I could not have possibly known had this not happened to me. You listen to people like Joni Erickson, Tata, and others, have said over and over the same thing.

I rejoice in my infirmity because it is in weakness that God's strength is made manifest. I'm not one to stick up my hand and say, Lord, let me learn in that way. I don't think I've got the starch to volunteer for something like that.

Lord, put me through horrible suffering or bereave me or decimate me or put me through some... I hope that I am motivated enough that I don't need that kind of incentive to draw close to God. Don't you? I hope that I am so hungry and so thirsty and so forward-leaning that God doesn't have time to give me an episode like that because He's too busy answering the asking and the seeking and the knocking in my soul to slow me down with something like that. I don't want to have to need that.

But it's what you make it. There are other people that would become embittered, people that lose a loved one or lose a child or whatever, and they say, well, I hate God. I've got nothing more to do with God.

I think this is part of Bart Ehrman's problem is he was bereaved and he went the other way. He reacted instead of responding. He didn't let God fill up the weakness with strength.

He became embittered and spiteful and hateful. The very same episode can happen to two

people. One of them is drawn to God and the other is repelled away from God.

Now, the reason that's important is it's in this passage. Paul says, I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles. To me who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given.

Verse 8. You remember what I read to you from the Jewish Encyclopedia under Saul of Tarsus and the denigration and the despicable view that is taken of Paul. He's an epileptic. He had fits.

He made this unholy defiled concoction of Judaism with paganism. He brought in Gnosticism and all of this. And it's all very reasonable and very down-the-nose-ish.

And, well, you know, we believe in honoring God through what we do and we're reasonable and we're rational. And this crazy nutcase went around and founded this other religion and it has ever been thus. That's the reaction that they have to the preaching of Christ to the Gentiles through Paul.

And it goes back to the Damascus Road. From that time forward, Paul's message and himself as the messenger has divided people into camps who either love and appreciate the truth that comes to us through Paul or hate and despise both the message and the messenger. And it's interesting because we come to this passage in Ephesians 3 and we say, well, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, and he's, you know, manfully suffering through and he says to me, who I'm less than the least of all saints, this grace was given.

And we think, wow, you know, he's less than the least of all saints because he persecuted the church and so on and yet he's got this wonderful, he's the one apostle to the whole Gentile world and what a wonderful thing. But look at it carefully. What does Judaism think of the apostle Paul? When they say, well, yeah, he is less than the least.

Remember all the times when they said he's not worthy, he calls himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He's not a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He wasn't born in Israel.

All of his stuff is Hellenistic and secondhand and he can't even quote the Hebrew Scriptures. You know why that is, of course. Who is he writing to? People who are not familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures but the Greek.

If you want to see Paul quote the Hebrew Scriptures, read Hebrews when he's writing to Hebrews. But the Bible that was most accessible to his audience, the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world, was, duh, the Septuagint. So this is such a specious argument but it sounds so compelling to someone who wants to believe it.

Well, he couldn't have known. He couldn't have sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He couldn't have had any rabbinic training.

And this is very reasonable. And we have to be careful. I told you before that I can hear myself

coming down on both sides of the fence on an issue.

We have to be careful about dogmatism. We have to be careful about self-righteousness. We have to be careful about looking at others and making judgments in areas where it's easy to make a case.

If you read that article in the Jewish Encyclopedia on Solitarsis, it's a compelling case to someone who wants to believe it. Very compelling if you're preaching to the choir. What is the truth? Well, the very same facts make us love and appreciate and admire the Apostle Paul and, most importantly, the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

It's the very same guy with the very same message. And it's just what Paul says. To some, Christ is the rock of salvation.

He is that upon which we fall in humility to be delivered. For others, he is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. And that rock is going to fall on them and grind them to powder.

It's the same rock. And we're all made out of the same clay. It all depends on what we choose.

And it is a dangerous thing to let that root of bitterness spring up and defile. And what Judaism lacks in the realm of terrorism or oppression or a vindictive sort of pushing of itself onto others that you see in Islam and even in Catholicism, which isn't Christianity, by the way, what it lacks in that, it makes up for in this attitude, this rejection and spitting on the Lord Jesus and the apostles who preached him. And that's what they do.

Judaism spits in the face of Jesus Christ just like they did when he was crucified, just like they did when he was preaching in the synagogues. And it doesn't matter. People judge by, what is the impact on humanity? Well, Judaism hasn't been a blight on the human race.

They haven't gone around as a scourge, murdering in the name of religion. What they do in some ways is worse because it's directed at the Lord Jesus and at those who preach him. And this is something that put them out among the nations.

This is what destroyed the temple. This is what destroyed the nation. This is what keeps them scattered in will until God regathers them in the tribulation.

And this is what is ultimately going to divide them in the millennial kingdom. Attitude, attitude, attitude. So when Paul says, I who am the least of all saints, this is almost with a wink because there are people who say he really is the least.

He's a short, bald, beak-nosed, squeaky-voiced little runt who corrupted Judaism. He's not even from Israel for crying out loud. What does he know? Where does he get off saying that people don't have to be circumcised to come to God? And you know, he was struck blind and had a vision and a fit on the road to Damascus and now there are people who are following his

message and it's become a whole faith unto itself.

This is just ridiculous. So, he who is the least of all saints, this grace was given to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. It ultimately boils down to how compelling do you find the Word of God which transcends the messenger and pierces to the dividing asunder the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Well, this can be, by way of a resolution for the new year, that we remember that it is God's purpose to place us here as an example, as an illustration of His manifold wisdom. We are on display to the angels. We are being viewed and God is making Himself known to all creation in and through us and it reminds us of our responsibility.

We are not our own. We are bought with a price and we're not here just to see if we can live a life that pleases us. We are here to live a life that pleases God and fulfills His purpose so that in the ages to come we can continue to live a life that fulfills His purpose because in doing that we find our happiness, the fulfillment of our destiny, that satisfaction and that inner joy and peace that only come from a close connection to God Himself.

But it is a choice and this very information we can either be motivated and encouraged and driven and drawn toward the Lord. We can be static and apathetic and indifferent and stagnant or we can be embittered and reactionary and hastily walking in the other direction. It is up to us.

It's the same truth in the same package that it has always been in. It's what we decide to do with it that matters. And this is Paul's point in writing to these Gentiles in Laodicea, in Colossae to remind them of the great opportunity that has been extended now in Christ to the Gentiles that in former days was restricted to the nation of Israel and its near periphery.

And that same invitation is there for us. It is unchanged. It is, if anything, more available and more powerful because of the tremendous resources we have to reveal to us the Word of God.

Well, we're going to resume with the prayer of Paul next time in Ephesians 3, verse 14. He's going to resume his thought and he is going to complete and complement his description of his prayer at the end of chapter 1. But he's going to turn it a little and in these fresh lights and facets we're going to see some things that are really interesting for us. What exactly is the width and length and depth and height? We tend to think, well, it's all beyond understanding.

His ways are past finding out. But I'll just point out one word for you in verse 18. That you may be able to comprehend.

This is not incomprehensible truth. The width and depth and length and height are comprehensible. And it is his prayer that we comprehend it.

This is really cool because this expanse of God's plan and purpose is gettable. We can get it. We

can understand it.

And the key is being rooted and grounded in love. So we'll see that next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the meaning and purpose and definition that it gives to our lives. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will refresh it in our souls. That it will become a part of our identity.

That we will live with a sense of mission and purpose. That every task that comes to hand, every conversation, every time of work or time of relaxation and refreshment will be one in which we are reminded that we belong to you. That the Lord Jesus Christ purchased us.

And that our lives serve your purpose now and in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.