

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON L : DIGRESSION #2 - PAUL AS MINISTER OF THE MYSTERY TO THE GENTILES (3:1-13)

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 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; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: 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. 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: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 KJV)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 NIV)

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the nations, if, indeed, ye did hear of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me in regard to you, that by revelation He made known to me the secret, according as I wrote before in few [words] — in regard to which ye are able, reading [it], to understand my knowledge in the secret of the Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit — that the nations be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in the Christ, through the good news, of which I became a ministrant, according to the gift of the grace of God that was given to me, according to the working of His power; to me — the less than the least of all the saints — was given this grace, among the nations to proclaim good news — the untraceable riches of the Christ, and to cause all to see what [is] the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ, that there might be made known now to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenly [places], through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God, according to a purpose of the ages, which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have the freedom and the access in confidence through the faith of him, wherefore, I ask [you] not to faint in my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 Young's Literal Translation)

Paul as Minister of the Mystery to the Gentiles (3:1-13)

The essence of what Paul is saying is as follows:

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles —

*if, indeed, ye did hear of **the responsibility of managing the GRACE of God which was given to me, namely, that He made known the mystery that the Gentiles should be***

joint – heirs

and joint – body

and joint – partakers

of His promise in Jesus the Messiah through the gospel;

this **GRACE** was given to me

- **to preach** the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles
- **and to enlighten** all as to what is the plan of the mystery which was hidden in God

in order that [hina] the untraceable wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and to the authorities in the heavenlies through the ecclesia.

Therefore I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on behalf of you which is your glory.

v 10 — **that there might be made known now to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenly places, through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God,** (Young Literal Translation) — ἵνα γνωρισθῇ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποικίλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ [hina gnōrīsthēi nun tais archais kai tais exousiais en tois epouraniois dia tēs ecclēsias hē polupoikilos sophia tou theou] **“It is remarkable that God purposed to make known his manifold wisdom, the mystery, to heavenly rulers through the church rather than telling them directly.”** [Hoehner, 458]

TO WHAT DOES THE PURPOSE CLAUSE REFER? — that, so that, to the intent — ἵνα [hina] **This is what is commonly called a ‘purpose clause,’ showing intent or why something was done: ‘in order that through the ecclesia the manifold wisdom of God might be made known...’.** The question is therefore asked, ‘to what does the purpose clause ‘in order that ... it might be made known’ refer?’ While some may argue some of the finer particulars, it appears the sense is as follows:

‘Paul was made a minister of the gospel (v. 7) to preach the unsearchable wealth of Christ (v. 8b) and to enlighten all of the mystery (v. 9), in order that the manifold wisdom of God may be made known to angelic leaders by means of the church (v. 10).’

“God’s final purpose in endowing Paul with grace is that the manifold wisdom of God may now be made known to the heavenly powers. This brings us back to the cosmic scope of 1.10.” [Best, 322] “The main idea in the paragraph from ver. 7 onwards is unmistakably that of the marvellous call and commission of Paul, and the wonder of the grace that made an Apostle and preacher of him is magnified the more by the Divine purpose revealed in that commission, to wit, the making known the manifold wisdom of God in His ways with sinful men and with the outcasts of the Gentile world in particular.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 308] “God’s intention was that his many-splendoured wisdom might now be made known through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This verse indicates the purpose of Paul’s ‘preaching’ (v. 8) and ‘making plain’ (v. 9), which together spell out the content of his missionary task.” [O’Brien, 244]

THE DESIRED RESULT — might be known, there might be made known — γνωρισθῇ [gnōrīsthēi] First aorist passive subjunctive of gnōrīzō with hina. [Robertson, *Word Pictures*] **“The subjunctive mood presents the action or the event as something wanted or expected. The action is not considered as an objective fact by the speaker. In other words the subjunctive indicates what the subject of the verb wants, can, may, must do or is expecting to do.”** **“The passive verb ‘be made known’ suggests that God himself is the author of the disclosure.”** [O’Brien, 246]

that now, now — νῦν [nun] “The adverb ‘now’ contrasts the mystery which in the past had been hidden to the present revelation (vv. 5, 9). **The ‘now’ period began with the inception of the church, the time when Jews and Gentiles in Christ formed one body.**” [Hoehner, 459] “It would be wrong to imagine a three-stage process in which Paul preaches, Jews and Gentiles come together to form the church and, after it has grown to a certain size, God’s wisdom is revealed to the powers. **There is a time of hiddenness, the period prior to Christ or to his ascension, and then, ‘now’, a period of disclosure, the period of the apostles, prophets and Paul.**” [Best, 324f] “The term νῦν (nun), ‘now’, is significant in this verse. Not until this particular time in the history of salvation has the mysterious plan of God been disclosed to the spiritual powers, and as in v 5, this ‘now’ is clearly the period of the Church. In fact, the Church is the means by which God makes known his wisdom to the powers.... In the immediate context, its occurrence here recalls the ecclesiological content of the mystery from v 6, namely, Gentile Christians as fellow members of the same body with Jewish Christians. It is through this new entity, the on Church out of Jews and Gentiles, that the mystery is made known, as God’s wisdom is demonstrated to the principalities and powers.” [Lincoln, 186]

unto the principalities and powers, unto the rulers and powers, to the rulers and authorities, to the principalities and authorities — ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις [tais archais kai tais exousiais] **“Ten times these two terms for power are listed in the order of the present passage (Luke 12:11; 20:20; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:12; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1) and can refer to either human or angelic leaders. In the present context they are in the plural (probably indicating more than one leader) and refer to heavenly beings as opposed to earthly ones.”** [Hoehner, 459f] “Whereas previously in this chapter the mystery can be said to have been made known to Paul (v 3) and to the apostles and prophets (v 5), and to have been proclaimed by Paul to the Gentiles (vv 8, 9), now the wisdom of God, which serves as a functional equivalent to mystery in v 9, is said to have as the recipients of its disclosure the principalities and authorities in the heavenly realms.” [Lincoln, 185]

NOT EARTHLY POWERS — **“Understood by some of the older expositors of earthly powers in general, or of Jewish rulers in particular, or again of heathen priests, or of Church authorities; all from unwillingness to admit the sublime thought of the apostle, that God’s wisdom in the scheme of redemption is an object of contemplation to heavenly intelligences. Comp., on the contrary, 1 Pet. i. 12, ‘which things angels desire to look into.’”** [Abbott, 88] Verses referencing the involvement of

angels in earthly affairs:

“To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into.” (1 Pet 1:12 NKJV)

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” (1 Tim 3:16 NKJV)

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Mark 13:32 NKJV)

“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” (Luke 15:7 NKJV)

“For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.” (1 Cor 4:9 NKJV)

“For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” (1 Cor 11:10 NKJV)

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:11,12 NKJV)

WHAT SOME TEACH: ‘EVIL ANGELS ONLY’ — (e.g., Frank Thielman, Klyne Snodgrass, Andrew Lincoln, Ernest Best)

“In light of the way Paul speaks of ‘the rulers and authorities’ elsewhere in the letter, there can, in any case, be little doubt that Paul considered these figures to be thoroughly evil spiritual beings who exercised power over the unbelieving world (2:1-2; 6:12).... From this position with Christ, the church can ‘now’ testify to the powers that, despite their ability even in the present to work in ‘the sons of disobedience’ (2:2), to make strategic plans to trouble God’s people (6:11), and to shoot their ‘ignited missiles’ at them (6:16), their designs will ultimately fail.” [Thielman, 216f] *“The focus in Ephesians on ‘the rulers and authorities’ has to do with evil powers, not good angels or human institutions. This verse should thus be understood in the context of the display of God’s glory even to those who oppose him.”* [Snodgrass, 164] “[Some connect] the thought of this verse with that of 1 Pet 1:12, where more well-disposed angels are said to desire to look into the gospel, and claims that the mention of the principalities and authorities, therefore, serves simply to underline the significance of what God has done in the present time. But since other references make clear that for Ephesians the spiritual powers are evil forces who need to be subjected (cf. 2:2; 6:12), the notion of making known in relation to them the great affinities with a passage such as 1 Pet 3:19-22, where the victory of Christ over such adversaries is proclaimed to them. Here, however, it is not the victory of Christ as such (cf. 1:20-23), but, as we shall see, the consequences of that victory in the bringing into existence of the Church that is the focus of the disclosure to the powers.... That [Paul] can conceive of not only Christ and believers, but also hostile powers, in the heavenly realms is again to be explained against the background of the cosmic heavens in the OT and in the Jewish apocalypses where angels and spirit powers were often represented as in heaven (e.g., Job 1:6; Dan 10:13,21; 2 Macc 5:2; 1 Enoch 61:10; 90:21,24), a concept that was also developed in Philo.” [Lincoln, 185f] Lincoln continues by explaining that since Paul ‘inherited’ the two-stage eschatological perspective often found in the Jewish apocalypses that contained “a perspective which incorporated heaven and earth in each age, he could think of the present overlap of the ages, brought about by God’s action in Christ, as a period in which heaven was still involved in the present evil age, so that though the powers had already been defeated, they would not be totally vanquished until the consummation.” [Lincoln, 186] *“What now becomes clear is that the Church provides hostile cosmic powers with a tangible reminder that their authority has been decisively broken and that all things are subject to Christ. The overcoming of the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, as they are united through Christ in the Church, is a pledge of the overcoming of all divisions when the universe will be restored to harmony in Christ (cf. 1:10). In this way the Church as the focus of God’s wise plan could give the readers an essential clue to the meaning of this world’s history.”* [Lincoln, 194] “Were friendly supernatural beings intended, ... it is not clear why God required to make his wisdom known to them; 1 Pet 1.12 (cf 1 Tim 3.16) has been adduced to support such a view and Mk 13.32 may suggest that angels do not possess all knowledge. However in Lk 15.7 angels are said to rejoice when sinners repent, thereby indicating another stream of tradition in which they understand God’s way of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 4.9). If God makes his wisdom known to hostile angels, it can be assumed he makes it known to good angels, but do the latter need to wait for that knowledge until the church has come into existence?” [Best, 322f]

‘GOOD ANGELS ONLY’ — (e.g., Henry Alford, Kenneth Wuest, S. D. F. Salmond, William Hendriksen, Marvin Vincent, John Gill, John Calvin) *Alford believes this refers to the holy angels; not Jewish rulers, Christian rulers, or even good and bad angels since while the evil angels would recognize the power, good angels would recognize the wisdom of God in all His works. “That the holy angels are capable of a specific increase of knowledge, and of a deepening insight into God’s wisdom, seems from this passage clear and incontrovertible.”* [Alford, 106] “The principalities and powers are the holy angels.... The Church thus becomes the university for angels, and each saint a

professor. Only in the Church can angels come to an adequate comprehension of the grace of God. They look at the Church to investigate the mysteries of redemption. 1 Peter (1:12) speaks of the things which the angels have a passionate desire to stoop down and look into, like the golden cherubim that overshadow the Mercy Seat, ever gazing upon the sprinkled blood that is upon it.” [Wuest, 85] “The ἀρχαί [archai, ‘principalities, rulers’] and ἐξουσίαι [exousiai, ‘powers, authorities’] can only mean good angels; and these names of dignity are appropriate here as suggesting again the greatness of Paul’s commission, and perhaps also the glory put upon the ἐκκλησία [ekklēsia, ‘assembly, church’].” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 309] “Now it is true, indeed, that the expression ‘principalities and authorities’ is neutral just like ‘angels.’ Gabriel is an angel, but so is Satan. In each case it is the context that determines whether the designation refers to angels in general, as in 1:21, to evil angels, as in 6:12, or to good angels. Even the addition here in 3:10 of the words ‘in the heavenly places’ is not decisive in determining whether good angels or demons are meant, as 6:12 proves. Nevertheless, I still see no reason for disagreeing with Calvin, Bavinck, Grosheide, Hodge, Lenski, and a host of other leading theologians and commentators, in believing that 3:10 refers to the good and not to the evil angels.” [Hendriksen, 158] “Principalities and powers. Good angels.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] “By whom are meant, not civil magistrates, much less evil angels, but the good angels, the angels in heaven.” [Gill, 81] “Some are of opinion that these words cannot apply to angels, because such ignorance, as is here supposed, could not be found in those who are permitted to behold the brightness of God’s countenance. They choose rather to refer them to devils, but without due reflection; for what could have been regarded as extraordinary in the assertion, that, by the preaching of the gospel and the calling of the Gentiles, information was, for the first time, conveyed to devils? There can be no doubt that the apostle labors to place in the strongest light the mercy of God toward the Gentiles, and the high value of the gospel. For this purpose he declares, that the preaching of the gospel exhibits the manifold grace of God, with which, till now, the heavenly angels themselves were unacquainted. The wisdom of God, therefore, which was manifested by uniting Jews and Gentiles in the fellowship of the gospel, ought to be regarded by men with the highest admiration.” [Calvin]

‘BOTH GOOD AND EVIL ANGELS’ — (e.g., Warren Wiersbe, F. F. Bruce) “*God is ‘educating’ the angels by means of the church! By ‘the principalities and powers,’ Paul meant the angelic beings created by God, both good and evil (Eph. 1:21; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15). Angels are created beings and are not omniscient. In fact, Peter indicated that during the Old Testament period, the angels were curious about God’s plan of salvation then being worked out on earth (1 Peter 1:10-12). Certainly the angels rejoice at the repentance of a lost sinner (Luke 15:10), and Paul suggested that the angels watch the activities of the local assembly (1 Cor. 11:10). ‘We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels,’ Paul wrote (1 Cor. 4:9).*” [Wiersbe, 28] “There is no need to limit the ‘principalities and powers’ in such a context as this to hostile forces. All created intelligences are in view here. When the foretelling and accomplishment of the Christian salvation as said in 1 Pet. 1:12 to be ‘things into which angels long to look,’ something of the same sort is intended as we find here. The wisdom of God revealed in the cross of Christ and in its saving efficacy in the lives of believers upsets all conventional notions of wisdom and demands their reappraisal in the minds of the spiritually mature (1 Cor. 1:18-2:6).” [Bruce, 321] “Unto the various orders of *good* angels primarily, as these dwell ‘in the heavenly places’ in the highest sense; ‘known’ to their adoring joy (1 Ti 3:16; 1 Pe 1:12). Secondly, God’s wisdom in redemption is made known to *evil* angels, who dwell ‘in heavenly places’ in a lower sense, namely, the air (compare Eph 2:2 with Eph 6:12); ‘known’ to their dismay (1 Co 15:24; Col 2:15).” [JFB, Commentary on Whole Bible]

in heavenly places, in heaven, in the heavenly realms — ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις [en tois epouraniois] “*As before, ‘heavenly realms’ points not so much to a place as to a spiritual reality, the reality beyond what we see.*” [Snodgrass, 163] “In Ephesians the term ‘heavenlies’ refers to the source of the believers’ spiritual benefits (1:3), where Christ presently resides at the right hand of the Father (1:20), and where believers are positionally raised and seated with Christ (2:6). Hence, *the heavenlies is the place where both good and evil leaders reside and attempt to influence humans.* Such a concept may be difficult to understand, but in fact it is parallel to the idea that there are good and evil humans living together on earth. As a matter of fact, God and Satan are seen conversing with one another in heaven (Job 1:6-12) and a struggle between good and evil angels is portrayed in heaven and on earth (Dan 10:13, 20). Therefore, it seems acceptable to suppose that both good and evil beings are being informed of the manifold wisdom of God.” [Hoehner, 460] *As discussed in lesson 5, ‘in the heavenlies, in the heavenly realms’ is not the equivalent of ‘heaven.’ Rather Paul uses these terms to refer to the ‘spiritual realms’ in contrast to the material, physical realm. John MacArthur considers ‘the heavenly places’ to ‘encompass the entire supernatural realm of God, His complete domain, the full extent of His divine operation’ and is thus more than just heaven itself.*

“Because we are members of God’s dominion, unlike the ‘sons of this age’ (Luke 16:8), we are able to understand the supernatural things of God, things which the ‘natural man does not accept’ and ‘cannot understand ... because they are spiritually appraised’ (1 Cor 2:14). When an American citizen travels to another country, he is every bit as much an American citizen as when he is in the United States. Whether he is in Africa, the Near East, Europe, Antarctica, or anywhere else outside his homeland, he is still completely an American citizen, with all the rights and privileges that citizenship holds. As citizens of God’s heavenly dominion, Christians hold all the rights and privileges that citizenship grants, even while they are living in the ‘foreign’ and sometimes hostile land of earth. Our true life is in the supernatural, the heavenly places. Our Father is there, our Savior is there, our family and loved ones are there, our name is there, and our eternal dwelling place and throne are there. But we are presently trapped in the tension between the earthly and the heavenly.” [MacArthur, 9]

by the [ecclesia], assembly, congregation — διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας [dia tēs ecclēsias] Some of this has been discussed above but these quotes are worth reading:

“[T]hrough the church’ signifies that the very existence of this new multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body is the manifestation of God’s richly diverse wisdom. Its presence is the means by which God himself discloses to the powers his own richly diverse wisdom.” [O’Brien, 246]

“The Church is the phenomenon, which by its existence is a proof and exhibition of the Divine wisdom as manifested in a scheme of redemption which is world wide.” [Abbott, 89]

“The church thus appears to be God’s pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future, the mystery of God’s will ‘to be administered in the fullness of the times,’ when ‘the things in heaven and the things on earth’ are to be brought together in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10).” [Bruce, 321f]

“The church’s very existence and conduct are making known how great God’s plan of salvation is — both to people and to powers. This gives an unparalleled importance to the church.” [Snodgrass, 164]

*“Ephesians 3:9, 10 bears a significant relation to the consummation of the mystery, the bringing together of ‘all things’ into unity in Christ (1:9, 10). The terms employed in 3:9 for the disclosure of the mystery, namely, ‘make known’, ‘administration’, and ‘mystery’, were all used in the earlier discussion of the mystery at 1:9, 10. There Christ’s summing up of all things involved ‘the things in heaven’ (the chief representatives of which are the powers) and ‘the things on earth’ (especially the church) coming under Christ’s lordship so that these divine purposes might be fulfilled. But with the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ and the new creation of the two in one new humanity (2:13-16; 3:3-6), together with the disclosure of this as tangible evidence of the manifold wisdom of God, one difficulty to ‘all things’ being summed up in Christ was being overcome. **The consummation of God’s cosmic plan was drawing nearer every day, and this reconciliation was a token that his final purpose in Christ was about to reach its conclusion. Furthermore, if the very existence of the church is a reminder that the authority of the powers has been decisively broken, and that their final defeat is imminent, then the overcoming of the second obstacle, namely, ‘the things in heaven’, moves to its completion. Perhaps, as F. F. Bruce suggests, the church appears as ‘God’s pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future’. The uniting of ‘Jews and Gentiles in Christ was ... God’s masterpiece of reconciliation, and gave promise of a time when not Jews and Gentiles only, but all the mutually hostile elements in creation, would be united in that same Christ’. The church is not only the pattern, but also the means God is using to show his purposes are moving triumphantly to their climax....** [T]hese words of v. 10 in the context of Ephesians would have been of great comfort to the readers. Troubled by the powers, these Christians have been reminded that the presence of the church, the body of Christ, means that the authority of the rulers has been broken, that they cannot hinder the progress of the gospel, and that all things are to be subject to Christ. Such assurances would surely encourage them as they engage in a spiritual warfare and await the final day.” [O’Brien, 247f]*

THESE CHURCHES ARE ORGANIZED ASSEMBLIES OF THE LORD’S PEOPLE — *“It would seem that local congregations, as well as house-groups that met in particular homes, were concrete, visible expressions of that new relationship which believers have with the Lord Jesus. Local gatherings, whether in a congregation or a house-church, were earthly manifestations of that heavenly gathering around the risen Christ... [Regarding Ephesians 3:10:] Here the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to the spiritual authorities through the church, an unusual expression which means that this communication was neither by evangelism nor by social action. Instead, it signifies that the very existence of the church, this new multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body, is itself the manifestation of God’s richly diverse wisdom. But it is inadequate to view this entity as simply a heavenly gathering or, for that matter, the universal church. The context of Ephesians 3:10 strongly suggests that there should be a concrete and visible expression of this new relationship which Jewish and Gentile believers have with their Lord Jesus. Local congregations and house-churches are that concrete, visible expression. If occasionally the term ‘church’ refers to a heavenly meeting with Christ, and this is a metaphorical way of speaking of believers’ ongoing fellowship with him, then it was appropriate that this new relationship with the ascended Lord should find particular, concrete expression in their regular coming together, that is, ‘in church’ (cf. Heb 10:25). In the light of these remarks, then, ‘the church’ here in 3:10 may be taken as speaking of this heavenly gathering that is assembled around Christ, and, at the same time, of a local congregation of Christians, in which Jews and Gentiles are fellow members of the body of Christ, as a concrete expression of this heavenly entity.” [O’Brien, 26f] **“People do not discover wisdom; it is beyond their understanding (Job 28.12ff) and must be disclosed to them; so here wisdom is made known to the powers. It is normally God who discloses wisdom; in 3.10 he is said to do this through the church.... God’s wisdom has now been made known; the aorist suggests a single action rather than a continuous process of slow revelation. When was wisdom made known? Because this is related to the church it must be since the church came into existence, and, since the church is the church of Jewish and Gentile Christians, it must be since the cross and resurrection of Christ.”** [Best, 324] *No one could read that statement by Ernest Best and imagine Paul is talking of anything other than the local church!**

EACH ECCLESIA PICTURES THE ETERNAL ECCLESIA TO COME — *“In 1963 E. A. Judge, using contemporary political models, suggested that the polis (‘city-state’) denoted ‘a visible assembly of persons to whom great theoretical significance might be attached. All the ideals of the polis were fulfilled completely and identically in each particular case where it was established.’ If the parallel works, we should expect to find, Judge claimed, that ‘everything that can be said about the ekklesia, can be said equally and fully of each ekklesia.’ He added that the difficulty New Testament lexicographers have in allotting instances of the term ἐκκλησία [ekkleisia] to the two categories ‘local church’ and ‘whole church’ suggests ‘that the categories are themselves false.’” [O’Brien, 27]*

THE EXISTENCE OF THE ECCLESIA ITSELF IS GOD ‘MAKING KNOWN’ HIS WISDOM: IT IS NOT WHAT WE DO BUT WHO WE ARE — Several excellent quotes concerning Paul’s emphasis here:

“The church must hold either an active or a passive role with regard to making known God’s wisdom to the ‘powers.’ The passive role better explains the meaning of this passage. The church is not passive in the sense of failing to resist the influence of the ‘powers,’ but in the sense that it does not act as a dispatched agent to proclaim the message of God’s dominion to the ‘powers.’ The church visibly testifies to God’s wisdom by its very existence.... [Paul] never states that the church is given the task of ‘preaching’ to the ‘powers.’ He merely remarks that the wisdom of God will be made known (passive voice) through the church.” [Clinton Arnold, Power and Magic – The Concept of Power in Ephesians, 63]

How is this wisdom made known? Some believe through the preaching, but preaching is nowhere mentioned in this passage. Some say our worship in which angels are present, but there is no verse stating the angels present in worship can be identified with hostile powers. “The writer’s thought is, therefore, best understood as being that *by her very existence as a new humanity, in which the major division of the first-century world has been overcome, the Church reveals God’s secret in action and heralds to the hostile heavenly powers the overcoming of cosmic divisions with their defeat.*” [Lincoln, 187]

The inference which some draw from this passage, that angels are present in our assemblies, and make progress along with ourselves in knowledge, is a groundless speculation. We must always keep in view the purposes for which God appointed the ministry of his word. If angels, who are permitted to see the face of God, do not walk in faith, neither do they need the outward administration of the word. The preaching of the gospel, therefore, is of no service but to human beings, among whom alone the practice exists. *Paul’s meaning is this: “The church, composed both of Jews and Gentiles, is a mirror, in which angels behold the astonishing wisdom of God displayed in a manner unknown to them before. They see a work which is new to them, and the reason of which was hid in God. In this manner, and not by learning anything from the lips of men, do they make progress.”* [Calvin, Ephesians]

PAUL CANNOT BE REFERRING TO THE UNIVERSAL – INVISIBLE CHURCH — *How could this be a reference to the ‘universal-invisible church’? What was being manifested as the wisdom of God to these powers? It was the uniting of the Jews and Gentiles into a single body, all on an equal basis. But if that is so, and if the reference is to the ‘universal-invisible church’, then why was not this wisdom manifested in the OT? Both Jews and Gentiles were being saved in the OT, and in the ‘universal-invisible church’ (or the family of God as I would prefer to call it) everyone is on an equal basis. Then why does Paul declare this to be something ‘hidden’ and now during the apostolic age or church age it is now ‘revealed’? The thrust of Paul’s argument MUST be the local church, the only thing ‘new’ in this age where the Jews and Gentiles could unite on an equal basis. It MUST be in the local church where the wisdom of God is being manifested!*