

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LI : 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 γνωρισθῆ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἢ 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]

by the [ecclesia], assembly, congregation — διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας [dia tēs ecclēsias] Some quotes 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).” [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 [ekklesia] 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 — 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!*

THE PERPETUITY OF THE ASSEMBLIES, CONGREGATIONS WORSHIPPING THE LORD — Forgive the long quote but B. H. Carroll has comments worth repeating:

“Through Paul, by special divine appointment, all men are to be made to see this mystery unveiled. Not only so, but unto angels by the church must this manifold wisdom of God be made known. The church is a pedagogue to angels. By the church they are instructed....

“Now,’ says Paul, ‘those angels up yonder are flaming spirits, but there are many things they do not know. They have had their curiosity aroused ever since Christ interposed to save man, “which things the angels desired to look into.”’ On the mercy seat the curiosity of the angels is represented by two golden cherubim on either side leaning over, looking down where the blood is dropping. These heavenly students are trying to study out God’s wisdom, and God’s wisdom is manifold, it is rolled up in a great roll and the angels cannot see. The church comes along and takes hold of the roll and unrolls, unrolls, unrolls, the many folds, and as the church unrolls, the angels behold the manifold wisdom of God.

“That is a beautiful thought. It elevates one in his own mind to know that he is helping explain difficult things to the angels. Not only were the apostles a ‘spectacle to the angels,’ but the church in its work is a spectacle to the angels, in

unfolding to their view the marvelous election, foreordination, predestination, and foreknowledge of God, developed in redemption and made apparent through the ministry of the church in preaching the gospel. The church comes opening one door and sets Jerusalem on fire, and the angels clap their hands and praise God — 3,000 Jews saved. The church turns a key, throws open another door, and the Gentiles come in. The angels clap their hands and sing, ‘Glory to God in the highest.’ The church goes to Ephesus, 100,000 perhaps are converted there; it crosses the Bosphorus and enters Europe, goes to Athens, Corinth, and to Rome itself. From there it goes to Britain, and then on gospel wings it flies across the Atlantic Ocean, the gospel is carried across the American continent, rises in another flight to the islands of the sea, the Orient, flies over the walls of China, and goes into Tibet, the darkest, most isolated place in the world. All of that the angels learn as the kingdom develops.

“We now come to a point that always thrilled me.

“I never could understand why some Baptists rejoice to say there is no church succession.

“I would like for them to take hold of these two passages in this chapter, ‘To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord,’ coupled with the last verse, ‘Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations forever and ever. Amen.’

“Whenever church work stops, then the glory stops. Did God intend for it to stop? If he did, why did he say, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world’? And why should we tell the church when celebrating the Lord’s Supper, ‘As often as you do this you show forth the Lord’s death till he come’? Why does he provide for perpetuity?

“I am not discussing church history now. I am discussing God’s purpose in establishing the church. Jesus said, ‘The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ I do not believe they have. They have never been able to convince me that the gates of hell have prevailed against the church.

“I believe that God not only has had people in all ages, but that he has had an organized people.

“He provided for transmission: ‘The things which I have committed to you, the same commit thou to faithful men.’ How do men have faith? By hearing. How can they hear without a preacher, and how can they have a preacher unless he be sent? Did he not send the church all gifts — apostolic gifts, prophetic gifts, evangelistic gifts, and pastoral gifts? He set every one of them in the church. The apostles and prophets served the church; when they were taken away, there remained pastors, evangelists, teachers. On whose authority? Christ’s. Where placed? In the church. I am satisfied that if the angels, after watching the unfolding of the wisdom of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ, from the time Christ died until the time the apostles died, they have not had a recess since of a thousand years. They are not left in suspense, vainly bending over to learn more through silent centuries. The school goes right on. The purposes ripen. The ordinances continue to tell their story. Churches come from churches somewhat as horses come from horses. History cannot trace every detail of the pedigree showing how a certain drove of wild mustangs in western Texas are descendants of the Spanish barbs, brought here by the discoverers 400 years ago. The fact that the mustangs are here proves the succession, since only like begets like.

“I do not undervalue church history, but far more important to me than fallible human records of passing events is the New Testament forecast of church history. The former may err — the latter never.” [B H Carroll, *Colossians, Ephesians, and Hebrews*; 129ff]

BOTH THE ECCLESIA (CHURCH) AND THE REDEMPTION OF THE UNIVERSE IS TO GLORIFY GOD — *As we have previously mentioned, one of the purposes of the ecclesia (church) is to be a ‘microcosm’ (a world in miniature, a picture of what the Lord is doing within His universe; cp. Eph 1:9-11 with 3:9-11).* “The sense is, that it was with this design, or that this was the purpose for which all things were made. One grand purpose in the creation of the universe was, that the wisdom of God might be clearly shown by the church. It was not enough to evince it by the formation of the sun, the stars, the earth, the seas, the mountains, the floods. It was not enough to show it by the creation of intelligent beings, the formation of immortal minds on earth, and the various ranks of the angelic world. There were views of the divine character which could be obtained only in connection with the redemption of the world. Hence the universe was created, and man was made upon the earth, not merely to illustrate the divine perfections in the work of creation, but in a still more illustrious manner in the work of redemption. And hence the deep interest which the angelic hosts have ever evinced in the salvation of man.” [Barnes, *Ephesians on CD*]

“The ultimate goal both of creation and redemption is the manifestation of the divine wisdom. In particular, the commission Paul himself has received to proclaim the mystery is designed to promote this objective as the church becomes its instrument. What had been screened from the angelic hierarchy is now to be declared through the body of Christ on earth (Eph 2:6, 7). ***The ecclesiological implications of such a verse as this are staggering indeed (cf. 1 Peter 1:12). ‘The Church becomes a mirror through which the bright ones of heaven see the glory of God. And in order to show them this glory, God committed the gospel to Paul’ (Beet, p. 319).”*** [Wood, *Ephesians on CD*]

Once again, please forgive the long quote but John MacArthur makes an excellent summation statement:

“The church does not exist simply for the purpose of saving souls, though that is a marvelous and important work. The supreme purpose of the church, as Paul makes explicit here, is to glorify God by manifesting His wisdom before the

angels, who can then offer greater praise to God. **The purpose of the universe is to give glory to God, and that will be its ultimate reality after all evil is conquered and destroyed.** Even now, ‘The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands’ (Ps. 19:1). The church is not an end in itself but a means to an end, the end of glorifying God. **The real drama of redemption can only be understood when we realize that the glory of God is the supreme goal of creation.** Holy angels are especially made and confirmed in purity and praise as creatures who will forever give God glory (Ps. 148:2; Heb. 1:6), and the redemption of fallen men enriches their praise. Redeemed people, then, are to enhance angelic praise and some day in heaven to join in it (Rev. 4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 14:1-3; 19:1-8).

“Even fallen angels glorify God, though they do not intend to do so. It was their very rejection of His glory and the seeking of their own glory that caused them to be cast out of heaven in the first place. Yet Jesus said, ‘I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it’ (Matt. 16:18). God is glorified through the fallen angels by continually frustrating their rebellious plans and showing the futility of their evil intentions to destroy His church. His holy wrath also displays His glory, since it is a revelation of who He is (cf. Rom. 9:19-22).

“The angels can see the power of God in creation, the wrath of God at Sinai, and the love of God at Calvary. But above all they see His manifold wisdom that is made known through the church. They see Him taking Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female — who together murdered the Messiah and were worthy only of hell — and making them, by that very cross of murder, one spiritual [family; MSM] in Jesus Christ. They see Him breaking down every barrier, every wall that divides and making all believers one in an indivisible, intimate, and eternal union with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and every other believer from every other age and circumstance. ‘There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents,’ Jesus said (Luke 15:10)....

“When Paul admonished the Corinthian women to show submission to their husbands through the custom of wearing long hair, he reinforced the command by saying it was given ‘because of the angels’ (1 Cor. 11:10), so as not to offend their sense of submissiveness and to give them greater cause to glorify God by the obedience of the church in the matter of proper male and female responses. They are led to praise the Lord when they see the right relationship in the church overruling the perversion of man’s relationship engineered by Satan and sin. After Paul had stated certain principles regarding elders in the church, he wrote, ‘I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias’ (1 Tim. 5:21). Angels are exceedingly concerned about the discipline needed to produce holy behavior and pure living in the church as well as godly leadership (vv. 17-25). After all, says the author of Hebrews, ‘Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?’ (Heb. 1:14). They minister to and watch over the church.

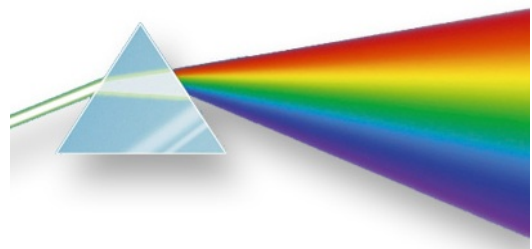
“In the classroom of God’s universe, He is the Teacher, the angels are the students, the church is the illustration, and the subject is the manifold wisdom of God.” [MacArthur, 96f]

the manifold wisdom of God, — ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ [hē polypoikilos sophia tou theou] **“It is God’s wisdom which is made known to the heavenly powers. We might have expected his grace, or the lordship of Christ as in Phil 2.9-11 (cf v. 11 here), or salvation to be revealed, but it is wisdom;** this follows appropriately after the many terms denoting revelation in 3.2-13. In 1 Cor 1.18ff God’s wisdom is related to the cross, and this relationship lies in the background here for the revelation which is disclosed is that of the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles and the basis for this is the cross (2.14-22). **Wisdom is not a simple concept capable of being expressed in a brief statement, but a complex idea with many aspects.”** [Best, 323]

THE SUBJECT OF THE SENTENCE IS HERE DISCLOSED, POSSIBLY FOR EMPHASIS — While many versions place ‘the manifold wisdom of God’ earlier in the sentence as its subject, Paul originally placed this at the last, possibly for emphasis. **“Finally, the subject of the sentence is stated. It may well have been put last for emphasis.”** [Hoehner, 461]

THE ‘BEAUTIFULLY COMPLEX’ WISDOM OF GOD — ἡ πολυποίκιλος [hē polypoikilos] a poetical adjective, ‘beautifully complex.’ **“This rare term combines the more common adjective ποικίλος [poikilos] meaning ‘many-coloured, spotted, pied, dappled, wrought in various colors, changeful, diversified, manifold’, with the common adverb πολὺς [polys] meaning ‘many.’** Πολυποίκιλος [polypoikilos] connoted complex variety, sometimes in crafted items such as a multicolored veil or a floral wreath of many different flowers. It could also be used of complex emotions and reasoning processes. Here in Eph. 3:10 it seems to refer to the many complex facets of God’s wisdom. Just as the wealth of Christ is ‘untraceable’, according to 3:8, so now Paul describes

the wisdom of God as ‘very many-sided.’ ... Paul probably thinks of ‘the beautifully complex wisdom of God’ as especially evident in the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in the church (v. 6). This is the mystery that was utterly inaccessible to human understanding until God, in whom it was hidden, revealed it to the apostles and prophets, and especially to Paul (vv. 2, 5, 7-9). The full unity of Jewish with Gentile believers in the one body of Christ, moreover, is the ‘creation’ of a ‘new human being’ (2:15-16). All this is evidence of the vast complexity of God’s wisdom, a wisdom now



evident not merely in the beautiful diversity of his creation but also in the surprising way he is restoring this creation after the ravages of sin.” [Thielman, 215f] *“One could say, perhaps, in a modernizing idiom, that the pure light of God refracted through the prism of the material creation breaks into all the colours of the spectrum.”* [Muddiman, 160] *This word was used of Joseph’s coat of many colors (Gen 37:3) in the LXX. “Euripides used it of multicolored cloth and Eubulus of flowers. Nowadays it is a technical term in geology, specifying unusually assorted crystals.”* [Wood, Ephesians on CD]

A ‘HAPAX LEGOMENON’ — This word is what they call a *hapax legomenon* in the NT, i.e., *a word or form of a word that occurs only once.*

THE ‘MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD’ SHOWN IN THE LORD BRINGING TOGETHER THE JEWS AND GENTILES WITHIN A SINGLE ASSEMBLED BODY — “‘The manifold wisdom of God,’ which in the divine purpose was to be made known at the present time, is a unique expression. The compound adjective meaning ‘manifold, variegated, very many sided’ was poetic in origin, referring to an intricately embroidered pattern of ‘many-coloured cloaks’ or the manifold hues of ‘a garland of flowers.’ ... *In our present context ... this variegated wisdom has particular reference to God’s richly diverse ways of working which led to a multiracial, multi-cultural community being united as fellow-members in the body of Christ. In other words, it is integrally related to the mystery: ‘the mysterion is shaped by God’s wisdom, it is a product of it.’* [O’Brien, 245] “On those rare occasional uses outside the NT, it refers to intricate embroidery or flowers of many colors. This is the only occurrence in the NT and it has the idea of ‘most varied,’ or ‘(very) many sided.’ *It alludes to the variegated facets of God’s wisdom, not with reference to redemption but to the unification of Jews and Gentiles into one new person in Christ.* In past history God, in his wisdom, has dealt with humankind in a variety of ways. For example, his dealings with people before Abraham differed from his dealings after he made a covenant with Abraham. Likewise, there was another change when Israel became a nation under Moses. Accordingly, in this NT era the unification of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body is another change. Therefore, the manifold wisdom of God must refer to this mystery which Paul has been explaining from 2:11 to the present verse.” [Hoehner, 461f]

MORE THAN MERELY ‘GREAT’ WISDOM — *“It does not mean merely that there was ‘great’ wisdom, but that the wisdom shown was diversified and varied; like changing, variegated colors. There was a ‘beautiful and well-ordered variety of dispensations’ toward that church, all of which tended to evince the wisdom of God. It is like a landscape, or a panoramic view passing before the mind, with a great variety of phases and aspects, all tending to excite admiration.”* [Barnes, Ephesians on CD]

DO WE STAND IN AWE OF GOD’S WISDOM? — *“[B]y making the gospel to be proclaimed to all men without exception, God has brought forth to view another instance and proof of his wisdom. Not that it was new wisdom, but that it was so large and manifold as to transcend our limited capacity. Let us rest assured that the knowledge, whatever it may be, which we have acquired, is, after all, but a slender proportion. And if the calling of the Gentiles draws the attention, and excites the reverence, of angels in heaven, how shameful that it should be slighted or disdained by men upon earth!”* [Calvin, 255f]

THE CHURCH WAS A REVOLUTIONARY NEW CONCEPT — “Equality between Jews and Gentiles was beyond the comprehension of any human being and any angelic being. Nevertheless, contrary to all prior thought, Paul has been showing that the mystery is the church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles united into one body. They are ‘fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow participants of the promise in Christ’ (3:6). This was a revolutionary new concept. Through the church, the angelic leaders, both good and evil, gain knowledge of the manifold wisdom of God. It is a defeat for evil angels who would like to continue to engender animosity between Jews and Gentiles in order to frustrate the plan of God. The formation of the church is tangible evidence that the evil angelic leaders’ power has been broken, demonstrating that even the most diverse elements of creation are subject to Christ.” [Hoehner, 462]

PRACTICAL APPLICATION — Thought: The unity within the ecclesia is used by God to manifest His wisdom and power to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies. What is it that reveals this wisdom and power? In the original strict context, it was the love and respect the Jews and Gentiles showed for each other within the ecclesia, despite their former animosity towards one another, for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. Making that applicable to today’s ecclesias: God uses our love and unity with one another, even though we are all so different and come from a different backgrounds, yet work together for the cause of Christ, to show forth His wisdom and power to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies. *God is honored when we work with each other, sometimes at the cost of our own rights and privileges, to advance the cause of Christ! And God is dishonored when we selfishly look towards our own so-called ‘needs’ and force our own agendas on others, even at the cost of the cause of Christ.* And be careful to note: this dishonoring is not just as the world sees us although that is a reality; but this dishonoring is to all of creation since the heavenly beings are observing how we act towards one another. Now for balance: What am I saying, ‘unity at any price?’ No, the NT is clear there are times to discipline and if need be, separate. In the case of the erring brother, discipline is commanded (1 Cor 5). In the case of heresy, separation may be the final result if all other recourses fail. But while not specifically Paul’s point here, even those times when unity is broken without question glorifies God in that He is righteous and rightfully expects obedience from His children. That does not diminish Paul’s point here, only clarifies it.