

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LII : 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

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.

according to God's purpose that runs through the ages

in Whom we have freedom of speech, freedom of access in confidence.

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

“God’s making known his many-splendoured wisdom through the church to the authorities in the heavenly realms was his intention from all eternity, and he has now accomplished this in Christ Jesus. Just as in the eulogy of 1:3-14 God’s choosing men and women in Christ to be his inheritances was in accordance with his eternal plan (1:11), so here also what has been made known through the church to the powers can be traced back to his everlasting purpose.” [O’Brien, 248] “This prepositional phrase indicates that this manifold wisdom of God was not the result of a last minute idea which God had. Israel’s rejection of their Messiah did not make it necessary for God to create hastily a new plan, namely, the church.... Thus, it was in God’s eternal plan for the church to be the means by which angelic leaders learn of this manifold wisdom of God.” [Hoehner, 462f] “Having established that God’s eternal plan was accomplished in the death of Christ Jesus our Lord, Paul proceeds to explain the wonderful privilege enjoyed by believers, namely, free access to their heavenly Father.” [Hoehner, 464] These words should be connected with the whole of the previous clause. [Lincoln, 189]

v 11 — WHILE GOD ACTS DIFFER IN THE DISPENSATIONS, THERE IS ONLY ONE ETERNAL PURPOSE

— **According to the eternal purpose, according to a purpose of the ages** — κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων [kata prothesin tōn aiōnōn] — *literally, ‘according to the purpose of the ages* (YLT, Vincent *Word Studies*, Abbott). “*God’s purpose runs on through the ages. ‘Through the ages one eternal purpose runs.’*” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*] “*A better sense is obtained by taking the genitive as one of possession, ‘the purpose that runs through the ages.’ Cf. Teenyson, ‘through the ages one increasing purpose runs.’*” [Abbott, 89f] “Literally, ‘according to the purpose of the ages’ or ‘world-periods’; but represented with substantial accuracy by the ‘eternal’ of the AV and the other old English versions with exception of Wycliffe and the Rhemish.” [Salmond, *Expositor’s GK Testament*, 308] “The expression πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων [prothesin tōn aiōnōn] is a Hebraism with the genitive ‘purpose of the ages’ functioning as an adjective (cf. 3:21; 1 Tim 1:17).” [O’Brien, 248] **This cannot be a reference to mean ‘foreknowledge.’** [Abbott, 89]

GOD’S PURPOSE FORMED FROM ETERNITY PAST — “*God’s purpose is ‘eternal’, meaning either that it is conceived from all eternity, or that it is directed towards the age to come, or that it is the purpose for which God ordained the unfolding ages of salvation-history.*” [Muddiman, 161] *Most of the writers I have read believes it is a reference to eternity-past, noting the same term is used in 1:11: “What has been made known through the Church is tied to God’s eternal purpose in the same way as the benefits of salvation were traced back to God’s purposes throughout the eulogy of 1:3-14.”* [Lincoln, 189] “Paul now reaches back to a prominent theme in the letter’s opening benedictory prayer — that everything involved in the redemption of his people and the reuniting of creation in Christ, including the revelation of the mystery, happened according to a conscious decision of God prior to the beginning of time (1:5, 9, 11). Here in 3:11 he adds that the revelation of God’s beautifully complex wisdom to the evil powers through the church was also in God’s plan from the beginning.... *A reference to God’s ‘purpose from before the ages’ fits neatly with the predestinarian echoes of the benedictory prayer that are already reverberating in Paul’s use of the phrase κατὰ πρόθεσιν [kata prothesin, according to the purpose; cf. 1:9, 11].*” [Thielman, 217] “[N]o purpose, resolution, or decree can be made by him in time, which was not in his breast from everlasting.” [Gill, 81] “The fair meaning of the passage here is, that God had formed a plan which was ‘eternal’ in reference to the salvation of people; that that plan had reference to the Lord Jesus; and that it was now executed by the gospel. It is impossible to get away from the idea that God has a ‘plan.’ It is too often affirmed in the Scriptures, and is too consonant with our reason to be disputed. It is as ‘undesirable’ as it is impossible to escape from that idea. Who could respect or honor an intelligent being that had no plan, no purpose, no intention, and that did all things by caprice and hap-hazard? If God has any plan, it must be eternal. He has no new schemes; he has no intentions which he did not always have.” [Barnes, *Ephesians on CD*] “In Aristotle *prothesis* (literally, ‘presentation’) is used in rhetoric for the statement of a case. In other classical writers it frequently denotes a deliberate plan or scheme. The plural *aionion* (‘of the ages’; NIV, ‘eternal’) suggests not only the infinite length but also the complexity of God’s age-long purpose (Heb 1:1).” [Wood, *Ephesians on CD*]

IS PAUL REFERRING TO GOD ‘CONCEIVING / FORMING A PURPOSE’ OR ‘ACHIEVING / EXECUTING A PURPOSE’? — **According to the eternal purpose which he purposed** — κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων ἣν ἐποίησεν [kata prothesin tōn aiōnōn hēn epoiēsen] Note the two underlined words are different words in the Greek. There are questions as to how the verb ‘purpose’ (the second underlined ‘purpose’) relates to ‘the eternal purpose’ (the first underlined ‘purpose’). Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary* gives these meanings: ‘to create, make, do, act’ (for you who love Greek, the word is in the indicative mood, aorist tense). It could either mean ‘to conceive a purpose’ or ‘to achieve a purpose.’

‘CONCEIVED, FORMED, MADE A PURPOSE’ — Those who take it to mean ‘conceive’ claims it would be in

line with the eternal origins of the making known of the mystery. The sense would therefore be, ‘the eternal purpose which He formed in Christ Jesus.’

‘Which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ “It is questioned whether [epoiesen] means ‘formed’ or ‘executed’ the purpose. The immediate connexion favours the former view; but it is urged by [some commentators] that what follows belongs to the execution, not the formation of the purpose; and this has been thought also to account for [Jesus] being added, since it was not the formation of the purpose, but its accomplishment that took place in the historical Jesus.... [But the natural meaning of this phrase] is ‘to form a purpose.’ ... The addition of [Jesus] is sufficiently accounted for by this, that the apostle desired to bring to the mind of his readers the thought that He whom they know as Jesus their Lord is none other than the Christ in whom God had from eternity formed His purpose.” [Abbott, 90]

“How carefully does he guard against the objection, that the purpose of God has been changed! A third time, he repeats that the decree was eternal and unchangeable, but must be carried into effect by *Christ Jesus our Lord*, because in him it was made. Thus he declares, that the proper time for publishing this decree belongs to the kingdom of Christ. Literally the words run, ‘according to the eternal purpose.’ But I consider the meaning to be, *which he purposed*; because the present discussion does not relate solely to the execution of the decree, but to the appointment itself, which, though it took place before all ages, was known to God only — till the manifestation of Christ.” [Calvin, Ephesians]

‘TO ACHIEVE A PURPOSE’ — Those believing it means ‘to achieve a purpose’ gives the following reasons:

“The expression used here, (lit.) ‘the eternal purpose which he made’, has been understood by many to refer to the original formation of God’s plan, that is, his decision taken in eternity. However, on contextual grounds it seems preferable to understand it of the accomplishment of God’s purpose (so RSV, NEB, NIV).” [O’Brien, 248]

“But the meaning of achievement or accomplishment seems to suit the context in this passage better, where the making known of the mystery has been described as realized through the existence of the Church, and where what follows will speak of that which has been accomplished in terms of access. The mention of Christ’s lordship suggests the execution of God’s purpose.” [Lincoln, 189]

“The verb is rendered ‘purposed’ by the RV; as it is also taken by many to mean *formed, constituted*.... [There is reason to give] it the sense of fulfilling, carrying out; and the designation Christ Jesus (not Christ simply), pointing as it does to the historical Person, suggests that what is in view now is the *realisation* of the purpose rather than its *formation*. On the whole, therefore, it is perhaps best to render it ‘which He *wrought, or carried into effect*, in Him whom we preach as Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 310]

“The words ἧν ἐποίησεν [hēn epoiēsen] may be rendered either, as by our translators, ‘*which he purposed*,’ or, ‘*which he executed*.’ The latter method is preferred by the majority of commentators, as better suited to the context, and especially to the words ‘*in Christ Jesus our Lord*,’ as the title *Christ Jesus* always refers to the historical Christ, the incarnate Son of God. The purpose of God to make provision for the redemption of men has been fulfilled in the incarnation and death of his Son.” [Hodge, 121]

It is important to realize there is very little difference between these two opinions, and both views are consistent with scripture. Note how the various versions translate this verse; note there is no variance in the Greek texts, each of these translations are using the same Greek words to arrive at their meanings.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized (RSV, ESV)

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed (Tyndale, KJV, RV, ASV)

According to the eternal purpose, which he wrought (Geneva)

According to the eternal purpose which He accomplished (NKJV, NIV)

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out (NASV)

According to a purpose of the ages, which He made (YLT)

in Christ Jesus our Lord — ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν [en Christōi Iēsou tōi kuriōi hēmōn] — According to Lincoln, the construction used here is very unusual (definite article + Christ + Jesus + definite article + Lord + possessive adjective ‘our’), the closest equivalent is Col 2:6 but even in that verse there is no possessive adjective. Literally, ‘in the Christ, in the Messiah, (namely) Jesus our Lord.’ [Alford, 107] [Note that the first definite article is in the texts underlying the newer versions but is wanting in the Received Text.] “Elsewhere in Ephesians when Paul uses the names Christ, Jesus, and Lord in combination with each other and the pronoun ‘our’ (1:3, 17; 5:20; 6:24), he always uses the order ‘our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Here, however, he places the title ‘Christ’ first and uses the article with it as if he wanted to emphasize that ‘Jesus our Lord’ is ‘the Messiah’ (cf. Col. 2:6). **God decided before the world began not only to fulfill his purposes for the universe through his anointed king Jesus but also to make the fulfillment of his purposed through Messiah Jesus known to the inimical spiritual powers of the universe.**” [Thielman, 218; see also Muddiman, 162] “God made his purpose known ‘in Christ Jesus our Lord’,

thus giving his purpose a christological orientation. The threefold title, Christ, Jesus, Lord, is found elsewhere in varying forms in the address (1.2) and final greetings (6.23f), at the beginning of the eulogy (1.3) and the renewal of prayer (1.17), and in the thanksgiving of 5.20. It is thus used at solemn and liturgical moments. Its use here is then deliberate and emphatic.... Significance may however lie in the one point at which the use of the three titles differs from the other instances in that Christ is placed first with the definite article. This could be a deliberate messianic reference, for the divine intention included the history of the people from whom the Messiah came. It is through the Messiah that Jew and Gentile are united in one body and that wisdom is proclaimed even to the powers. Apart from this a strong strand of early christological thought connected Christ with wisdom and understood him in its terms.” [Best. 328f]

v 12 — In whom — ἐν ᾧ [en hōi] — This indicates the grounds for the believers’ confidence of access – it is because of the new situation God has brought about in and through Christ — while the phrase at the end of the verse, ‘through faith in him,’ indicates the means by which believers appropriate the new situation for themselves. [Lincoln, 190] “Thus, as the [‘in whom’] expresses the fact that Christ is the ground of our [‘boldness’] and [‘access’], and the [‘in confidence’] the state of mind in which we enjoy these blessings, so this clause declares the means by which they become our actual possession. The whole verse, moreover, is not so much a simple addition to the preceding statement as rather an indirect appeal to personal experience, in confirmation of what was said of the fulfilment of God’s eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 310]

we have — ἔχομεν [echomen] — present tense, stressing the our continued and current redemption through Christ Jesus

boldness — τὴν παρρησίαν [tēn parrēsian] — This word “was used originally in Classical Greek for ‘freedom of speech,’ the democratic right ‘to say everything’ one wished to say. It also took on connotations of openness and frankness in speech, a virtue that was highly valued in connection with friendship, and of boldness or courage in speech, which could sometimes turn into insolence. In Hellenistic Judaism the term also came to be used in the context of a person’s relationship with God, especially in prayer. In the NT the two main connotations of the term are a similar joyful confidence before God, but now based on Christ’s saving work, and a bold and open proclamation of the gospel. It is the former which is in view here, and it reflects the attitude of those who lack any fear or shame and have nothing to conceal, because they are assured of God’s gracious disposition toward them in Christ.” [Lincoln, 190] “While people may have an inherent or democratic right to address others and express their opinion, it is only through Christ that they gain the right to speak without fear to God. Without Christ they may shout rashly at him and go unheard but with Christ believers may speak boldly knowing that they will be heard.” [Best, 329] “The term παρρησία [parrēsia, boldness] appears to have been used first in political contexts to refer to the freedom of speech granted to citizens of Athens in the public assembly.... *The source of this ‘freedom’ of speech is the intimate and open relationship that the believer has with Christ. Here the thought is similar to 2 Cor 3:4-18. Because they are in Christ, both Jewish and Gentile believers have access to God and may speak freely with him.*” [Thielman, 218f] “Παρρησία [parrēsia], as used in Scripture, is not merely ‘free-spokenness,’ nor yet simple ‘frankness,’ but ‘fearlessness,’ freedom from apprehension of rejection or of evil. It is this Christ has procured for us. Even the vilest may, in Christ, approach the infinitely holy, who is a consuming fire, with fearlessness. Nothing short of an infinite Savior could effect such a redemption.” [Hodge, 122] “The παρρησίαν [parrēsian, ‘boldness’] is not to be limited to freedom of speech, freedom in preaching, or boldness in prayer, but is to be taken in the large sense which it has in Phil. i. 20; 1 Tim. iii. 13; Heb. x. 19; and especially in 1 John ii. 28, iii. 21, iv. 17, v. 15 — *freedom of spirit, cheerful boldness, ‘the joyful mood of those reconciled to God.’*” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 310] “Lit., ‘saying everything one wishes, free speech.’” [Muddiman, 162]

WE ENTER WITH BOLDNESS, NOT BRASHNESS — We must remember to Whom we are speaking: not to a subordinate nor even an equal but to the infinite holy Creator of the Universe. But although we may be mortal and sinful, through Christ we have freedom to (respectfully) say anything that is on our minds! This would include all our praise, worship and requests, but also:

all our doubts and concerns — cp. Habakkuk: *‘Why are you not doing anything? Why does the wicked prosper while those who serve you suffer?’*

all our fears — *‘I am afraid, please support and sustain me. Please protect me.’*

all our hurts — *‘I believe others are mistreating me, misunderstanding me. Help them. Help me respond as Christ!’*

even our own lack of faith — *‘Father, I am in a dark space. I am in a “funk,” paralyzed and depressed. I am not serving or honoring You the way that I should, and honestly right now, I do not care. Help me. Bring me back. Do not let me give up. Please do not give up on me!’*

We do ourselves a great injustice when we hide those thoughts and act as if it were not true. The Lord already knows!! Give Him everything, even our apathy!

access — τὴν προσαγωγήν [tēn prosagōgēn] — “The noun [‘access’] is already used in 2:18 and occurs one other time in the NT (Rom 5:2).... [This word implies] access, freedom of approach. It suggests familiarity without contempt. Whereas [‘boldness’] gives the idea of the freedom of address, [‘access’] has the idea of freedom of approach.” [Hoehner, 466]

‘BOLDNESS TO ENTER?’ — “Believers have access to God; the two nouns [boldness] and [access] have a single article [in the UBS Greek Text; the Received Text has the definite article before each noun – MSM] and probably form a hendiadys, ‘boldness to enter.’ The idea comes in appropriately here because in v. 14 the thought moves on to access to God in prayer.” [Best,

329] Lincoln makes the same observation. [Lincoln, 189] *“The two words ‘boldness’ and ‘access’ appear separately in parallel statements in the New Testament (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; Heb 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35; 1 John 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14). Only here are the two found together, and they are further strengthened by the phrase ‘with confidence’. Since these two nouns are governed by the one definite article ‘the’, they are probably best regarded as forming one idea (a hendiadys), while the phrase ‘with confidence’ qualifies the second noun and strengthens the notion so that the whole expression signifies ‘the boldness of confident access’, or ‘the boldness to enter confidently’. Paul has gone out of his way to make this declaration of assurance as strong as possible for his readers. They need to know that this privileged and certain access to the Father is theirs.”* [O’Brien, 249f]

with confidence — ἐν πεποιθήσει [en pepoithēsei] — *“Believers may enter the door of prayer with confidence (only elsewhere in the NT in Paul, 2 Cor 1.15; 3.4; 8.22; Phil 3.4), sure that they will receive an audience.... The positive reference to confidence is necessary since access of itself does not give confidence; the guilty prisoner is given access to the judge when brought before him but he wishes he was not there for he lacks confidence in the procedure. Christians however approach God without anxiety, not because of clear conscience or past good behaviour, but because of Christ.”* [Best, 329f] *“This access is also characterized by πεποιθήσις (pepoithēsis), a term that appears only here and in the undisputed Pauline letters, where it means ‘confidence’. Paul sometimes uses it to speak of confidence in other people (2 Cor. 1:15; 8:22), sometimes of confidence ‘in the flesh’ (Phil. 3:3-4), and sometimes, when God, through Christ, is the source of one’s strength, of confidence in one’s competence to fulfill the task God has given (2 Cor. 3:4-5). Here in Eph. 3:12, in a way that is reminiscent of 2 Cor. 3:4-5, it is only ‘in him’ [Christ] that believers have ‘confident access’ to God. Because they are ‘in Christ,’ then, both Jewish and Gentile believers have a relationship with God so close that they can speak freely with him. This access is also characterized by confidence that he will hear and welcome what they have to say.”* [Thielman, 219]

DIRECT, CONFIDENT ACCESS TO GOD HIMSELF — *“In Judaism only the high priest could enter the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, and that but briefly once a year on the Day of Atonement. For anyone else to come into God’s presence meant instant death. But now, Paul says, every person who comes to Christ in faith can come before God at any time and with ‘boldness and confident access.’ That is the privilege within the mystery of the church. ‘For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need’ (Heb. 4:15-16). We are not to be flippant or irreverent but are to come to the Lord with an honest, open heart — in freedom of speech and freedom of spirit. ‘Confident access’ is trust that knows no fear of rejection, because we belong to Him.”* [MacArthur, 97f] *“Hence, as the consequence of this accomplished work, we have, in him, ... boldness and access with confidence, — i.e., free and unrestricted access to God, as children to a father. We come with the assurance of being accepted, because our confidence does not rest on our own merit, but on the infinite merit of an infinite Savior. It is in Him we have this liberty. We have this free access to God; we believers; not any particular class, a priesthood among Christians to whom alone access is permitted, but all believers without any priestly intervention, other than that of one great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, — Jesus the Son of God.”* [Hodge, 121]

WE CAN TRUST GOD HEARS EVEN WHEN ‘THE HEAVENS ARE BRASS’ — *“Wicked men seek rest in forgetfulness of God, and are never at ease but when they remove to the greatest possible distance from God. His own children differ from them in this respect, that they ‘have peace with God,’ (Romans 5:1), and approach to him with cheerfulness and delight. We infer, likewise, from this passage, that, in order to call on God in a proper manner, confidence is necessary, and thus becomes the key that opens to us the gate of heaven. Those who doubt and hesitate will never be heard. ‘Let him ask in faith,’ says James, ‘nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.’ (James 1:6,7)”* [Calvin, 258f]

by the faith of him — διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ [dia tēs pisteōs autou] — *This shows the means by which believers can have freedom of speech and freedom of approach before God: it is through faith. This could be understood in two different ways. The first could be a reference to the faithfulness of Christ, ‘we have freedom of speech and freedom of access through the faithfulness of Christ on behalf of His people’ (so Barth, Best, O’Brien). This fits well not only in the context but throughout the NT. Others however consider the faith to be that of the believers, ‘we have freedom of speech and freedom of access through faith in Christ’ (so Lincoln, Moule, Hoehner). Hoehner believes both as acceptable and the decision between the two are difficult but he prefers the latter.* [Hoehner, 466f]

WE APPROACH BEST WHEN CHRIST IS CENTRAL — *“A practical conclusion is drawn from these considerations. The centrality of Christ has a bearing on the devotional life of believers. It is in Christ and on the ground of faith in him that we can enter God’s presence (Eph 2:18) without the inhibitions that might arise from any sort of self-reliance and self-consciousness.”* [Wood, Ephesians on CD] *“It is the discovery of the dignity of his person, confidence in the mercy of his blood, and assurance of his love, all of which are included, more or less consciously, in faiths that enables us joyfully to draw near to God. This is the great question which every sinner needs to have answered — How may I come to God with the assurance of acceptance? The answer given by the apostle and confirmed by the experience of the saints of all ages is, ‘By faith in Jesus Christ.’ It is because men rely on some other means of access, either bringing some worthless bribe in their hands, or trusting to some other mediator, priestly or saintly, that so many fail who seek to enter God’s presence.”* [Hodge, 122]