



# Ephesians

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**...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, Ephesians 3:10**

The words “to the intent” explain the thoughts of verses 8 & 9 concerning the grace given to Paul in relation to the sharing of the gospel to the Gentiles. It also refers to their being gathered together with the Jews to form a single, united, and whole church. It was for this “intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church.”

The word for “manifold” is found only here in the New Testament. It is *polupoikilos*. It comes from two words, *polus*, meaning “much in number,” or “many” (think of the word “poly”); and *poikilos*, meaning “multi-colored,” or “variegated.” It was used in the Greek Old Testament when referring to Joseph’s multi-colored robe.

The intent of this then is that many aspects of God’s wisdom are revealed in the forming of the church. There is wisdom in how it began, there is wisdom in the selection of the people, there is wisdom in how the message is conveyed, etc. Each aspect of the construction of this heavenly temple, made of individual people, displays the wisdom of God in Christ the Lord. It is as if a heavenly tapestry of colors is slowly being formed into a grand and beautiful painting where all the details come into the clearest focus.

It is through this organism that His manifold wisdom is displayed “to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*.” This is now the fourth of five times that Paul has mentioned the *epouraniois*, or “heavenly realms.” Within the sphere of these heavenly realms, there are “principalities and powers.” Which are viewing what goes on in the material creation. But in particular, their attention is directed to God’s working in the redemption of man.

God had selected a group of people from the beginning by which He would reveal Himself to the world. There was one select line of chosen people and all others were left unattended to as far as special revelation is concerned. The principalities and powers in the heavenly realms (certainly this is referring to both good and bad entities as can be seen from many passages of Scripture, but Job 1:6 is sufficient to demonstrate this) viewed what God was doing. They were aware of the writings of the prophets, and knew that God was doing something, but they could not deduce what it was. This is seen for example in 1 Peter 1:12 –

“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.”

In 1 Corinthians 4:9, Paul continues with this thought by saying that he and the other apostles “have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.” The heavenly beings watched the apostles, curiously studying what they were doing in order to see how God’s wisdom would be revealed through them. A heavenly theater has been set to view this worldly spectacle. Now, in this new dispensation known as the church age, the absolute marvel and majesty of the wisdom of God was put on full display.

So the question to be asked is, “What is it about the church that demonstrates this manifold wisdom of God?” The answer is that when all of heaven thought God was doing a single thing through a single group of people, and which would have a very limited effect on humanity, it turned out that what He had done was of unlimited scope in regards to the people of the earth.

The single selected line was set apart unto God while all the other people of the world went about making up their own religions and falling further and further away from God. And yet, through Jesus Christ, all of these who were far away have been brought near through His blood. The fact that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God in exactly the same way is the most astonishing thing of all. None of those in the heavenly realms could ever have guessed it, and yet it was promised in the very writings of God through the Jewish people.

Life application: The Bible gave all the necessary information for those who read it to know what was promised, but it didn’t give the specifics of how it would come about. Only in Christ do the Scriptures make any sense. We should now cherish those words even more. When we see what was once concealed, but now revealed through Christ, we should be more and more astonished at the marvelous workings of God in human history.

**...according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,**  
Ephesians 3:11

The verses of this paragraph are a continuous thought and should be kept in that context. To fully grasp what is said here, uniting it with the previous verse will help –

“...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*,<sup>11</sup> according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The “wisdom of God” is made known to the “principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*” by what is occurring in the building of the church. Paul now states that this “wisdom of God” is “according to the eternal purpose” of God. The idea is that from the eternal state itself, God had a plan to reconcile all things to Himself. That plan is being worked out in the stream of time which He created.

What we see as random and often even chaotic, is completely known to God. It is further not out of control at all. An example of this is Joseph being sold by his brothers. They intended evil, and Joseph certainly did not understand his plight, but God had already figured it into the plan. Each step is a part of “the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jesus is the focal point between the eternal state and what occurs in the stream of time. This is why Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 10 that the Rock which followed Israel was Christ. He has always been there, working out His plan. However, the word for “which He accomplished” carries a sense of ambiguity. It could mean either being “ordained” or being “worked out.”

In other words, Scholars debate whether this is saying that God’s eternal purpose was “ordained” in Christ Jesus or whether it is “being worked out” in Christ Jesus. The latter is probably the true sense. God’s purpose was ordained from the eternal state. However, Christ is the means by which all was created and by which all is being worked out.

This seems the most likely because the word for “purpose” is *prosthesis*. It means “a setting forth.” It is the word used to indicate the show-bread (the consecrated bread) of the temple in Jerusalem, such as in Matthew 12:4. What is occurring is according to God’s presentation of His eternal purpose as if the setting of the showbread; Christ Jesus the Lord (who is God) is the One to work out that purpose within the stream of time.

Life application: There may seem to be random, and even chaotic, events in the world around us, but God has it all under control. Don’t lose heart if the world continues to come against You. God’s plan includes your eternal security if you are in Christ Jesus the Lord.

**... in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.**

Ephesians 3:12

The words in this verse are similar to verse 2:18 –

“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

Paul is bringing the practical application of what has occurred back into focus. In 2:18, he was speaking of the fact that Gentiles, along with Jews, “both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Now he simply says “we.” He has been describing the mystery which defines his apostleship, which is bringing in of the Gentiles to God through the work of Christ. It is the “fellowship of the mystery” that he spoke of in verse 9.

Together, both Jew and Gentile are joined into one fellowship. In this state “we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” The Greek word for “boldness” indicates especially a boldness of speech. This boldness then surely includes several aspects:

Boldness to call on Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, for salvation

Boldness to make our prayers known to God through Him, not fearing that they will be hindered or obstructed in any way

Boldness to speak of the marvelous riches of Christ to others

Boldness to proclaim our salvation, understanding that is an accomplished fact

The second, that of unhindered prayer life, is probably where the stress most fully lies though. This is because of the next words “and access with confidence.” Our prayers are unhindered and there is with them the confidence that we have free and unfettered access, even with a sure confidence, to the throne of grace. This is reflected in the words of Hebrews 4:16 –

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

These marvelous privileges are ours simply “through faith in Him.” By trusting in the finished work of Christ, we may now enter the Most Holy Place where God dwells. And we may do it without any sort of hindrance at all. In Israel of Old, only the high priest, and only once a year, could gain this type of access. However, through the torn body of Christ, which is represented by the torn veil in the temple in Jerusalem, we have full and unfettered access.

Life application: The prayers of God’s people now pass through Christ and immediately into the presence of God. There are no obstructions at all because Christ has opened the way back to full and unfettered access to Him. What was lost in Eden is realized in what Christ has done. Our fellowship is intimate and it is immediate. Let us never assume that our prayers are unheard. Each one is heard because of what Christ has done for us.

## **Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

Ephesians 3:13

Paul now makes a petition for strength. All translations state it as a request for strength for his readers – “I ask that you do not lose heart.” However, the scholar Bengel, says that “the nominative of the finite verb is naturally the subject of the infinitive which follows.” For this reason, he says it should read, “I ask of God that I may not faint.” He is a lone voice in this and it seems to then not agree the words of verse 16 which are yet ahead.

However, if he is speaking of himself, the word “Therefore...” is referring to the “grace of God which was given” to him of verse 2, and which he continues to refer to after that. If he is speaking of his audience, the word “Therefore...” is referring to the mystery which has been revealed to them; that they are now “fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” referred to in verse 6, and which he continues to refer to after that.

It is difficult to be dogmatic about this. Either way, Paul is petitioning for strength so that either he or the Ephesians “do not lose heart.” The word is *ekkakeó*. It is a word which indicates “to be utterly spiritless, to be wearied out, exhausted” (Strong’s). In classical Greek, it also means to be cowardly, but this is probably not the intent here. Rather, Paul is using it in the sense of being “dispirited.”

It is used only six times in the New Testament, once by Jesus in Luke 18:1, and five times by Paul. Whether he is referring to himself or the Ephesians, he notes that the losing of heart is on account of his “tribulations for you.” His work was on behalf of the Gentile people and despite his present imprisonment, this situation could actually continue to be a source of benefit. He then expressly states that this benefit is “for your glory.”

Here, he either means that their not losing heart because of his suffering was for their glory, or that his sufferings were their glory. This, because they actually bolstered his teachings as he was willing to suffer for the very thing that he had proclaimed to them. He had been given a high office in the household of God, and yet he suffered in chains because of it. His ability to suffer in this way, and not lose heart (either him or them), was (or became) a marvelous example to them as well.

Life application: When we see people suffer for the sake of Christ, and yet they remain steadfast in their proclamation of Him, it strengthens us. As this is so, we should then be willing to stand firm in our proclamation of Christ as well, thus giving others this same confidence. Let us not draw back in our time of testing!