

Sermon Title: The Manifold Wisdom Of God  
Scripture Text: Eph. 3:4-13 (Ephesians #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 8-8-21

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We are in Ephesians Chapter 3. This book very conveniently splits into two halves: three chapters that are just *crammed* full of doctrine, and then three chapters that are *crammed* full of practical application from that doctrine.

So in these first two chapters, the Apostle Paul has already summed up an astounding amount of the New Testament information that had been "revealed" through the "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:5; cf. Lk. 11:49; 1 Cor. 12:28), and he has come along as the last—"late edition," if you will (1 Cor. 15:8)—to the circle of the Apostles; and these are the revelations that have come to the people living under the New Covenant, in the first generation thereof.

We saw in Ephesians Chapter 2, Verses 19 and 20—"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted). So Paul is saying the foundation is just about finished now; the era of the Apostles is almost over. He didn't say that right here in this passage, but that's what he was given to say—especially in Second Corinthians Chapter 12.

That last part of Chapter 2—the last 11 or 12 verses—elaborated upon the glorious truth that the Gospel, to use the words Paul used, "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall" (vs. 14) between Jews and Gentiles, and we are all one body in Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

So we lingered there for a while; I wanted to show you that that is the paradigm for the reconciliation of *all* groups because the Gospel is sufficient for that kind of reconciliation. It's not only *sufficient* for that, it is the *only* thing that is sufficient for that; all other attempts to break down the dividing walls of culture and race and bigotry and hostility and generations-long feuds—*only* the Gospel can ultimately solve that.

Well, Paul is now about to launch into one of the most magnificent prayers in all of the Bible. A rather lofty goal—he's going to pray that we are all "filled up to all the fullness of God" (vs. 19). But he thought about writing that prayer, and then—I appreciate him; he's kind of my hero in this category—he interrupted himself, which is who I live my life, and he wrote verses 2 through 13 to give a little background to why he was so joyous about what he was going to pray for us. And in this little section here, he talks about the glories of the "mysteries" of this eternal plan that is being unfolded in Christ, and we're going to see that today. It's probably the largest section of verses that we're going to take in all of Ephesians.

Last time, we read just the first three verses, and then we took a side-trip and we surveyed all 27 uses of the Greek word *mustērion*, which gets transliterated into English as "mystery"; and I showed you that theologically, the Biblical use of "mystery" does not mean that something is baffling or esoteric or unknown or has twists and turns in it (e.g., Ecc. 7:24); it means it was not formerly known to man, but now it has been made known by direct revelation from God (Eph. 3:5).

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Jesus began revealing "mysteries of the kingdom of God" in Matthew Chapter 13, talking about an era in which it was going to be a "mystery" form of the Kingdom—something that had never before been revealed (cf. Lk. 17:20-21). Remember that, and we'll come back to that later on this morning.

So, in this section before us today, Paul gives much insight about himself; and as we look at Paul's view of his own life and his own ministry, we will see principles and applications that are *fully* transferrable to our lives. You're not an Apostle. I'm not an Apostle. We don't have "the signs of a true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Acts 2:43)—the ability to do those things—but we can have the *attitudes* of an Apostle, and we *must*.

And so, let's dive into it. I'll read the first three verses—we read them last time—because we build on it from there. Paul says: "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief" (vss. 1-3).

He has written in brief; he's already written two chapters about it. And the first attitude we've seen about Paul—we saw this last time—he understood God's sovereignty; God is in control. He understood God's goodness; God always uses all circumstances for the "good" of "those who love" Him, "who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). So he reasons: "I'm a prisoner—therefore, I'm a 'prisoner of Christ Jesus'! Yeah, the Jews arrested me; yeah, the Romans took over, and they've taken me to Rome; but I'm 'a prisoner of *Christ Jesus*!' " Everything about him evoked the attitude: "This is what God has for me today." (cf. Phil. 4:11-13)

So just think about what this imprisonment of Paul produced. We have many chapters of the Book of Acts that record him getting to Rome, and what happened in the time that he was there.

But notice what else we have: four New Testament books: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. We have an evangelistic trip to Rome *at government expense*! Paul had been wanting to go to Rome for a long time; he wrote this giant letter to them and he said, "I want to come and I want to minister to you, and then maybe we can partner and maybe I can even get to Spain" (see 1:10-15; 15:24)—we can't verify *for sure* that he ever did, but he intended to go to Rome. He had already done his first missionary trip and his second missionary trip and this third missionary trip, and each one went in a broader and broader circle, but none of them had gotten to Rome. Well, this time, he didn't need to make one single tent (Acts 18:3); he didn't need to ask for one contribution (2 Cor. 1:16); *the government* paid for his trip to Rome! And an eventful trip it was, indeed. Along the way, and after he was there, souls were won to Christ. He talks about there being a more and more bold and broad testimony throughout Rome (Phil. 1:12-14). And then we also see that, in exact fulfillment of what was said about Paul when he was first converted (Rom. 9:15)—along the way, the Gospel was also preached to all the Roman officials who examined him at all the various stages of his trial.

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So now today, we are going to see the remainder of his overview of what he summarizes as "the mystery of Christ" (3:4). About this "mystery of Christ," as we work from Verses 4 through 13, we will see: The Mystery Stated—Verses 4 through 6; The Man Sent—Verses 7 through 9; and The Manifold Sophistication—Verses 10 through 13. Yeah, I stretched for that last word, but the Thesaurus doesn't have an "S" word for "wisdom," so it's "the manifold wisdom of God" (vs. 10); we'll see it all as we get there.

First, he's going to State The Mystery, yet again. Ephesians 3:4—"By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ..." He's saying: "By referring to what I already wrote, plus what you have here in this letter, you can share "my insight into" the never-before-unveiled riches that are ours in Christ Jesus: "Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," he called it in Chapter 1, Verse 3.

And then in the next verse, he gives one of the several New Testament descriptions of the theological significance of the word "mystery." It starts at Verse 4, so I'll read you Verses 4 and 5—"By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit."

That is a "mystery": You *can't* know it—because it's part of the mind of God—unless God reveals it (Deut. 29:29; 1 Cor. 2:11b). It was formerly unknown; He has now revealed it. That is The Mystery.

And by the way: Paul wrote almost identical words to Verses 4 and 5 here, about the mystery era of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of God, over in Romans Chapter 16, Verses 25 and 26; and there's another one over in the Book of Colossians (1:26).

He said God has made this known; and how do you know it? By the writings of the New Testament. He has "revealed" it "to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." The word "holy" means "set apart." God "set apart" and designated this group, through which He gave the further revelation of all of these wonderful blessings that are ours in Christ (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21, NKJV).

Now, when he says "*holy* apostles and prophets," he means "holy" in that sense—"set apart" for that work. No Apostle, no Prophet in the New Testament era, was more holy than *you are*, because in Christ, *all* your sin is forgiven, *all* of His righteousness is "credited" to your account (Rom. 4:5; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). You *are* made holy!

Now, you are *growing* in the practical illustration, the practical demonstration—that's the process of sanctification (Phil. 3:12-14; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18)—but in Christ, you "have been sanctified" (Acts 26:18). That's why, in Chapter 1 Verse 1 of Ephesians, we are *all* called "holy ones"; it's translated "saints," from the Greek word *hagioi*—"the set-apart ones."

We'll study a lot more about the "apostles and prophets" when we get to Chapter 4; we'll deal with that more thoroughly, and you can hold me to that when we get there.

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Verse 6 explains some of the specifics of this "mystery" to which Paul referred: "to be specific"—here is one of the aspects of the "mystery" that is so significant—"that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Now, understand: It is *not* a "mystery" that Gentiles would one day be saved! That is predicted *all through* the Word of God, going back as far as Genesis Chapter 12, Verse 3, that in Abraham "*all* the families of the earth will be blessed"—"*all* the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 26:4; cf. Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8). Gentile salvation is not a mystery (see Is. 49:6).

The "mystery" was that instead of just an alliance of some kind between Jew and Gentile, or just some kind of an agreement to peaceful coexistence between Jew and Gentile, or even some sort of partnership of Jew and Gentile, they mystery is: There is a *total fusion* of Jew and Gentile into *one new spiritual organism!* All the distinctives between Jew and Gentile are *wiped out* in Christ! (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:11)

Now, you still have your DNA; you're still from whatever country you are from; you still have whatever *features* you have—but you *all* come together on the basis of one message, one Gospel (Acts 15:11); and it leads to "one body [of] Christ" (Rom. 12:5).

There's an interesting play on words in Verse 6 that emphasizes that. Sadly, some translations don't capture it; ours does. But there are three words in that verse which have a prefix attached to them which, in English, turns into our word "fellow": We are "fellow heirs"—that means we are equal sharers in the inheritance that is ours in Christ. We are "fellow members" of one "body"—Jews and Gentiles are members of God's Church *in exactly the same way*. It is not two different paths; one message, one result (Acts 11:18; 14:27). And then, we are "fellow partakers of the promise"—that refers to every aspect of the promise of salvation, and all of the promises of our "inheritance" because we are "fellow heirs." And notice that this is all "in Christ Jesus."

Years earlier, Paul wrote it this way, over in Galatians Chapter 3, Verses 28 and 29; speaking of being "in Christ," he says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." Now, is everyone in the Body of Christ a *biological descendant* of Abraham? Well, no. But, *spiritually*, you receive all of the blessings that were promised through the covenant that God made with Abraham—which was expanding upon the promise that He had made of the "seed" of the "woman" who would crush the head of Satan (Gen. 3:15); you all become his spiritual "descendants," his spiritual "heirs" (Rom. 4:11-12, 16; Gal. 3:7-9, 14).

Now, that doesn't mean that there is not a distinction between the Church and Israel; *there is*. We'll be dealing with that later, as well. But there it is again, in something Paul wrote several years before Ephesians—all one, same promises, no distinctions. There is *one Gospel* (Gal. 1:6-9), and it is the same to every person.

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How do you witness to a Jew, as opposed to a Gentile? *There's no difference!* The Gospel is: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried, and...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). That is also the message *perfectly designed* for the needs of the heart of every Hindu, every Buddhist, every Atheist—any other "ist" you can think of! It's one message.

About this Mystery of Christ—there it is, Stated in Verses 4 through 6. Now, how about The Man Sent on behalf of this "mystery"? Chapter 3, Verse 7—"of which"—the antecedent of that is "gospel"—"of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power."

There's a word there that needs a little bit of explanation. It's unfortunate that the word "minister" in our culture has come to be a technical term for paid clergy, the pastors that are supported by the church. It's actually the Greek word *diakonos*; and from that, in English we get, by transliteration, our word "deacon"—and *that* doesn't help us, even a *little bit*, because "deacon" isn't a translation of a Greek word! You just take the letters out of the Greek alphabet, put them in the English alphabet, and you get the word "deacon." What does it actually mean?

Well, the Greek literally means "one who serves." It comes from a verb that means "to do a service, to care for someone's needs"; it actually started out describing a table waiter. So, Paul says, "I wait tables for God. I 'serve' what God has given me."

Now, *you* aren't an Apostle; but what the Apostle Paul says about his attitude is what we all need. Paul did not regard himself as a "*mighty* Apostle"—he regarded himself as a humble *servant* of a mighty *Savior*, and what a difference that is.

I don't know who to credit for this, but it's clever; it stuck in my mind, so I thought I would share it with you: "When it comes to living as a Christian, life is like Tennis: You can't win without serving." We are called to be "deacons," be "*daikon-izing*" the world. Our purpose is to serve everybody we come in contact with. And what's the best way you can serve somebody? Tell them how they can get to Heaven! That's what it means to "minister" to somebody. To have a "ministry" means "to serve people in a way that points them to Christ." Paul saw himself as a "servant" (1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Cor. 6:4)—same attitude that we need to have: a humble servant...oh, but what a glorious Master!

There's another important attitude right there in that same verse. He says "of which gospel I was made a minister according to"—now, how do you go about ministering?—"according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power." Paul recognized that everything he had to offer was by "God's grace"—His unmerited favor (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7)—and by "His power" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10). And if we are going to serve God, it has to be with that very same attitude about whatever the service that you render turns out to be. If you feel like *you* are the key that is making a ministry work, you're on the edge of a great disappointment, because God does not share His "glory" (Is. 42:8; 48:11). We serve *by* His grace, *by* His power, *for* His glory.

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Look further at how Paul viewed himself. Verse 8—"To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ" One reason that Paul was such an effective servant, one reason that he was so unflapped—even by being arrested and dragged across the Mediterranean Sea in chains—is that he understood: He was completely *undeserving*.

I would like you to see just a little bit about how his perspective changed and grew as he underwent spiritual growth. Over in First Corinthians Chapter 15, Paul wrote this; he's been talking about the appearances of the risen Christ, and he came last; First Corinthians 15:9—"For I am *the least of the apostles*, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." So how did Paul feel about Peter, James, John, Andrew, Phillip, all of them? "I'm the *least!* I *persecuted* the Church of God!"

Well, then later, when he was a "prisoner of Christ" (Eph. 3:1; Philem. 1, 9; cf. Phil. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:8-9), he wrote this; I think you've heard this verse fairly recently: Ephesians 3:8—"To me, *the very least of all saints*, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ."

And then after he got out of jail—before he got *back* to jail, before he was martyred—in First Timothy Chapter 1, Verse 15, he writes to Timothy: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, *among whom I am foremost of all.*"

Do you see how that progressed? The more *extensive* his ministry, the *greater* his experience, the *broader* his influence, the *deeper* his understanding—he went from saying, "Well, among the Apostles, I'm the least" to "Among the saints, I'm the bottom drawer" to "Among sinners, I'm Number One." Understand: *That's* what "grow[ing] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" leads you to (2 Pet. 3:18): *not* a false humility, but an *understanding* of "the unfathomable riches of Christ"!

Now look how he wraps up this little spiritual autobiography, in Verse 9. Again, I'll start reading from Verse 8—"To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." What does a servant of Christ do? What does an Apostle do? What does *any believer* do? "Bring to light" what was formerly hidden. Well, what was "formerly hidden" that has been "brought to light"? Everything in "the Scriptures" (Rom. 16:26).

Remember, I showed you last time how the beginning of the Biblical use of the word *mustērion* started with Daniel Chapter 2, where there's this rather spectacular description of how the nations of the world, the empires of the world, are going to unfold, all under the plan of God; and *now*, we've come to the part where, in that picture that was given to King Nebuchadnezzar, that part of the revelation of the mystery—now, we're in another era of that, where Jesus says there is going to be a time in which the Kingdom work is going to go on, on Earth, with the King not present (e.g., Lk. 19:11-13), and now *we are in that!* What a special role the Apostle Paul played in that whole plan!

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So, about this "mystery"—the Mystery is Stated in Verses 4 through 6; The Man who was Sent is described in Verses 7 through 9. And now: The Manifold Sophistication; and from this is where I get the title: "The Manifold Wisdom Of God."

In the next verse, there is something astounding. Ephesians 3:10: He ministers the Gospel, brings these things to light, "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."

Interesting Greek word there, translated "manifold." Now, back in the olden days, before fuel injection, I guess there's still a "manifold" in a car—you know, there's the exhaust manifold; that's where you have a lot of things that spread out from one source, or gather together into one source, and that's how we use the English word. But the Greek word behind this literally means "many-colored"; it's describing something like looking through a prism, and you see all of the breakdown of the details of what we think of as "white light"—it actually has all of these components.

Well, the version of the word that's in Chapter 3, Verse 10—it occurs *only here* in the New Testament—it's that word "many-colored," but it has a prefix on it that means "much" or "many" or "great"; so it means that the "wisdom of God" is being "made known through the church," and it is "very much greatly many-colored." In other words: *You can't put it all into one word! You can't put it all into one description!*

I mean, *just look at this group!* We're only *one group*, gathered in *one place*, on *one Sunday*...and you know what? No two of you look alike! We are *very much* "many-colored," in the sense of the distinctiveness of each aspect of the Body of Christ, each member of the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:18).

The number of the facets of the wisdom of God now being put on display in this era, in drawing all these different kinds of people into one body (Rev. 5:9)—it's just *innumerable!* There aren't words; you have to put prefixes on they *hyper*-words to get to this description! (cf. Rom. 11:33)

Now, all of that is wonderful. But *here's the astounding part*: "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church"—but listen to this: "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." "Rulers and authorities in the heavenly places"—that's two of several words that describe *angels*—angelic beings; so you could include angels and demons, if you would like to (Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15). We're talking about "in the heavenly places" here; I think he's talking about the *holy* angels. And what he's saying—this is *really* astounding: All of us in the Church are, collectively, a display for the angels to study, and then to give God glory for what they see (e.g., Lk. 15:10).

Now, remember: The word "mystery" starts back in Daniel: the unfolding of the plan of God through all of the ages; it culminates now in Christ—oh, and yeah, there's more to come; there's the Rapture, there's the Second Coming, there's the Millennial Kingdom, there's Final Judgment, there's the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (Rev. 21:1)—but it has all built up so far to *this era*.

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Now, *we are* a display for the angels to look at. Think about that! The phrase that I like has been coined long before I came along: We are "trophy of His grace"—it's like God is putting us on the mantle and saying, "Look what I did!" Well, who is He showing off to? It's okay to "show off," by the way, when you're Almighty, Infinite God. Who is He displaying this to? Well, to the angels.

Look over to First Peter. Peter wrote to the same people that Paul wrote to, in the Roman province of Asia; and he adds this little bit of explanation, in First Peter 1, starting at Verse 10—"As to this salvation"—what we have in Christ—"the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you"—so, who's that? All the Old Testament prophets—they "made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow."

Now, here was their conundrum: They read about the Messiah, the Savior; they knew He was coming. He's going to be the King of the *glorious* Kingdom (Zech. 14:9); all the descriptions, especially in the Book of Isaiah, when it seems like the curse on the earth is pretty much reversed, and the "lion" lies down with the "lamb" and the kids play with the "viper" at his "den," in perfect safety (Is. 11:6, 8; cf. 65:25).

But they *also* read Isaiah 53, about a Suffering Servant who would be crucified! Now, they *knew* this was from God; they *knew* this was about the Messiah; but they didn't understand—because they *couldn't* understand, because it was, as yet, an unrevealed mystery—they didn't understand that He was *coming twice*! That is a "mystery" not known before Jesus announced it, and as it is explained further in the New Testament.

Now, here's the part about this being displayed to the angels. Keep reading in First Peter Chapter 1—"It was revealed to them"—to who? To the Old Testament prophets—"that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven..."

The answer to their question was: "I'm not saying. I'm not explaining to you *how* this works out." But they *were* told that there *would* come a time *when* the people of God *would* have that explanation given to them. *That's* "the mysteries of the kingdom"! We live in the "mystery" era of the Kingdom.

And then, notice the very last thing in First Peter 1:12—"things into which angels long to look." There's a very picturesque image there, about "things into which angels long to look." It's like they're stooping down to look in and see.

And not to make too flimsy of an analogy: It's like we are the diorama, and they're looking to see and saying, "Wow! I am *astounded* by that!" There may be some angel today who is nudging his buddy next to him and saying, "Just get a load of that group that's gathered there in Boise, Idaho! *Look what God did!* What a *motley crew* that is! And God *saved* them! And God is *using* them! Wow! All glory to God!"



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Now, it's almost a *duty* for a pastor, every four years—or five, in this case—you *have to* make *one reference* to the Olympics at a time like this. I don't know if you saw last night: Allyson Felix—solid believer; her dad is a seminary professor: Paul Felix; and she has been a believer since she was little; and she finished her career last night by winning her eleventh Olympic medal, which makes her the most medaled track and field athlete in American history—it was her *fifth* Olympics!

And I love how they got the team together—and they did what we always do in the 4 by 400: they just blew everybody away—and so they wanted to interview these four women, and they talked only to Allyson—only to Allyson, no questions to anybody else, she did all of the talking for all of them—she deflected the praise to her teammates, but she just slipped it in: "All glory to God."

*That's the point!* You are saved *for the glory of God!* In our "Provoke the Pastor" series, we're going to talk about what you do when you lack assurance of your salvation. Well, you have to understand: It's *the work of God* (e.g., Rom. 8:16).

But this is something that the angels are *absolutely baffled by!* This is *too wonderful* for them to grasp. None of those who fell among the angels can be redeemed (Heb. 2:16), but they get to see what God does for His glory through us.

Verses 11 and 12 are reminders that the ministry of Christ is based on the sound doctrine which Paul has already been teaching. Chapter 3, Verse 11—"This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord..." That's like him saying, "If you didn't catch it last time, turn back to Chapter 1, Verses 4 through 6: You were chosen 'in Him before the foundation of the world,' He 'predestined' *you* to get to this point of 'adoption' as His 'sons.' "

It's the *eternal* purpose that you're part of. Verse 12—"in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." That's like him saying, "If you didn't catch it last time, turn back to Chapter 2, Verses 17 and 18: Jew and Gentile together come *exactly* the same way—same Gospel 'preached' to 'those who were near' and 'preached' to those who 'were far away.' "

The most important job of the Church is to teach *everything we can* about the eternal plan of God, the eternal purpose of God, His plan being worked out now through the Church to the world (Acts 20:20, 27). Our job is to teach "doctrine" (1 Tim. 6:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 7). How are we ever going to grow and know who we are in Christ, how are we ever going to know how to tell others about it, if we don't study to know what God's purpose is? (Eph. 5:17; 1 Tim. 4:6) No one can be saved without knowing the Gospel and all that it brings by way of forgiveness and eternally-guaranteed promises and inheritance (Rom. 10:14).

So, in light of this marvelous plan of God, which has been unfolding stage after stage since He formed it before the foundation of the world, we should realize: Any price we pay in this era—*it's worth it*. Look at the *majesty* of this plan! It *astounds the angels!* All glory to God! It's all part of His plan! (Rom. 11:36)

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So look how Paul wraps up this little autobiographical section. Verse 13—"Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory."

I showed you how profoundly the believers in Ephesus loved the Apostle Paul with all their hearts. After all, he spent three years there, and during that time—the longest time that he spent in one place—not only was this church founded in the pagan metropolis of Ephesus itself, but all the churches around that region in the Roman province of Asia, all seven of the churches to which the Book of Revelation is addressed, spun off, apparently, from the mother-church in Ephesus; and besides the ones mentioned there, there's also "Colossae" (Col. 1:2), there's also "Hierapolis" (Col. 4:13), and who knows how many other little villages and towns had churches then. And they loved Paul so much; probably many of them went out to those towns while Paul was there.

And then, when he came back and visited them on the way back from his Third Missionary Journey, we saw it in Acts Chapter 20—their tear-jerking affection as they fell on his neck and kept kissing him as they went back toward the ship (vs. 37). And now, he's in jail in Rome, after over a year in jail *before* the life-harrowing journey across the Mediterranean from Caesarea to Rome; and during his "two years" or more in jail in Rome, where we're told that he was allowed to stay "in his own rented quarters" (Acts 28:30), and that he was allowed to entertain visitors—which he did.

It's all but certain that some of those visitors surely came from Ephesus, and they would have reported back; and can you imagine their heartache at seeing their beloved Paul chained? All he could do was talk to whoever came to him, write letters when he could. It would have been easy for them to see that and hear about that, and "lose heart," and so he writes Verse 13—"Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory." It is for the glory of God that the people of God endure *whatever* the plan of God brings to them to spread the Gospel (2 Tim. 2:10).

Earlier, when Paul wrote Romans, he wrote this: Romans 8:18—"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And he *could not possibly* have known then that when he wrote that letter to the church in Rome, it would be through the sufferings of *his own imprisonment* that he would finally get to come and see them. Are we willing to take whatever comes our way? (1 Pet. 2:21; 3:14; 4:12-19)

I read something from a fellow pastor in the last week or so. He was actually referring to John Chapter 9; that's the chapter in which Jesus healed the man who was born blind, and it baffled the Jews, and His responses infuriated the leaders of the Jews. And this pastor made a very insightful comment about that; it applies in John 9, and certainly it applies here as well.

He says: "When teaching this passage"—John 9—"I often ask: Is it okay with you if it takes *your pain* to be the stage upon which God's power is displayed?" Whatever form the suffering may be, how we suffer is one of the *best* platforms from which to proclaim the glorious goodness of our Savior!

Sermon Title: The Manifold Wisdom Of God  
Scripture Text: Eph. 3:4-13 (Ephesians #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 8-8-21

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If we can have the attitude: "Yeah, they threw me in jail—Now, I have a prison ministry! I'm the prisoner of Christ!" You know, that all sounds so theoretical, except—it's happening just north of us in Alberta! It's happening *all around the world!* And what if it gets here? How are we going to do?

Now, Paul gave some wonderful advice to the man that he placed to be the main teacher in the church at Ephesus after he was there, and we would do well to realize: These commands are in full force for us, almost 21 centuries later. Look what Paul wrote to his understudy, Timothy, in First Timothy Chapter 1, Verses 3 and 4—"As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus..." Now, we think of Ephesus as this wonderful, great church from which all these other churches were spun off; well, Jesus was going to rebuke them for losing their "first love" (Rev. 2:4). And before that, why did they lose their "first love"? Well, maybe they got weary of the battle, because *they were attacked* by false teachers! (Acts 20:29-30) So he says, "I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith."

If he was writing it today, he would say: "*Quit talking about COVID*, will you? It's about Christ! *That's* what matters! Don't get into all the 'myths and endless genealogies.' Don't take all the different *opinions* and ride them off to their destinations. Focus on the truth, on sound doctrine!"

What do you mean by "sound doctrine"? Well, he wrote another letter to Timothy—this one when he was *back* in jail again, just before he died. He knew his death was imminent (2 Tim. 4:6). Most people are pretty familiar with Second Timothy 3:16 and 17. You know what it says: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

And then comes, perhaps the single most unfortunate chapter break in all of the Bible. There's no change of subject! Look at the very next words: "I solemnly charge you..." Now, look: When an Apostle says, "I'd like you to do this," *do it*. And if he says, "I *really* want you to do this," *do it*. If he says, "I *solemnly charge you*," and he doesn't even stop there!—"in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom"—I think this is pretty important to him!

What is *the number one thing* that *every single person who ever opens the Bible* needs to do? Here it is: "Preach the word"—what "word"? "All Scripture" which "is inspired by God" and "profitable." "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season..." Now, I've studied New Testament Greek my whole life; I finally figured it out: "in season and out of season" means *all the time*, okay?—popular or not! Do it *all the time!* (e.g., Acts 8:4) That's a clever way to say it. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (4:1-2). You know, none of us get everything on the first pass. "With *great patience* and instruction," over and over and over, from the Word of God (cf. 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Titus 3:2).

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So, here's this little autobiographical portion about Paul. It's legitimate to check our lives, compared to his "example" (Phil. 3:17; cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). We are not Apostles—I get that. But we *all* have ways to serve (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Do you see yourself as an unworthy servant of a *supremely* worthy Master? Do you see your life as a stewardship, a *responsibility* granted to you to take care of what belongs to somebody else? It's *His* Word, it's *His* Gospel, it's *His* Church; we are stewards. Jesus said several times that, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more" (Lk. 12:48).

Do we understand the message of salvation—it's for *everyone*? (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Jn. 3:16) Do our lives and our lips proclaim that message? *When* was the last time that you explained the Gospel to someone? *That's the best way you can serve your King!* "Well, I don't want to offend anybody!" Trust me—they'll be *offended* when they land in "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10, 15)! You don't want that to happen, do you? Are you willing to risk the offense?

Live your life so that the very-much-multi-colored wisdom of God is on display. It comes through us (Phil. 2:15).

And let's pray:

*Our Father, we are so different from each other, but we all share in common our need for a Savior. Thank You for Your goodness to us in Christ, and thank You for the glorious Gospel that we have been entrusted with. Thank You that through the likes of us, You can actually put on display, for Your holy angels, Your grace and Your goodness. Father, You know what is in each of our hearts today. You know how we need to turn away from some things. You know how we can so easily fall into fear. You know how it is so easy for us to become lazy. Whatever the need of each of our hearts is, meet it today. "Reprove" us, "rebuke" us, "exhort" us; oh, and thank You for Your great "patience and instruction."*

*Father, we pray for those in our midst who are hurting—in various stages of recovery, or needing it; for Pete Webb and his injuries; for Mary Webb and her new hip—thank You that that's going well; for Charity Jensen and her slow recovery from this complicated set of surgeries for her injuries—keep her strong, we pray; for our friend Denise Brown, still in the hospital, still battling whatever it is that hasn't yet been defined—bless her and encourage her, and strengthen Rick while he takes care of her; for our friend Jane Guay and her many illnesses—encourage her, strengthen her as well. And we pray for those who are in positions of leadership over us; grant that we might live peaceful and quiet lives in Your sight, in spite of whatever might be done. But how glorious it would be to see an outbreak of the Gospel into those who are in positions of leadership over us! We pray for our brothers and sisters in churches around the world that are so overtly being persecuted, and things burned and property confiscated and people abducted and people murdered, simply for standing for You. Make us strong in Your grace in which we stand today, in Jesus' name. Amen.*