

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for September 16, 2018

God's Wisdom in the Church
Ephesians 3:7-13

I. The calling of Paul (3:7-8a)

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given,

- A gracious call
 - *7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace,*
 - Paul mentions the gospel as the message to which he was bound
 - The power of this gospel explained the mystery in verse 6
 - Ephesians 3:6 “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”
 - The gospel message that unifies is the gospel message that he constantly served and spread to all peoples
 - “Minister” = *diakonos* or servant
 - 1 Corinthians 3:5 “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.”
 - Paul was made a minister by the gift of God's grace
 - 1 Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”
 - Paul went from murderer to minister and that truly was the grace of God
- A powerful call
 - The power of God's call began on the Damascus Road
 - The power of God's call continued throughout Paul's ministry
 - Colossians 1:29 “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”
 - 2 Corinthians 12:9 “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”
 - God's grace and power guaranteed that Paul would be able to carry out the task

- “God does not give responsibility without the provision of his power to carry it out. In the end God is to be praised, for humans can neither initiate nor accomplish the work in their own power.”¹
 - A shocking call
 - Verse 8a is a parenthetical statement
 - “We can see how strongly Paul feels this unworthiness by the fact that he takes a superlative adjective, “least,” and adds to it a comparative form—literally, “more least” (Greek, elachistoterō, rendered in the NIV as “less than the least”).”²
 - The literal translation into English would be “leaster”
 - Paul viewed himself as the foremost of sinners
 - 1 Timothy 1:15-16 “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”
 - Paul remembered his previous life of persecuting the church
 - 1 Corinthians 15:9 “For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

II. The charge for Paul (3:8b-9)

to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,

- Paul’s charge was twofold from the Lord
- Charged to preach
 - Since Paul met Christ, Paul’s charge as an apostle was to preach Christ
 - This surely included evangelistic preaching of salvation in Christ alone
 - This also included preaching the “unsearchable riches of Christ”
 - The word “unsearchable” is a unique word
 - “Paul modifies it with the adjective ‘incomprehensible’ (ἀνεξιχνίαστον)—a word that nowhere appears outside of biblical Greek. It is built on the word ‘footprint’ (ἵχνιον). The verbal form (ἐξιχνεύω or ἐξιχνιάζω) was used literally in Greek literature for a tracker, that is, someone who pursues another by tracing their footprints.”³

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 451.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 87.

³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 194.

- The idea is preaching the riches of Christ that are unable to be traced or comprehended
 - “In other words, it is beyond man’s ability to investigate; thus it is translated ‘unfathomable.’ Origen and Jerome suggest that the reason that Paul is able to preach that which is unfathomable is because it was revealed by God and can now be perceived by the people.”⁴
 - “The image, then, is that Christ represents an enormous expanse of riches that extends far beyond the horizon.”⁵
 - Colossians 2:3 “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
 - Colossians 2:9 “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,”
 - Romans 11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”
- Charged to reveal
 - *and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,*
 - Paul was charged to preach the gospel and explain its place in God’s plan
 - “Paul does not wish only to present the gospel; he wants people to realize the grace and mercy that lie behind it.”⁶
 - *the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,*
 - God’s plan to unfold and disclose this mystery was established since creation
 - Hebrews 9:26 “But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”
 - Such a planned message would show the prominence of the church, now
 - This was not an afterthought by God
 - The Gentiles would rejoice at this wonderful message
 - The Gentiles would also need to get into the action themselves
 - The Jews would need to accept this plan of God
 - The Jews would also need to rejoice and welcome the Gentiles into the church, the new humanity in Christ

⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 454.

⁵ S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Wayne H. House, Hall W. Harris III, and Andrew W. Pitts, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 239.

⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, *Osborne New Testament Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 88.

III. The cosmic impact of the church (3:10-12)

10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

- The church is known to have many purposes
 - Worship of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)
 - Love for one another (John 13:34-35)
 - Compassion for the lost (1 Corinthians 6:11)
 - Saints/Holy ones (1 Peter 1:16)
 - Pillar of truth (1 Timothy 3:15)
 - Body of Christ (Ephesians 1)
 - Household of God (Ephesians 2)
 - Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5)
- The purpose of the church stated by Paul in verse 10 is not as well known
- Paul says that the church is the display of God's manifold wisdom
 - The church is the perfect illustration of God's wisdom
 - The world suffers from its own chaos and not knowing how to fix it
 - The church stands God's wise answer to restore all of humanity
 - The mystery that Paul preached was one of unity for all mankind when they found peace with God through the blood of Jesus on the cross
 - Thus, the church can and should be that display of God's wisdom for the world to see how hope, peace, and eternal life can be secured in Christ alone
- The church is not simply a generic display of wisdom for the world
- The church is the display of God's wisdom for "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places"
 - Here Paul is referring to angels
 - He is referring to all angels—the good and the bad
 - The good angels are completely amazed at the display of God's wisdom now revealed in the church
 - For the longest time they had watched and waited from the heavenly places, wondering how God would actually fix things on earth
 - They watched the Fall, the Flood, the Dispersion at Babel, the many shortcomings of Israel
 - Then Christ came onto the scene and perhaps they thought, "This is where it finally turns around"
 - And it does turn around, just not in the way that they or others had expected

- Christ, rather than setting up His physical Kingdom to rule over Israel, Rome, and the world, came to earth to die and to offer forgiveness of sins for mankind
- While this must have been puzzling for the angels, the birth and formation of the early church caught their attention
- They saw Jewish people repenting and receiving the Holy Spirit
- They saw Gentile people also repenting and receiving the Holy Spirit
- They saw churches formed all around the Mediterranean that contained Jewish and Gentile members
- They saw a unity of mankind in the church that was impossible to explain apart from the wisdom of God
 - 1 Peter 1:12 “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”
- However, we did mention bad angels or demons too
 - Ephesians 6:12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”
- What the demonic forces thought they may have accomplished in seeing Christ crucified on the cross was simply an act that perfectly aligned with God’s sovereign plan
- Even the rebellious angels could not stop God’s wise plan as it unfolded in the church
- Now, the very presence of the church stands as a constant testimony and witness to the manifold wisdom of God
- The church truly does have a cosmic impact
- Valley Bible Church has a cosmic impact in representing the wisdom of God
- To magnify the wisdom of God, Paul further states that this plan was His eternal purpose in Christ
 - *11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,*
 - The church was no afterthought to the failings of Israel
 - God has always utilized the shortcomings and sinful rebellions of mankind to serve His greater glory and purposes
 - The church is a glorious testimony to His wisdom because He had it planned all along
 - Christ knew that His work on earth would offer salvation for all mankind

- Christ knew that His work on earth would unify all kinds of people through the cross
- Christ knew that His work on earth would all for a glorious display of God’s wisdom in the church
- Finally, Paul does not just state that God’s wisdom is seen in the church
- Paul specifies the proof of God’s wisdom in the church through the restored relationship and access the church has to God’s presence
 - *12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.*
 - Again, can you imagine the regular experience of the angels in the heavenly places?
 - They are not used to anyone having access to the glorious presence of God except God Himself, in His Son, Jesus Christ
 - God’s wisdom in Christ has restored the relationship between God and man
 - The way in which Adam and Eve could have bold and confident access to God before the Fall, is now represented in the bold and confident access that we as believers in the church have with God
 - Through faith in Christ, anyone can have this access to God
 - Hebrews 10:19-22 “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

IV. The concern of the Ephesians (3:13)

13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

- Finally Paul addresses this concern of the Ephesian church
- They were concerned for Paul and the state of the church since their leader is in jail
- Paul simply tells them “not to lose heart”
- One reason the Ephesians should not lose heart is based upon what he just said in verse 12
 - Paul said that in Christ, *“we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.”*
 - The Ephesians had access to God no matter the condition of Paul
 - Paul could be in a different city being persecuted or thrown in jail and that did not affect the truth that the Ephesian church still had access to God through their faith in Christ

- Paul tells them not to worry because they don't need Paul in order to maintain their relationship with God
- The second reason the Ephesians should not lose heart is because of their glory
 - Paul gladly suffered for the sake of the churches because he believed in the cause
 - Paul believed in the true glory that awaited every believer in Jesus Christ
 - Paul would suffer anything so that eternal glory might be had by those who believe the gospel message
 - 2 Timothy 2:10 "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."
 - Since the glory was expected for all Christians in the early church, Paul also believed that this glory was in store for him
 - Romans 8:18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."
 - 2 Corinthians 4:17 "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,"