

# **EPHESIANS**

## **THE MYSTERY OF GOD REVEALED**

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### **The Mystery Of God Revealed**

#### **Introduction:**

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#### **Author and Recipients:**

There is not doubt that Paul was the author of the book of Ephesians. There has been some discussion as to whether it was originally intended for the Ephesians only or for the Colossians only or was intended to be a circular letter for these churches as well as possibly others. There are early manuscripts that leave a blank space where the address to the "church at Ephesus" is included in our book, suggesting that it was originally circular in intent. Whether it was therefore intended only as a letter to the Ephesians or for other churches, we will leave to those who are more scholarly in temperament. For our study we will conclude it was written to the Ephesians but the true intent of the Holy Spirit was for all believers of all ages to study and profit from it.

#### **Theme and Purpose of Writing:**

Most scholars believe the book was written while Paul was in his second imprisonment at Rome which was likely around 61 to 65 AD. While there is no internal evidence to give a certain time of writing, there are obvious references to Paul being a prisoner for the sake of preaching Christ.

Unlike some of his other letters, Paul does not seem to be writing to deal with a specific problem at Ephesus. Also unlike his other letters, there is a dearth of personal references to his many friends and former companions at Ephesus. This has caused some to doubt the authorship of Paul. This alone, while unique in his writing, is not sufficient evidence to discount Paul as the author.

The theme of Paul in this letter is to reveal the mystery of God which has been hidden from ages past. Peter tells us the prophets of old had longed

to understand the things of which they had written but could not (1 Pet.1:10-12). It is obvious to the reader that the religious leaders during the life of Jesus failed to understand the plan of God also. This burden is compounded by the Jewish people being God's chosen ones. Since Jesus (the promised Messiah) came thru the line of Abraham, Judah and David, and since the Jews had been God's chosen people since Abraham, it was obvious to any Jew of New Testament time that the followers of the Messiah must be Jews also.

For some time after the church was established in Acts 2, all followers of Christ were Jews and considered their new religion and new faith in Christ as an extension and fulfillment of their Jewish faith and heritage.

After the gospel was preached to the Gentiles and they were accepted into the fellowship of other believers, it continued to be a problem for both. Many of the Jewish Christians had difficulty accepting the Gentiles if they maintained their Greek cultures and when they failed to keep the basics of Judaism, such as circumcision and certain feasts days. For the Gentile Christians this was a problem because those who knew most of Christ did not fully accept them and thus created doubt as to the certainty of their salvation. Paul, while not dealing with this problem directly, answers all of these questions by establishing the oneness that is created and maintained in Jesus Christ as he addresses the Ephesians in this letter.

### **Outline of Ephesians:**

The book is divided into two sections.

<b>Chapters 1-3</b>	What God has done for mankind
<b>Chapters 4-6</b>	Practical applications because of what God has done (for the church and then for individuals)

We will divide each of these sections below.

#### **Chapters 1-3      What God has done for mankind**

<b>Chapter 1</b>	God's purpose for man revealed
<b>1:1-2</b>	Greetings by Paul
<b>1:3-14</b>	Praise to God for his eternal purpose of redemption
<b>1:15-23</b>	Paul's thanksgiving prayer for the Ephesians

<b>Chapter 2</b>	The Ephesians' salvation from sin
<b>2:1-3</b>	Their lost condition before Christ

**2:4-10** God's saving grace in Christ  
**2:11-22** The extension of God's grace to the Gentiles

**Chapter 3** Paul's ministry to the Gentiles  
**3:1-13** Paul – God's minister to the Gentiles – to reveal the mystery of God that had been hidden in the past  
**3:14-21** Paul's prayer for the spiritual assurance of the Ephesians

**Chapters 4-6** **Practical applications because of what God has done**

**4:1-16** Oneness (unity) and growth of the church – applications for the church as a unit  
**4:17-24** Individual commitment and purity  
**4:25-5:21** Specific sins and specific opposite Godly traits

**Chapters 5:22-6:9** Family (household) instructions  
**5:22-23** Husband and wife relationships  
**6:1-4** Parent and child relationships  
**6:5-9** Master and slave relationships

**Chapter 6:10-20** Our spiritual war

**Chapter 6:21-24** Paul's personal notes in closing

We will divide this study into the following 6 lessons:

Lesson 1 1:1-23  
Lesson 2 2:1-22  
Lesson 3 3:1-21  
Lesson 4 4:1-5:21  
Lesson 5 5:22-6:9  
Lesson 6 6:10-24

While a lot of different subjects will be covered in this study, there are a few that need to be noted. We will not be able to fully explain these but will attempt to understand them the best we can so that we can properly

apply the things taught in this book. As we will see, these are interrelated and complement each other.

The mystery of God – what it is and how it is revealed today

The church

The heavenlies (heavenly places)

The relationship and work of God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

God's grace

**Method of study:**

We will offer comments on each section (or sub-section) and then have questions on that section. Some of the questions will be simple “fill in the blank” type, others will be thought questions. As you consider the things being studied, try not to rely on what you have learned in the past or on what some commentator says (even my comments) but rather rely on what the scripture says. In this way, your knowledge and in turn your faith will be your own. It is the goal of this study that each of us will come away with a more secure relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ and that God be glorified in all we do.

**Lesson 1**  
**Ephesians 1:1-23**

**1:1-2**

Paul was called to be an apostle by the Lord. When he was converted to Christ, he was told that he would be sent to preach to the Gentiles. He probably did not realize for some time just what that meant but now he has spent many years ministering to them. Paul never forgot that he was a Jew and that the gospel came through the Jewish nation, so he always went into the synagogue first and gave the Jewish community opportunity to know Christ.

Even though his letter to the Ephesians seems to be the most impersonal of all his letters, he was probably as well (if not better) acquainted with this group of saints than he was with any to which he wrote. When we read (Acts 18-20) of his work at Ephesus, this seems strange. He was responsible for planting the church in that city and had worked with them for more than two years. He had been so effective in his work that Demetrius, the silversmith

of Diana the goddess, was afraid he and the other craftsmen would go out of business. It was because of this that a riot was started against Paul and the other Christians and Paul was forced to leave Ephesus. Paul was passionate toward the Ephesians and their spiritual welfare and it shows in this letter.

While the terms “grace” and “peace” are common in the greetings of Paul’s letters, we need to not lose sight of their significance. As we will see, he never uses the term “grace” without a great deal of meaning. He is invoking the blessings and good will of God on the readers. From his Jewish background, he also wishes them the peace of God that only those in Christ can know.

### **1:3-14**

As we read through this section, we are impressed with one thought above all others. It is that everything is according to the will of God, from the mind of God, thru the work of God and for the purpose of His glory. The agent through which God does all of this is His Son, Jesus Christ. In these verses alone there are 21 references (may vary – depending on the translation) to God and Christ. We read over and over “in Him”, “thru Him”, “in God”, “in Christ” and variations of these. This study then is about God and about Jesus Christ and all of the glory is His.

The story begins before creation and the start of time as we know it today. God knew that He would make man and that man would rebel against Him. He also knew that man would never be able to restore the fellowship that He had planned between them. Therefore, God predetermined that He would devise a way in which man could be forgiven.

These verses teach that God has predestined the saved for salvation, even before birth. One view is that God has simply decided which individuals would be saved and that is it. If I happen to be one of those saved, there is nothing I can ever do that will change that decision by God. I will come to faith and I will be saved. If, on the other hand, I am not one of those chosen for salvation, I will never be able to come to a saving faith and I will be lost. This in essence takes away the free moral agency of mankind. We become mere puppets with no free will. In light of other passages of scripture, I cannot accept this view of predestination.

Another view of predestination is that God has chosen those who will later choose Him. They in turn come to faith and choose to serve God because He has chosen them. In keeping with this idea is that God loves us first. He does not love us because we love Him but rather He loves because He is love. God, in His infinite wisdom and because of His wonderful grace,

is able to know who will choose Him. He does not cause us to make the decision to serve Him or not serve Him; He just has that knowledge. Thus, this does not argue that God causes (by His decision or predestination) anyone to be lost or to be unable to come to saving faith. While God has the ability to foreknow, this is not really predestination. Therefore, it seems that there must be another explanation for this subject.

A third view (the one I believe to be most credible) of the subject is that God has predetermined that those who accept his Son by faith will have their sins forgiven. Those who continue to serve him faithfully will continue to have their sins forgiven. Thus, by class and not on an individual basis, God has predestined those who are saved and those who are lost.

Since God is infinite in His wisdom and we must struggle to attempt to know His mind, we may never in this life be able to fully explain some of these things. There is no doubt that Paul teaches (by inspiration) that the children of God have been predestined to salvation by our loving Father. We are to receive great assurance and consolation from this. We are not children of God by accident – it is only because of His choosing.

Verse 3 introduces this section by giving praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He then says that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessing in Christ, in the heavenly places (or heavenlies). Spiritual blessings are all things that have eternal benefit to us. However, it is not only things that are in heaven after this life. The wonderful fellowship we share with other believers is a spiritual blessing. The joy we have in serving God is a spiritual blessing as well as the peace we have in Him. Our lives are filled with all kinds of spiritual blessings today, yet all of these are only preparing us for eternity with God and our Lord Christ Jesus in heaven.

But he tells us that these blessings are ours in the heavenly places. While some have identified this as heaven that really doesn't fit the context. Some have said that this refers to the church as we know it here on earth. So, what are the heavenly places to which Paul refers? To be able to understand this phrase we need to also look at 1:20, 2:6, 3:10 and 6:12.

**1:3:** All spiritual blessings are in Christ in the heavenly places.

**1:20:** God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places.

**2:6:** When we are saved, we are raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places.

**3:10:** The manifold wisdom of God is made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

**6:12:** Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but is against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Now, before we answer this question, we will raise another. What is the church? Too many have an institutional view of the church. It is often taught that there are three great God-given institutions. There is marriage, the church and government. The concept of an institution is an entity that exists separate from the people that make it up. We form a corporation and it has the traits and responsibilities of an individual. Even if all the founders die, the corporation continues. In fact, it is formed to separate it from the individuals who make it up. We will deal with marriage later. The church is referred to as the body of Christ (1:22-23), as the fellow-citizens with the saints (2:19), God's household (2:19) and the building or temple of God (2:20-22). All of these are used to denote the relationship that we as believers have with God and with Jesus Christ. The church is therefore used in more than one way. There are times that it refers to a local group or assembly or congregation of people that work and worship together but whose bond is their common devotion to Christ. There are times that the church refers to those of several such fellowships (the churches of Galatia Gal. 1:2).

There are also times that the term refers to all of those who belong to God. Those who are alive, those who from the past have physically died and those who are yet to come in the mind of God that will serve Him are all a part of His church. In this sense the church is the forerunner and a foretaste of heaven itself on this earth. It is in this sense that the spiritual battles take place as we understand that our bodies live here but we are a part of that heavenly place. It is here that the wisdom of God through the church is shown to the forces of wickedness (Satan and his servants). It is here that Christ is seated at the right hand of God and we are raised and seated next to Him. It is here that we have all spiritual blessings in Christ. It is this sense that the heavenly places can be equated with the true location of the church.

In establishing the assurance that we are to have in Christ, Paul uses several words and phrases. He says we are chosen by God; he has adopted us as His children; he has redeemed us and forgiven us. We have been given an inheritance and have been sealed with the surety of the Holy Spirit. All of this is said to be given and done for us in Christ and through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The revelation of this predetermined plan of God is made known to us through the gospel. It is a demonstration of God's grace and must be accepted by faith on our part. (Romans 1:16-17)

## **1:15-23**

In these verses Paul is offering a prayer of thanksgiving for his friends at Ephesus. He also prays for them in some very specific ways. His thanksgiving is because of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for one another. He then prays for their knowledge of God to increase. The knowledge for which he prays is not just an academic knowledge but a personal knowledge from experience. To know God is more than knowing about Him. He also prays for their wisdom in understanding how to live as the children of God. It is from this knowledge that their hope that sustains them in trials is derived. As we come to know God, we realize in a limited way, the power that God has for us. We become a channel for God to use His power on this earth.

He then tells us that this power is because of the work of God through His Son, Jesus. God has raised him from the dead and because of this we can have the hope of the resurrection for ourselves. But not only has God raised Jesus from the grave but has exalted him above all things. Jesus Himself tells us that all power has been given to him in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). Paul assures us that Jesus has this authority and particularly has been put over the church as its head. Just as the physical head directs the physical body to which it is attached, so Jesus gives direction to the church, his body. There has been some discussion concerning the phrase “the fullness of Him” in verse 23. It seems from the context that this refers to the church being the fullness of Christ. While it is He who makes us complete, it is also the church that makes Christ complete. It is His bride and thus complements Him in his headship. Without the church under Him, He is not all that God intends Him to be; that is, the head of the body, the church.

### **Questions**

#### **1:1-23**

1. Who is the author of the book of Ephesians?
2. What is the source of all of our spiritual blessings?
3. These spiritual blessings are said to be in \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What does it mean to be in Christ?
5. What or where are the heavenly places (heavenlies)?

6. Explain how God chose us before the foundation of the world.
7. For what purpose have we been chosen?
8. What are the rights and privileges of an adopted child compared to one that is natural born?
9. We read in other passages that we are born into God's family. Here we are told that we are adopted. How do we reconcile this?
10. What is the good pleasure (kind intention) of God's will in verse 5?
11. How does our being adopted by God praise the glory of His grace?
12. What is the source (basis) of our redemption?
13. What (if anything) is the difference between forgiveness and redemption?
14. Does God grudgingly forgive us?
15. Can we "squeak by" into heaven?
16. What is the fullness of times mentioned in vs. 10?
17. Who are those that are all made one (summed up) in Christ, in heaven and on earth?
18. What is the inheritance we have in Christ?
19. What is the significance of all things working according to the will (counsel) of God? What does that mean to us?
20. What is God's means for revealing His saving grace to us?
21. What two things does Paul say we must do with the gospel for it to be effective to us?

22. What is the seal or pledge (assurance given – down payment – deposit) that we have to affirm that we belong to God?
23. This pledge is to assure us of what promise?
24. When and how do we receive the Holy Spirit?
25. What are three things that Paul tells us (vs.3-14) that lead us to praise the glory of God?
26. Paul gave thanks for what two things that he had heard about the Ephesians?
27. Should we pray for fellow Christians?      If so, why and what?
28. Paul prayed that God would give them a spirit of what?
29. What eyes does Paul pray be enlightened?
30. What three things does he pray that they would know?
31. What was the power that raised Jesus from the dead?
32. Where is Christ now?
33. Of what is Christ said to be the head?

**Ephesians 2:1-22**  
**The Ephesians' Salvation From Sin**

**2:1-3**

Prior to coming to a knowledge of Christ the Ephesians were dead in their trespasses and sins. They, like their pagan neighbors had been worshiping idols and living in debauchery. They were under the control of Satan, the prince of the power of the air. Too often today we think we can ignore God and His will, living for ourselves but still somehow belong to Him. The truth is that we either belong to God or Satan. We either are servants of sin or servants of righteousness (Romans 6). Jesus was told by

Satan to bow down and worship him and He would be given all the kingdoms of the world. Satan claimed that he had the power to give them and it is worthy of note that Jesus did not argue that point.

Paul then recognizes the universality of sin by saying that at one time we all were in the same condition as they, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind. We were all by nature children of wrath. Some have taken this later phrase to imply that we are born as sinners (inherited guilt). While it is a fact that we all are prone to sin, this phrase seems rather to state that as sinners (our own guilt) we are under the judgment wrath of God.

## **2:4-10**

One of the key words in the English language is the word “but”. While we were following our own desires, God had a plan for something else. **But God**, being rich in mercy, considered our plight and provided a way for us to be forgiven. God is merciful and does not want any to perish but all to come to repentance. God is love. It is His great love that prompted His mercy. Notice also, that it was while we were still in our sins that He loved us. And even then, it is described as His great love.

While we were dead in trespasses and sins, He loved us and through Christ made us alive again. Just as Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification, so we must die to sin and be raised up as a new creation to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6). Not only has he made us alive and raised us up with Christ but has seated us with Him in the heavenly places. This denotes a complete fellowship with Christ who is at the right hand of God. He does this to show the surpassing riches of His grace toward us. The idea of grace is that we receive something we don’t deserve. Not only do we not deserve it but we can’t earn it on our own. This grace is given because of the kindness of God toward us. But notice the superlatives that Paul employs. It is not only the riches of His grace but the surpassing riches of His grace. It is beyond our ability to truly understand this part of God’s nature.

God does this in a way that we can never boast of our own works or our own goodness. God extends His grace to us freely, as a gift. He only asks that we accept it by faith. It is therefore by faith that we are saved. This faith is described by Paul to the Romans as faith that is willing to totally submit to the will of God in obedience, trusting Him with our all (Rom 6:17).

Faith is illustrated in our lives when we are told by a doctor that we need to have a dangerous surgery. He then gives us a list of things we must do and not do before and after the surgery. We lie down and under his leadership allow someone to put us to sleep, knowing that he is going to cut

us open to repair our body. We do this, knowing all the while that we may never wake up. Why are we willing to do this? It is because we trust the doctor, that is, we have faith in him, his knowledge, his skill and his leadership. So it is with saving faith in God. We quietly submit our will to His and allow Him to have control over our life and our eternal destiny.

Paul then states that we are created in Christ so that we can become a new person. We are God's workmanship so that we can carry out His will. It is not the good works that save us but we do them because we are saved. As a new creation in Jesus Christ it is now our desire to do only the will of God and to please Him in every way.

### **Questions** **2:1-10**

1. How does Paul describe the Ephesians before they came to know Christ?
2. Who was their ruler (or leader) at that time?
3. What spirit had they been following?
4. How can we serve Satan today?
5. The result of this kind of life (following our own desires) is described as what?
6. What attribute of God motivated His willingness to save us?
7. God is said to be rich in what?
8. Because of His rich mercy and His great love God saves us by \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Is there a difference between the love of God, His mercy and His grace?  
Explain your answer.
10. What does it mean to be raised up with Christ?
11. How does your answer apply to being seated with Christ in the heavenly places?
12. What are the coming ages that he refers to?

13. We are said to be saved by grace through \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Why did God choose to save us by grace instead of by works?
15. We are God's \_\_\_\_\_.
16. What does it mean to be created in Christ Jesus?
17. If we are not saved by works, why have we been created to do good works?
18. How can we know if something is a good work that God prepared for us to do?

## **2:11-22**

From the time of Abraham, it was the law of God that His chosen ones would circumcise their young boys. This was a symbol of the covenant between God and his children. When the gospel was given to the Gentiles, the question was raised concerning circumcision for all believers. It was determined by the Apostles and the elders in the church at Jerusalem that circumcision was a Jewish rite and did not have application for the Gentile converts. This decree was given, not because of personal feelings or wishes but because God's plan of salvation is based on grace by faith and not on the basis of works of righteousness. While this decision should have settled the matter, this issue was the source of contention for many years to come.

There were those of Jewish background who insisted that it must be practiced and even refused to associate with any believer who did not agree with them and practice it. Paul, therefore, in his writing refers to the "circumcision" and means by that term, those who were of Jewish background and who insisted that circumcision must be practiced. The Gentiles were referred to as the "uncircumcision". He specifically states that he is talking about physical circumcision at this point.

He reminds the Ephesians that as Gentiles they had been outside the covenant relationship with God. They were not citizens of [physical – national] Israel. Without these they were without hope and without God in the world. They had their gods (remember that Ephesus was the city of Diana) but they did not know God. As Gentiles who believed in God, they still could not come near the inner portion of the temple.

The good news is that in Christ this has all changed. They once were far off from God but now have been brought near to Him through the blood of Jesus. They once were enemies of God but now have peace with Him because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

The law given to the Jewish people stood as a barrier between the Gentiles and God. This barrier was taken away by the death of Jesus. He had kept the law perfectly and offered that perfect life as a sacrifice to God. It was through and because of this sacrifice that the Jewish people who had been given the law but failed to keep it could be reconciled to God. It was this same sacrifice that afforded the Gentiles access into fellowship with God. Thus, this sacrifice made the two into one fellowship with God. What had previously been a barrier had been taken away. This is why we do not even attempt to keep the Law of Moses today. It was given to the Jews for a period of time and has now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is through this one person, Jesus and His one sacrifice on the cross that we all can have access to the Father by the one [Holy] Spirit.

Because of this, these Gentile Christians (that includes us) are no longer foreigners and aliens but rather members of God's household. This figure is one of many used to describe our relationship with God. As His household we are under His direction but also under His protection.

He then changes figures to use that of the temple. The temple signified the dwelling place of God. We (the church – God's chosen ones) are that temple, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone in that foundation. The implication is that we must depend on their teaching as given to them by God for what we do in our service to God. This is a spiritual dwelling and not a physical building.

In Christ this whole building (spiritual dwelling) is joined together. We should not overlook the importance of unity among believers as it is once again introduced in the text. While we expend so much effort to divide ourselves, God has joined us together. Perhaps the admonition of Jesus would be appropriate; what God has joined together, let no man separate. We are to be the temple of God and He lives in us through His Holy Spirit. What kind of dwelling do we offer Him?

**Questions**  
**2:11-22**

1. Who were the Gentiles?
2. What was the significance of circumcision to the Jew?
3. What advantage to the Jew (and disadvantage to the Gentile) is described in verse 12?
4. What does Paul mean by “far away” in verse 13?
5. What is meant by being “brought near”?
6. What is the basis of being brought near?
7. Explain what is meant by two being made one. What are the two and what is the one?
8. How can God’s law be described as hostility?
9. How did the cross end the hostility and bring together all men?
10. What is the peace that is discussed in these verses?
11. All who come to God have access through one \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Give three figures of speech used in verses 19-22 to describe God’s people.
13. What is unique and significant to each of these figures of speech?
14. God is said to dwell in His temple by what means?

**3:1-13**

In this section we see the hidden mystery of God, the revealed mystery of God and the application of the mystery after revelation. Paul recognized that he had a special place in the plan of God. While he never took this to imply any superiority on his part, he accepted the added

responsibility that God had given to him. He refers to himself as a prisoner of Christ and as a steward of God's grace. It was probably while in prison at Rome that he wrote these words. This imprisonment was directly due to his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. He does not bring this up to put a "guilt trip" on them but to show them the earnestness of his desires for them. The Ephesian brethren knew of Paul's understanding of the mystery of God.

Paul says that his understanding was by revelation. This is not something that he had figured out on his own. Remember that Paul was at one time one of those religious leaders in Jerusalem who persecuted the Christians. If he had not personally given consent to the crucifixion of Jesus, it was only because he had not attained to the position of Jewish hierarchy to do so. We do know that he later gave his consent to the stoning of Stephen and the death of others. (Acts 22:4-5, 26:10) This, perhaps, is why in verse 8 he refers to himself as the least of the least among saints. What he preached, what he explained was not his own wisdom. It was the revelation of God's eternal mind for the salvation of all mankind in Christ Jesus.

Paul devoted his life (after becoming a Christian) to the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. It was not a popular move among his former friends and colleagues in the Jewish community. It was not easy at times among the Gentiles, because he was a Jew. Yet, in it all he continued to carry out the task that God had given; to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.

While there had been many who wanted to know the mystery of God in past ages, God had not revealed it to them. Even those who had been responsible for writing the prophecies did not fully understand the fulfillment of them or how they would apply. (1 Pet. 1:10-12) The Ephesians could know (and so can we) how Paul was able to come to an understanding of God's great mystery; it had been revealed to him by God. As we read this chapter we can see the evidence of the correctness of his revelation.

The mystery has been revealed. As he began explaining in the previous chapter, the mystery of God is that all mankind can be forgiven of all wrong through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Because of this forgiveness we then can each be brought back (redeemed) into complete harmony or fellowship with God. When two or more have this restored fellowship with God, they in turn have fellowship with one another. For the Jew who had lived and believed in the exclusiveness of God's love and care for their nation, this was a huge concept to grasp. For the Gentile who had been the subject of this rejection by God's people, it was equally difficult to understand.

To understand just how difficult this was, read the Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) from the perspective of the Jewish leaders. The greatest of their theologians understood the prophets to be talking about the physical resurrection of the national Jewish empire they had enjoyed under the reign of King David. Even the apostles, on the night that Jesus was betrayed, were arguing about which would be greatest in this new kingdom. It was only after the resurrection of Jesus that the light began to shine in the hearts of men to see the revelation of God's mystery. This is why Jesus promised his apostles that the Spirit would reveal and guide them into all truth.

Paul declares that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs (heirs of God's inheritance) with the Jews. That is they are equal in this respect. They are also fellow-members of the body. He has already said that the body of Christ is the church, those called out as a special assembly belonging to God. There are no second class members in the body of Christ. He then says that the Gentiles are fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Peter observed at the house of Cornelius that God is no respecter of persons. This is equally true today. It does not matter about our heritage, our race, our education or our physical attributes. The only thing that counts is if we have faith in Jesus Christ and accept His gospel.

For those who would play down the importance of the church, the book of Ephesians poses a difficulty. It makes it equally difficult for those who would promote the church to the position of savior. The church is the body of Christ and is therefore a living organism directed by the mind of Christ. Since the church is made of people who have been saved by the blood of Christ, it is full of sinners who have been forgiven.

We need never forget that each of us is accepted by God only on the basis of what Jesus did for us on the cross and the forgiveness we have received. Since God has forgiven me, who am I to pass judgment on another? If God can forgive me in my weakness and misunderstandings, (and He has) he can surely forgive my brothers and sisters as they struggle with theirs.

The eternal purpose of God was to restore the fellowship between heaven and mankind that was lost in the Garden of Eden by the sin of Adam and Eve. This is accomplished in Jesus. Yet, another part of the purpose of God is to give us confidence and boldness in this new relationship. We are assured that we have access to our adoptive Father. We can go to Him at any time and know that He will hear us and that He wants what is best for us.

Paul ends this section by asking the Ephesians not to lose heart because of his problems. Yes, he is a prisoner but he is not complaining

about his plight. In fact, he gives praise to God that he is counted worthy to suffer with Christ (2 Tim. 1:7-12). He encourages his readers to use his suffering as something that makes them stronger rather than discouraging them. Remember that he was in prison as he wrote to the Philippians and encouraged them to “rejoice in the Lord always” and to not worry about anything but to make their request known to God by prayer and pleadings.

**Questions**  
**3:1-13**

1. Where was Paul when he wrote this letter?
2. Why was he in prison?
3. What special revelation had he been given?
4. Why was the mystery of God revealed to Paul?
5. Is it possible for us to understand the mystery of God?
6. What means did God use to reveal His mystery to the Apostles and prophets?
7. The Gentiles are said to be \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
8. What is an heir?
9. What is the relationship of a member of a body with the entire body?
10. What promises were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning the Jewish people?
11. When and how were each of these fulfilled?
12. What are the promises of God to His people in Christ Jesus through the gospel?
13. How did God give Paul power as a minister of the gospel? (vs. 16 also)

14. What are the “unfathomable (unsearchable) riches of Christ” in verse 8?
15. By revealing His mystery that had been hidden, God showed his \_\_\_\_\_ through the \_\_\_\_\_.
16. To whom is this wisdom shown?
17. What or who is the eternal purpose of God?
18. Because of Jesus, we can have what through faith in Him?
19. How can we use troubles, problems and hardships in our lives to make us stronger and better?
20. Was Paul complaining in verses 1 and 13?

### **3:14-21**

These verses contain a prayer from Paul on behalf of the Ephesians. There has been a lot of discussion as to whether this is a continuation of the prayer at the end of chapter one or if should be viewed separately. As with such discussions earlier, we will leave this to those inclined to be more scholarly in their endeavors.

Three times in the text so far Paul has begun a sentence with “for this reason.” While we might decide what reason in a number of ways, the fact is that it will not change our understanding of the text. The reason that Paul is concerned about them and their spiritual welfare is because they have been saved by the plan and action of God through His Son, Jesus. It is because they, as Gentiles, have been granted an equal standing before God and given the precious promises that had previously been reserved for the Jews only.

Paul begins this prayer by addressing God as the Father and offering a posture of reverence in bowing down to Him. After discussing the unifying effect of the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of all mankind, it is no wonder that Paul would say that all (Christians) receive their name from God. The Old Testament prophets had foretold that God’s people would be called by a new name. Peter announced that there is salvation in no name other than the name of Jesus. Jesus told those who would follow Him to be baptized into His name and then as His disciples to pray in His name. We belong to God and we proudly wear His name.

In the previous prayer, Paul had asked that they would know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. In these verses he asked that they be granted strength according to the riches of His glory. As we take on the nature of God in our lives we share in His glory. While we will not know this glory in the fullest measure until we move into eternity, we can enjoy a foretaste of it with God's people here in this life.

He then asked that God give them power. This power is the dynamite (the Greek word is "dunámei" from which we get the word dynamite) that is released in those who belong to God. It is given to us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is not a power that we generate in ourselves but is given to us in our submission to God and His will. The opposite of this concept is explained by Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. In that text he speaks of those who are supposed to be disciples and even teachers but they are devoid of the Spirit and the power He gives. They hold to a form of godliness but they deny the power thereof. Today there are those who deny the reality of the indwelling of the Spirit in our lives. They relegate His work to some kind of influence from studying the Bible. While the Spirit can have an influence through the Word, this is not limited to those who are God's chosen children. The indwelling of the Spirit is the promise, the pledge, the assurance that we are chosen of God. The Spirit is real and He empowers us to live and actively work for God.

It is when the Holy Spirit lives in us that Christ lives in our hearts. This should not be surprising since in 2:22 we were told that God dwells in us through the Spirit living in us. In fact, we see many attributes of each that are shared with the other persons of God in this book. When God is in us, we have His Son living in our hearts. When the Holy Spirit is living in us and moving us we are being controlled by the Father and the Son. Someone has asked how God dwells in us. The answer is given in this verse: by faith.

God is said to be one, yet we see three persons. It is much easier for us to understand the three separate persons than for us to conceptualize the oneness but it is this oneness that is the true emphasis of scripture concerning God. This is one of many things that we must just accept by faith because in our minuscule minds we will never understand the nature of God in His fullness. We will see it when we have been glorified in a new body in His presence in eternity.

When we observe a mighty oak that has withstood many storms and has weathered the seasons we know that it is rooted and grounded. We are told that the roots below the ground are often as vast as the limbs above. When we have this kind of faith in the power of God and allow Him to live in us, we will be rooted and grounded in His love. John describes this as

God's love being perfected in us. We are so filled with the love of God that we cannot help but share His love for mankind with others and we demonstrate His love in the way we treat others.

Can we ever understand this love that God has shown for us? Paul prays that we will know this love that surpasses knowledge. It is when we begin to be filled with the love of God that we become more like Him. One of the applications that we will study later is found in 1 Jn. 5:1, where we are told to become imitators of God. John tells us that God's love is perfected in us when we obey Him. (1 Jn. 2:5) He then tells us that God's love is perfected (or made complete) in us when we love Him and when we love one another. (1 Jn. 4:12, 17) We can know God's love in the sense of experiencing it our lives; making it a part of us.

The last two verses of this chapter comprise one of the most encouraging doxologies found in scripture. Paul expands his usage of superlatives even more. After all, there are no words to describe just how wonderful is our God! He does not just state that God is able to do what we ask. God is able to do more than we ask or even imagine. But that is not all. He is able to immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine and he does it through us with the power of His Holy Spirit. While he does not identify that power in this verse, we know from verse 16 that he has reference to the Holy Spirit.

We have identified the church as all of the saved of all the ages, just waiting to be accepted as the bride of Christ into our eternal home. It is in this church that God is glorified. It is in Christ that we are able to give glory to God. To be in the church is to be in Christ which is to be in the heavenly places (heavenly realms or heavenlies). From a practical standpoint, we give glory to God in the church where we work, worship and fellowship with fellow saints. We will see later that each member of the body plays an important role in the overall health and effectiveness of the entire body.

### **Questions** **3:14-21**

1. We are to kneel (pay homage or worship) before whom?
2. In what sense does His family derive its name from God?
3. What is the name of God's family?
4. What is the source of the power that God gives us?

5. How does God dwell in us (2:22)?
6. How does Christ dwell in us (3:17)?
7. How are power, faith and love related?
8. Can we ever know the love of God in its entirety?
9. What does it mean to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God?
10. What is God able to do in and for us?
11. What is the power God uses to work in us and through us?