

Ephesians 3:1-13

Introduction

What's the purpose of the church? Why does the church exist?

- A. The "consumer" asks "What can the church do for me?"
- B. The "achiever/performer" asks, "what can I do for the church?" but sometimes uses the church as an opportunity to show giftedness/achievement.
- C. Paul broadens our minds to ask: "What is God's purpose for the church?"

The Passage

I. Summary: God's purpose to display his wisdom through the church to the watching world (v. 10)

- A. God as a painter, painting a "manifold" (= multi-colored) painting on a canvass.
- B. It's a painting of the church (reconciled people from every nation in one new community).
- C. Angels and demons are looking on in amazement
v. 10: "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms"
see also Ephesians 6:12 and 1 Peter 1:12
- D. The church seems like such an unlikely thing to display God's wisdom
It's so broken, messy, etc

II. The church as God's "mystery" (v. 2-6, 9)

- A. What Paul means by "mystery": something that was kept hidden/secret for a long time but has now been made known (v. 5, 9)
- B. What the mystery is: Jew and Gentile reconciled in one body in Christ (v. 6)
Jew and Gentile are "together"
- C. This was a revolutionary idea in Paul's day
 - 1. Jews and Gentiles had been hostile enemies for centuries
 - 2. The Old Testament gives hints of the Gentiles receiving future blessings (Gen 12:3), but there's no full-fledged description of Jew and Gentile becoming one new body together
 - 3. No one was expecting the Jewish Messiah to come and reconcile Jews with their Gentile oppressors through his own death
- D. God had to make this known by direct revelation
 - 1. Revealed to Paul (v. 3): think of the Damascus road experience, Acts 9
 - 2. Revealed to God's apostles and prophets (v. 5): think of Peter's dream, Acts 10
 - 3. Analogy: God had his painting covered with a veil, and then he pulled away the veil for all to see.

III. How does the church display God's manifold wisdom? (v. 10)

- A. = By revealing his surprising work in history to bring such a diverse group of people together into one new body
- B. God's work in History

1. At the Fall, there was a “double alienation” (alienation with God and alienation with fellow man)
2. At the cross, there was a “double reconciliation” (see Eph 2:14-16)
At the cross, God takes humanity’s hostility towards God and man, and turns it on its head, and uses it to bring about reconciliation between God and man and between man and man. That is infinitely wise and brilliant!
- C. So the church displays God’s “manifold” wisdom by showing his brilliance in reconciling hostile people and in creating a “manifold” (multi-colored/diverse) new people.
- D. The demons see God’s wisdom and they look on in disgust, and the angels see God’s wisdom and they marvel/celebrate

IV. What are the implications for us?

- A. We need a perspective change from “how can the church meet my needs” to “how can we engage each other so that God’s wisdom really is on display to the watching world?”
- B. We display God’s wisdom by being reconciled to each other:
Forgiving each other, being patient, serving each other, Loving each other, etc
- C. Where does your perspective need to change?
 1. How you approach relationships in the church (just trying to meet your relational needs vs. being available to whatever God has for you)
 2. How you approach Sunday mornings (your own spiritual “juice boost” vs. an opportunity to love and serve others)
 3. How you approach broken relationships (make every effort to reconcile)
 4. Checking in on your own cynicism about the church
- D. Consider Paul’s example
 1. He considered serving the church to be a gracious privilege rather than a burden (see his use of “grace” in v. 2, 7-9)
 2. He was willing to sacrifice for God’s church community
In prison for sharing this message of a reconciled community (v. 1, 13)

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. How did you respond to the idea that God is using the church to demonstrating his wisdom specifically to supernatural beings (angels and demons)? What role do they play in your view of the universe and your view of daily life?
3. On Sunday we talked about the imperfections of the church and, therefore, our surprise that God would use such an imperfect instrument to display his wisdom. What are the toughest issues for you personally regarding the church (either the church universal or the local church specifically)? Where have you grown cynical toward the church?
4. How did Sunday's sermon impact your view of the church? Specifically, consider the image of the church as God's multi-colored work of art that displays his wisdom to the watching world (v. 10).
5. In the sermon outline, some examples are given on how our perspective and engagement with church may need to change. Which of those do you relate to most, if any? How might you want to adjust your own engagement with the church?
6. How did Paul's own example in this passage (especially v. 1-2, 7-9, and 13) impact you?