



*To Know Christ . . .
and to Make Him Known*

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What God Is Doing through His Church Ephesians 3:1-13

Listen to verses 10 and 11 again, this time from the New International Version®.¹

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Isn't that an absolutely astounding declaration? That God's intention in what He is doing through His church is to display His multi-faceted wisdom to the spiritual powers of the universe—both good and evil!

Just thinking about it almost makes my head spin! It's as though God called together the spiritual rulers and authorities that inhabit and operate in the realm that is beyond what we can see, and said, "So you want to know what I'm doing through My Son? Well, here it is! Let me demonstrate . . ." And then He points to *us*, His church.

There's only one problem, though. And it's a big one.

When I look around me at the condition of the Christian church in the world today, and of many local congregations, *it just doesn't seem to be so*.

I mean, how in the world does it reflect God's eternal wisdom and His purpose in Christ *when the church is so much like the world*? Our values seem to mirror the values of the culture around us. That was fine when the church had strongly influenced the culture, when *ethics* and *morality* and *modesty* really *meant something*.

But now it seems that it's the other way around, so much so that it's hard to tell much difference between the church and the world around us! Little by little, the world's values have supplanted the church's values—not only in the world, but in the church! Far too often we act and treat each other more like those who don't know Christ than those who do!

And how does *a divided Christendom* reflect it? Think about it. We're not just divided as Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox. There are so many denominations within Protestantism that it's hard to keep count, not to mention all the independent churches that would fall into the Protestant classification. Some church historians are even saying that Pentecostalism has now become a separate fourth major branch of Christianity. Even among Baptists, the largest Protestant denomination in America, there are more than 30 different conventions, general associations, or fellowships! How does that reflect God's wisdom that Paul is talking about here?

And how does the *disunity* that permeates so many local congregations and the *disinterest*

among so many church members reflect it? How does the *discontent* that plagues so many local expressions of the body of Christ demonstrate God's wisdom to the spiritual principalities and powers in the heavenly realms?

The church in Paul's day

Now it really wasn't much different in Paul's day when he wrote these words. Oh, there weren't *as many* divisions, but only because there weren't as many Christians!

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul did spiritual battle against a group in the church that was claiming that Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians. In his letter to the Philippians and in 1 Corinthians, he was addressing churches that were dealing with disunity and disturbances in the fellowship. Even a cursory reading of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation (several of which may very well have received copies of this letter to the Ephesians about 35 years earlier) show that these congregations were dealing with divisions, disinterest, discontent, and the temptation to "dumb down" their commitment to Christ. James in his epistle addressed the deadly diseases of faith without works and the terrible tongue with the damage it can do through gossip and harsh words.

Yet in the midst of all this, Paul declares (NIV®):

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Couldn't Paul see the reality of the condition of these churches? Was he blind to what was going on?

Hardly! He confronted those who would distort the gospel of Christ and the ethical demands that grew out of it. He himself was the victim of slander by others who claimed to be followers of Christ. He knew all too well just how things really were!

But he believed deep down in his heart that in what God was doing in Christ, there was much more going on than meets the eye—that the reality *in the eternal realm* that we can't see is actually *more real* than the reality we can see and experience in this realm of time and space.

A powerful statement (in parentheses)

What Paul says here is actually a digression he makes as he begins to offer a prayer for his readers. But even though it's a statement in parentheses, so to speak, in many ways it reflects the very heart of his letter that we know as Ephesians.

As Paul describes **the stewardship of God's grace** entrusted to him—the preaching of the boundless, unfathomable riches of Christ to the Gentiles—he talks about the mystery of God's purpose. Though it had been hidden from past generations, it had now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. The mystery is this: that in Christ **the Gentiles** (that's us, who are not descended from the nation of Israel) **are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel** (3:6).

The key word for Paul here is actually a three-letter preposition in Greek that he compounds with three other words. The preposition means "with" or "along with" or "together with"—the idea that Gentile believers are heirs, members of the one body, and partakers of the promise in Christ just as much as and on the same level with Jewish believers. No second-class citizens of

the kingdom, no hierarchy, no nobility and peasants.

Now many Jewish believers understood that the prophets had said that *some* from the Gentiles *would* believe. And many of them had no problem with that.

But to say that Gentile believers were their *fellow* heirs, *fellow* members of one body, and *fellow* partakers of the promise in the Messiah Jesus—now *that* was *truly* revolutionary. But this is Paul’s key and constant theme in Ephesians, especially in the first four chapters: *God shows His manifold wisdom through the church as He unites Jews and Gentiles in Christ!* No one else would ever have dreamed of it. If they had, they could never have pulled it off. What Paul is talking about here is *something only God could do!*

When you consider the implications of all this, isn’t Paul saying to us, “Okay, now. Listen up! The spiritual powers of the heavenly realms—both good and evil—they’re all watching. They have their eyes on you, to see if what God is doing in Christ is really working. So remember: our unity reflects God’s wisdom to them!”

But when I look around me, I *have* to ask: As we live out our life together as the church of Jesus Christ, are we *really* like what Paul is describing here?

The weirdest herd

One of the joys of parenthood since the mid-twentieth century is that when your kids are young, you get to watch children’s movies with them. Now I have to admit, some of these movies are pretty lame. But some of them are really quite good.

One that we watched with our boys on DVD years ago was *Ice Age*. It’s a wonderful animated movie that’s a lot of fun but also conveys some great values—unlike so much that comes out of the movie industry today.

The storyline runs like this . . . While all the animals are migrating south anticipating the coming Ice Age, Manfred the Mammoth is heading north. He’s a loner who’s obviously carrying some painful memories. He just wants to get away from everything and everybody.

Manfred ends up reluctantly saving the life of Sid the Sloth, who inadvertently got into a scrape with two rhinos. Out of a combination of gratitude and a desire for a bodyguard, Sid follows his newfound acquaintance, and dubs him “Manny.” Manny just wants Sid to *go away*.

In the meantime, a group of saber-toothed tigers have attacked a human village. A mother has escaped with her baby. Just as Manny and Sid come upon them, she looks them in their eyes and dies. They know what the look means: “Don’t let the tigers get my baby.”

So this unlikely duo takes the baby to try to get him back to his “herd,” as they refer to the group of humans. One of the tigers, Diego, tries to talk them out of the baby, promising to get him back to his “herd.” But all the while he’s intending to take the baby to the leader of the tigers, just as he has been ordered to do.

As they near Glacier Pass, where they hope to catch up to the humans, a volcano beneath the ice pack erupts. Manny kicks Sid to safety, then carries the baby across to Sid. But as Diego the Tiger gets ready to leap, the ice bridge they’re on collapses, and he’s hanging on for dear life. As he’s about to fall into the river of lava below, Manny catches him with his trunk and tosses him to safety. The ice Manny is on breaks and falls, but a massive shot of steam pushes it high in the air, and he falls safely onto solid ground. Remember—it’s a movie!

Afterwards, Diego says to Manny, “Why did you save me? You could have died doing that.” Manny replies, “Because that’s what you do in a herd. You look out for each other.”

To which Sid the Sloth adds, “I don’t know about you guys, but we’re the *weirdest* herd I’ve ever seen!”

No Sid. Gentiles who are fellow heirs with Israel, fellow members of one body with Jews, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ, people from all races, all walks of life, all colors, all backgrounds, rich and poor, noble and peasant, from twenty centuries of time all with *only one thing in common*—that they’ve been redeemed by God and been made one in His Son Jesus Christ, experiencing what only God can do—now *that’s* the weirdest “herd” you’ll ever see!

But isn’t that exactly what Paul is talking about here?

And isn’t that exactly what Jesus was talking about in His high priestly prayer in John 17 the night before He died—that somehow, some way, *all people* who came to believe in Him would be *one*?

And isn’t that exactly what John saw in his vision in Revelation 7 when he saw **a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb**, wearing white robes, holding palm branches of victory in their hands and singing praise to God?

But it’s so hard for us to see it! We look around and see all the difficulties in Christ’s church—the defections, division, and dissension—and it just doesn’t look real.

But then I remember a line from another children’s movie, based on the book *Polar Express*—a line that really expresses a profound biblical and theological truth: “Sometimes the things that are the *most real* in the world are the things you *can’t* see.”

For you see, my brothers and sisters, in a realm that’s beyond what our natural human eyes can see, the spiritual rulers and authorities look on in absolute amazement and astonishment as God displays His manifold wisdom through the church by uniting Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ. He flashes its dazzling brilliance like the multitudinous facets of an exquisitely cut diamond sparkling in the noon-day sun, giving a glimpse of what is to come when, as Paul says in Ephesians 1:10, God will finally bring all things in heaven and on earth together in perfect unity under one head—His Son, Jesus Christ!

Are they seeing it in us?

†MEG

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®.