

St. Peter's Anglican Church, Tallahassee, Florida  
*Fr. Michael Petty*

**THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS**  
**Ephesians 1:1-14**

**“It abounds with sentiments of overwhelming loftiness and grandeur.”**  
**St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians***

**I. The Greeting: Ephesians 1:1-2**

1. This greeting follows the norm for ancient letters: Identification of sender, identification of recipient, blessing (1:3-14).

2. The sender is identified as Paul “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (cf. Romans 1:1). This is an official letter from Paul (or, perhaps, a delegate of Paul). The greeting makes the status of Paul clear—he is an apostle (Greek=“sent one”), one who has been expropriated by God for God’s mission.

3. The recipients are also identified and their status noted. Some manuscripts lack the “in Ephesus” and some scholars hypothesize that Ephesians may have been a circular letter, one sent to several churches. Tending to support this view is the fact that no specific people are greeted in the letter as in other letters addressed to specific congregations.

4. Who are the recipients? Their precise geographical location is not of final importance. What is important is how they are identified. They are identified as “saints” and “faithful in Christ Jesus”. “Saints” is Paul’s common designation for Christians (cf. Romans 1:7) and has the meaning of “holy ones”. The meaning of this word is closely tied to the meaning of the phrase “in Christ” about which there is much controversy. The meaning of the phrase is probably something like this: “those who are faithful *in dependence upon Christ* or *through the power of Christ*”. Through the power of Christ (in dependence upon him) the recipients are “faithful” and can be considered “holy one”. Here holiness means neither a state which is simply imputed nor a state of completed perfection. Because of Christ’s presence, these people are both holy in the sense of being claimed by God and are being made holy through Christ’s work.

5. This is the presupposition underlying 4:1-6:20, the section which is devoted to *parenesis* or instruction.

6. In the Pauline letters greetings are given theological freight to carry. 1:2 reinforces this point. Note that “God our Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” are the common origin of grace and peace. This part of the greeting makes it clear that Jesus Christ is the mediator of God’s blessings—all of what God gives to his people is given through Jesus Christ. In a real sense, the letter’s whole doctrine of Christ is expressed in 1:2.

**II. The Blessing: Ephesians 1:3-14**

1. In the Greek text, this section is one sentence and English translations have had to break it up into smaller sentences. It would be a mistake to see this section as simply “introductory or

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rhetorical fluff". The blessing indicates some of the themes which the letter will address as well as provides a sketch of what is meant by the gospel. The gospel turns out to be no simple matter but involves an intricate set of relationships between God, God's purposes and grace, Christ and the mystery of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Church.

2. Early Christian blessings such as this one were closely patterned after the *berakah* prayers of Judaism, a good example of which can be found in the apocryphal book of Tobit. The whole of chapter 13 is given over to a *berakah* prayer which begins "Blessed [*berakah*] is God who lives for ever, and blessed is his kingdom" and then proceeds to recount things that God has done. The important thing to note is that such prayers are not wishes but *declarations* so 1:3 might be translated as "Blessed *is* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

3. The mediation of Christ appears as a theme in 1:3. God has blessed us "in Christ" with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places". The theme of "the heavenly places" appears five times in Ephesians (1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12). "The heavenly places" are the realm beyond this world, the realm of spiritual powers—both good and evil.

4. The affirmation of 1:4-6a constitutes a unity held together by the theme of God's intentions prior to creation or "before the foundation of the world" (1:4). In 1:4 God chooses or elects "us" (all Christians) and in 1:5 God predestines "us" (all Christians) for adoption. The purpose of God's electing or predestining is stated in two different, though related, ways. Stated one way, the aim of God's electing is that all Christians should be "holy and blameless before him" (1:4). This affirmation obviously has huge implications for understanding the Christian life; salvation and becoming "blameless" before God are not separable notions. Stated another way, the aim of God's predestining is to adopt all Christians "through Jesus Christ" (1:5). As 4:1-6 will make clear, for Ephesians adoption into sonship and holiness are inseparable notions.

5. 1:6b-10 also constitutes a unity. We now move into the realm of history where God's grace is manifested and it is manifested in two ways, through redemption and through revelation. Both are equally manifestations of grace. The Beloved is a technical name for Christ. It is in Christ that "we" have redemption (release from slavery) and forgiveness; the concrete historical act of redemption is the cross ("redemption through his blood"). Theologically speaking, the cross is not a contingent event but is rooted in God's eternal purposes.

6. Revelation is also a manifestation of grace and here it refers not to the disclosure of interesting bits of information but to the "making known to us the mystery of his will" (1:9). What is revealed is God's design for the redemption and completion of creation or "a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). This means that God's purposes are cosmic in scale. The salvation mediated in Christ concerns not simply the salvation of humans but the right ordering of the whole creation.

7. 1:11-14 is the next unit. This section is divided into two parts, one focused on "we" (1:11-12) and one focused on "you" (1:13-14). The "we" is probably Jewish Christians and the "you" Gentile Christians. The difference between the two groups is that the Jewish Christians "were the first to hope in Christ" (1:12), were first to have Christ as the object of their hope. Note that both groups are joined in Christ, both are where they are "in him" (1:11, 13). It is through Christ that believers receive the Holy Spirit whose presence is the sign of God's full intention to complete his

work and fulfill his promises. Both groups are also joined in terms of the consequences of grace which results in both cases “to the praise of his glory” (1:12, 14)

8. The sealing of the Spirit would have meant several things. It certainly would have been understood as indicating ownership. It probably would have also been understood to indicate protection. But most importantly, the gift of the Spirit is seen as the “guarantee” (1:14) or “down payment” on the complete fulfillment of all God’s promises. The Spirit indicates God’s utter seriousness about completing his work.

### **III. Reflection**

1. One of the major theological questions which emerges here is that of the meaning of predestination (1:4, 5, 11). Predestination was not invented by Christians but was known to the Jewish sect which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. For the Qumran sect, God had predestined some people to salvation and others to damnation and they, of course, saw themselves as belonging to the former group. Within Christian theology, predestination came to have a similar meaning in the theologies of St. Augustine and John Calvin. In both cases, predestination emphasized the priority of God’s gracious action over human responses. Thus conceived, however, predestination appears to be very close to a Christian version of fate.

2. In Ephesians there is no indication of a predestination to damnation. Rather, there is only a predestination to holiness and adoption. So, then what does predestination mean in Ephesians?

3. We need to note the context in which the word is used, that of a *berakah* prayer and this should alert us to the fact that we are not being offered a theory of predestination but an affirmation aimed at praising God. Analogously, the Nicene Creed affirms that Jesus “suffered death and was buried” but does not offer a particular theory of the atonement.

4. What might predestination be thought to mean in this context? The following meanings seem to be suggested:

- a. Predestination connects God’s activity in creation with his activity in redemption; in bringing a world into existence God also had purposes for this world such that creation and providence can not be separated.
- b. Predestination makes it clear that what God does in Jesus Christ is not an innovation or some type of “plan B” but that which God intended all along (1:10).
- c. Predestination makes it clear that as in creation so in salvation, God takes the initiative and it is this initiative which makes a human response both possible and meaningful.
- d. Predestination makes it clear that the gathering of God’s people is not merely dependent upon historical, cultural or sociological factors such that God’s people is composed of those who for some reason have come to faith; there was an Israel and there is a Church because God intended that one should exist.

**THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS**  
**Ephesians 1:15-2:10**

**I. Thanksgiving: 1:15-16a**

1. The thanksgiving begins with “for this reason” (1:15) which looks backward and forward. It looks backward to all the blessings which have been previously enumerated (“redemption through his blood,” “the riches of his grace...lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight,” “an inheritance,” “the promised Holy Spirit”). It also looks forward to those who have received these blessings. Thanksgiving is made for both the giver of these blessings (God through Jesus Christ) and those who have received them. Note that the congregation addressed is identified by *what it has received*.

2. These blessings have issued in one consequence which has two dimensions: “your faith in the Lord Jesus” and “your love toward all the saints” (cf. 1:1). Here faith in the Lord Jesus can not be separated from love toward those who are part of his body (cf. 1:23). In this we see the parallel between the love of God and the love of neighbor (Matthew 24:34-40).

**II. Intercession: 1:16b-19**

1. The intercession focuses on three types of knowledge which ultimately constitute an organic unity—the things that are to be known are distinct but they are part of God's one work in Christ. In each case, the knowledge involved is a consequence of “having the eyes of your heart enlightened” which means that the knowledge under consideration is *experiential knowledge* and this is necessary because what is know is not simply facts or ideas.

2. The first type of knowledge is eschatological: “the hope to which he has called you” (1:18). This refers to the consummation of their salvation, the goal toward which God's purpose is moving. The certainty of this hope is expressed in the references to predestination and election (1:4, 5, 11). In this context the phrase “to hope in Christ” (1:12) is synonymous with “faith in Christ” because salvation is not present in its totality but “in hope” (cf. Romans 8:24).

3. The second type of knowledge is ecclesiological: “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (1:18). Here “inheritance” refers to God's people (cf. Deuteronomy 9:26). This type of knowledge involves an appreciation of the wonder involved in being included into God's people. For Ephesians, the categories “faith in Christ” and “inclusion into God's people” are distinct but not separable and salvation involves both.

4. The third type of knowledge of soteriological: “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” (1:19). Salvation is wrought through the power of God and this power is identified with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1:20).

5. To some extent, all three types of knowledge refer back to the Holy Spirit (1:13-13) who is the one who guarantees hope, includes people into the Church and is the power of God at work for salvation.

### III. A Digression: 1:20-2:10

1. This digression focuses on the power of God. 1:20-23 focuses on God's power in Christ while 2:1-10 focuses on God's power in Christians.

2. 1:20-23: God's power is displayed and made effective in Christ both in his resurrection and in his ascension. Note that resurrection and ascension are two aspects of one movement but that it is necessary to mention both. It is not simply that Jesus is raised from the dead but also that he is exalted to God's right hand (cf. Psalm 110:1). Through resurrection and ascension Christ is exalted over every type of power (earthly and spiritual) or above "all rule and authority and power and dominion" (1:21). A similar list of powers can be found in 1 Corinthians 15:24. There is also the affirmation that Christ's authority is effective "not only in this age but also in the age to come" (1:21), meaning that Christ's rule will never come to an end. This rule, then, extends over every power and is eternal making it co-extensive with God's own rule. Borrowing the language of Psalm 8:6, Ephesians affirms that God has put all things under Christ's feet.

3. 1:22b-23 are translated in various ways. The RSV renders it as God "has made him [Christ] the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." The ESV renders it as God "gave him [Christ] as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." What is affirmed is powerful. Christ is not simply the head of the Church but he is head of all powers *for the Church*. The Church is Christ's body and he fills the Church as the *one who fills the whole created order*. The Church is not merely a gathering of people but contains the full spiritual reality that comes from Christ. The authority which is over all things fills the Church with a spiritual power.

4. 2:1-10: This section helps us to understand what is affirmed by 1:22-23. The "you" of 2:1 is probably Gentile Christians while the "we" of 2:3 is probably Jewish Christians. Prior to being placed under the power of Christ the Gentile Christians (that is, former pagans) were "dead," meaning that they followed the natural course of the world and evil spiritual powers. The affirmation is that both pagans (who are now Gentile Christians) and Jews (who have now become Jewish Christians) were essentially in the same situation, being "children of wrath" (2:3) that is, objects of God's wrath (cf. Romans 2:1-11). The point is that the pre-Christian state of both pagans and Jews is the same—one that can be designated as death.

5. 2:4 introduces a radical departure from this situation—God moved both groups from death (2:5) to life through or by the power of Jesus Christ. The motivation for God's action is clearly identified; God's actions proceed from his own mercy and "great love" (2:4). This is the basis of God's electing and predestining in chapter 1.

6. Note that salvation is described as reflecting the pattern of resurrection and ascension mentioned in 1:20. God has "raised us up with him" and "seated us with him" (that is, with Christ, by means of Christ) "in the heavenly places" (2:6). What is affirmed is not that believers have undergone an actual resurrection and ascension but that since they share "in Christ" they participate in his victory over sin, death and the powers of evil. Here resurrection and ascension describe the consequences of Jesus's resurrection and ascension for believers. The power of Christ (who is the

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power of God) has displaced all other powers for them. (Note the similar language used in Colossians 2:13-15; 3:1-3.) As in Psalm 110:1 being exalted refers to heavenly empowerment; believers are empowered by God and share in God's power over death, sin and the powers of evil.

7. 2:8 offers a theological comment on what has just been said (cf. 2:5). The whole of salvation—understood as being raised and seated with Christ—is the gift of God. The implication of 2:8b is that both grace (which conveys the substance of salvation and refers to God's work) and faith (which is the means by which one receives what is conveyed by grace) are finally gifts of God. A further implication is that faith should not be understood simply as cognitive assent but is rather a disposition. This is indicated by 2:10 where faith issues in a particular form of life which is something “which God prepared beforehand”.

**THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS**  
**Ephesians 2:11-22**

1. The focus of this entire section is on the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ. To understand it properly, we have to remember two things. First, the theme of unity has already been introduced in 1:10. The unity envisioned is cosmic in nature (“things in heaven and things on earth”) and is the consequence of God’s victory over sin and the evil powers. Second, in 1:11-14 the distinction between Jewish Christians (“we”) and Gentile Christians (“you”) has been introduced. While these two groups are distinct (Ephesians holds on to the temporal priority of Jews to Gentiles in the history of salvation), as in Romans (3:9) both Jews and Gentiles are subject to sin (2:3).

2. 2:11-13: This section raises two important issues for the argument of Ephesians. The first is the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. This enmity shows up in the word “circumcision”. Jews could designate all Gentiles simply as “the uncircumcised” roughly meaning “not us”. Since many Gentiles saw circumcision as a form of mutilation, it can be imagined that they saw this designation as both ridiculous and offensive. The fact that there was such bitterness over this identity marker suggests the deep alienation between the two groups. The second issue is the status of Gentiles before God. While it is clearly affirmed that sin contaminates both groups, Ephesians insists that Gentiles before Christ are “without God in the world” (2:12).

3. The situation of Gentiles apart from Christ is dire as the description of it makes graphically clear. They were “separated from Christ” which means (significantly) that they were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel” and “strangers to the covenants of promise” (2:12). Note that the theological presupposition here is that salvation comes for Gentiles when they are connected to Israel’s covenant God through Jesus Christ. What is said here may seem to be in tension with Romans 2:6-10. The tension is lessened, however, when we realize that the Gentiles praised as seeking for “glory and honor and immortality” (Romans 2:7) are most likely Gentile *Christians*. These people are not saved simply by “living a moral life” but rather live a moral life because of Christ and, thus, fulfill the law of Israel (Romans 2:14).

4. The grim situation of Gentiles apart from Christ is summarized as “without God” (2:12), the Greek meaning literally “atheists”. In the ancient world, an atheist was a person not who denied the gods completely (there were very few who did) but one who did not acknowledge the gods of the city or the empire. The charge of atheism was made frequently against both Jews and Christians. Here, atheism is given a new meaning; it now designates denial of the God of Israel. While there are many *religions* there is only one *covenant*.

5. One question here is why Gentiles would be reminded of their non-Jewish status. It was, presumably, something of which they were aware. The reason might be quite similar to the reason for the same thing in Romans 11:13-32. It may be that Gentile Christians have forgotten that Israel came *before* them and that they are being warned against looking down on *Jewish Christians*. An important principle is at work here, one which pagans (ancient and modern) have found difficult to accept: Salvation is not a matter of a general religious consciousness or efforts at moral behavior but is a matter of being included into God’s covenant people.

6. 2:13 offers a condensed theological expression in that it specifies how these Gentile

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Christians have become part of God's covenant people. This verse may contain an echo of Isaiah 57:19, "Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the Lord..." The phrase "the blood of Christ" probably has a range of meanings. On one hand, it probably refers to the fact that in Israel covenants were sealed in blood (as in "the blood of the covenant" in Exodus 24:8). On the other hand, it could also refer to the idea of atonement through blood (Leviticus 16) by which cleansing is effected. As Jesus' words over the cup in the Upper Room make clear, the ideas of covenant and atonement go together: "...for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

7. 2:14-18: Many scholars hold that all or part of this section is either an early Christian hymn that is quoted here or that it is an early Christian hymn which has been modified. As a hymn, this section would be similar to Philippians 2:6-11 or Colossians 1:15-20. The hymn begins by identifying Christ as "our peace," an important move: Christ = Peace. Peace was an important concept for both Jews and Gentiles. For Jews peace (*shalom*) designated the final, eschatological state of Israel's salvation comprehending the security of Israel as well as just relations between people and just relations between Israel and her God. For Gentiles, the mention of peace (the Roman *pax*) would have suggested the Roman claim to have established a "new world order". Jesus is presented as being the real fulfillment of both of these (a very appropriate claim given the theme of unity).

8. 2:14-15 has a loose grammatical construction and can be translated in a variety of ways, each translation yielding different meanings:

English Standard Version: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace..."

Revised Standard Version: "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace..."

New International Version: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace..."

Two important questions emerge at this point: How does Christ reconcile Jews and Gentiles and destroy the enmity between them? What is intended by the abolition of the law? The ESV translation suggests that the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile takes place in the person (flesh) of Christ who by his perfect obedience embodies a perfect human response to God and thus overcomes the human hostility to God. This is theologically important because it helps us to see the unity Ephesians has in mind is not simply the result of the resolution of human differences (religion, ethnicity, political status, etc.) but the result of reconciliation with God. This would mean that the

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human enmity with God (the source of all other human enmities) would literally be ended in Christ. What about the law? Does Christ simply do away with the law in its totality? Paul continues to think that the law has a prophetic (Romans 3:21) and a moral (1 Corinthians 10:11) role in the Church. The phrase "law of commandments and ordinances" may indicate a particular feature of the law, the role of the law as a line of division between Jew and Gentile. In this reading, Jesus' perfect obedience to God has embodied and made possible a human obedience which is now available to all so that the function of the law as an ethnic /religious line of division is rendered needless.

9. 2:15 seems to confirm this view. Notice what Jesus accomplishes. He creates "in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace". This is very similar to Romans 5:18-21 where Christ's act of obedience literally starts a new humankind in opposition to the old, sinful humankind. Christ's work results in a reconciled humanity precisely because it results in a *new humanity*, a humanity reconciled to the Creator. Note that 2:15 concludes by reinforcing the theme of 2:14: Christ = Peace. 2:16 takes us back to the theme introduced in 1:22-23. The reconciling work of the cross creates a community of reconciled people, as such the Church is a direct consequence and fruit of the cross. The claim that human hostility has been "killed" receives its confirmation in the Church in which Jews and Gentiles now share a common life and other types of hostility (socio-economic, for example) are overcome. 2:18 places the capstone on this argument: "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father". Note that reconciliation is not simply a "horizontal" thing (reconciliation among humans) but also a "vertical" reality as well (reconciliation with God). Gentiles who were once "without God in the world" (2:12) and were, therefore, atheists, now have equal access to God with Jews. One idea which may be in the background here is the fact that Gentiles were denied physical access to the Temple in Jerusalem, this physical limitation being a sign of a spiritual gulf. Now, this has all changed. Note the trinitarian dynamic implied here: through the Son Jew and Gentile have access to the Father in the Spirit.

10. 2:19-22: This section returns to the theme of the Church. Reconciliation is not simply an matter affecting an individual's relationship with God; one is also reconciled into a community created by Jesus, a community which can be designated as his body (1:23). Gentile Christians are reminded that they are no longer "strangers and aliens" (cf. 2:12) but are now "fellow citizens" and "members of the household of God". Both of these are "political" metaphors in that citizens recalls the voting members of city-state and household refers to all the people (immediate family, servants and clients) associated with an important figure. This community is established on the foundation of "apostles and prophets". Each of these terms designated an office within the early church. Taken together, these two offices provide a witness to Christ both as a historical figure (what he said and did) and also as a continuing presence (a the risen Christ). Ephesians considers these persons along with Christ himself to be the Church's foundation. The cornerstone was the stone which set the alignment for a whole building; apostles and prophets are part of the foundation but they do not function autonomously. 2:21-22 further the architectural metaphor but complete it in a very specific way. If 2:18 has the Temple in mind, 2:21-22 explicitly bring it into focus. Jews and Gentiles are now, in Christ, organically fitted together into a temple. Like the Temple in Jerusalem, the purpose of this structure is to be "a dwelling place for God" but unlike it this structure is not a building but a "body," the body created by Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

**THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS**  
**Ephesians 3:1-13**

1. 3:1 identifies Paul as a prisoner (a designation repeated in 4:1). The phrase “on behalf of your Gentiles” could indicate the reason for imprisonment—he is in prison because of Jewish agitation against him. The fact that Paul advocated the inclusion of Gentiles into the covenant without circumcision or obedience to the law as a “boundary marker” aroused opposition. Oddly enough, the sentence breaks off abruptly to be resumed at 3:13.

2. 3:2 is probably ironic. Of course they have heard of the “stewardship [*oikonomia*] of God’s grace that was given to me” because their faith is the direct result of it. The word *oikonomia* is important as it suggests the management of a household. This is to say that Paul’s apostleship is a means God’s uses to order his own household, one which consists of Jewish and Gentile Christians. In Galatians 6:10 Paul can refer to the Church as the “household of faith”.

3. 3:3-6: The word “mystery” is used three times in this section, obviously for the sake of emphasis. It has already appeared in 1:9 (“the mystery of his will”). Mystery is connected to revelation (3:3) in that because it is used to refer to God’s secret design it is knowable only through revelation. In I Corinthians 4:1 Paul refers to himself and to his coworkers as “stewards of the mysteries of God”. The content of “mystery” is rather clear. It is made known through revelation that Gentiles are “fellow heirs” (3:6) with Jewish Christians as members of God’s covenant people. This, of course, refers back to 1:9-10 in which Christ reveals “a plan for the fullness of time”. 3:3-4 seems to refer to another letter which has already been written but not yet read by the Ephesians in which an account of this mystery is given. This other letter may explain why no actual account of Paul’s calling is given here. Perhaps this other document is something like Galatians 1:11-2:15. Another possibility is that Paul is referring to Colossians: “...the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27, 28). The relation of Gentile Christians to Jewish Christians is described in three ways. They are fellow heirs (cf. Romans 8:17), members of the same body (cf. 1:22-23; 2:16) and partakers of the promise.

4. 3:7-10: This section focuses on Paul’s calling. 3:7 is similar to Colossians 1:23 in which Paul speaks of the gospel “of which, I, Paul became a minister”. Paul is a servant of the Gospel and this is the result of God’s gift and the “working of his power” (cf. 1:19-20). Paul’s reference to himself as “least of all the saints” can be compared with I Corinthians 15:9. It is probably wrong to see this expression as a bit of “false modesty” (in which Paul says humble things about himself so as to be exalted in the minds of his readers!); more likely, the expression is intended to emphasize Paul’s role as a servant of God’s grace. I Corinthians indicates a very specific reason for this self-designation—Paul’s previous career as a persecutor of the Church. Paul has been called to preach “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8). To get an idea of what “unsearchable” means here it is helpful to note that the same word is used in 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!” The emphasis is on the superabundance of grace, of grace being beyond the capacity of human being to fathom. No sooner has the attention shifted to the specific nature of Paul’s calling than the attention

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is shifted to the universal scope of the work. The task to which Paul has been called is to enlighten everyone about the plan of the mystery which was hidden for ages in God. What is disclosed in the Gospel is God's cosmic plan for the redemption of all things. Precisely because it is God's plan it truly embraces all things. The "manifold wisdom of God" (3:10) is made manifest in the Church in that the uniting of the human race into one body through Christ reveals the depth and complexity of God's design. God makes one people out of many peoples and overcome the alienation that has divided them. If only Israel was God's people, the full depth of God's wisdom would not be revealed. God's triumph over "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (3:10) is displayed in the Church in that what they divided and enslaved God has united and freed. The Gentile mission and the catholicity (universality) of the Church are not simply part of God's plan but they are also elements of revelation; in the creation of one people out of many the wisdom and power of God are displayed.

5. 3:11-13: The manifestation of God's "manifold wisdom" (3:10) and the "mystery hidden for ages in God" (3:9) is part of God's "eternal purpose," a purpose which 1:4 identifies as preceding creation itself, and is fulfilled or effected in Christ. The key to understanding the christology of Ephesians is notice Christ's status as the one through whom God's *eternal purposes* are realized. An adequate understanding of the person of Christ must look beyond history, though it must not leave history out. To get the full picture, we have to embrace a christology along the lines of Colossians 1:15-20. 1:4 seems to necessitate this kind of affirmation since God "chose us in him [Christ] *before the foundation of the world*. 3:12 uses two important words, "boldness" and "access". The important word access has already appeared in 2:18 where it was clearly used as a technical term for admission to God's presence. In the context of 3:12 it seems to have a different meaning. It now refers to opportunity for apostolic work, work which can be carried out in boldness. It is this fact which underwrites 3:13. The Ephesians are not to despair over Paul's imprisonment because even in his confined situation he has opportunity for work and is supplied with boldness. It is clear that Paul does not wish to be the focus of attention in this letter and its purpose is not to inform the congregation about his situation—he has more important things to discuss. The Ephesians will not be left in the dark, however, since Tychicus will bring them news so that "you may know how we are" (6:22).