Chapter 3 – The Mystery Revealed

1. *For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,*

This letter to the Ephesians was evidently written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, but just as apparent is the reality that he was there because of his faith – he calls himself a *prisoner of Jesus Christ*. Although he was being kept in prison by the Roman authorities, he was not there because he was in violation of Roman law, but because of the Message of life that God had given to him. "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20). The Apostle, called to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15) who were once *far off*, with the news that they were now *made nigh* by the blood of Christ, was in prison because of the Message that he had for the Gentiles. In Jerusalem, as Paul made his defense before the Roman captain and the Jews who sought to kill him, the Jews were attentive to his testimony until he declared his God-given mandate to go to the Gentiles: "[21.] And he [the Lord] said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. [22.] And they gave him audience **unto this word**, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22:21-22). It was God's call for Paul to go the Gentiles that escalated the Jews' hatred of him.

Paul now goes on to provide the Ephesians with a glimpse into how God is using him in the proclamation of the Gospel. His Hebrew name was Saul, which means *desired*, but he became known as Paul (his Roman name), which means *small or little*;[1] having received the mandate from

[1] Strong's Online.

the Lord to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, he set his Hebrew name and heritage aside (Philippians 3:4-8).

2. *If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:*

Paul was entrusted with the stewardship of the grace of God toward the Gentiles – another way of saying that he was made an Apostle to the Gentiles by the will of God (Ephesians 1:1). The word *if* is not used to inject a sense of doubt into the thought; it would probably have been better translated as *since*. Lest they be unduly concerned about his imprisonment, Paul launches into a description of how God chose him to reveal mysteries, to proclaim the Way to the Gentiles, and to herald the removal of that middle wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles. The bulk of chapter 3 is generally considered to be parenthetical, then in chapter 4:1 he returns to the thought of his being in prison, and goes on from there.

Paul was entrusted, by God, with the administration (*dispensation*) of the Message of God's grace to the Gentiles. What immediately follows is a sketch of the Gospel of God and Paul's role as His messenger. It would seem that Paul never overcame the awe that he felt at being called by God to be a minister of the Gospel, and being named an Apostle is a testimony to the effectual grace of God in a life (particularly in light of his purpose for going to Damascus, Acts 9:1-2).

3. *How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,*

4. *Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)*

This is not just any mystery referred to here, but it is **the** mystery; the Greek includes the definite article in this passage. What was evident in God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3 – "… in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"), and also through the message of the Prophets of old (Isaiah 42:6 – "… a light of the Gentiles"), had been lost to the Jews of Jesus' day – God's offer of salvation is open to all people. What was hidden to the Jews (and **by** the Jews, for it was their interpretation of the prophecies that clouded the promise) was opened in great clarity through God's revelations to Paul. Acts 15:1 and 5 are testimony to the fact that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem struggled with the freedom from Jewish traditions that God provided through the completed work of Christ on the cross. It is evident that they kept their traditions (even though the temple sacrifices would have been forsaken) and sought to impose them on the Gentile Christians. What had remained hidden for years, and what was slowly coming to acceptance among some of the Jews of Paul's day, God had made known to Paul, and he became a minister of this revelation to all who would hear. It seems evident that if God had not laid claim to Paul for this special task, then the Apostles of Jerusalem would have been very slow at bringing the Message to the "uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This letter is evidently not the first one that Paul had written to the Ephesians, the first one being a brief note explaining how he came by his insight into the mysteries of God.

Paul's earlier, brief note (*few words*) had been given to them, *to which you, who are reading, are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ* (literal).[2] What we are missing in our English is a proper translation of the Greek word *dunamai* (which means able to, or capable of, but shows up in the KJV as *may*); *dunamai* is also in the indicative mood, which means that it is a statement of fact – with the reading, understanding will come.[3] The Greek word that is translated as *read* is *anaginosko*, a compound of *ana* (again) and *ginosko* (to know), and it

[2] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.
[3] Strong's Online.

means to *distinguish between*, *to recognize*, or *to know accurately*.[4] This word is used for *reading* since that involves identifying characters, or letters, that make words, sentences, etc.; howbeit with accuracy, lest the reading should become meaningless. Paul is expressing his certainty that they will understand the authority that he was given by God for the presentation of the Gospel.

5. *Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;*

The Greek word used for *ages* (*genea*) is generally translated as *generations*; here it refers to the generations of those who came before, to whom the reality of the Messiah was foretold.[5] There was always an aura of mystery surrounding the coming of the Messiah, the Deliverer Who would crush the power of Satan (Genesis 3:15); despite Daniel's very specific prophecy (Daniel 9:24), the timing of His coming eluded the Jewish leaders, and what He would come to accomplish remained a mystery to them, and even became a source of stumbling. Jesus' disciples did not comprehend the purposes of God for His coming, even after His death and resurrection; their question to the risen Lord was: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). What the Jews longed for was a Messiah Who would restore their national identity and free them from the tyranny of their Roman conquerors. What they failed to see was that the hopeless plight of mankind was of far greater importance than their earthly kingdom, and the Messiah came to provide a way of deliverance for everyone. God has a schedule, and "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). It is plainly declared here that the hidden things of the Messiah were not revealed to prior generations of believers; although there was no mistaking the coming of a Deliverer (for that had been clear since the fall), the unfolding details of that revelation through

[4] Vine's, "read"; Strong's Online.
[5] Strong's Online.

the generations was a different matter. When the timing was right for God (Galatians 4:4), He sent Jesus (the Word made flesh, John 1:14) to fulfill three significant promises: 1) the defeat of Satan that had been given in the Garden (Genesis 3:15), 2) the blessing of all of earth's families through Abraham (Genesis 12:3), and 3) the full atonement for sin as foreshadowed by the law (Leviticus 23:27; atonement was made annually – it was only a temporary forgiveness). With the plan of redemption for mankind now complete and in place, God continues to call a people out for Himself, but with new power and clarity.

Jesus told His disciples that, after He had ascended to the Father, He would send the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, Who would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). There is a difference in God's revelation in the past and what He was now doing through the apostles (those commissioned to go out representing the Sender) and the prophets (those given specific insight by the Spirit of God into the truths of His dealings with mankind, and who make those truths known). There is a new unveiling of the mystery of the Messiah Who came to pay the price for the sins of all of humanity. Paul is not alone in declaring this new insight, for he freely includes all of the *holy apostles and prophets* of his day who are in the Spirit. There is a double qualifier used here: 1) the apostles and prophets are called holy, or set apart unto God, and 2) the apostles and prophets must be in the Spirit of God. We are told later (Ephesians 4:11-13) that these giftings, along with others, were given in order to bring the holy ones (*saints*) to perfection, or completion, until we will all arrive at "the unity of the faith." It is noteworthy to realize that it is the individual who is to be perfected and changed, not the message of the Gospel. What we find today among Evangelicals is a changing message, with little or no consideration for the perfecting of the saints. By whittling away at the pure doctrine of Scripture, modern Evangelical thinkers are demonstrating a unity of faith – but this is no longer the faith for which we are called to contend, "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Today there is a spurning of this new disclosure made by the Spirit of God in favor of the old lie of Satan that we are really not that bad; why do we need to change? When Evangelicals turned their backs on God's call for

separation, one of the first things to come into question was the integrity and infallibility of the Word of God in all of its details. Once the textual reliability of the Bible was no longer accepted, the falling away took place very quickly – everything that Scripture declared was now open for debate. We are once again faced with the question: "Yea, hath God said?" (Genesis 3:1), and rest assured, it is still Satan who is asking.

Satan's ploy has not changed; if he is able to get us to question even one small part of God's Word, then he has opened the door to sin. When New Evangelicals made their voices heard, they said, "Yea hath God said that we are to separate ourselves from error?" Their answer was a resounding, "No!" They set out to make themselves socially sensitive, theologically accommodating, and intellectually admired by their worldly counterparts. Once they had called the Word of God into question, they zealously ate the forbidden fruit, and shared it with all of those around them.

One way that Evangelicals have accomplished a "diluting" of the Word of God is through the plethora of translations that are now available to everyone. In the late 1800s, modern textual critics began to call into question the basis for the translation of the King James Version. These critics (now referred to as *higher critics*) refused to acknowledge that the Scriptures contain the very words of God and need to be handled differently from worldly, ancient literature. They no longer accepted the teaching that God has promised to preserve His Word (Psalm 119:89, 152; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25), and they placed a greater emphasis on the worldly credentials of the translator than on his submission to the clear teachings of Scripture. During this time, these critics compiled a new Greek NT based upon their new criteria, a text that won great favor and underlies ALL modern translations. Their team of language "experts" included several Unitarians who openly deny the Triune God and that Jesus is God come in the flesh – evidence that credentials eclipsed a right heart with God. The latest tactic has been to depart from making a literal word-for-word translation of the Greek text, but rather, to translate ideas and thoughts, which means that the final product becomes a translation of what the translator **thinks** that the

underlying text means. We refer to our Bible (the KJV) as the Word of God; yet those who hold to modern translations, such as the New International Version, cannot say that and be correct, for, based upon the translation methods that were used, they only have a more general interpretation of the "thoughts" or "ideas" of God. This method of translation, referred to as dynamic equivalency, is what is used today by Wycliffe Bible Translators in working with the numerous languages of the world; they are no longer translating the words of God, words that God has promised to preserve, but rather, are translating **interpretations** of those words (the thoughts that the translators understand to be there). Combine this with the fact that they are using a Greek text that has been mishandled by those who deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you have a recipe for perpetuating modern Evangelical accommodation, and an undermining of God's Word.

Such accommodation is clearly demonstrated in the teachings of Rick Warren. He will use any and all modern translations and paraphrases to establish his position – if one translation does not support his point, then he simply finds another one that does. This is the modern way – their reasoning is that since God has not promised to preserve His words for us (which is a lie upon which modern mistranslating is based), then it simply does not matter how the Scriptures are translated, and all are equally acceptable. It is small wonder that there is an increasing dumbing-down of the average Evangelical as to what God's Word really is. It's not that some modern translations don't contain enough truth to be still used by God, but there is an erosion of the support for some of the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, and there is a breakdown in identifying God's Word as the sole authority for living.

Not unlike the temptation with which Eve was faced, today many of Satan's wolves-in-sheep's-clothing call us to question God's intent in making His commandments known to us. The rationalization is that God surely could not have meant what He said to us in His Word. We are warned that there will be false prophets among us, and so we must be alert and discerning lest we fall under their spell (1 John 4:1). "Evaluate

something, not by how much good is in it, but by how much error is in it."[6]

6. *That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:*

This begins a summary of what this new uncovering, or unveiling, of the mystery of Christ is. Just prior to this, Paul called the Gentile believers *fellowcitizens with the saints*, and *of the household of God* (Ephesians 2:19), the middle wall of separation having been removed by Christ when He fulfilled the Law of Moses. Now these non-Jewish believers are called *fellowheirs* – the inheritance of the faithful is shared by all of the faithful, regardless of race. Hebrews 11 confirms this by including the names of the faithful ones who lived before Abraham.

When Jesus removed that middle wall of separation, He made one body out of two distinct peoples (Ephesians 2:15-16). Those who were *afar off* and those who were *nigh* are now brought together into one *in Christ*. There is only one! This is the unity of the faith that Paul will discuss in Ephesians 4:5 and 13; this is the one body spoken of in Ephesians 4:4 and again in 5:25-27. The Greek word used for "of the same body" is *sussomos*, which means *united in the same body*.[7] *In Christ*, there is perfect unity; it can be nothing else, for there is **only one body**. If Evangelicals today could grasp this truth, they would be much less likely to chase after every whim and apparition of unity. Our unity is secured *in Christ*.

We live in a day of "experts," and we have learned to defer to them; after all, we reason, they should know! Consequently, we are prone to leave the interpretation of Scripture to the said experts, those New Evangelical theologians who have set the "thus saith the Lord" aside for a theology that will find acceptance by a broader audience. "Unity" has

[6] John E. Ashbrook, New Neutralism II, p. 82.
[7] Vine's "body."

become their god, and they have removed the fences of separation that God has established so that they can enjoy the pasture with a greater number. What they fail, or refuse, to realize, is that God placed those fences there for a purpose. In many respects, the average Evangelical today is quite similar to the average Catholic during the dark ages. Throughout the dark ages, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church kept the Word of God from the people so that they could impose their own interpretation of truth on them. Today, the average Evangelical willingly sets the Scriptures aside, and accepts the teaching of the "experts" without any further thought. The end for both is the same: a general neglect of God's Word, and a perpetuation of error by those who become self-appointed spokesmen for God's truth.

Not only have we learned to defer to the experts in our understanding of the Word of God, but we have also become pragmatic in our approach to life, rather than being Biblical. If the desired results are achieved, then, it is reasoned, how we got there must be okay: i.e., the end justifies the means – we have become "results oriented." Jesus said to obey His commands (John 15:10), to expect to be persecuted (John 15:20), and to leave the results to Him (Luke 12:29-31). Today's New Evangelical expert says, "Look at all of the good that we do, look at our love and unity, how could anything with such positive spirituality be wrong; come join us, but leave your narrow thinking behind." The focus has become what we achieve, how we appear, and how accepting we are of others, rather than our obedience to God's Word. There is a softening of our reading of what God requires of us; in essence, "thus saith the Lord" has become "yea, hath God said?" There has been a turning away from the Truth of God, and an insatiable appetite for the contaminated teachings of Satan. The devil is too clever to teach pure lies, for that would be too easily recognized and rejected – no, he loves to put forth a mixture of truth and error so as to ensnare the unsuspecting. Just as counterfeiters do not produce three-dollar bills, but do their best to duplicate the real thing, so Satan makes his deadly potions of religion to appear as authentic, even using the Scriptures to justify what is done and taught. This should not be surprising since he used the very Words of God when he sought to derail

Jesus' ministry on earth (Luke 4:10). We **MUST NOT** accept the words of men without holding them against the standard of the Word of God; if they fall short, then the message must be rejected, and we also need to turn away from the messenger (Romans 16:17).

The Gentile believers have been made fellow-partakers of God's promise *in Christ*; the Greek word for *partaker* means to be sharing with.[8] "And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith … Therefore *it is* of faith, that *it might be* by grace; to the end the **promise might be sure to all the seed**; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:13, 16). God's promise was first addressed to the serpent (Genesis 3:15): the promise of a Son Who would crush the power of the devil; this promise was made much more specific with God's call of Abraham. By choosing Abraham, God established the human family through whom the Messiah of the world would come – however, it is important to remember that the promise to Abraham was larger than just his physical family line (Genesis 12:3). As we heed the message of the Gospel, as we exercise faith in the finished work of Christ, and as we abide in Christ through God's infinite mercy and grace, we become participants in the fulfillment of God's first promise of redemption. The promise that God made at the time that sin entered into the world was fulfilled in Christ; God's promise to deal with the root of sin (the devil) becomes the hope of everyone who will ever live. It was God's promise, and it is His Provision Who fulfilled that promise, thereby bringing salvation as a gift, an unmerited gift from God – a truth that we must not lose sight of lest our hearts be lifted up in pride (Ephesians 2:8-9).

7. *Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

[8] Friberg Lexicon.

Paul now begins to elaborate more fully concerning the work that God has given to him. *Minister* is from the Greek word *diakonos*, which is also translated as *servant* or *deacon*, and is someone who executes the commands of another.[9] It is the word used by Jesus: "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*]" (Matthew 23:11). The word speaks to the relationship of the individual to the work that he is doing, as opposed to *doulos* (bondservant or slave) that focuses on the individual's relationship with his master.[10] It is a work of service to which Paul had been called; even as an Apostle, he was a *servant*. How many *ministers* in today's churches would qualify as servants? Their service is to be such that the saints are spiritually brought to where they ought to be (Ephesians 4:12); they are to "preach the word … reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). They are to proclaim **the Word**, not their words, and this is to be done with patience and careful instruction while adhering to the teaching that has been established by God, and not inventing their own doctrines.

How did Paul, who at one time set about persecuting those who placed their faith in Jesus, become obedient to the Gospel message that he had worked so diligently to stamp out? It was through the power of God working through His gift of grace. Paul was called, cleansed, and commissioned, all within a matter of days (Acts 9:4, 6, 15-16).

Paul did not become a minister through his own efforts, or through the desire of others, but through God singling him out for a special ministry. Paul thought that he was already working for God when he made his way to Damascus that day; he was certain that he was doing the will of God – after all, he had papers from the religious leaders of Jerusalem for the mission. Yet his work was in opposition to God's desires, and, through the gift of God's grace, the persecutor became the persecuted. The phrase *effectual working* comes from the Greek word *energeia* that is applied only to superhuman power – primarily of God, but also the power of the

[9] Strong's Online.
[10] Vine's "deacon."

devil.[11] It took the power of God to impart the gift of grace into Paul's life; however, that is no less the case with each of us for, left to ourselves, we will not desire the things of God. "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Romans 3:11).

8. *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;*

Paul never forgot that he was once a persecutor of Christians; even though he was appointed by God as an Apostle to the Gentiles, that did not erase what once had been. Although there is forgiveness in Christ, and He will restore us to usefulness for Himself, that does not erase what we did before we found His forgiveness. However, those things should not drag us down, but, rather, encourage us to faithfulness and holiness. The grace of God was given to Paul so that he would become a minister, or servant, for God. Of all of the people in Jerusalem, Paul was undoubtedly one of the least likely to become an apostle of the Way, yet the grace of God, administered through the power of God, turned Paul's life around. Even as Paul never forgot his role as a persecutor, he also never ceased to marvel at the power of the grace of God that worked in his life.

What is also clearly evident here is that there is an equality before Christ that transcends all personal giftedness, talents, or station in life. Paul, perhaps the most prominent of the Apostles, refers to himself as *less than the least of all saints*; once again, we must realize that, *in Christ*, the leader is to be the servant of all. What is normal protocol in the culture of this world has been turned upside down within the Body of Christ; we are to each look out for the needs of others, and not just our own (Philippians 2:3-8). It is this principle that runs contrary to what we find in modern psychology, and what we hear from many within the Evangelical community. James Dobson has become one of the leading proponents of

[11] Strong's Online.

the need to build up a *healthy self-esteem*. "For Dobson self-esteem, self-worth, self-acceptance and their related self-words are crucial, not only for the individual but for society as well. He contends that '… low self-esteem is a threat to the entire human family….'"[12] Martin and Deidre Bobgan, who have written on Dobson's errant philosophies, declare: "The self-esteem movement began in the third chapter of Genesis. Initially Adam and Eve were God-conscious and aware of one another and their surroundings rather than being self-conscious. Their awareness of themselves was incidental and peripheral to their focus on God and one another. Adam realized that Eve was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, but he was not self-aware in the same sense that his descendents would be. Self was not the issue until the Fall."[13] For the Christian, self must be rendered crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20), deemed to be dead (Romans 6:11), and we are to live in the righteousness of God through His indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:4-7). If we exercise a lively self-esteem, then we are yet carnally minded, which is *enmity against God*. Within genuine faith in Christ, there is no room for the self-esteem that is advocated by Dobson, yet this doctrine finds a haven among Evangelicals today. "Christian" colleges teach such psychology as a science (when it is more correctly defined as a humanistic religion, with its emphasis upon "self"), and they will go to great lengths to justify their teaching as being Biblical.[14] Much of the "Biblical counseling" emphasis today (again demanding a deferral to the experts) has its foundation firmly set upon the humanism of psychology, and not the Word of God. Psychology has tremendous appeal to our fallen natures, for the focus of our thinking turns inward, yet we are warned in Scripture to not permit such thinking to ruin us: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Psychology specifically fits that warning, for it is the brainchild of

Martin & Deidre Bobgan

[12] Martin and Deidre Bobgan, James Dobson's Gospel of Self-Esteem and Psycology, p. 46.
[13] Bobgan, Dobson, p. 48.
[14] Bodgan, Psychoheresy, p. 65.

several atheists, some of whom deliberately worked to discredit God and everything Christian; it has flourished under the philosophy of humanism, which is equally anti-God. Yet Evangelicals continue to forage through the dregs of human philosophy in search of a fragment of shattered truth, rather than turning to the convicting Word of God to discover Truth that will endure for eternity. Only Satan could have formulated a philosophy that would entice those who, with the one hand, hold the very words of God, and with the other, tenaciously grasp such a lie.

There was a purpose in God's choosing of Paul; His grace was administered with power so that Paul might bring the good news of Christ's completed work to all people; more specifically, to those who were outside of Israel – to those who were *far off*. The other eleven Apostles seemed oriented toward the Jews, and centered in Jerusalem; even after the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen, they were still found in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1, 15:2). It was Philip, one of the seven appointed to "wait on tables," who took the message of the Gospel to the Samaritans (north of Jerusalem), and to the Ethiopian returning to Africa (Acts 8). Yet even this was still within the area of Israel. It was Paul who took the Gospel to those in *far off* places – to *the uttermost part of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

It's interesting when you follow the ministry of Paul as revealed in the book of Acts, that he always began in the synagogues (Acts 13:5, 14, 44; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). This might almost seem to be a contradiction since he was commissioned by God to be a minister to the Gentiles (Romans 15:16), yet, out of these synagogue beginnings came an established group of believers within the Gentile community. The synagogues were not a teaching center strictly for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well – but clearly, the Gentiles who would have attended these meetings would have been those who deliberately desired to know the God of the Jews. It seems clear that Paul began his work by seeking those who exemplified a desire to know God; out of this would come an assembly of the saved, both of Jews and Gentiles, who recognized that they were one *in Christ*.

What was Paul's message? – *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. These riches are not *unsearchable* in that we are not permitted to dig into them, but rather that no searching will plumb the depths of them; they are beyond our comprehension – our finite minds will never grasp the fullness of the riches of Christ. Paul has already outlined some of these marvelous riches in the earlier portion of this letter:

1. In Him, we are blessed with every spiritual blessing (1:3)
2. In Him, we are chosen by God from before the world began (1:4)
3. In Him, we are holy and blameless before God (1:4, 6)
4. By Him, we are adopted by God as His children (1:5)
5. In Him, we are forgiven (1:7), and it's a gift (2:8, 9)
6. In Him, we have obtained an inheritance (1:11)
7. In Him, we have been made alive (2:5)
8. In Him, we are created to walk in good works (2:10)
9. Through Him, we have access to the Father (2:18)
10. In Him, we are being made into a habitation of God (2:22)

Do we understand these things? – not fully. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

9. *And to make all* men *see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:*

Here is another purpose to Paul's ministry. The words *make* and *see* are from one word in the Greek: *photizo*, which means to enlighten, to inform, to illuminate or to make clear and so to understand.[15] This contains no concept of forcing people to accept what you teach (no

[15] Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

brainwashing), but rather giving instruction and teaching for the purpose of providing guidance and increased understanding. However, just as surely, this does not mean tailoring the message so as not to cause offense. "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased" (Galatians 5:11). Paul realized that if he preached a message that the Jews found acceptable, then his persecution from them would cease, yet he would not in any way alter the Message that he had been given – it was the Message of the cross that brought him persecution. Modern Evangelicals, on the other hand, have bent over backwards to eliminate the offence of the Gospel, and, in so doing, have stripped the Message of its power. The sinners are being entertained and loved under the pretext of luring them into the kingdom; yet, not unlike the Israelites of old, the allurement of the worldly entertainment is proving to be too great for the "saints," for they are becoming increasingly worldly while the sinners, being entertained, remain in their sins. Jesus' words come to mind: "Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?" (Luke 6:39). Modern Evangelicalism has become a fiasco of blindness!

Back to our verse – possibly, there are those who would use this verse to justify a doctrine of universalism, yet it is clear that the *all* here cannot mean everyone in the world (the rest of Scripture forbids such an interpretation). Again, we must pay particular attention to the context. Paul has just noted that he is preaching the Good News of Christ's unsearchable riches among the Gentiles (*euaggelizo* is not just preaching, but includes the Good News of the Gospel),[16] and now he says: *and enlighten them all*; the *all* is simply a reference to those who are hearing his teaching.[17]

Here again we have a mention of *mystery*; that which has been hidden in God has now been revealed to His own. In Colossians 1:25-27, Paul speaks of this mystery: "[25.] Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; [26.] even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from

[16] Friberg Lexicon.
[17] https://www.deepl.com/translator.

generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: [27] to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." This is the mystery of God that was hidden for the most part from the OT prophets and the Jewish leaders, but is now being proclaimed openly to everyone: **Christ in you**!!

Our passage speaks of the *fellowship of the mystery*. *Fellowship* is a word that has been severely downgraded through excessive use over time. Today we see it as simply getting together in a friendly fashion; the term translated as *fellowship* rests in the Greek *koinonia*, which carries the thought of community, of communion, and of intimacy.[18] When we consider the *mystery* as being "Christ in you," clearly the *fellowship* of this mystery demands intimacy. This is more than sitting down to have a cup of tea together; it is, "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5), and "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). John understood this when he wrote: "truly our fellowship [*koinonia*] is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3); there is an intimacy here, a oneness, and a unity that goes well beyond the concept of fellowship as we might understand it today.

This is the theme of Paul's ministry: Christ in you, you in Christ – God has opened a personal access to His grace and mercy through Christ's death and resurrection. The Jews gave Stephen their attention until he identified them as the betrayers and murderers of Jesus, the Just One spoken of by the prophets (Acts 7:52-54); Paul held the attention of the Athenians until he spoke of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:32). In Paul's day, these were the two points that caused many to turn away: the Jews had great difficulty in accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah (after all, their religious leaders had orchestrated His death), and the Gentiles, who were well versed in humanistic philosophy, had to open their minds to accepting the reality of the resurrection from the dead. Modern

[18] Strong's Online.

Evangelicals have no problem agreeing with these two pillars of the faith, but they run amuck by settling for a misrepresentation of the freedom that we have in Christ. They will readily pay lip service to the authority of the Word of God and the necessity of standing for the truth, yet their life-styles, activities, and choices do not affirm this. Chuck Colson referred to himself as being a Fundamentalist, even while he reduced the fundamentals of the faith to five cryptic phrases that opened the floodgates to his misguided concept of the "narrow way."[19] Rick Warren pushes the need to reach out to those about us, even while he uses the techniques of the world to create a worldly atmosphere and then points to the large numbers as a sign of his success. The freedom that we have *in Christ* means to be empowered by the Spirit of God to live a life of holiness and righteousness (Romans 8:4; Ephesians 4:24) – something that we cannot do outside of Christ (Romans 8:8), no matter how successful we might appear to be, or how logical our reasoning might seem.

From the beginning of creation, God's plan to pay the full price for the sins of man was already in place (1 Peter 1:18-20), but how this was to be accomplished remained hidden in Him.[20] Promises were made: Adam and Eve heard the promise and understood that God would deal a death blow to Satan through a descendant of Eve ("bruise his head," Genesis 3:15); Abraham believed the promise of God that, through him, a Blessing would come to all of the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3); Moses wrote the words of God and heard that one day a Prophet would arise Who would be like him but much greater (Deuteronomy 18:17-19). David experienced fellowship with God and was called a man after God's own heart, yet he spoke of a Priest Who was to come, a Priest after the order of Melchisedec – even though the Levitical priesthood was still in full operation (Psalm 110:4). All through the ages, there were glimpses of the reality that God had planned – snatches that together laid the foundation for Who was to come; yet it seems clear that each purveyor of those

[19] Charles Colson, The Body, p. 186. He laid out the "nonnegotiables" as 1) the infallibility of Scripture, 2) the deity of Christ, 3) the Virgin Birth and miracles of Christ, 4) Christ's substitutionary death, and 5) Christ's physical resurrection and eventual return. Yet even in these, he used broad brush-strokes in order to keep the Roman Catholics and Evangelicals on the same page. His goal was unity, **not** the truth of God's Word.

[20] Friberg Lexicon.

glimpses really did not comprehend the full magnitude of what they spoke. Why God chose to withhold the full light of His plan in this way also remains hidden in God. Isaiah understood this when he declared that God's ways are higher than our ways even as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9). Although the extent of God's plan for salvation was not revealed, His grace reached those who believed Him and walked in obedience to Him. Abel believed God, and he is counted among the faithful even though it cost him his life; Hebrews 11 recounts some of those of old who are numbered among the faithful – the point being that God, throughout all of the ages, has had those who were faithful to Him.

Who created all things by Jesus Christ – this almost seems to be an intrusion into the flow of the passage, yet the Spirit of God has included it. What is clear from this is that Jesus is the Creator – the One Who brought all things into being according to the creative thoughts of God the Father. There are many passages that support this: John 1:3 (the Word [Jesus] made all things), 1 Corinthians 8:6 (Jesus, our Creator), Colossians 1:16 (including things visible and invisible, i.e., principalities, powers, etc.), Hebrews 1:2 (He *made the worlds*). In keeping with being the Creator, Jesus, through His death, burial and resurrection, also became the Creator of new life within the heart of the believer in accordance with the plan of God, which was kept hidden from the time that creation began.

10. *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly* places *might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,*

Principalities is from the Greek word *arche*, which means *beginning*, and, therefore, *the first place*, or *rule*;[21] within this context, it refers to the holy angels.[22] *Powers* is from the Greek word *exousia*, and carries the thought of authority, the right to act, and here again, it refers to the

[21] Strong's Online.
[22] Vine's "principality."

angels.[23] The reason why we can say that these refer to the angels is that these principalities and powers are in the *heavenlies* – the dwelling place of God and His angelic hosts. This does not include Satan and his host of fallen angels, for they have been cast out of the heavenlies (Isaiah 14:12; Revelation 12:9).

Here is a mystery for God working in us: He is using us to teach the angels. *Might be known* means to make known or to reveal;[24] therefore, one of God's purposes (*to the intent*) for having Paul preach the Gospel to all men is so that His angelic hosts will see something new. From this, it is evident that the angels are observing us, and they are watching God work in us, His *ekklesia*, or assembly of believers. What is God showing them? He is demonstrating to them His *manifold wisdom*, the many aspects of His infinite wisdom – it is being revealed in many, many different ways. The wisdom of God that is being evidenced through His saints is something that the angels have not understood before; this is something that they have never seen because it is centered in God's working in His people under the New Covenant – this is a *new* demonstration of God's wisdom that they are witnessing. After being with the Lord for eons, the angels are learning something new about their Creator; perhaps this is a glimpse of what eternity with the Lord will be like for His children – always learning something new.

11. *According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:*

Once again, we have reference made to the *purpose* of God; earlier (Ephesians 1:11) we saw that our adoption as His children was a part of His *purpose*. His desire to use His children to show the holy angels His wisdom in new ways is *according to the purpose of the ages that He made in Christ Jesus our Lord* (literal).[25] This is not a spin-off of His dealing

[23] Vine's "power."
[24] Friberg Lexicon.
[25] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

with us; this is something unique that He had planned in Christ Jesus – something that could only take place once the mission of Christ was completed and the New Covenant established. Earlier we also learned that because Christ's mission was completed, He was raised to a place that is far above all *principality* and *power* (Ephesians 1:20-21); He is the Creator of all things (John 1:3), including the *principalities* and *powers* who are now learning of God's wisdom by observing His actions among us. Through faith in Christ, we are raised up together with Him, and are sitting with Him in heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:5-6). If we remain faithfully *in Him*, then we will one day be saved in order to abide with Him forever (Matthew 24:13), and will join the company of the angels in praising Him (Revelation 5:8-12). All of this is the grace of God expressed in all fullness through the salvation that is available only through Christ – a deliverance from sin that is sufficient for all of mankind (2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2), prepared by God from eternity past as a gift that is available to everyone (Revelation 13:8; Ephesians 2:8; John 3:16).

Something that we often miss when contemplating the working of God among mankind is the eternality of His plans and purposes. God is timeless and all knowing – concepts that we cannot begin to fathom; He is eternally sovereign – there are no surprises to Him; His Word will never fail – yet we are so easily swayed by the opinions of men. It seems that we would much rather place a question mark over the Word of God than to jeopardize a relationship with a friend, or question the teaching of someone who is more educated than we are; we would prefer to set the declarations of God aside rather than rock the boat. As the Lord began to open the eyes of my wife and me to a proper understanding of Biblical separation, one of the things that took me some time to get over was that there are many, many men who are far better educated than I am, men who have spent years studying the Word of God, yet they have not come to understand what was becoming evident to us. How could this be? Surely, I must be mistaken. How could anyone study God's Word for so long and never arrive at a correct recognition of something as basic as Biblical separation? It has become apparent that there is a spirit of delusion among Evangelicals, a spirit that has bound them to the fallacies

of New Evangelicalism (as proclaimed by Harold Ockenga in 1948), a spirit of Ecumenism that seeks to unite everyone under one banner. With this thoroughly engrained in their thinking, and a generally accepted systematized theology of whatever persuasion, there is very little room left for the Spirit of God to speak to their hearts. Such as these have chosen a superficial understanding of the Word of God in order to avoid conflict with their broad, Ecumenical message; they have the "answer" to every Biblical question (hence we have Hank Hanegraaff as the *Bible Answer Man*), yet they choose to disregard the holiness of God and the unshakeable, eternality of His plan for mankind. God is the same yesterday, today and forever; He has not changed nor will He (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), and just as assuredly, His plans remain unchanged from the day that He spoke light into existence.

There are those today who proclaim the doctrine of "progressive omniscience," or "open theism." They hold that God cannot know the future because it has not happened yet; therefore, God is learning from what is taking place and responding to it, even as we are learning and responding; in other words, God is bound by time. Philip Yancey, a very popular author within Evangelicalism, and one of the editors of *Christianity Today*, is a proponent of open theism. What such men fail to recognize is that God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last (Revelation 1:8, 11); as the Creator of time, He is the "I AM," the One Who is ever "now" (Exodus 3:14). In man's intelligence and sophistication, he may not carve idols out of gold or silver, but he does not hesitate to mold a philosophical god that is no better than he, himself, is – a god who cannot save, and cannot hear. In Isaiah 59:2 we read: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." The God of the universe has hidden Himself from those who have sought to recreate Him after their own likeness. They face two difficulties: 1) the God of the universe will not hear them, and 2) the god that they have fashioned cannot hear them. They are lost and perceive it not; "2. For men shall be lovers of their own selves … boasters, proud, blasphemers … 5. having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn

Philip Yancey

away" (2 Timothy 3:2, 5). We must have no part with the likes of Philip Yancey.

Since Philip Yancey is quite popular, and open theism is seemingly an acceptable Evangelical doctrine, let's consider the major components of this theology:

1) "God is not sovereign. He is not always and necessarily in control. His will can be thwarted.

2) "God is at risk. God responds to our responses. While God is endlessly resourceful, He can make mistakes. He can drop the ball in our lives. Our actions can so affect God as to frustrate His plans and force Him to seek alternatives. To some degree God is at the mercy of His creatures' choices and actions.

3) "God is limited in knowledge. Since God does not know the future He seeks input from His creatures to help Him make decisions. He does not know the future because He is subject to time as we are. He is not infinite in knowledge; He is constantly learning. He is not immutable but is constantly changing, not in essence but in understanding. God truly does not know what anyone will do until they do it.

4) "God's ultimate purpose is not to glorify Himself but to give and receive love. His greatest and central attribute is love, around which all other attributes revolve."[26]

Bruce Ware, in his book *God's Lesser Glory*, has exposed the foundation and appeal of this aberrant theology:

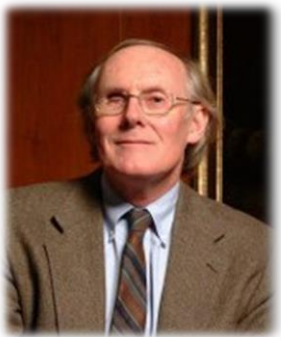
> "Along with open theism's view of God's limitations comes a corresponding exaltation of human beings. God is lowered while man is elevated. Herein lies both the appeal (sadly) and the danger of open theism. The culture in which we live, including much of the Christian subculture, has drunk deeply at the well of self-esteem [something that we have already noted]. Where the Bible enjoins

[26] Gary Gilley, "Open Theism," http://www.svchapel.org/resources/articles/23-doctrine/550-open-theism-part-1

unfettered but deeply humble 'God-esteem,' we have been conditioned to think that we should have some of that esteem for ourselves. So, when a theology comes along that says, 'God often doesn't make up his mind what to do until *he hears first from you*,' or, 'God and *you together* chart out your course for the future as *both of you learn together* what unfolds,' or, 'Sometimes *God makes mistakes* but we need to realize that he was doing his best,' such a view plays well with many in our culture. We feel like we are almost peers with God, in a relationship in which we are encouraged to have an elevated view of what we think and feel, struggling along together with God while we are both subject to many of the same limitations – and all of this feels so right.

In fact, it is so very, very wrong."[27]

In 2000, the Baptist General Conference declared that open theism falls "within the accepted bounds of the Evangelical spectrum."[28] Greg Boyd was espousing this view as a member of the faculty of Bethel College and Seminary, St. Paul, MN (which is associated with the Baptist General Conference). Although Boyd resigned from Bethel in 2002, clearly, it had nothing to do with the heresy that he believed and propagated. This is also the school where Paul Ferris and Robert Rakestraw continue to teach (as of this writing), both having been a part of Prairie Bible Institute, Three Hills, AB in the past.


Clark Pinnock

Clark Pinnock promoted open theism for quite some time; a course on modern theologians at Briercrest Biblical Seminary, Caronport, SK, presented his teachings **without** exposing the error of his thinking! In 2002, Clark Pinnock and John Sanders were charged by the Evangelical Theological Society ("a professional society of Biblical scholars, teachers, pastors and others involved in Evangelical

[27] Bruce Ware, God's Lesser Glory, p. 148.
[28] http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2000/1156_We_Took_a_Good_Stand_and_Made_a_Bad_Mistake/

scholarship"[29]) for their views on open theism. However, not surprisingly, after the case was carefully reviewed, the membership of the Society voted to drop the charges; in other words, this Society of Evangelical "thinkers" saw no problem with them holding and promoting this heresy.

In stark contrast to open theism, is the growing enthusiasm among Evangelicals for Calvinism; this is the polar extreme where God is accused of predetermining every minute detail of everyone's life, including their eternal presence in either Heaven or the Lake of Fire. It is this kind of accommodation of heresy that is the downfall of most modern, professional theologians. They are so carefully carrying the banner of their particular denomination, or their well-honed theology, that they are unable to clearly see the teachings of Scripture. Unless we are prepared to embrace the Word of God as our personal final authority for spiritual instruction, we run the risk of reading the Scriptures through the lens of someone else's doctrinal persuasion – rather than permitting the Spirit of God to guide us into His truth (John 16:13). I am slowly learning to be unimpressed by educational credentials.

Again, we are reminded that all is *in Christ Jesus our Lord – Lord* means one who has full authority over another as an owner.[30] When we call Jesus our Lord, we are saying that we belong to Him (after all, He did buy us out of sin!), and that He has the authority to decide what is best for us. Therefore, when things happen to us (something that we did not choose) we must rest assured that it has come through the permissive hand of the Lord Jesus. Scripture reminds us many times to persevere, to endure (Ephesians 6:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Timothy 2:3; 4:5; Hebrews 12:7, James 1:12; 5:11), and if we understand what it means for Jesus to be our Lord, then our faith will be strengthened to endure all that comes our way.

12. *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

[29] http://www.etsjets.org/
[30] Gingrich Lexicon.

In Christ, we have *free and fearless boldness* to come before God; however, this bears no hint of either brashness or carelessness. It is true that we have the freedom to come to God without hesitation, but it is only *by the faith of him* or *through His faith*.[31] One thing that has been obvious in our study of Ephesians so far: nothing comes to us from God except through our being *in Christ*. It is not due to anything that we might do, or who we might be – it is only by means of what Christ has done that we can have access to the Father. Christ remained completely faithful throughout His life on earth; His trust in the Father, even while in His limiting body of flesh, was complete.

By the faith of him is a phrase that caught my attention; it seems to be one of those things that we might pass over quickly and not really understand. There are many verses that make reference to the faith of Jesus Christ; here are a few:

> Romans 3:21-22 – "[21.] But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; [22.] Even the righteousness of God *which is* by [through] **faith of Jesus Christ** unto all and upon all them that believe [*are believing*]: for there is no difference ..."[32]
>
> Galatians 2:16 – "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the **faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ …"
>
> Galatians 3:22 – "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by [out of] **faith of Jesus Christ** might be given to them that believe [*are believing*]."[33]
>
> Philippians 3:9 – "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the **faith of Christ**, the righteousness which is of God by faith …"

[31] Strong's Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.
[32] Strong's Online.
[33] Ibid.

Revelation 14:12 – "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the **faith of Jesus**."

As I read these verses and others like them, it became apparent that it is the faith of Jesus that is central to securing our salvation. What is the faith of Jesus? Here it is, demonstrated for us: "[5.] Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: [6.] Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: [7.] But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant [*doulos*, slave], and was made in the likeness of men: [8.] And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. [9.] Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: [10.] That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; [11.] And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5-11).[34] Jesus, eternally with the Father and the Spirit, and the Creator of the universe, became a man and placed unwavering faith in God, the Father, and His eternal plan – a faith that took Him to the cross in order to purchase the eternal deliverance from sin for lost mankind. It was the faith of Jesus that became our means of justification before God (Galatians 2:16); it is through the faith of Jesus that we can claim the righteousness that comes from God (Romans 3:22). We place our faith *in Christ* and His finished work, which is the express demonstration of the faith that Christ had in God the Father. We take God at His word, and believe Him even as "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3). As we believe God, and place our faith *in Christ* and His finished work, His faith becomes effective in us. Jesus said that if we would have faith as a grain of mustard seed, then we would be able to accomplish great things (Matthew 17:20) – the faith of a mustard seed is 100% in its Creator! Jesus did not say that we should have faith the size of a mustard seed; rather, we are to have faith **as** the seed. Like the seed, our faith must be completely in our Creator and Redeemer – since He has paid for our sins, we have a much greater reason to have faith in the Lord than the mustard seed does. As we

[34] Strong's Online.

place our faith in Christ, and as we are believing God, the righteousness that has been established through the working of Christ's faith in God's eternal plan becomes our righteousness (Philippians 3:9).

Returning to our passage, our *boldness* and *confidence* to come before God has nothing to do with our great faith, but it has everything to do with where our faith has been placed. As we are believing God, the righteousness that Christ purchased for us through the exercise of His perfect faith, becomes ours, and, thereby, we can come before a holy God with confidence. All of this simply underscores the theme of Ephesians: all that we have before God is *in Christ*; it is only in Him that we are brought together with the saints of all of the ages to show forth His glory, and to be His inheritance. What a great loss for those who are duped by the subtlety of New Evangelicalism as they bring the eternal Word of God into question; yet they seem unaware of their loss as they fashion a god after their own designs.

13. *Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

Wherefore – a word that draws on what has come before in order to make a final point. Paul has covered several things that are included in this *wherefore*: 1) the Gentiles have full access to the salvation that Christ secured by the cross, and now offers to all men (Ephesians 3:6), 2) Paul was made a minister of this Gospel despite his unworthiness (v.7-8), 3) the angels are learning about God's wisdom as He works with His saints (v. 10), and 4) our confident access to the Father rests in the faith of Christ (v. 12). The preceding verses give us an overview of Paul's message, his ministry, and the effects of his ministry. Because of all of this, he now expresses his desire for the Ephesians.

Faint not means to not become discouraged or lose heart.[35] Clearly, Paul was facing tough times for these people; *tribulations* is from the

[35] Friberg Lexicon.

Greek word *thlipsis*, and literally means *pressing together*, or *pressure*, and metaphorically speaks of oppression, distress and affliction.[36] Because of these things, Paul is asking them not to become discouraged because of what he is going through for them – this is coming from Paul, the prisoner! The one who is experiencing the *pressing together* is requesting that they not become disheartened at his trials.

Paul goes on to say that the affliction that he is facing *is their glory*. How can this be? The Greek word for *glory* (*doxa*) is also translated as *honor* and *praise*, in addition to meaning the splendor and majesty of God.[37] Remember that Paul had been imprisoned because the Jews of Jerusalem sought to silence his message of the risen Lord Jesus (which he took to the Gentiles) and that the Law of Moses was ended in the risen Lord (Acts 21:27-28; 22:21-22). The *tribulations* that Paul faced were a direct result of the Message of life that he preached everywhere and to everyone, including the Gentiles. It seems that it was Paul's desire that they should view his tribulations as an honor; he was willing to suffer persecution as long as he could bring this message of hope to the Gentiles, and that included the Ephesians! Paul declared: "… we glory [or boast] in tribulations [*thlipsis*] also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience …" (Romans 5:3); we also read that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution [*dioko* (hostile pursuit)]" (2 Timothy 3:12).[38] This is not a comforting thought to our soft, North American way of life to which we have become accustomed; yet persecution can take many forms. For my wife and me, it has been our personal experience that since we committed ourselves to follow the Lord more fully, and as we have sought without reservation to live in obedience to Him, many friends and family have forsaken us. Indeed, we have found the way to life to be narrow, and often steep.

[36] Strong's Online.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

14. *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

The action here is of Paul bowing before God in worship and adoration, but also in supplication for the Ephesian believers (as we see in what follows). Bowing indicates a submission to God, a willingness to come under His authority and command. There will come a day when every knee will bow before God (Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10), even those who deny His very existence will bow before Him and acknowledge His supremacy. How much better to willingly bow before the Lord today and accept His provision for the deliverance of our souls, than to wait for the day still coming when the unwilling knees will bend before Him only to experience His righteous judgment, rather than His grand salvation.

For this cause draws what follows to Paul's desire that the Ephesians would acknowledge his persecution and trials as a sign of honor for them. Clearly, Paul has accepted his tribulation in this life as what the Lord will use for his growth. "[22] Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you [drive you out] *from their company*, and shall reproach [insult] *you*, and cast out your name as evil, **for the Son of man's sake**. [23] Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets" (Luke 6:22-23).[39]

15. *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,*

The family to which we, as the faithful *in Christ*, belong has been named after Christ; hence we are referred to as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12). The word *family* speaks of lineage, or a common origin,[40] and our lineage, as the Body of Christ, is through Christ, the Deliverer Who was promised from the beginning. Everyone

[39] Friberg Lexicon.
[40] Strong's Online.

who is being saved has been purchased by Christ: those before His coming to earth, and those after His resurrection. This family, of which Christ is Head, abides in heaven and upon earth; saints from all of the ages are a part of this family, as Hebrews 11 so clearly illustrates – those who have passed on, and those who are still living here on earth. Ephesians 1:10 declares that God set out to sum up the whole in Christ, both in the heavens and upon the earth. This is specifically within the context of expounding all that God has done for us in Christ; *in Christ* there is a bringing together of those who have gone before and those who are coming after. God is the God of the living, as Jesus so clearly declared to the Sadducees (Mark 12:27), and so those who have been declared righteous before God, through faith, after the manner of Abel, Enoch and Abraham, are united with those who, through that very same faith, have been declared righteous by believing in the finished, saving work of Christ. There is only one family made up of all who have placed their faith in Christ, the righteous Savior (both as promised and as fulfilled).

Once again, it is clear that the focus of our faith is Christ; it is His name that we bear, and we must remain in Him in order to realize the riches that God has prepared for us.

16. *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;*

We return here to the main, beginning thought, namely that the Ephesians will see Paul's tribulations as being to their glory, and that he is bowing his knees before God for a purpose. *That*, or *in order that*, is the sense here; he now begins to outline his purpose for bowing before God as it relates to the Ephesian believers and the faithful in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1).

Paul has a specific request of God for this group of saints – something that he longs for God to give (*grant*) to them. What follows is the reason that Paul willingly bears tribulation for the glory of the Ephesians; he

submits to God the Father, even in his tribulations, and it is in his surrender that he petitions the Lord on behalf of the Ephesians. In the next portion of his letter, he ouitlines his desire of the Lord Jesus for these saints; it is as his appeal to the Lord finds expression in the Ephesians that Paul's tribulations will become their glory. Paul's request to God is that they would look past his trials and begin to move in the direction that he is outlining for them.

Paul's petition is all of God, and its measure is the immeasurable splendor of God – *the riches of his glory*. Therefore, Paul can present his purpose without a doubt as to the fulfillment of his desire; his request is couched in the infinitude of God's glory, and therein is the hope of seeing it fulfilled in the lives of the Ephesians.

This is the first in a series of four specific things that Paul desires for the Ephesians and for us – *the ability to be strengthened through His Spirit in the inner man* (literal).[41] His request is for God to give them the power that would see them strengthened by the Spirit of God in the *within* man.[42] Jesus said, "[18.] Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. [19.] For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: [20.] These are the things which defile a man …" (Matthew 15:18-20). It is that inner cleansing that is needed to live a life of holiness before God, and this can only come through being *in Christ*, by appropriating His faith and His righteousness as our own. Romans 8:9: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." If the Spirit of God is dwelling in us, then we carry about with us the very Spirit Who is able to strengthen us from within so that we will live as we are commanded. However, this does not mean that life will be easy – the Scriptures do not teach the prosperity gospel of health and wealth that some today seek to use in order to dupe many out of their money. Paul declared: "…though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). The prosperity gospel has its

[41] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.
[42] Strong's Online.

roots in the doctrines of Satan that were first proclaimed in the Garden of Eden; through the smooth words of the devil, the forbidden fruit became *good for food*, *pleasant to the eyes*, and able to make one *wise* (Genesis 3:6). The deception has changed little with the passage of time: the message is still the same, and the appeal is just as strong. The way to life is narrow and lonely, for there are few who find it (Matthew 7:14), yet we are challenged to walk this path of godliness, and to expect affliction and persecution along the way (2 Timothy 3:12). Modern Evangelicals have been convinced that the way to life is not nearly as narrow as Jesus stated, yet God has not, nor will He ever change.

17. *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,*

This is the second request presented by Paul. These petitions, although individually identifiable, are also cumulative in nature; i.e., each builds on the one(s) that came before. The first, that they would be strengthened in their inner man by the Spirit of God, provides a basis for the second – *Christ to reside in your hearts through the faith* (literal).[43] *Dwell* (*katoikeo*) carries with it the thought of settling into a place and remaining there.[44] Paul's desire is that Christ would inhabit the essence of their (and our) spiritual being, that He would fill and rule us.[45] Contained here is the spirit of Jesus' instruction to "abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4) so that we are able to bring forth spiritual fruit.

Paul clarifies here that the mechanism for this indwelling Christ is *faith*; however, not just any faith – the Greek includes the definite article to make it *the* faith. There is much *faith* in the world today, but it is not *the* saving faith of Christ. "Watch ye, stand fast in **the faith**" (1 Corinthians 16:13) is not an admonition to have faith, but to be on the alert and to persevere in *the faith*. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that

[43] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.
[44] Vine's, "dwell."
[45] Strong's Online.

in the latter times some shall depart from **the faith**, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1). We live in just such a day: *the faith* once delivered through the Apostles and carefully recorded for us in the Scriptures by the Spirit of God, has fallen into disrepute. Evangelicals have determined that there is a better way, one that holds greater appeal to more people, a way that demands less of us and makes it feel less restrictive; so they speak forth words of deception – inaccurate words that mislead the unsuspecting. Our practice of deferring to the experts has caused the error of New Evangelicalism to spread like wildfire; even those whom we would consider to be elderly saints, those who supposedly have walked in the Christian faith for many years, have been duped into accepting the doctrines of today as being Biblical. How can this be? The process is gradual; the changes in course are minor so as not to rock the boat and draw undesired attention. Consider this example: a charted course that is set one degree off, after a mile will be off by a mere 92 feet; however, after 100 miles, we will now be 1.7 miles off course. It doesn't take a huge error to carry one significantly off course over a period of time. New Evangelicals said that they would not practice Biblical separation; this seemingly small change has produced results that have been spiritually devastating, and we have yet to realize the full extent of this departure from the path of *the faith*. The impact of this error will become more evident when the Antichrist is revealed, and its full effect will be understood at God's great white throne judgment. In the meantime, the siren song of unity and accommodation has already blinded the minds of many Evangelicals so that they will never find the Narrow Gate (the Lord Jesus) that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14).

That ye, being rooted and grounded in love – this introduces Paul's third request, which carries on into the next verse. *In love, ye have been rooted and established* (literal);[46] this provides the foundation for what follows. Again, consider that the requests are linked together and build in a cumulative manner. First, that we will be strengthened in our inner man by the Spirit of God; second, that we will experience the abiding presence of Christ within us. The result of this is that we have become *rooted and*

[46] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

grounded in the love of Christ, and this forms the basis for the third request.

Rooted (*rhizoo*) means to strengthen with roots, and here it is used figuratively to mean: to firmly establish or to strengthen.[47] It exudes a feeling of permanency; something that is rooted is not easily moved. James understood this when he wrote: "5. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5-8). Someone who is *double minded* cannot be *rooted* at the same time; conversely, someone who is *rooted* in Christ will not waver, or vacillate, in his commitment to Him.

Grounded (*themelioo*) means to lay the foundation, to make stable or cause to be firm and unwavering.[48] Here Paul uses two different Greek words with somewhat similar meanings to underscore the extent of our being established *in love*, not based on our own efforts but on being yielded to Christ: being **in Him** and **He in us**. The Greek word used for *love* is *agape*, and denotes the love that God has, and the love that we are to have toward God and toward our fellow man (Matthew 22:37-39). John tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and as we are *in Him*, we are in His love!

Unfortunately, today's Evangelical community has so focused on the love of God that they have lost sight of His other characteristics – particularly His holiness and justice. In the name of *love*, they have set a proper understanding of Scripture aside lest they should cause anyone offense; in the name of *love*, they accommodate error and heresy in order to display a feigned unity after the fashion of their own imagination. God's dealings with the children of Israel have been provided for us by the Spirit of God as an example and for our instruction (1 Corinthians

[47] Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.
[48] Ibid.

10:6; 2 Timothy 3:16), and what is very evident is that God's holiness, justice and grace are conduits through which His love flows to mankind. It is by this love, which found expression through His grace to meet the requirements of His justice, that sin is dealt with, so that even in His holiness, He is able to have fellowship with the sinner who is *in Christ*. We hear much of "God accepts you the way that you are"; and this has become an excuse to overlook sin and our need for repentance before God. Yes, it is true that there is nothing that we can do to gain merit before God; we cannot cleanse ourselves in order to be acceptable before a holy God. However, God does not accept us the way that we are, or else we would all make our way to heaven; there is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6) – the way is still narrow and very, very exclusive. God will only recognize the work that Christ did on the cross as payment for the sins of the world; our acceptance by God is **not** unconditional, but is entirely dependent upon our being *in Christ* by faith. We have been chosen by God *in Christ* from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians1:4), therefore, if we are not *in Christ*, then we are simply not among the chosen. Today it is emphasized that God understands our humanity and our frailty to the extent that repentance has been banished from our vocabulary and, too often, from our experience; there is a mindset that seems to think that if we pray a little prayer, then that is all that is necessary to secure our eternal destiny. We have lost sight of God's requirement of a righteous life (1 Peter 1:15-16) that will make the Christian life a struggle (1 Timothy 4:10), and it will come at a great cost to our natural desires (Galatians 5:24; Luke 14:26-27).

We live in a day when the Word of God is subject to much neglect – and this is within the Evangelical community! Not only is there a growing neglect, but there is also a corresponding increase in the inability to discern the spiritual truths of Scripture; it is only reasonable that the latter should follow the former. Therefore, when we hear "God accepts you the way that you are" we can rest assured that it has not been processed through a mind that grasps and holds the truths of Scripture in

righteousness. Underlying the statement is the thinking that we do not have to change (at least not much); we certainly wouldn't want our Christianity to cramp our style. The Spirit of God, through Paul, declares, "[20] Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: [21] That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. [1] What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? [2] God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 5:20-6:2). There is an attitude that glories in the fact that where sin abounds, God's grace abounds to a greater extent; what many Christians fail to realize is that they are to be *dead to sin*. It's not a matter of the overabundance of God's grace that is greater than the sin that we commit – it's a matter that our lives are to be dead to sin. Obviously that does not mean that we become sinless while in the flesh, for "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). What it does mean is that we are no longer to live in a perpetual state of sin, the Spirit of God has not been given to us to be ignored; we are to be strengthened by the Spirit so that we are able to live in righteousness. We come to the Lord in our sin to be cleansed by faith in the blood sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, but "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the [full] knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26). These are sobering words that Evangelicals today refuse to hear.

18. *May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;*

19. *And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

This is the core of the third request, which is based upon Christ dwelling within us, and our being firmly grounded in the love of God. The indwelling Christ and abiding in His love are necessary *in order that ye are able to lay hold of with the mind what the width and length and depth and height, to come to know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge* (literal).[49] The thought of verse 18 flows right into the next without a break, and so we understand that the four dimensions are related to our comprehension of the love of God. The saints who have gone on before and now abide in the presence of God, understand more fully the scope of the love of God, yet we who are still in this life, are to always be growing in our understanding (2 Peter 3:18). Nevertheless, it is by being firmly established in the love of Christ that we will be able to come to such a surpassing knowledge one day. Jesus said: *"If my commandments you do keep, you will remain in my love, even as I the commandments of My Father have kept and I am remaining in His love"* (John 15:10, literal).[50] Remaining firmly in the love of Christ requires that we live in obedience to His commands; we must not be so deluded as to believe that we can remain in His love even as we live in disobedience to Him! John the Baptist understood this very well: "He that believeth [*is believing*] on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not [*apeitheo*; *is disobeying*] the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth [*is abiding*] on him" (John 3:36).[51] *Apeitheo* (from *a*, a negative, and *peitho*, to persuade) is much more than simply *believeth not* – it is a rejection of God's will, which can only be described as *disobedience*.[52] Jesus said: *"If you are loving Me, My commandments you must obey"* (John 14:15, literal).[53] To what commandments would Jesus be referring? There are many of His commands scattered throughout the Scriptures, but they all find their foundation in the Law of God, the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments! The abiding presence of the Spirit of God within the

[49] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Strong's Online.
[52] Vine's, "disobedience."
[53] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

heart of the child of God was a mystery that was hidden for many generations, but the commandments of God have always been known (though not always written). When the Lord reiterated to Isaac the promise that He had made to Abraham, He said that He could do so because "Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, **my commandments, my statutes, and my laws**" (Genesis 26:5) – Abraham knew what God required of him because he knew God's *commandments*, *statutes*, and *laws*. Every generation has known what God expects of them, yet it seems that today's "Christian" is suddenly at a loss, and so everyone does what is right in their own eyes – like Israel of old (Judges 17:6).

The dimensions of this love (*breadth*, *length*, *depth* and *height*) are interesting in the Greek: *platos*, *mekos*, *bathos*, and *hupsos*. *Platos* is correctly translated as *breadth* or width, and includes the idea of a great extent.[54] *Mekos* is *length* and completes the two-dimensional expression (length and width).[55] *Bathos* literally identifies that which is below the surface (whether earth or sea); figuratively, it is used to express an extreme greatness, and in relation to God, inexhaustibility.[56] *Hupsos* speaks of the summit or top – the pinnacle.[57] Here are four dimensions applied to the love of God that begin to stretch our minds as we contemplate the greatness of His love. Paul's third request for the Ephesians, and for the faithful in Christ Jesus, is that we will come to understand, at least to some extent, the unlimited love of God. While in this life, we will never be able to plumb its depths or scale its heights, but perhaps we will come to comprehend, in a limited way, the love of God as it has been expressed in bringing us, who were once far off, into a building that is made up of all of the saints from all ages (Ephesians 2:19). God's love is so great that even though He knew the price that it would take to pay the penalty for the sins of fallen mankind, He made no change in His plan.

[54] Strong's Online.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Friberg Lexicon.
[57] Vine's, "height."

We now come to the fourth request, or desire, of Paul expressed for the Ephesian believers and for all of "the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1), which means that it is for us as well. Once again, this rests upon that which has come before: 1) we are being strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit of God, 2) Christ is dwelling in our hearts by faith, and 3) we are growing in our understanding of the immensity of God's love. The phrase *to know* carries with it the concept of a completed action (the verb is aorist), as in *to come to know* or *understand*.[58] Peter understood this when he wrote: "but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Growing in our understanding of the Lord is really a lifetime project, for as long as we abide in the flesh, we will never comprehend, with any measure of completeness, the greatness of our Savior and God. As Paul expresses it here: *and to come to understand the love of Christ that is surpassing knowledge* (literal);[59] this is the essence of Paul's fourth request.

The reason or intent of Paul's fourth request is this: *in order that ye, with all the fullness of God, have been filled* (literal).[60] *Filled* is in the subjunctive mood, but because it is contained within a purpose clause, it expresses the fulfillment of Paul's desire;[61] this is not a possibility (as per a normal subjunctive) but is the reality that comes through growing in our understanding of the love of Christ that is beyond comprehension. Paul's desire is that we will experience the fullness of God that comes through the love of Christ. There will come a day when this will be a reality, if we remain faithful to Him: "[2] Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. [3] And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). This is the hope of those who are abiding *in Christ*; the

[58] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon; https://www.drshirley.org/greek/grammar/g_verb-1AIAa.pdf.
[59] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.
[60] Ibid.
[61] https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

mystery, whereof Paul has been made a minister, is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27) – a present reality through the abiding Spirit of God, mingled with the hope of glory that will be realized when we abide forever in the presence of God.

As you pause to reflect on Paul's desires for the Ephesians and all who are faithful in Christ, it becomes readily apparent that this is a life-changing commitment. There is no room for a half-hearted assent to the tenants of Christianity while living a self-centered life – a life that bears a façade of being righteous even while it is really no different from the world. "Christ in you" precludes any demonstration of the world's values, its goals, or its pleasures; we are to fix our eyes only on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of saving faith (Hebrews 12:2). What we see so much of today is custom-designed faith: a faith that will not offend, a faith that will meet my needs, or a faith that will bring great numbers together in unity. Yet we are reminded that there is only "one Lord" (Ephesians 4:5), the same Lord Who desires to live in us and be our Hope of glory – not our hope for earthly prosperity. It is the same Lord Who, through Paul, said that if we will live godly in this life, then we can rest assured that we will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Today we would rather hear of prosperity than persecution, yet we must not neglect the Word of God in favor of the words of false teachers; there is a cross to be born, and we must not fail to bear it and follow the Lord (Luke 9:23).

20. *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

Paul now breaks into an expression of praise to God. It's as though his heart is so full of gratitude to God for all that He has done that he can't hold it in any longer. In this verse, *able* (*dunamai*) and *power* (*dunamis*) are verb and noun forms of the same Greek word – a word that describes an **inherent** ability to act with strength; God is not enabled to act, but is

capable of acting because of Who He is.[62] It seems that Paul had some difficulty expressing the full extent of God's ability to act, for the Greek carries this sequence of words: *huper ekperissou* (*exceeding abundantly above*), which denotes superabundantly, or what we cannot express.[63] This forms a strongly emphasized articulation of God's ability to act that is beyond anything that we could *ask* (or request) or *think* (or conceive).[64] It is this superabundant ability of God that *is working* (present tense) in us who are obedient to Him! God help us to always submit to His wonder-working power!

21. *Unto him* be *glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

Unto him refers to God, Who is filling us and working in us through His abiding Spirit. *Glory to Him in the ekklesia in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of the ages* (literal).[65] *Age* (*aion*) is used in Greek to describe a period of indefinite duration, and so *the age* becomes *forever*, and *the age of the ages*, *forever and ever*.[66] Glory will come to God through His called-out ones (*ekklesia*) who are *in Christ*; however, the last phrase applies this truth to ***all generations*** *forever and ever*! *Generations* (*genea*) can only have an earthly application (it is derived from *genos*, which speaks of birth, and from *ginomai* – to become) because there will be no ongoing *generations* in heaven (Matthew 22:30).[67] Therefore, *all generations* must include everyone from Adam to the generation that will close the Millennial reign of Christ. *In Christ*, all of the redeemed from *all generations* will bring glory to the Father; it is God's purpose to "gather together **in one** all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1:10), and Christ

[62] Strong's Online.
[63] Vine's, "exceedingly"; Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible.
[64] Friberg Lexicon.
[65] Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.
[66] Vine's, "age."
[67] Strong's Online; Vine's, "age."

will forever be the Head over the *ekklesia*, which is His Body (Ephesians 1:22-23)!