

The Eternal Purpose

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March 2011 AD

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The Eternal Purpose

The concept of eternity goes well beyond the grasp of our human minds. To conceive of time extending forever both before and after any given point of “now” overwhelms the imagination. All we have ever known has a beginning and an end: nothing our physical senses engage remains constant or lasts forever.

Eternity exists in the realm of faith, the unseen. The apostle Paul once wrote: “*the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*”¹ In the entire physical universe, only the mind of man could ever approach or even consider the reality of an eternity. Yet Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived, stated that eternity has been “set” in our hearts.² And phrases like “before the foundation of the world” and “in the ages to come” have been placed before mankind for many centuries.³

In considering an eternal purpose, a reason or objective for our existence, mankind has the natural tendency to see himself as the center of all things. This parallels our positioning in the solar system. Initially man conceived that the earth was the center of the universe: the sun, planets and stars revolved around the earth. This would be the natural expectation. Natural man sees himself as the center of the universe, so why not his home planet? But of course Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543) found the truth of the matter scientifically, that the earth revolves around the sun. We are not the center of the universe, nor are we even the center of our small solar system. In fact we are but one of several planets revolving around our pivot star, the sun.

And so it is spiritually with us as well. Many believe and teach that the salvation of man contains the main, even sole, purpose and preoccupation of our Creator. But as one understands the true nature of God’s eternal purpose, our salvation becomes redefined as the means by which God accomplishes His objective, rather than being the end in and of itself. This startling point comes to the following conclusion: It is not all about us!

In 1543 Copernicus published his paper entitled “On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres.” He determined that the sun does not orbit the earth, but rather “the earth rotates on its axis and, with the other planets in

¹ II Corinthians 4:18.

² Ecclesiastes 3:11.

³ Ephesians 1:4, 2:7.

the solar system, revolves around the sun.”⁴ History records that this and subsequent writings caused what is often referred to as the “Copernican Revolution,”⁵ in which the whole scientific paradigm of astronomy was radically changed. Once we understand our proper place in reference to God’s eternal purpose, not as being the center but a very important component part, we will embark upon a spiritual Copernican revolution of sorts. And this promises to change everything!

This paper proposes to first introduce the perplexing situation in which we find ourselves, then examine the Biblical definition of God’s stated purpose for creating mankind. Specifically, a detailed examination of Ephesians 3:8-12 and its context lie at the center of our study. This passage contains the following statement: “*the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies in accordance with **the eternal purpose**.*”⁶ The paper closes with an appeal for further research, development, and personal application of this most vital and exciting subject.

Life Questions and Reality

“Who am I?” “Why am I here?” These comprise mankind’s most fundamental quest for truth. When it comes to finding meaning in life, there are no deeper questions. Time and again, we find ourselves grasping for the answers. These gnaw at the very core of our being, and impel us to continue the search for self-identity and purpose.

Each one of us experiences life as a gradual dawning of awareness, beginning with the sounds of our mother’s voice and beating heart while we are still in the womb. Successive stages of physical growth in the womb culminate in the eruption of birth. Slowly our senses pick up and define our bodily sphere: from not being able to see our own hand in front of our face, to seeing it, then realizing that hand is mine; its part of me! Rapidly a personality reveals itself, along with walking and talking usually in our first year.

The “terrific twos” and “delightful threes” give way to the pivotal fourth and fifth years of our life here. I remember our daughter’s questioning, especially during her fourth year with the repetitive “Why?” Whenever a question would be answered and confirmed, her next response

⁴ Wikipedia, Nicolaus Copernicus, *On the Revolution of Celestial Spheres* (en.wikipedia.org, June 2010).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ephesians 3:10 quoted, **bold lettering** added here and throughout paper for emphasis.

was another “Why?” The best that even an Einstein could do to finally settle her questioning would be to use the statement, “Because God made it that way.” At this point we hope our little ones are content with this explanation... at least for the time being.

I will never forget bringing our oldest son Stephen, then all of five years old, to the small town where I graduated from high school. They were celebrating Heritage Days, which commemorates the establishment of our town. Main Street was blocked off from car traffic, vendors lined the sidewalks, music blared, and people were dancing in the street. As we approached the crowd on foot, Stephen stopped, put his hands on his hips, and demanded in a loud deliberate voice: “What is going on here?” My wife and I looked at each other and broke out in laughter.

Little did he understand just how profound that question really is! Once we become self-aware, the next question we are wired for has to do with “What in the world is going on here anyway?” As our life accelerates through puberty, the teen years, the twenties and probably marriage, the thirties and raising children, the forties and coaching young adults, and the decades on into life’s golden years, these questions regarding life’s purpose and meaning recycle themselves over and over.

Even in the best of lives, every one of us faces sickness, tragedy, loneliness, fear, pain, and gut-wrenching sorrows. And when one considers the recent past of the twentieth century; the hundreds of thousands slaughtered by Hitler, the millions assassinated by Stalin, and the tens of millions starved to death by Mao,⁷ the desperation for reasonable answers to the questions of life escalates dramatically. During the last century localized genocide has scourged every continent on the face of the earth. Even in times of relative peace, every neighborhood on earth has its share of theft, rape, vandalism, and murder.

Personally, the sting of death penetrates most deeply into those of us who remain alive. They say there is nothing worse than the loss of a child. I’ve never experienced this pain, but I’ve seen stout men on work crews break down and cry uncontrollably when the subject came up. Whether it is a freak accident, a senseless presidential war, or a bald-headed cancer, the loss never totally heals. Oh! The unnatural order of it, the unfairness of a life never lived-out as it should have been, cuts so savagely a wound that refuses to close.

The greatest tragedy I’ve ever experienced in my life so far has been the suicide of my brother Larry. Fourteen months younger than me, we

⁷ Although these numbers are unbelievable in many ways, they are probably too low. Only God knows for sure.

bunked together all through our childhood years: memories of forts and pillow fights, confiding talks, camping trips, fishing, school bus trips, and families being raised, gathered for Christmas. I don't think I'll ever lose the raw edge of the initial impact; the wrenching gut pain, loss of breath, the emptiness full of sorrow that came with the news of Larry's leaving us. Then came the inevitable repeated wonderings: the cruel mistakes I made... we made... that he made. Our folks went to their graves more than a decade later, still shell-shocked and staggering.

Steve Doty, president and founder of DirectConnect Humanitarian Aid, travels the world over bringing medical supplies and hope to some of the most ravaged areas of our planet. He speaks of women in Kosovo who have a "thousand-yard stare."⁸ Their husbands and sons are no more. In many cases their young boys were ripped from their arms to be executed before their very eyes. Oh! How great our present darkness!

So why would a merciful and loving God allow such things? Certainly these things are not beyond His control! This desperate question echoes throughout all generations of humanity as almost a cliché. And a cliché it would certainly be, if the tragic realities of this life were not so fresh and raw a repeated sting. Again, with even greater resolve, we ask the question: "Why?"

In this life we all experience a bit of hell, some of us more than others. On the other hand, every person tastes a bit of heaven as well. The sweet love of a lifelong mate, the warm sunshine on a fresh spring day, summer hikes on fragrant forest trails, jumping into a cool mountain lake on a hot August afternoon. A child absorbed in play reminds us from where we have come, and quite possibly, where we are going. Things like these, the good things of life, most all of us enjoy.

This life is a mixture. It's like floating an unknown river; times of smooth, peaceful sailing, other times rapids fearful and loud. We never know what lies around the next bend. And eventually a fatal waterfall sucks us over. So what's the point?

As adults pondering our situation, we find this life to be an irony of contrasts. On one hand the universe around us shouts of precise order and predictability. The stars and planets move with mathematical accuracy, the laws of physics remain constant to any observer at any time, and logic always works to reasonable ends. But at the same time terrible things happen to the best of people. Books entitled When Bad Things Happen to Good

⁸ Quoted from message, Oregon Family camp, Feb. 2005. Interviewed for verification, Montana Family Camp, Sept. 2010.

People and songs with lyrics like “Only the Good Die Young” generate enormous sales because they hit the mark. This stark inconsistency constitutes our most basic human dilemma.

Each one of us knows innately, down deep, that things should be different. Situations down here on earth in the moral, ethical sense are not as they should be. Political and social forces for change, regardless of what that change may entail or become, drive popular idealistic movements in every generation. But for all of our efforts mankind seems to end up further removed from the ideal than when we first started, as with the French Revolution.⁹ But whatever the instance, the drive that moves people comes from a deep-seated awareness that things are not fair, injustices comprise the status quo, and there must be something better! All people, regardless of time in history, culture, or social position sense this. We somehow know there has to be an ideal, somewhere or sometime; if for no other reason than man can conceive of it. And of course, **where** and **how** we look for our answers makes all the difference!

The Bible

The sixty-six individual writings, or books, which make up today’s Bible canon claim to be the Word of God. These books were written over a span of fifteen hundred years by forty different authors of various background, social position, nationality, historical time frame, and geographic location. As the Word of God, the Bible purports to have been written word-for-word directly from the mind of the Creator. One of the main writers, the apostle Paul, explains the process this way:

*“but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’ For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in **words** taught by human wisdom, but those*

⁹ One of history’s most senseless bloodbaths, 1789-1799, which resulted in much worse conditions for the people afterwards. The Russian Revolution of 1917 would be another appropriate example; as Lenin, then Stalin, proved to oppress the people much more severely than any of the czars.

taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (I Corinthians 2:9-13).

If we use the Bible to unfold and answer life’s basic questions, first we must come to grips with the Bible’s function and design. First the Bible does not set out to prove the existence of a creator God. This fact is assumed. Romans 1:20 states: *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”* Therefore the creation itself proves the existence of a transcendent Creator to the honest, reasonable human mind. Currently the scientific field of study referred to as “intelligent design”¹⁰ frames the necessary technical evidences for the existence of God.

Secondly, the Bible presumes to contain “all things pertaining to life and godliness” (II Peter 1:4). Certainly then the Scripture must contain sufficient information to satisfactorily answer the most basic questions of life, including who we are and why we are here. In addition, Jesus expounded this fact in a statement to His disciples found in John 15:15: *“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”* In other words, Jesus promises that those close to Him, those whom He considers as friends, will have access to insider information. This insider information includes not only what we are to do but also what the Father is doing and, most importantly for our discussion here, why!

So an understandable, cogent presentation of answers to our most vital questions must not only be obtainable in God’s Word, but also even expected! This is exactly what we find, and will continue to discover in the Scriptures. And so our expectation to understand God’s eternal purpose becomes very real and attainable.

Thirdly, God’s word must be provable beyond a reasonable doubt to the reasoning mind. This proof comes in many forms both outside of and within the Bible itself. Archeology, history, and science all verify the truth of God’s word. Jesus Himself said, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). But ultimately the proof that the Bible is the one and only Word of God must come from within the text itself. Prophecy stated precisely and in great detail, then fulfilled exactly as foretold, often hundreds or even thousands of years later, provides the objective backbone of proof. Up until the discovery

¹⁰ See Appendix I, [Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed](#) and [The Privileged Planet](#).

of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, many scoffers attacked the authenticity of ancient Biblical prophecy. Today any honest and reasonable critic of the Scriptures must acknowledge the legitimacy of fulfilled Bible prophecy as unique and miraculous indeed. Only an all-knowing God who transcends time and space could make the predictions found in the Bible and be 100% accurate in every case. And this is what history precisely records.

Many books have been written to prove that the Bible is, or must be, the word of God. Proof that The Bible is the Word of God,¹¹ which we use and recommend, provides a good starting place for the serious student. Appendix I provides a short list of recommended books and movies on this subject.

The other, more subjective, means of proof comes in the transformation of individual lives. I Thessalonians 2:13 states it in this way: *“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also **performs its work** in you who believe.”* This work of transformation comes from the renewing of our minds supernaturally. Many Scriptures describe and verify this process of transformation, including Ephesians 4:23, Romans 12:2, and II Corinthians 3:18.

If and when one researches the facts and concludes that the Bible truly comes from God then *“all things pertaining to life and godliness”*¹² avail themselves to the committed student of the Word. But God has designed the Word so that intellectual study and research alone will not guarantee correct insight and mastery of understanding. Jesus Himself spoke out-loud to His Father at one point, obviously so that those around Him could hear: *“I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight”* (Matthew 11:25-26). Rather, the heart condition of the reader of God’s Word determines the degree of understanding and enlightenment he receives. Hebrews 4:12 puts it this way: *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

With these things in mind, we now turn to the Bible itself.

¹¹ Jay Wilson, *Proof that the Bible is the Word of God* (Bozeman, 2007), 40 pp.

¹² II Peter 1:3

Definitions

The phrase “the eternal purpose” occurs only one time in both the King James(KJV) and New American Standard(NASB) translations of the Bible, buried in the middle of Paul’s letter to the Church at Ephesus, chapter three, verse eleven. Verse eleven reads: “...*in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord...*” A thorough study of this phrase, its context, and related Scriptures will reveal and define God’s purpose for mankind and the creation of the physical universe. And in such a study, the core questions of “Why?” find their answer.

In 1828 Noah Webster published his American Dictionary of the English Language. His first entry for the noun “purpose” reads as follows:

“That which a person sets before himself as an object to be reached or accomplished; the end or aim to which the view is directed in any plan, measure or exertion. ‘We believe the Supreme Being created intelligent beings for some benevolent and glorious purpose, and if so, how glorious and benevolent must be his purpose in the plan of redemption!’”¹³

How certainly true and appropriate this definition and its example sentence of usage become to the reader as one comes to understand the Biblical statement of our Creator’s eternal purpose.

Mr. Webster obviously had great insight not only into American English, but also the Word of God. His entry for the verb form of “purpose” thrills any serious disciple. It contains the following information:

“To intend; to design; to resolve; to determine on some end or object to be accomplished. ‘I have purposed it; I will also do it!’ Is. 46. Ephesians 3.”¹⁴

Notice that Webster not only pinpointed the third chapter of Ephesians as the location for God’s declaration of His purpose, but also cites the O.T. prophesy given 700 years earlier in Isaiah concerning its fulfillment! Unfortunately neither Noah Webster nor his contemporaries mined Ephesians chapter three for the ultimate answers hidden there. A mother lode of truth had been located, but its riches left for future generations.

¹³ Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language 1828* (San Francisco, 1980), II, 47.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Ephesians 3:11 in the KJV as translated in 1611, which Noah Webster used, reads:

“According to **the eternal purpose**, which he [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁵

The modern NASB (1977) translation gives this rendering:

“This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose** which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord”.¹⁶

Marshall’s 1986 word-for-word translation from the 21st edition of Eberhard Nestle’s Greek text *Novum Testamentum Graece* arrives at this base rendering:

“according to/ **[the] purpose/ of the/ ages/**which he made/ in/ - / Christ/ Jesus/ the/Lord/ of us”.¹⁷

Note the original Greek phrase Marshall translates as “the purpose of the ages” became “the eternal purpose” in the KJV and on through the NASB used today. The term “purpose” remains unaltered, while “of the ages” becomes “the eternal.” Notice also the English translations reverse the order of the terms “purpose” and “of the ages” from the original Greek. Obviously something interesting, possibly important, is going on here.

This paper relies heavily on four sources for Greek word studies. The primary starting point for our study of Greek words begins with James Strong and his numbering system for New Testament (NT) Greek words. The Lockman Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and Greek Dictionary provides a general overview of words being translated. From here W.E. Vine’s Expository Dictionary and Joseph H. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon give a more detailed description for each NT word’s grammatical usage and contextual meaning.

ETERNAL

James Strong gives the Greek word for eternal (*aion*) the number 165. The Lockman Dictionary defines this Greek word as: “continued duration; a

¹⁵ *The Open Bible, KJV*, ed. Manford G Gutzke (Nashville, 1975), p.1107.

¹⁶ *New American Standard Bible, Updated Edition*, Lockman Foundation (Anaheim, 2002), p. 1830.

¹⁷ Alfred Marshall, *The NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 561

space of time, an age.” The Lockman Exhaustive Concordance gives the following listings for the English words translated from “aion”, and the number of times it is so translated in the NASB:

Age (20), ages (6), ancient time (1), beginning of time (1), course (1), eternal (2), eternity (1), ever (2), forever (27), forever and ever (20), forever more (2), never (8), old (2), time (1), world (7), worlds (1).¹⁸

W.E. Vine shares the following information in his dictionary entries for “eternal” (*aion*) and “age” (*aion*), which gives us much insight on the reason why the literal Greek “of the ages” contains the meaning “eternal” or “forever”:

Eternal (*aion*) – “an age, Eph. 3:11 literally – ‘(purpose) of the ages’”¹⁹

Age (*aion*) “signifies a period of indefinite duration, or time viewed in relation to what takes place in the period... The phrases containing this word should not be rendered literally, but consistently with its sense of indefinite duration. Thus *eis ton aiona* does not mean ‘unto the age’ but ‘for ever’ (see e.g., Hebrews 5:6). The Greeks contrasted that which came to an end with that which was expressed by this phrase, which shows that they conceived of it as expressing interminable duration.”²⁰

Note: *Aionios*, the adjective corresponding, denoting eternal, is set in contrast with *proskairos*, lit., ‘for a season’... See ETERNAL, EVERLASTING.²¹

So the Greek usage and conception of time encapsulated in their word “*aion*” does not refer to a literal age or specific amount of time, but goes beyond time limitations. Joseph Thayer, who often elaborates on such matters, takes this understanding as a given matter of fact without

¹⁸ *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Nashville, 1981), p.1629.

¹⁹ W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, 1966), II, 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 41.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

controversy. His lexicon entry states: “an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity”, and for Ephesians 3:11 specifically: “eternal purpose.”²²

PURPOSE

The term “purpose” comes through from the Greek to the English seemingly straight across-the-board, at least on the surface level. But digging a little deeper an additional dimension of meaning presents itself. This discovery proves to be very exciting, especially when coupled with the information immediately preceding Ephesians 3:11.

In Strong’s numbering system, the Greek word for “purpose” (*prothesis*) receives the number 4286. The Lockman Greek dictionary entry reads as follows:

4286 (*prothesis*) from #4388, a setting forth, i.e.: fig. – proposal, spec. – the showbread, sacred (bread)
Consecrated (3), purpose (7), resolute (1), sacred (1)
Ephesians 1:11, 3:11, II Tim. 1:19, 3:10²³

The following gives the Lockman dictionary’s entry for the derivative word as noted in the entry above for *prothesis*:

4388 – purposed from 4253 and 5087, to set before i.e.: propose
Displayed publicly (1), planned (1), purposed (1).²⁴

So the Lockman dictionary indicates the general meaning for the Greek term translated in the NASB as “purpose” generally means “a setting forth” of something. The figurative sense of the word indicates a “proposal”, which seems to attach to our current English translation as “eternal proposal” or “eternal purpose” easily enough. But the literal or specific application of “showbread”, “sacred” (bread), along with the other renderings of “consecrated (3)” and “resolute (1)” in the other NASB New Testament verses, seems rather odd.

Vine’s dictionary gives us a little more information. In his entry for “purpose,” the noun form of *prothesis*, the following is given:

²² Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids. 1977), p. 19

²³ *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, p.1678

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1679.

“a setting forth (used of the ‘shewbread’), a purpose, (akin to B, No. 3), is used a) the purposes of God, Romans 8:28, 9:11, Ephesians 1:11, 3:11, II Tim. 1:9”.²⁵

The reference to “akin to B, No. 3” refers to the verb form of the noun *prothesis*. Of this verb form, Strongs #4388 (*protithemi*), Vine submits:

“to set before, set forth, is used in Romans 3:25, ‘which lays stress upon the personal interest which God had in so doing; either meaning, to set forth or to purpose, would convey a scriptural view, but the context bears out the former as being intended here’. Eph. 1:9 ‘He purposed (in Him).’”²⁶

But in the case of this Greek word *prothesis*, Thayer gives the most revealing and comprehensive definition. He gives two separate definitions; first the specific or literal definition, and then the figurative meaning. His entries are as follows:

- 1) A purpose; the setting forth of a thing, placing of it in view; the showbread in the temple. “12 loaves of wheaten bread, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel, which loaves were offered to God every Sabbath, and, separated in two rows, lay for seven days upon a table placed in the sanctuary or anterior portion of the tabernacle, and afterwards of the temple.” (The rite of) the setting forth of the loaves, Hebrews 9:2.
- 2) A purpose; Acts 27:13, Romans 8:28, 9:11, Eph. 1:11, 3:11, II Tim. 1:9, 3:10, Acts 11:23 “with purpose of heart.”²⁷

So the Biblical word *prothesis*, which God decided to use in expressing Himself in the phrase “eternal purpose” in Ephesians 3:11, carries a unique and very specific illustration with it. God’s “purpose of the ages” corresponds to the Old Testament (OT) showbread put on display week by week in the outer room, or holy place, of the temple. The OT showbread represented the 12 Tribes of Israel, God’s people in that age.

²⁵ Vine, III, 233.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 234

²⁷ Thayer p. 539.

In God's great wisdom and planing, this showbread on display in the temple and representing the OT people of God foreshadows the spiritual positioning of the Lord's people today. In Ephesians 3:10, which immediately precedes the phrase "*in accordance with the eternal purpose*", God declares: "*so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be **made known through the church** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies.*" According to this statement, God puts His people, the church²⁸ on display, not only before our fellow man, but also the heavenly hosts! In a very real sense we, as the church, are God's eternal showbread of fulfillment!

To come to grips as to what this means for us today, as well as the fullness of God's intention and will in doing so, the diligent student needs to first carefully examine the text and context of Ephesians chapter three. But at this point, we most certainly agree with Noah Webster's proclamation some 180 years ago today: "We believe the Supreme Being created intelligent beings for some benevolent and glorious purpose, and if so, how glorious and benevolent must be His purpose in the plan of redemption!"²⁹

God's Position

The question exists concerning a supposed loving God who would allow the suffering, violence, and tragedy to exist and even intensify as time continues on planet earth. So why did the Creator of the universe even start this thing in the first place? If He is omniscient, He knew this would happen. So why did He do it? And is He not powerful enough to stop this mess and set things aright? Many reasonably question the God of the Bible on these counts. It just doesn't make sense.

It doesn't make sense, that is, unless one considers the eternal purpose of God as He has stated it in His Word. The Creator of the universe certainly has enough power to stop the injustice and suffering in the world. But that is just the point. God's purpose goes beyond the question of mere power, and includes His "*manifold wisdom*" being made known.

Consider the illustration of two men arguing; one being much larger, more powerful and skilled, than the other. The larger man could easily crush and silence the smaller man in a physical fight. But does that make him

²⁸ The word "church," as used in this paper, denotes the collective body of individual Christians faithfully serving Christ in accordance with the New Testament at any given time on earth during the Church Age. The term is **not** used here to refer to a building, any denominational organization, or Christendom in general.

²⁹ Webster, II, 47.

right?³⁰ And more importantly, for our discussion here, would this display wisdom?

The same goes for God. God could stop the devil and end all the misery on earth for mankind in an instant with brute strength. But would that make Him right? Would doing so show His manifold wisdom; thoughtful discernment, correct judgement, just action, and eliminate any doubt as to His preeminence? Would it prove that He alone is worthy of worship? And perhaps most importantly, would such force demonstrate God's central characteristic of lovingkindness? Certainly not!

In God's infinite wisdom, in order to demonstrate and define Himself to the hosts of Heaven appropriately, He created the universe and the planet earth as a stage. Mankind, the players, He created as free will agents in His likeness. Genesis 1:26 states, "*Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'*" And very significantly, God has allowed the devil to be "the god of this world" (II Corinthians 4:4) for a span of time. God, to be sure, has limited the devil. But the one true God gives him enough authority, power, and influence to demonstrate what it would be like if the devil were indeed God.

Many people are bitter against God. The experiences and injustices of this life have beaten them down, and they blame God, the creator, for their plight. But their disappointment and disdain are misdirected. The god of this world. The destroyer. The accuser of the brethren. He is the one who instigates. He is the one who tempts. He, not God, is the one to blame!³¹

Only an in-depth study and understanding of God's eternal purpose, as explained in His Word, can make sense of all this and set things aright. I cannot help but think of those ladies in Kosovo with the "thousand yard stares."³² Yes, the darkness is great. But the Word assures us that the Light overpowers the darkness.³³ Only an understanding of the eternal purpose, as defined by the Scripture, can give the light of life and hope back into those eyes. God supplies the answers if only we will take Him at His Word.

³⁰ Illustration used by Steve Doty, Montana Family Camp, Sept. 2004.

³¹ And of course, we ourselves, by our own free-will decisions, are often to blame for the misfortunes we experience!

³² Noted earlier on pg. 4.

³³ John 1:5

THE ETERNAL PURPOSE

An Overview of the Ephesian Letter

The Ephesian letter contains six chapters; the first three contain thickly interwoven doctrinal theology, while the last three provide practical application. The phrase “the eternal purpose” positions itself as a pinnacle in the center of the third chapter. Ephesians 3:11 contains the phrase “*the eternal purpose,*” while the proceeding ten verses build to its climax. The ten verses that follow give application and an awesome prayer for the fulfillment of God’s purpose in and through us, as the church!

Chapter one of the Ephesian letter introduces the theme of God’s eternal purpose shortly after the opening salutation. Verses eight through ten point to the eternal purpose with the following words:

*“In all wisdom and insight **He made known to us the mystery of His will,** according to His kind intention which **He purposed** in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, **the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on earth**” (Ephesians 1:8-10).*

The discussion builds from there through chapter two, with the final four verses setting the stage for chapter three:

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The intensity and focus quickly builds in the beginning of chapter three:

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you that by revelation there was

made known to me **the mystery**, as I wrote before in brief” (Ephesians 3:1-3).

Building on previously written material concerning the mystery, the Scripture then dramatically moves in a step-by-step progression toward the crescendo:

*“By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ**, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it **has now been revealed** to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow **partakers of the promise** in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power”* (Ephesians 3:4-7).

The summit of revelation and definition for the eternal purpose comes in the next four verses:

*“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to **bring to light what is the administration of the mystery** which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the **manifold wisdom of God** might now be made **known through the church** to the rulers and the authorities **in the heavenly places**. This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose** which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Ephesians 3:8-11).

Paul then gives application for this positioning of the church in verse twelve: *“in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.”* Next Paul addresses the Ephesian brethren personally: *“Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory”* (Ephesians 3:13).

The apostle closes the chapter with an incredibly deep prayer from verse fourteen to end of the chapter:

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in

*your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled up to all the fullness of God**. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to **the power that works within us**, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:14-21).*

The second half of the Ephesian letter, beginning in chapter four, then gives the essential teachings containing practical application for the church in carrying out her part in the demonstration of God’s wisdom. In chapter four the Lord gives seven doctrines,³⁴ upon which the unity of His church must be secured, as well as the five organizational positions responsible for equipping the church for growth.³⁵ The second half of the fourth chapter, and most of the fifth, gives the individual Christian instruction for a godly lifestyle; including how to “*put on Christ*”³⁶ and “*be filled with the Spirit*.”³⁷ The remainder of chapter five highlights Christian marriage as a reflection of Christ and His bride, the church.³⁸ Chapter six gives direction for family and public relationships,³⁹ then explains the nature of the spiritual war now raging and how to armor-up for victory.⁴⁰ In these specific ways the Christian comes to understand **how** to fulfill his part in the eternal purpose of God.

The Immediate Context

Ephesians 3:1-7 contains the immediate context leading up to the Scripture’s specific statement of God’s eternal purpose. For this reason, in order to accurately understand the eternal purpose, a preparatory review of this passage is presented for the reader. The following paragraph quotes the passage and highlights the key phrases that will be examined on a verse-by-verse basis.

*“**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace***

³⁴ Ephesians 4:4-6.

³⁵ Ephesians 4:11.

³⁶ Ephesians 4:24.

³⁷ Ephesians 5:18.

³⁸ Ephesians 5:22-33.

³⁹ Ephesians 6:1-9.

⁴⁰ Ephesians 6:10-18.

*which was given to me for you; that **by revelation** there was made known to me **the mystery**, as I wrote **before** in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ**, which in other generations was **not made known** to the sons of men, as it **now has been revealed** to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that **the Gentiles** are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and **fellow partakers of the promise** in Christ Jesus through **the gospel**, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to **the working of His power**" (Ephesians 3:1-7).*

Paul begins chapter three of Ephesians with the phrase "*For this reason,*" which refers back to the information previously shared in chapter two. Chapter two primarily addresses the Christians in Ephesus of Gentile, or non-Jewish, background. The Gentiles, who were once separate from Christ and described as "*strangers to the covenants of promise*" and "*the common wealth [nation] of Israel*" (Ephesians 2:12), are now "*fellow citizens*" and "*are of God's household*" (Ephesians 2:19). These former Gentiles, who are now in God's family as adopted sons ⁴¹are described as "*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone*" (Ephesians 2:20). At the end of chapter two Paul gives a description of a spiritual building. This passage describes the building of a "*holy temple*" (Ephesians 2:21), "*a dwelling of God*" (Ephesians 2:22).

I Peter 2:5 contains a parallel passage which reads: "*you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*" Here God's people are depicted as "*living stones*" which constitute the building blocks of a "*spiritual house*". This spiritual building then, made up of people including those of both Jewish and Gentile heritage, comprise the reason for Paul's writing in chapter three. This spiritual house, made up of living stones, constitutes the church of Jesus Christ. Later in Ephesians 3:10, Paul builds upon these foundational descriptions in revealing the church's role in God's eternal purpose.

Ephesians 3:2-4

*"...if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that **by revelation** there was made known to me **the***

⁴¹Ephesians 1:5,13-14

mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ...”

After identifying himself as a prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles and his stewardship towards them in the first two verses of Ephesians chapter three, Paul then wrote: “**by revelation** there was made known to me **the mystery...**”(Ephesians 3:3). Paul received a revelation shortly after his conversion according to II Corinthians, chapter twelve. Here Paul stated he was taken up into the “*third heaven*”⁴² and “*heard inexpressible words*”.⁴³ During this experience Paul received “*revelations of the Lord*”⁴⁴ and these revelations had “*surpassing greatness*”.⁴⁵ Paul also wrote in his letter to the Galatians that he received the gospel through revelation: “*For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 1:11-12).

In Ephesians 3:3, Paul goes on to state: “*by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.*” Obviously Paul had written to the Christians at Ephesus previously about the mystery. Next he writes, “*by referring to this when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ*” (Ephesians 3:4). Here Paul directs the Ephesian reader back to a previous letter or writing in which he must have defined and explained “*the mystery*” he alludes to here. Now he intends to build upon that original discussion of this mystery to further their understanding and insight. Interestingly, we do not have the initial writing of Paul to the Ephesians regarding the mystery, as referred to in these two verses, available to us today. So we are at a loss without that information to fully understand the rest of this passage as Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus in the first century!

But God in His infinite wisdom and planning has provided in the Colossian letter the essential definition of the mystery. Providently Paul wrote the Ephesian, Colossian, and Philemon letters at the same time period as a prisoner in Rome and sent them together with Onesimus⁴⁶ to Asia. Paul had never written to the congregation at Colossae about the mystery before and quite possibly had never even visited the congregation there, as he addresses “*all those who have not personally seen my face*” (Colossians 2:1).

⁴² II Corinthians 12:2.

⁴³ II Corinthians 12:3.

⁴⁴ II Corinthians 12:1.

⁴⁵ II Corinthians 12:7.

⁴⁶ Onesimus was a “beloved brother” (Philemon 16) who Paul sent as a courier for these letters.

So, in his letter to the Colossians he defines “the mystery” in a passage which reads parallel to Ephesians 3:1-7.

*“Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of **this mystery** among the Gentiles, **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Colossians 1:25-27).*

Note the specific definition of the mystery contained in verse twenty-seven: “*Christ in you.*” So we reasonably conclude that “Christ in you” is the definition of the mystery which Paul alludes to writing about “*before in brief*”⁴⁷ to the Ephesians.

In some study Bibles the editors have given Romans 11:25 as the cross-reference to understand the nature of “*the mystery*” given by Paul in Ephesians 3:4. Romans 11:25 states: “*For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*” The mystery in this Romans text pertains to the “*partial hardening*” of the people of the physical nation of Israel, which facilitated the entrance of the Gentiles into the Church. This partial hardening of the Jews in the first century must be viewed properly as a subordinate part of the all-encompassing mystery of Christ. Students of the Word have been often sidetracked away from the essential definition of “the mystery” early in Ephesians chapter three by cross-referencing Romans chapter eleven as the defining Scripture passage, rather than using Colossians 1:27. This often confuses the significance and the meaning of “the mystery” cited later in Ephesians 3:9, which in turn derails the church’s understanding of and vital participation in the eternal purpose as given in Ephesians 3:10!

The mystery of the Gentiles coming in to the church does have important application to God’s eternal purpose. Consider this scenario: Who shows a more dramatic change in being conformed to Christ- the good Jewish boy, or the pagan Scythian who formerly lopped off people’s heads for vessels from which to drink blood?⁴⁸ Of course the Scythian convert shows the most dramatic change in lifestyle. In this way the Gentiles coming into the Church dovetails into the mystery of Christ in order that God’s

⁴⁷ Ephesians 3:3.

⁴⁸ Illustration used by Matt Hartford, Oregon Family Camp, Feb. 2008.

purpose be accomplished in the most dramatic way. Whereas the Jews being hardened and the pagans coming into the church, as stated in Romans 11:25, was a mystery in the first century, now Gentile participation is common place. But the mystery of Christ, Christ in you, still remains a mystery to most people even today.

The Gentiles coming into God's kingdom, the church, and the bloodline of Abraham not yielding to salvation by faith in Christ, was indeed a mystery for the Jews and probably very much so for Paul. But the "mystery of Christ" given in Ephesians 3:4 has to do with Christ; not the Jews or Gentiles specifically, but Christ Himself. Christ coming into a person, that is dwelling within a person's body, makes that person a temple of God.⁴⁹ This certainly constitutes the mystery of Christ. This evidence, coupled with the parallel letters to the Ephesians and Colossians written by Paul and sent out at the same time, fortifies God's defining of "the mystery" for the Ephesian letter's usage as "Christ in you".

Ephesians 3:5

*"... which in other generations was **not made known** to the sons of men, as it has **now been revealed** to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit..."*

According to verse five of Ephesians chapter three, this mystery of Christ "*was not made known to the sons of men*" in other generations. The phrase "other generations" refers to those people living before the Church began in 30 A.D. on the day of Pentacost. This would include all those living under the Law of Moses, as well as all Gentiles and the patriarchs starting initially with Adam. I Peter 1:10-12 states:

*"As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and **the glories to follow**. It was revealed to them that they were **not serving themselves**, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven---things into which angels long to look."*

⁴⁹ I Corinthians 3:16.

So even the prophets before Christ's life on earth did not have a clue as to the mystery. Note also that the angels long to look into these things: specifically, in context, the "*glories*" that would follow during the Church age. Of course "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*"⁵⁰ would be paramount for the angels to look in to, as well as the very nature of faith.⁵¹

Note also in verse five the phrase "*has now been revealed*". The mystery of Christ has been made known as God decided the timing, as well as the arrangement, of the mystery being revealed to mankind in the Church Age. As verse five goes on to state: "*it [the mystery] has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.*" Earlier in the Ephesian letter Paul states: "...*you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone*" (Ephesians 2:19b-21). The foundation consists of the writings of these apostles and prophets, which contain the blue prints for the living temple of God. Those people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that we are "*growing into*"⁵² and "*being built together into*"⁵³ the temple of the living God. How inspiring it is to be a part of this great plan and design of God! But how much more exciting to understand how and why, to know the very purpose for which we are being constructed as such.

Ephesians 3:6

"...that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel..."

Ephesians 3:6 delineates three aspects of the Gentiles belonging to Christ; they are heirs, members of the body, and partakers of the promise. As fellow heirs the Gentiles have been adopted into the family and household of God, along with Christians of Jewish heritage. In the beginning of the Ephesian letter Paul writes: "*He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself*" (Ephesians 1:5). This process of adoption is later clarified by Paul in his letter as follows: "...*after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of His glory*" (Ephesians 1:13-14). As stated in this passage our

⁵⁰ Colossians 1:27.

⁵¹ Angels do not need faith, as they see God face-to-face.

⁵² Ephesians 2:21.

⁵³ Ephesians 2:22.

adoption, the “pledge,” or guarantee, of our inheritance, consists of the Holy Spirit by whom we are “sealed.” By virtue of adoption, Christians are heirs.

The phrase “*the Holy Spirit of promise*,” used in Ephesians 1:13 corresponds to the third aspect of the Gentiles belonging to Christ. As stated in Ephesians 3:6, the Gentiles are “*fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus*.” The phrase “the promise” definitely requires a close examination here, as many differing ideas and precepts surround the various promises of God. Most commonly, the word “promise” in the NT is associated with eternal life. I John 2:25 reads: “*This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life*.” Jesus defines eternal life in John 17:3 as: “*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*.” The word “know”(ginsoko) in this text concerns an intimate knowledge of someone. The Christian “knows” God through the Holy Spirit living inside him.⁵⁴

Paul also uses the phrase “the promise” in Galatians 3:14: “*...in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*.” Here “the promise” is the Holy Spirit, as received through faith. Later in Galatians 4:6 Paul gives more information concerning the promise of the Spirit: “*... God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father.'*” So, as Paul defines and uses the phrase “the promise” in his Galatian letter, this phrase refers to the Spirit of God indwelling the Christian. Considering these statements by Paul in the Galatian letter, and his phrase “*the Holy Spirit of promise*”⁵⁵ used in the opening the Ephesian letter, a reasonable rendering of the phrase “*partakers of the promise*” in Ephesians 3:6 would include the indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit in the Christian.

The remaining aspect concerning the Gentiles at Ephesus, that Ephesians 3:6 brings forward, concerns their being “*fellow members of the body*.” The body spoken of here is understood to be the body of Christ, which Paul defines as the church in closing the first chapter of the Ephesian letter: “*...the church, which is His body...*”⁵⁶ Romans 8:9 provides an absolute division between those who are in the body of Christ and for those who are not: “*However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him*” Note the indwelling of the Spirit marks those who are in the body of Christ, His church.

⁵⁴We submit that the only biblically sound way to “know”(ginsoko) God would be through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, as seen in the use of this Greek word in I Corinthians 2:11, Hebrews 8:10-11/10:15-16.

⁵⁵ Ephesians 1:13.

⁵⁶ Ephesians 1:22b-23a.

So the entrance into Christ remains the same for both Jew and Gentile alike; in becoming an heir, a member of the body, and a partaker of the promise. All three of these demarcations embrace the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, that Paul also calls “*Christ in you.*”⁵⁷ This is significant. In building towards the definition of His eternal purpose, God’s Word underlines the importance of the Holy Spirit indwelling the Christian.

The gospel

Ephesians 3:6 ends by citing the gospel as the means by which an individual becomes an heir, enters the body, and partakes of the promise of the Holy Spirit. The gospel itself remains a mystery, vague and unknown, in most people’s minds even today. Near the end of the Ephesian letter Paul asks: “*pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the **mystery of the gospel***” (Ephesians 6:19). The gospel is specifically defined in the NT Scriptures by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Verses one and two of this text first identify the gospel as the topic under discussion, then verses three through eight actually defines the gospel. This defining passage states:

*“Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel** which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, **by which also you are saved**, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that **He was buried**, and that **He was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that **He appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that **He appeared** to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then **He appeared** to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, **He appeared** to me also”* (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

So the gospel, as defined by Paul here, has four parts: the death, the burial, the resurrection, and the appearance of Jesus Christ. Note the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are each given about one-half verse apiece. The appearance then receives four full verses of explanation and testimony. In this way the Scripture graphically underlines the importance of Christ’s appearance in His physical body, on earth for forty days,⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Colossians 1:27.

⁵⁸ Acts 1:3.

following his resurrection. His appearance serves to verify, and so prove, His bodily resurrection.

Paul's NT writings not only call a person to believe in the gospel,⁵⁹ but also to obey the gospel,⁶⁰ in order to be saved. Romans 6:2-4 explains how a person individually obeys the gospel of Jesus Christ: "...*How shall we who **died to sin** still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been **baptized into His death**? Therefore we have been **buried with Him through baptism into death**, in order that as Christ was **raised from the dead** through the glory of the Father, so **we too might walk in the newness of life.**"* In NT water baptism[immersion], the individual obeys the gospel as he is baptized into Christ's death, literally buried in water, and raised from the dead spiritually. The Christian then continues to obey the gospel as he walks in newness of life following his baptism, by the power of the Spirit, which constitutes his appearance in proving his own resurrection. This "*walking in newness of life*" is absolutely essential to the role that the Christian assumes in fulfilling his part in the church and God's eternal purpose as defined later in Ephesians 3:10!

Ephesians 3:7

*"...of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to **the working of His power.**"*

In Ephesians 3:7 Paul shares that God made him a minister of this gospel. And as such, he received his ministry "*according to the gift of God's grace... according to the working of His power*". Later in chapter three, as Paul words a prayer for the brethren at Ephesus, he refers to God's power twice. First he prays: "...*that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with **power through His Spirit** in the inner man.*"⁶¹ Then Paul concludes his prayer with these words: "*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to **the power that works within us**, to Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*"⁶² So the power by which Paul lived and preached the gospel is the same power that moves every Christian, the power necessary for each of us to participate in God's

⁵⁹ Romans 1:16.

⁶⁰ II Thessalonians 1:8.

⁶¹ Ephesians 3:16.

⁶² Ephesians 3:20.

purpose. This power comes through the Holy Spirit as He resides inside each Christian.

These first seven verses of Ephesians chapter three comprise the context and platform upon which Paul's next statements rest. The next five verses which follow in chapter three, verses eight through twelve, actually reveal and define God's eternal purpose for the Christian. But without the previous definitions and integrated understanding being fully considered, the eternal purpose stated in the following verses will most probably remain a mystery to individual Christians and the church at large.

Actually it is quite amazing that God chose this largely Gentile audience at Ephesus to receive His definition of the eternal purpose. This is especially the case when we see God defining the former state of these Gentiles earlier in Ephesians 2:12: "*You were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*" In other words, before the church began, these folks were clueless as to what God had done, what He was doing, and especially what His intentions were. They were without background and preparedness for what was going to be shared with them. In this short passage, Ephesians 3:1-7, Paul attempted to pick them up and bring them to a fullness equivalent to those of a Jewish background. In their case, humility overcame background. This remains true for us today, and possibly even more so!

The Eternal Purpose Defined

Ephesians 3:8-12 contains God's specific statement of His eternal purpose. Herein lies the heart of the matter, the reason for our being and the answers to our most basic life questions. The following paragraph quotes the text, highlighting the key phrases to prepare the reader's mind. The examination which follows unfolds all of the various parts of this passage, makes application and discernment with other pertinent scriptures, then pulls them back together again to gain the fullest depth of meaning and comprehension. To God be the glory!

*"To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and **to bring to light** what is **the administration of the mystery** which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that **the manifold wisdom of God** might be*

made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.”

Ephesians 3:8

“To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...”

Paul begins his progression to the defining of God’s eternal purpose with a statement of humility: *“to me the very least of all the saints.”* In other Scriptures he elaborates on this estimation of himself: *“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all,”*⁶³ because *“I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and violent aggressor.”*⁶⁴ In I Corinthians 15:9 Paul goes on to explain: *“For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”* The vitally important lesson Paul demonstrates in this confession is that God can use “the least” of us in the greatest, most important ways.

When Paul was in the third heaven receiving his revelation of Christ, in order to become an apostle, he petitioned God to remove a physical disability, his so-called *“thorn in the flesh.”* God answered: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness”* (II Corinthians 12:9). This response reveals an essential component of God’s strategy in accomplishing His eternal purpose through very common men. God uses the weak things to overcome the strong in order to glorify Himself: to magnify and define His unique wisdom. Paul states this clearly in I Corinthians 1:26-27:

“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.”

The proud old man Saul became the humbled apostle Paul.

⁶³ I Timothy 1:15.

⁶⁴ I Timothy 1:13.

It is therefore consistent with God's program that this stewardship, "*this grace*," was given to Paul as "*the least*" to proclaim the greatness of Christ, especially among the Gentiles. But what Paul shares with words, concerning the ultimate theme of God's eternal purpose, still comes as secondary to the life he lived. Paul's job was to preach by word and example to the Gentiles, those who were the furthest removed from God,⁶⁵ the "*unfathomable riches of Christ*".⁶⁶

The term unfathomable, as translated from the original Greek, indicates the riches of Christ are both without limit and not completely ascertainable to the human mind.⁶⁷ No wonder Paul uses the expression "*lavished upon us*"⁶⁸ earlier in the Ephesian letter when speaking of the riches of Christ we receive. Note these riches have to do with "*redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*" (Ephesians 1:7). The riches of His forgiveness towards us are unfathomable, being more than enough to cover all our mistakes and shortcomings. God's primary concern lies in our being equipped and positioned to carry out His purpose, and so He cleanses us and keeps us pure in order to make us adequate for more important things. By design, the blood of Christ will "*cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God*" (Hebrews 9:14). The more important things, having to do with our serving God and fulfilling our part in His eternal purpose, are then defined in verses nine and ten.

Ephesians 3:9

"...and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things..."

In addition to Paul's preaching the riches of Christ, as stated in the previous verse, he also aspires to "*bring to light what is the administration of the mystery*." The phrase "*bring to light*" on the surface simply means to expose so that understanding becomes possible. Thayer indicates the Greek word used here, *photizo*, generally means "to bring to light" or "render evident."⁶⁹ This is certainly a part of the meaning here.

But Thayer goes on to point out that in the context of Ephesians 3:9, *photizo* includes the concept of "to enlighten spiritually" and "imbue with

⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:12.

⁶⁶ Ephesians 3:8.

⁶⁷ Thayer, p. 44, Strong's #421.

⁶⁸ Ephesians 1:8.

⁶⁹ Thayer, p. 663, Strong's #5461.

saving knowledge.”⁷⁰ The word is used in this sense earlier in the Ephesian letter. Paul prays that “*the eyes of your heart may be **enlightened**, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe*” (Ephesians 1:18-19). The clearest passage in which the saving knowledge aspect of *photizo* comes through regards Jesus Himself: “*There was the true Light which, coming into the world, **enlightens every man***” (John 1:9).

The administration

The object exposed, brought to light, in verse nine “*is the administration of the mystery*”. Note it is not the mystery specifically that Paul works “*to bring to light*” in this verse, as discussed earlier concerning Ephesians 3:3-4.⁷¹ But Paul’s focus here pertains to bringing to light “*the administration*” of the mystery. The meaning and application of the phrase “*the administration of*” then becomes of utmost importance.

The NASB English translation of “*administration*” comes from the Greek word “*oikonomia*,” Strong’s # 3622. The word *oikonomia* is used by a number of the ancient Greek texts and provides the basis for modern translations, including the 1901 American Standard, NASB, and New International Version(NIV). But we must note, as Vine points out:

“In Eph. 3:9 some mss. [ancient Greek texts] have *koinonia*, ‘fellowship,’ for *oikonomia*.”⁷²

The original 1611 KJV and modern New King James Version (NKJV) choose to use the word fellowship, from *koinonia*, in Ephesians 3:9. Whether the substitution of *koinonia* for *oikonomia* in those ancient texts were deliberate, or merely copy errors, we have no way of knowing. Fellowship (*koinonia*) does fit interestingly well into the text here as supplementary, as well as complementary, information. After a thorough examination how the Greek word *oikonomia* renders meaning in this passage, then the application of *koinonia* will be discussed.⁷³

⁷⁰ Thayer, p. 663.

⁷¹ The mystery was defined as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), commonly referred to as the indwelling Holy Spirit. See pages 19-21.

⁷² Vine, II, 90.

⁷³ The author agrees with the decision to have *oikonomia* as the primary word choice for Ephesians 3:9.

The word administration (*oikonomia*) is translated as “administration” three times, and as “stewardship” six times in the NASB.⁷⁴ Thayer in his lexicon gives the following explanations:

“generally: the management of a household, or of household affairs; specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of others’ property... in Ephesians 3:9 – ‘the dispensation by which he carried out his secret purpose.’”⁷⁵

W.E. Vine comments on the use of the word dispensation in translating *oikonomia* with the following note: “A dispensation is not a period or epoch – but a mode of dealing with, an arrangement, or administration of affairs.”⁷⁶

Vine’s dictionary gives the following description for the word *oikonomia*:

“primarily signifies the management of a household or household affairs... (*oikos*, a house, *nomos*, a law).”⁷⁷

So the most literal rendering for *oikonomia* becomes “house law” when viewed in its component parts. This rendering becomes most useful in determining God’s meaning here in Ephesians 3:9.

From the literal definition of *oikonomia*, “house law”, the conscientious student of God’s word draws out the fullness of God’s meaning as expressed here. The full phrase we are dealing with reads: “the administration of the mystery.” Plugging in the definitions arrived at so far for “administration” and “mystery” results in the following: “the house-law of the indwelling Holy Spirit.”

When the Holy Spirit comes into a person’s body, just as Jesus modeled as He came up from the waters of baptism, the person’s body becomes the house or temple of God’s Spirit. I Corinthians 6:19 states this truth clearly: “*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?*” So the house (*oikos*) referred to in this passage must be the Christian’s physical body.

The law (*nomos*) referred to here has to do with the Spirit. Romans 8:2 verifies this while indicating the Spirit’s authority: “*For the law of the*

⁷⁴ *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, p.1669.

⁷⁵ Thayer, p.440.

⁷⁶ Vine, I, 321.

⁷⁷ Vine, I, 320.

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” The Holy Spirit gives us His law from within, as He writes it on our hearts and minds; as predicted in the OT and declared in the NT:

*“And **the Holy Spirit** also bears witness to us; for after saying “THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND UPON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM” (Jeremiah 31:33/Hebrews 10:15-16).*

Of course the individual retains and even expands his free will, having been set free from sin,⁷⁸ and therefore is no longer a slave to sin.⁷⁹ But the Christian must use his freedom, not as an opportunity for the flesh, but to overcome sin and serve others.⁸⁰ In the context of this freedom, Paul writes further:

*“So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being **led by the Spirit of God**, these are the sons of God” (Romans 8:12-14).*

This law of the Spirit not only sets the Christian free, but enables him to meet the righteous requirement of the OT Law. Romans 8:3-4 makes this abundantly clear:

*“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that **the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”*

What a ministry, what an *administration*, the Spirit has in the Christian!

Possible renderings

When *oikonomia* and/or *koinomia* are coupled with “the mystery”, three distinct possible renderings for this phrase come before the student of

⁷⁸ Romans 8:2.

⁷⁹ John 8:34-36.

⁸⁰ Galatians 5:13.

God's word. As discussed previously, "the mystery" concerns the Holy Spirit indwelling the Christian's body. The primary rendering using *oikonomia*, translated as administration, would literally be "**the house law of the indwelling Spirit.**"

As stated previously, the Greek word *oikonomia* is translated in the NASB three times as "administration," but also six times as "stewardship." Substituting the word stewardship here would yield the phrase "**the stewardship of the indwelling Spirit.**" The concept of stewardship has to do with the management of another's property. This application would have the Spirit ministering to the Christian in managing his property, which would include the Christian's body and time, as well as his material resources. Galatians 5:17 puts it this way: "*for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another so that you may not do the things that you please.*" Again, the Christian retains his free will, but voluntarily yields to the Spirit's leading and management of his affairs.

If one considers the ancient Greek manuscripts which contain the word *koinonia*, rather than *oikonomia*, we come up with a rendering of "**the fellowship of the indwelling Spirit.**" The use of *koinonia* highlights the communion and partnership we have with the Spirit of God, especially with regard to His indwelling presence. This would coincide with Jesus' teaching during the last supper with His disciples as recorded in the Gospel of John. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as our "Helper"(NASB) or "Comforter" (KJV).⁸¹ Certainly the Christian needs the help and comfort of God's presence in carrying out his part of the eternal purpose!

The transformation

The indwelling Holy Spirit ministers to the Christian in many ways. The most important function of the Holy Spirit concerns facilitating a transformation, enabling a person to "*become conformed to the image of His [God's] Son*" (Romans 8:29). This transformation, *metamorphoo* in the Greek,⁸² consists of a spiritual metamorphosis. The process of metamorphosis in nature gives us a physical representation of what happens to the person indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit. Instead of caterpillars becoming butterflies or tadpoles becoming frogs, the fleshly carnal person changes into a spiritual person with the character of Jesus Christ.

Many NT texts describe this transformation process and command the Christian to yield to the Spirit in completing His work. Some of the most

⁸¹ John 14:16-17,26, and 16:7.

⁸² *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, p. 1666, Strong's #3339.

notable passages would include: Romans 2:29, 8:28-29, 12:1-2, II Corinthians 3:15-18, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:20-24, Col. 3:10-11. Probably the best known Scripture declaring the result of this metamorphosis states: *“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a **new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (II Corinthians 5:17).

The most radical, observable change the individual born again of water and the Spirit⁸³ exhibits has to do with his turning away from a self-centered lifestyle of sin. In the spiritually healthy, growing Christian these changes dramatically take place in the first few years after the *“washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:5). God even expects that, with the Holy Spirit’s help, the Christian will become holy: *“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”*** (II Corinthians 7:1). The apostle Peter also writes of this potential and purpose for the Christian:

*“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh **has ceased from sin**, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God”* (I Peter 4:1-2).

In the context of the Ephesian letter, God calls his adopted children to be *“holy and blameless”* two times in both Ephesians 1:4 and 5:27.⁸⁴

This constitutes the basic tenants of the phrase *“administration of the mystery”* that Paul determined to bring to light in Ephesians 3:9. The ministry of the Spirit is of utmost importance in empowering the Christian to fulfill his part in the eternal purpose as given by God. In the next verse, verse ten, all of this comes together.

For ages hidden

Paul closes Ephesians 3:9 by indicating that the administration of the mystery now revealed, *“for ages has been hidden in God who created all things.”* Earlier in chapter one of the Ephesian letter, Paul introduces this topic in verse ten: *“...with a view to an **administration** suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, **the summing up** of all things in Christ, things*

⁸³ John 3:5.

⁸⁴ Note the phrase “holy and blameless” sandwiches the eternal purpose statement of Ephesians 3:9-11; Ephesians 1:4 before, Ephesians 5:27 after.

in the heavens and things upon the earth.” The administration of the indwelling Holy Spirit was hidden by God before the church age. In God’s timing, now is “*suitable to the fullness of the times*” for the “*summing up*” or completion of all things in Christ, both “*in the heavens*” and “*upon the earth.*”

God deliberately decides when and how the manifestation of His Spirit works with the human race. And finally, now in these last days, He has unfolded His grand and ultimate purpose. In the OT times prophets such as Ezekiel forecasted the Holy Spirit living within people at their very core.⁸⁵ Jesus also predicted these things:

*“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, **From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.**’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified”* (John 7:37–39).

Truly the indwelling Spirit has been a mystery in ages past, and “*had been hidden in God who created all things*” (Ephesians 3:9). Yet even today, the indwelling Spirit remains a mystery to many.

The Old Testament prophets had the Holy Spirit in them; in their minds to dictate the exact word-for-word writing of Scripture, and especially their irrefutable predictions. David is a widely known example of this. He was a prophet and had a heart for God,⁸⁶ yet he could not overcome sin. He did not have the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit, as the Church now has. The Christian, separate and apart from the OT prophets, has the promise given in I John 4:4: “*You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is **He who is in you** than he who is in the world.*”

Finally now in these last days God unfolds His grand and ultimate purpose. So the administration of the Spirit during the church age, by God’s design and stated purpose, will finalize things both in heaven and on earth for God. And we, the church, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, have an integral part in God’s purpose in summing up of all these things.

⁸⁵ Ezekiel 11:19-21 and 36:26-27.

⁸⁶ Acts 2:29-30 indicates David was a prophet, I Samuel 13:14 states that God “had sought out for Himself a man after His own heart” and David was appointed ruler over the Lord’s people.

Ephesians 3:10

“...so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies...”

The significance of verse ten, its component parts and the total composite as applied to the eternal purpose, can not be overstressed! The verse starts with the conjunction “so that,” which launches the series of phrases that encapsulate God’s reasons for creating mankind and the physical universe, then bringing it all to conclusion with the church. Verse ten also reveals that God’s Spirit indwelling our bodies is not an end, in and of itself. The fact that a person can have the Helper and Comforter, power to overcome sin, have a brand new abundant life, forgiveness and removal of all sin, and expect eternal life in a glorified body certainly is marvelous. But from God’s perspective, new life with the Spirit constitutes the means to an even greater good. God reveals this greater good as His eternal purpose beginning in this verse.

Verse ten contains a progression of phrases following “so that”: “the manifold wisdom of God”, “might now”, “be made known”, “through the church”, “to the rulers and authorities”, “in the heavenlies.” Our peephole into God’s answer for the seemingly never-ending questions of “Why?” pinpoints itself here in this series of phrases.

The manifold wisdom

In the phrase “the manifold wisdom of God” the Word of God draws an awesome picture. The word manifold (*polupoikilos*) functions as an adjective here, describing the wisdom of God. The Lockman Greek dictionary gives the definition “of differing colors” and notes this is the only time this Greek word is used in the NT.⁸⁷ Thayer in his lexicon gives two definitions for *polupoikilos*; first the common usage, then as used in the NT:

1. “Much-variegated; marked with a great variety of colors: of cloth or a painting.”
2. “Much varied, manifold: manifesting itself in a great variety of forms, Eph. 3:10.”⁸⁸

Note the everyday usage of this word in the first century had to do with a great variety of colors on something man produced, such as dyed cloth or a

⁸⁷ *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, p. 1676, Strong’s #4182.

⁸⁸ Thayer, pg 529

painting. The Biblical application seems to focus more on the concept of variety; the many differences of form or presentation concerning God’s wisdom.

W.E. Vine’s dictionary gives the following entry for *polupoikilos*:

“Adjective. Much varied, *polus* – ‘much’ and *poikilos* – ‘denotes parti-coloured, variegated (poikillo means to make gay: the root of the first syllable is pik – found in English, **picture**)...’

Notes: (1) *polupoikilos*, Eph. 3:10, ‘manifold’ (lit., ‘much varied’).”⁸⁹

In pulling apart this compound word *polupoikilos* Vine uncovers an interesting dimension of meaning that God wanted infused here. The first idea conveyed, *polus* meaning “much,” remains constant. But the depth of the second half of this compound word becomes quite intriguing. According to Vine *poikilos* denotes “parti-coloured, variegated.” The old English term parti-coloured meant “showing different colors or tints.”⁹⁰ The word variegated means “varied,” and “especially having discrete markings of different colors.”⁹¹ Vine also points out *poikilos* as being closely associated with the Greek word *poikillo*. *Poikillo* is not found in the biblical text, but the scholar of old was moved to include it in his entry for *poikilos*. So the reader of Greek in the first century, according to W.E. Vine, would have detected a note of gaiety or joy in the word translated into English as “manifold.” And the common usage of *polupoikilos* by Greek speaking people in the first century, as also noted in Thayer’s lexicon entry, had to do with a colorful painting, which even comes through to us in our modern English word “**picture**”.

In tying this into a description of God’s wisdom the adjective that comes to us as “manifold” carries with it so much meaning! Pulling all the various aspects of *polupoikilos* together we come up with something like this: “many numerous, uniquely different, bright and joyful picture paintings, each containing many individually distinct colors and tints, displayed in a variety of forms.” And so God chose an adjective of great fullness and beauty, which He only uses once in the entire NT, to describe His wisdom.

⁸⁹ Vine, III: 37 for “manifold,” I, 326 for “divers.”

⁹⁰ *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, ed. Philip B. Gove (Springfield, 1967), p. 614.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 982.

Wisdom

Trying to pin down an adequate definition for the word wisdom, *sophia*, in the phrase “*wisdom of God*” presents quite an illusive task. Common dictionaries fall incredibly short in trying to encompass a meaning for wisdom that could possibly belong to God. The Greek scholars generally just note that *sophia* is either “of God,” or “of man.” Thayer gives us a general definition, explains the dynamic involved, then gives the specific application for Ephesians 3:10:

“wisdom, broad and full intelligence; used of the knowledge of very diverse matters, so that the shade of meaning in which the word is taken must be discovered from the context in each particular case.

b. supreme intelligence, such as belongs to God: it is called *polupoikilos* from the great variety of ways and methods by which He devised and achieved salvation through Christ, Eph. iii. 10.”⁹²

Note how the scholar’s concentration, in the specific application, focuses on the adjective “manifold” (*polupoikilos*) rather than on the noun “wisdom” (*sophia*)! The best even the scholars can do is let God define His own terms, especially regarding Himself!

In the Scriptures, God defines wisdom in a number of ways, with a multitude of examples. For our purposes here, we will first focus on God giving Solomon wisdom, when he became king of God’s people, and making him the wisest man who ever lived.⁹³ Then the book of Proverbs will be examined, where Solomon wrote on the acquisition of wisdom from God and the defined results. Finally, God’s NT description of wisdom in the book of James will be examined.

In I Kings 3:5-12, and again in II Chronicles 1:7-12 the Bible records how Solomon received wisdom from God. In II Chronicles 1:7, God says to Solomon: “*Ask what I shall give you.*” Solomon replies: “*Give me now **wisdom and knowledge**, that I may go out and come in before the great people, for who can **rule** this great people of Yours?*” (II Chronicles 1:10). God then grants Solomon wisdom and knowledge.⁹⁴

I Kings contains the same account, but uses different words. After God offers Solomon to “*Ask what you wish Me to give you,*” Solomon replies, “*So give your servant an **understanding** heart to judge your people to **discern** between good and evil. For who is able to **judge** this great people*

⁹² Thayer, p.581, Strong’s #4678.

⁹³ I Kings 3:12, the only exception being Jesus.

⁹⁴ II Chronicles 1:12.

of Yours”(I Kings 3:5,9). Fusing these two accounts yields a preliminary scriptural definition for wisdom. The word *wisdom*, as used in II Chronicles 1:10, is used interchangeably with “*understanding*” and “*to discern*” in I Kings 3:9. The application of wisdom in II Chronicles concerns “*rule*,” while wisdom gives the ability “*to judge*” adequately in I Kings. So wisdom concerns the understanding and discernment necessary to rule and judge in a manner worthy of God’s people.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon wrote many wise sayings, and chapter two gives direction on how to receive wisdom from God. The wise man first gives a list of prerequisites concerning one’s heart and attitude to gain wisdom,⁹⁵ then states the fact that God “*gives*” and “*stores up wisdom for the upright*.”⁹⁶ A statement of results follows: “*Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart*” (Proverbs 2: 9-10). Discernment becomes the operative word here with regards to righteousness, justice, equity (fairness), and every good course (decisions in every area of life). Character and good decision-making skills comprise wisdom from God in this passage.

James, in his NT book, asks: “*Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in deeds in gentleness of wisdom*” (James 3:13). Note wisdom produces good behavior, deeds done in gentleness. The following passage then describes the wisdom from God: “*the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy*”(James 3:17). Since this describes the wisdom that God gives to mankind it must reflect, or even mirror, His wisdom.

Pulling these examples, concepts, and descriptions together yields God’s own definition of wisdom. Essentially wisdom entails correct discernment of knowledge and situations, making appropriate decisions or judgements, which result in the right and best course of action.

Dr. Donald Howard, who developed the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum, defines wisdom in his staff-training materials as “character.” The following excerpt from one of the training manuals explains his conception of wisdom. “Because wisdom is the character of God in ACTION, the student is taught how to recognize and apply character qualities and how to put them into action in his life...[wisdom] inserts are designed to help students see life from God’s perspective and to act as God would, were He in human form on earth today.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Proverbs 2:1-5.

⁹⁶ Proverbs 2:6-7.

⁹⁷ Donald R. Howard, *School of Tomorrow Procedures Manual* (Lewisville, 1994), I, 30.

This definition, “wisdom is character”, fits comfortably well in attempting to render the fullness of God’s meaning in the phrase “wisdom of God” in verse ten. As a viable synonym, “character” may be inserted here. Hence the opening phrase of verse ten becomes “so that the manifold character of God...” The object of the Scripture pinpointed here concerns the very nature and being of God Himself – who He is. Wisdom then entails not just some attribute of God under discussion, but the very essence, the very center and apex of God’s person. In a lighter, more personal way, one may even consider the term “manifold wisdom” to encompass God’s personality.

Combining these two views of wisdom, discernment and character, we arrive at a viable, useful depiction of God’s wisdom. His wisdom is an all-encompassing discernment, arising from an application of all knowledge, acted out in absolute integrity of character and uprightness. For God; His life, His decisions, His divine nature, are all wrapped up in His wisdom.

might / now

The use of the English word “might” by the translators of both the KJV and NASB does not correspond exactly with the original Greek. According to Marshall in his interlinear Greek translation, the concept forwarded by the word “might” is bound up in the word *gnorizo*: “might be made known.”⁹⁸ Evidently, the translators saw an importance in using our English word “might” separate and apart from “be made known,” possibly to make sure its meaning is not lost on the modern reader.

The NASB rendering, using the word “might” would suggest that “the possibility exists, but the reality may or may not actually take place.”⁹⁹ In context, the wisdom of God “might” be made known through the church. God desires this to happen, but the individual Christian’s free-will decisions and actions ultimately determine the outcome. The inclusion of “might” indicates that the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ does not necessarily mandate one’s transformation by His power. The Christian still maintains his free will and can decide against the Spirit’s leading; “grieving the Spirit”¹⁰⁰ and “quenching the Spirit”¹⁰¹ are two ways the Scriptures express this. The Christian’s daily, even moment by moment, decisions dictate whether he will actually be transformed into the image and character of Christ [God].

⁹⁸ Marshall, p. 561 and *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, p. 1640.

⁹⁹ Author’s wording, gleaned from “may” and “might” from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. William Morris (Boston, 1981), p. 808

¹⁰⁰ Ephesians 4:30.

¹⁰¹ I Thessalonians 5:19.

The potentiality to become like Christ through the Spirit currently exists during the church age, but the individual ultimately controls whether or not he will become an accurate representation of the wisdom of God.

The word “now” stands on its own in both the English and the Greek, *nun* meaning “now, the present.”¹⁰² These words were first penned in the first century, the letter to the Ephesians being written about 62 or 63AD.¹⁰³ This has definite significance, because the previous verse stated: “...to bring to light the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden...” (Ephesians 3:9). Whereas, before the administration of the mystery was brought to light, the manifold wisdom of God had no chance of being made known. Now that the administration of the mystery, as well as the mystery of Christ itself, is being brought to light, the eternal purpose of God might now come to pass.

made known

The next phrase in Ephesians 3:10, “be made known” means “to become known, be recognized.”¹⁰⁴ In context here the very nature and person of God becomes known: communicated to and understood, even recognized, by others. Jesus did that when He came to earth in the flesh. Hebrews 1:1-3 contains the following information: “*God...in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...and He[the Son] is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...*” At the Last Supper, “*Philip said to Him[Jesus], ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you and yet you have not come to know me Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; How can you say ‘show us the Father’?’*” (John 14:8-9). Jesus exemplifies this concept, of “made known,” when He made God known during His earthly life.

Through the church

The passage goes on to state that the wisdom of God might now be made known “through the church.” In other words, we who compose the church, having the Spirit of Christ within us, are to make known the very wisdom of God Himself! Just as Jesus did when He walked the earth, so the Christian is called to become. At first this seems too high and exalted a calling for us here and now. Most would object, at least initially, that this can possibly be done in our bodies of flesh during our stay on earth. But this is precisely what this verse says and means!

¹⁰² *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, p. 1668, Strong’s # 3568.

¹⁰³ *The Master Study Bible*, The Lockman Foundation (Nashville, 1981), p. 1209.

¹⁰⁴ Thayer, p. 119.

Consider this: the church at any given time constitutes the body of Christ on earth. Earlier in the Ephesian letter we read: “*And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to **the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all***” (Ephesians 1:22-23). Other passages throughout the NT communicate the same message. I Corinthians 12:27 reads: “*Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.*” We Christians, as members of Christ, are His feet in bringing the gospel,¹⁰⁵ His mouth to proclaim the Word to generate faith among men,¹⁰⁶ His arms to reach out to others, His hands to hold and heal.

Upon examining God’s Word closely in this text, and many other passages in the New Testament, one finds that God has prepared His church for the very purpose of revealing Himself. Consider just two statements that Jesus made; one commonly known, the other largely ignored or covered up. In His sermon on the Mount Jesus commanded: “*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and **glorify your Father** who is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16), which seems fairly doable. But now consider Jesus’ statement in John 14:12: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and **greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.***” Imagine these things: the church glorifies God and has the ability to do greater works than Jesus!

Peter, who was given the keys of the kingdom by Jesus,¹⁰⁷ addresses all Christians in his second letter:

*“for by these [Christ’ power, knowledge, glory, and excellence]”¹⁰⁸ He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the World by lust.” (II Peter 1:4).*

The “you” that Peter identifies here, “that may become partakers of the divine nature,” are those whom he addresses in opening the letter of II Peter: “*those who have **received a faith of the same kind as ours...***” (II Peter 1:1). In other words, the divine nature is available to all that have the faith, all faithful Christians throughout the church age. The divine nature necessarily has to do with holiness, therefore we find Christians commanded to be “*holy*

¹⁰⁵ Ephesians 6:15.

¹⁰⁶ Romans 10:14-17.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 16:13-19.

¹⁰⁸ II Peter 1:3.

and blameless” two times in the Ephesian letter.¹⁰⁹ God specifically calls Christians to His character of holiness: “*like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’*” (I Peter 1:15-16). This “divine nature” which Peter writes about corresponds exactly to the “*wisdom [character] of God*” stated in Ephesians 3:10. Through this divine nature, the very character of God, we possess through the power of God’s indwelling Spirit!

Paul states it this way in Romans 8:29: “*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become **conformed** to the image of His son...*” This image or pattern of Christ, according to Hebrews 1:3, exists as the “exact representation of God the Father.” So God has designed Christ’s church to represent the various aspects of His character in our new life in Christ Jesus, and especially His wisdom. At this point, we agree with Paul in asking, “*Who is adequate for these things?*” (II Corinthians 2:16). Truly only those who have “*the mind of Christ,*”¹¹⁰ those who are indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit. These are the sons of God.¹¹¹

The manifold church

If we, as the church are to “make know” the manifold wisdom of God, then it follows that the unique and beautiful adjective “manifold” (*polupoikilos*)¹¹² should apply to us also. Webster’s 1828 dictionary gives us another aspect of this word as translated into English from the Greek; that of great diversity and number, as well as coming at different times and ways. His entry reads:

“Of divers kinds, many in number; numerous, multiplied.
Exhibited or appearing at divers times or in various ways; applied to words in the singular number; as the manifold wisdom of God, Eph. III.”¹¹³

This perspective of the meaning included in the word “manifold” certainly describes the Lord’s church. The church consists of numerous individuals of diverse background, circumstances, and personality who have lived in different cultures at various times and places all over the earth for the last two thousand years.

¹⁰⁹ Ephesians 1:4 and 5:27. note Ephesians 3:10-11 is sandwiched between these two texts.

¹¹⁰ I Corinthians 2:16.

¹¹¹ Romans 8:9-14.

¹¹² See page 35-36 for discussion of *polupoikilos*.

¹¹³ Webster, II, 12.

Two illustrations, drawn from other parts of the NT, present a beautiful picture of the church which graphically corresponds with the word “manifold” used earlier in verse ten. The first concerns Christians as being “living stones.” I Peter 2:4-5 gives this illustration:

*“And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as **living stones**, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

This connects well with the end of Ephesians chapter 2 where the church is described as a building:

*“...you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole **building**, being fitted together, is growing into a holy **temple** in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).*

Note that public buildings were usually constructed of stone in Jesus’ day, and certainly God’s Temple.

Picture these stones as clear crystals or as precious translucent stones, such as emeralds or rubies. God is light¹¹⁴ and when His character shines “*through the church*,” Christians become like prisms. The light of God’s character shines through us, as living stones, to display different “colors and tints” of God’s character. So the church, like a prism, refracts the glorious light of God Himself into bands of brilliant color. In this sense the beginning phrase of verse nine “*to bring to light*” furthers the picture conveyed here, and magnifies the adjective “*manifold*” used earlier in verse ten.

In Revelation chapter twenty-one, God pictures the New Jerusalem representing the church. Revelation 21:2 states: “*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.*” The bride of course relates to the church described in such passages as Ephesians 5:22-32. Revelation 21:14 describes the foundation of the New Jerusalem: “*And the wall of the city had twelve **foundation stones**, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*” This passage uses the same image as Ephesians 2:19-

¹¹⁴ I John 1:5.

20 in describing the church: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household, having been built on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.”

The stones which make up the New Jerusalem are described at length in the Revelation: “... the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper” (Rev 21:10-11). The description then continues with regard to the types of stones making up the wall and foundation:

“The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold like transparent glass” (Rev 21:19-21).

Imagine these stones glowing as the light of God’s presence illuminates and shines through them: “And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23). This is God’s picture for us of what the church looks like in the spiritual realm! Just imagine what the angels are viewing!

The other possible illustration of “*manifold*” within the NT pictures the church as a rainbow. Physically speaking, our bodies are basically containers of water. In nature rainbows arch across the sky when sunshine reflects through a multitude of water droplets falling through the air. In a spiritual sense that’s what happens when the light of God’s presence passes through the individual Christian and the church collectively. Ezekiel saw a vision like this in his OT book of prophecy: “As the **appearance of the rainbow** in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the **appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord**” (Ezekiel 1:28).

This glory of the Lord, we, as the church of Jesus Christ, receive from the Father. Peter refers to the Holy Spirit as “*the Spirit of glory,*”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ I Peter 4:14.

and recall that the indwelling Spirit is our “*hope of glory*”.¹¹⁶ Jesus requested of His Father at His last supper: “*The glory which You have given Me I have given to them[the apostles], that they may be one, just as We are one*” (John 17:22). This glory was not only for the apostles, but also for all who would believe in Jesus through the apostle’s teaching: “*I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their[the apostles’] word*” (John 17:20). Rainbows in nature picture the glory given to the church, as seen in the spiritual realms.

Whether likened to crystals or raindrops, the church acts as a prism with the Light of God passing through us. In the physical realm white light becomes a rainbow of various color beams, exposing and highlighting the component parts of visible white light as arranged on the electromagnetic spectrum. So it is with us, spiritually. We split the Light, the very nature of God into its manifold component parts, according to God’s wisdom and design. Recall the original discussion of “manifold” as tied to God’s wisdom. We arrived at the following rendition:

“many numerous, uniquely different, bright and joyful picture paintings, each containing many individually distinct colors and tints, displayed in a variety of forms.”

Each Christian manifests a different color, a unique tint, an individual living picture of joy, as we make known the many varied facets of God’s wisdom.

The first rainbow after the great flood of Noah’s day was to assure mankind that God would never again flood the earth with water.¹¹⁷ For all Christians, since the writing of the NT book of Ephesians, rainbows in nature should remind us of the awesome beauty and delight of God’s character being displayed through our lives in Christ.

The rulers and authorities

The intended audience for the spiritual rainbow of God’s character, as displayed through human bodies filled with the Holy Spirit, are “*the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*”¹¹⁸ Often the phrase “rulers and authorities” refers to those men and women wielding authority on earth. And true, God calls His church to witness before kings and all who are in authority. The Lord told Ananias, with reference to Saul: “*Go, for he is a*

¹¹⁶ Colossians 1:27.

¹¹⁷ Genesis 9:11-17.

¹¹⁸ Ephesians 3:10, last phrase.

chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Earlier Jesus told His disciples: “*you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles*” (Matthew 10:18). And of course all Christians are called to be ambassadors for Christ in the world among men and beg them to be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:20).

But the rulers and authorities stated in Ephesians 3:10 are those “*in the heavenly places*” (NASB) or “*in the heavnlies*” (Marshall). Thayer provides the following information on the Greek term “*epouranios*,” which is translated as “heavenly places:”

“existing in or above heaven, heavenly; existing in heaven:
b. the heavenly regions, i. e. heaven itself, the abode of God and angels: Eph. i. 3, 20; ii. 6, iii. 10; the lower heavens, or the heaven of the clouds, Eph. vi. 12.”¹¹⁹

Note that Thayer indicates that the “*heavenly places*” referred to in Ephesians 3:10 comprise “the abode of God and the angels.” But then he notes that the term also applies in Ephesians 6:12 to the “lower heavens,” or the place “of the clouds.” So *epouranios* can be used to indicate Heaven itself, where God lives, or earth’s atmosphere, commonly referred to as the sky.¹²⁰

W. E. Vine’s dictionary of Greek words does an exhaustive job on the use of *epouranios* in the NT. The entries, which apply most specifically to our study, are shared as follows:

HEAVEN, HEAVENLY (-IES)

B. Adjectives.

2. EPOURANIOS, heavenly, what pertains to, or is in, heaven (epi, in the sense of ‘pertaining to,’ not here, ‘above’), has meanings corresponding to some of the meanings of *ouranos* A, No. I.
 - (b) of the place where Christ “sitteth at the right hand of God” (i.e., in a position of authority), Eph 1:20; and of the present position of believers in relation to Christ, 2:6; where they possess ‘every spiritual blessing,’ 1:3;
 - (d) of those places whose sphere of activity or existence is above, or in contrast to that of earth, of “principalities and powers,” Eph. 3:10;

¹¹⁹ Thayer, p. 247.

¹²⁰ Also see Matt. 6:26, 8:20, Acts 10:12, 11:16, and James 5:18.

of the “spiritual hosts of wickedness,” 6:12 R.V., “in the heavenly places.”¹²¹

Here Vine addresses the adjective form of *epouranios*, as found in Ephesians 3:10, and other Scripture texts. Note the listings include where Christ is seated, (b); and the sphere of activity for “the rulers and authorities” (NASB), as used in the Scripture verse, Ephesians 3:10, (d).

So, the rulers and authorities indicated in Ephesians 3:10 exist and are active in Heaven and the sky, in contrast to on the earth. Most agree these rulers and authorities are angelic beings. Thayer comes to the following conclusions:

Rulers (*arche*): “Hence the term is transferred by Paul to the angels and demons holding dominions entrusted to them in the order of things: Ro. viii. 38; I Co. xv. 24; Eph. i. 21; iii. 10; vi. 12; Col. I. 16; ii. 10, 15.”¹²²

Authorities (*exousia*): “the leading and more powerful among created beings superior to man, spiritual potentates; used in the plural of a certain class of angels: Col. i. 16; I Pet. iii. 22, Eph. iii. 10... used also of demons: in the plural, Eph. vi. 12; Col. ii. 15.”¹²³

Vine also agrees that these rulers and authorities are angels:

ARCHE: beginning, government, rule, is used of supramundane beings who exercise rule, called “principalities”[KJV]; (a) of holy angels, Eph. 3:10, the church in its formation being to them the great expression of “the manifold (or ‘much varied’) wisdom of God.”¹²⁴

EXOUSA: denotes freedom of action, right to act.
Angelic beings are called “powers”[KJV] in Eph. 3:10.¹²⁵

Therefore; the “*rulers and authorities in the heaven places*,” as stated in Ephesians 3:10, must be the angels. And the terms “rulers”(*arche*) and “authorities”(*exousa*) apply to two hierarchies, or orders, of angels.

¹²¹ Vine, p. 209.

¹²² Thayer, p. 77.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 225.

¹²⁴ Vine, III, 213.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 196.

The specific target audience for the church making known the manifold wisdom of God, as stated in Ephesians 3:10, are two classes of ruling angels. As rulers, they must have authority and influence over the other angels.¹²⁶ They must exercise “wisdom,” whether godly or demonic,¹²⁷ as they carry out their decision-making responsibilities. These should be, of all the angelic hosts, most aware and attentive to the quality of wisdom.

In summary then, God’s Word indicates that we, as Christ’s church, are to make known His very wisdom to the angelic hosts. Many of these angels exist in Heaven itself, with and for God, as evidenced in the phrase “*the heavenly places*” also being used in Ephesians 1:20 and 2:6. But in context of the Ephesian letter, Paul uses the same two Greek words for “*rulers and authorities*” again in Ephesians chapter 6:12: “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood , but against **the rulers**, against the **powers[authorities]**, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness **in the heavenly places**.*” This specifically applies to fallen angels who oppose God and the Lord’s church. Satan, now that he has been thrown down to earth, is described as “the prince of the power of the air.”¹²⁸ All of these angelic hosts constitute the intended audience for the church’s display of God’s wisdom.

To recount and consolidate the Scripture’s amazing statements examined in the last two verses takes one’s breath away! Ephesians 3:9-10 aspires to: “*bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden I God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*” In other words, in illuminating the administration of the mystery, the operation and ministry of the Holy Spirit working within the Christian, God empowers and activates the Christian. His reason for doing so, as explained in verse ten, consists in the collective body of Christians displaying His wisdom to the ruling classes of angels.

This most certainly leads to the question as to why God needs us, as the church, to make known His manifold wisdom to the angels. This question is addressed in Appendix II.

¹²⁶ Ken Wilson, *A Study Guide on the Mystery of Angels* (Puyallup, 2009), p. 7.

¹²⁷ James 3: 14-16.

¹²⁸ Ephesians 2:2.

Ephesians 3:11

“...in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord...”

Ephesians 3:11 continues the line of thought carried through from verse ten. Verse 11 in the NASB version reads: *“This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Most noteworthy here is the fact that the original Greek texts never include the opening two words “This was.” Instead an uninterrupted continuum flows from verse ten into verse eleven. So the entirety of the thought would read:

“...the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3: 10-11).

The phrase *“in accordance with”* then becomes vitally important in binding the role of the church, as described in verse ten, with the eternal purpose which Jesus inaugurated, as stated in verse eleven. Thayer gives both a general definition for *“in accordance with”* (*kata*) and as it is used in the specific context of the Ephesian letter. The general definition reads:

*“a preposition denoting motion or diffusion or direction from the higher to the lower; as in classical Greek.”*¹²⁹

From the higher to the lower must have to do with Jesus (the higher) guiding and empowering His church (the lower). Thayer’s specific entry gives this insight:

*“used of the cause; through, on account of, from, owing to, (in accordance with i.e. in consequence of, by virtue of).”*¹³⁰

Jesus and His life must be the original cause, and our part in God’s eternal purpose comes, “through” or “from,” and “in consequence of” what Jesus has accomplished.

An example would be found in Jesus going to the cross for mankind. The angels must have been aghast as they watched the Son of God, God in

¹²⁹ Thayer, p. 328, Strong’s # 2596.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the flesh, nailed to a cross and take on the sins of the world. In all likelihood, some would have passed the event off, reasoning that He was God and knew the outcome, or using some other contorted rationale.¹³¹ But when they see the Christian dying daily as a living sacrifice by faith, or being martyred as in the days of old,¹³² the reality would be much harder to minimize. And formerly worldly people transformed to live holy lives should graphically convict the angelic audience!

Webster's 1828 Dictionary gives more insight in one of the definitions of "accordance," when used as a noun: "Agreement with a person; conformity with a thing."¹³³ The first application would be agreement with Jesus, which one does in trusting and obeying Him. With regards to "conformity with a thing," conformity with the eternal purpose fits very well in this case. Here the Christian conforms to the image of Christ,¹³⁴ being transformed into His character to reveal God's wisdom in individually diverse ways. This constitutes our part in the eternal purpose of God precisely.

Eternal purpose

The eternal purpose was defined in its component parts; "eternal" and "purpose," earlier in the Introduction section of this paper under the heading Definitions. From the literal rendering "setting forth the showbread of the ages"¹³⁵ the Scripture applies this foreshadow to the church of Jesus Christ. The church functions as the showbread of God today, the Lord's people are on display to reveal His wisdom to the heavenly hosts. In so doing, the church accomplishes God's stated eternal purpose.

In other words, Jesus initially broke the trail and God has recreated us in Christ,¹³⁶ by design, to finish what Jesus pioneered. In a sense, the Church functions as the follow through to what Christ first initiated. This is much like a baseball batter's completion of his swing after his bat connects with the ball, or the motion of a bowler's arm and wrist after the ball leaves his fingers. Truly the power and effectiveness, and especially the final results, reside in the follow through.

And so it is with us, Christ's church on earth. The follow through started with the Pentecost of Acts chapter two, when the enthroned Christ

¹³¹ True, this is speculation. But considering the rebellion by some of the angels and war in Heaven, Rev. 12: 7-9, this would be the likely disposition by some of the angels.

¹³² An example would be Acts 7, the martyrdom of Stephen.

¹³³ Webster, I, 2.

¹³⁴ Romans 8:29.

¹³⁵ See pages 11-12.

¹³⁶ II Corinthians 5:17.

sent the Holy Spirit from Heaven to indwell men on a permanent basis and perform a spiritual metamorphosis. From then on, the outcome of God's program depends on the body of believers alive on earth at any given time during the Church Age. The apostle Paul shared his part with these words: "*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do **my share** on behalf of His body, which is the church, **in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions***" (Col. 1:24). Whether it be suffering, or any other service for Christ, the completion of the eternal purpose depends on the individual Christians comprising the church.

Ephesians 3:12

*"...in whom we have **boldness and confident access** through **faith** in Him."*

This verse gives much insight on the position and empowerment of the individual Christian to accomplish God's eternal purpose. Verse twelve states: "*in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him*" (NASB). The "whom" here must be Jesus Christ our Lord as named in verse eleven. And the "we" refers to the Christians at Ephesus and the church at large as stated earlier in verse ten. Through Jesus, we as the church, "*have boldness and confident access...*" The immediate question comes: "Access to what?" Verse twelve does not say, but earlier in the Ephesian text Paul states: "*for through Him [Christ Jesus] we both [Christian of both Jewish and Gentile background] have our **access** in one Spirit to the Father*" (Ephesians 2:18). Our confident access then is to God the Father.

Under the OT, access to God was extremely limited. The NT access, gained by Jesus for His church, was portrayed when He cried out in a loud voice on the cross, "It is finished."¹³⁷ At that very moment the veil in temple was ripped in half from top to bottom.¹³⁸

The veil divided the tabernacle, then the temple into two rooms. In Exodus 26, God detailed the construction of the veil in the tabernacle:

"And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also being of gold, on four sockets of

¹³⁷ John 19:30.

¹³⁸ Mark 15:37-38.

*silver. And you shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and **the veil shall serve for you as a partition** between the holy place and the holy of holies”(Exodus 26:31-33).*

While the veil remained intact, the priests ministering daily in the Holy Place were shut off from the power and presence of God. Once the veil was torn, the Holy of Holies was then open to the daily ministrations of the priest. This represented that the barrier between God and man had been overcome through Jesus’ sacrifice. The book of Hebrews puts it this way: *“Therefore brethren, since we have **confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus** by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us **through the veil**, that is, **His flesh**...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...”* (Hebrews 10:19-20,22).

The spiritual fulfillment

But God’s plan called for the foreshadow and prophetic nature of the physical temple to transfer spiritually into the church. In the present Church Age the Holy Spirit comes into the Christian’s body and sits on the throne room of the Christian’s heart.¹³⁹ Hence we have scriptural statements such as I Corinthians 6:19: *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”* Therefore the Temple represented and foreshadowed the Christian’s body. With the Holy Spirit currently in our hearts, our daily lives of ministry are opened to the very throne room and seat of God.

The access we, as the Lord’s church, have to God the Father directly depends on the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Through the Holy Spirit¹⁴⁰ our personal and collective access to the Father is immediate, direct, full, and beyond even our ability to put into words.

One means of access to God regards the transmission and reception of a Christian’s prayer. Romans 8:26-27 states:

*“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but **the Spirit Himself intercedes for us** with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because **He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**”*

¹³⁹ Ephesians 3:16-17.

¹⁴⁰ Ephesians 2:18, 4:4.

The Spirit within the Christian “intercedes,” that is searches our inner most being.¹⁴¹ Knowing our thoughts, He takes our humble attempts to speak with God and communicates with God on our behalf “with groanings to deep for words.” Jesus, now seated on the throne with the Father and knowing “what the mind of the Spirit is,” speaks in the presence of the Father on our behalf! A plausible illustration of this would be likening the prayer process to a courtroom scene. Jesus acts as an attorney taking our case before the Judge; He uses the finest argumentation and legal terminology, complimented by His influence in being the Judge’s favorite and only begotten Son! This certainly is access with a capital “A”.

At this point we should note that Paul, after a short statement of comfort for the Ephesian brethren concerned about his tribulations,¹⁴² goes on to pray for the brethren to accomplish the purpose of God by means of this access.¹⁴³ Several phrases in the prayer highlight the church’s access to God through the Holy Spirit: “*to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,*” “*that Christ may dwell in your hearts,*” “*that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God,*” and “*to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us.*”¹⁴⁴ Note these words of prayer are from a man who admittedly “*doesn’t know how to pray as we should*” (Romans 8:26). My goodness, just imagine what these words sounded like to God after the Holy Spirit and Jesus were done with them!

On a daily, on-going basis, the Christian ministers before God as heaven itself is open to us continually. In Ephesians 2:6 the Scriptures even declare that we are seated with Him on the throne: “***raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus***” (Eph 2:6). In other words the church has constant spiritual access to God the Father through His Son.

Boldness and confident

Verse twelve describes the access we receive to the Father with the words “*boldness*” and “*confident*.” Not only is the access itself awesome, but our countenance as we live daily in His presence has significantly changed from the Mosaic age. Christians are called a royal priesthood, amongst other things, in I Peter 2:9:

¹⁴¹ I Corinthians 2:11.

¹⁴² Ephesians 3:13.

¹⁴³ Ephesians 3:14-21.

¹⁴⁴ Ephesians 3:16,17,19,20, respectively.

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A **royal PRIESTHOOD**, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Whereas the position of those OT priest entering the tabernacle was “fear and trembling,”¹⁴⁵ we have boldness and confidence before God. The author of Hebrews puts it this way: “*Therefore, brethren since we have **confidence** to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by **a new and living way** which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh...*” (Hebrews 10:19-20).

An example of such boldness would be the apostle Peter. Before he received the indwelling Holy Spirit he denied even knowing Jesus to a servant girl.¹⁴⁶ But after receiving the Holy Spirit he stood before the same council that forced the execution of Jesus, and he said: “*Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we can not stop speaking about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:19-20). Later Peter tells them, after being arrested again: “*we must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). And this boldness and confidence intensifies as the Christian understands the eternal purpose as stated in Ephesians 3:10.

The faith

In its entirety, verse 12 reads: “*in whom we have boldness and confident access **through faith** in Him.*” Note the last phrase “through faith in Him” declares that faith provides the basis for our continuing access to the Father. As such, the last phrase of verse 12 becomes very significant and even more so upon examination of the original Greek. “Through faith **in** Him” actually reads “*through the faith **of** Him*” in the original manuscripts.¹⁴⁷ When someone has faith **in** someone else, then it follows that he draws strength from and leans upon that person with trust. The person has confidence in the trusted person’s ability and willingness to be there for him. And this is certainly true of our relationship with Christ, and initially we are to have faith **in** Him.

But Ephesians 3:12 should be translated “*...in whom we have boldness and confident access **through the faith of** Him.*” The concept of having the “faith of” someone constitutes an entirely different realm from having “faith

¹⁴⁵ Hebrews 12:21.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 26: 69-72.

¹⁴⁷ The King James Version translates this correctly, whereas none of the modern versions do!

in” someone. In the rendering “the faith of,” one has the same or identical faith as someone else; specifically here, the faith of Christ. The other person’s faith is absorbed and duplicated within one’s self. So the power (in verse twelve the terms *boldness* and *confidence* are used) gained from such faith comes from within rather than needing an external person to provide what one may lack. According to Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 3:9, where the phrase “faith of” is used in the Greek, the Christian’s entire life and personal righteousness rests upon his acquisition of the very faith which Jesus had when he walked the earth. Peter, in his universal letter to the church, begins by addressing Christians as: “*those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (II Peter 1:1). Ephesians 4:5 states there is “*one faith.*” Jude 3 appeals to all Christians to: “*contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.*” As Paul explains: “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17). Starting with Christ Himself in a human body, to the Christian today, the Word of God produces the faith of Christ in those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

This faith of Christ developing within the Christian as he matures provides the basis for his personal access to God, as well as taking on the divine nature, the very wisdom and holiness of God Himself.¹⁴⁸ In doing so, the Christian manifests the “*manifold wisdom of God*” so that the reflected image of God’s person may be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This constitutes the essence of our part in the eternal purpose as described in Ephesians 3:10.

Summary

Prayerfully, this examination of Ephesians chapter three has brought to light many wonderful and inspiring concepts from God’s Word. The phrase “*the eternal purpose*” sits as a pinnacle right in the middle of the chapter. Verse eleven indicates Jesus initially carried out the eternal purpose: “*...in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Whereas verses nine and ten specifically identify mankind’s role in God’s eternal purpose:

“ *to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the*

¹⁴⁸ II Peter 1:4.

*manifold wisdom of God might now be **made known** through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”*

Ephesians 3:1-7 contains the context and lead in to God’s eternal purpose. In this section the reader finds essential phrases including; “*the mystery*,” “*the mystery of Christ*,” “*heirs*,” “*the promise*,” “*the gospel*,” and “*administration of the mystery*.” When these phrases are properly defined and assimilated, they form stepping stones leading to the summit of understanding, wherein the fullness of our part in the eternal purpose may be apprehended.

On the backside of Ephesians chapter three, the student of God’s Word finds a high plateau which gives insight into how we are able to accomplish God’s purpose. Our bold and confident access to God’s power and person through faith, the faith of Christ, gives the Lord’s church the high ground. Then Paul prays for the church, a rich and powerful prayer, to bring us “*to all the fullness of God*.”¹⁴⁹ All this so we might understand, and thereby more deliberately embrace, the eternal purpose of God. This constitutes the very purpose for which Christ purchased us with His own blood.¹⁵⁰

THE END

When speaking in terms of eternity, ends are always a beginning. In this physical universe we expect a beginning and an end. As we are conceived and born, live then die, a beginning and an end are all we know. But when Jesus cried, “It is finished!”¹⁵¹ and died on the cross, His end actually became a beginning. His physical death meant His body was done and it was laid in the grave. And yes, He accomplished all that God intended for Him while He lived as the Son of Man on earth. He indeed fulfilled all the prophets had foretold about Him for His life and ministry among the people.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ephesians 3:19.

¹⁵⁰ Acts 20:28.

¹⁵¹ John 19:30.

¹⁵² Luke 24: 25-27.

Jesus' work

Yet, in a greater sense Jesus' work and purpose had just begun. While His body lay cold in the tomb, in the Spirit He went to Sheol, the resting-place for the souls of the dead. I Peter 3:19-20 discloses that He went to Hades and:

“made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.”

And according to Luke 23:43, Jesus told one of the thieves crucified with Him *“today you will be with Me in paradise.”* So Jesus visited and ministered in the two holding areas of Sheol; Hades and paradise, interfacing the souls of all those people who had lived and died up to the cross.

Then, He arose on the first day of the week, alive in His fleshly body after three days in the grave.¹⁵³ He appeared to Mary at the gravesite,¹⁵⁴ took a seven-mile hike to Emmaus while having a personal Bible study with two of His disciples,¹⁵⁵ then showed Himself to the apostles that evening in the upper room.¹⁵⁶ All of these things He did on the very first day of His resurrection.

According to the book of Acts, Jesus appeared to His apostles over a period of forty days, teaching them about the kingdom.¹⁵⁷ During that period He appeared to many people at various times and places, proving to them with certainty His bodily resurrection. The next Sunday following His resurrection He appeared to the apostles again in the evening in the upper room. This time Thomas was with them, and Jesus gave him the proof that he had earlier demanded: *“... Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). The Bible shares several such appearances by Jesus during the forty days following His bodily resurrection:

“and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of

¹⁵³ Matthew 12:40, 27:62-66, 28:1-7.

¹⁵⁴ John 20:11-18.

¹⁵⁵ Luke 24:13-32.

¹⁵⁶ Luke 24:36-49.

¹⁵⁷ Acts 1:3-8.

whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (I Corinthians 15:5-8).

On the fortieth day after His resurrection Jesus ascended into Heaven, where He continues to accomplish His Father’s will in even greater ways. Luke gives us this account of the ascension: “*And after He had said these things, He was **lifted up** while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been **taken up** from you **into heaven**, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9-11).*

Upon entering Heaven the Scriptures indicate Jesus entered into the Holy of Holies of Heaven itself as our High Priest. Hebrews gives us this information:

*“Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but **into heaven itself**, now **to appear in the presence of God for us**; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with the blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:23-26).*

After fulfilling His high priestly duties, we understand that Jesus was crowned as King and sat down on the throne at the right hand of God the Father. Hebrews 1:3 makes this statement: “*when He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*” From this position Jesus received the promise of the Holy Spirit which He poured out onto mankind starting on the day of Pentecost, fulfilling the prophesy of Joel as preached by Peter in Acts 2:14-21. Since then Jesus: “*...is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them***” (Hebrews 7:25), as He sits with His Father on the throne. When Steven was martyred, according to Acts chapter seven, Jesus stood up from His seated position on the throne to give His man a standing ovation:

“But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’ (Acts 7:55-56).

During this church age, Jesus’ ministry continues to quicken His people as they minister for Him on earth. The N.T letters tell of His ministry now, to us and for us, indicating that His current employment has much more significance than His earthly work. Note the subtleties of this as stated in Romans 5:8-11:

*“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. **Much more then**, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His son, **much more**, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And **not only this**, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”*

The point

The point here, in delineating some of the more significant things accomplished by Jesus after His earthly life ended, concerns what the reader does after reading and contemplating this paper on the eternal purpose of God. Jesus’ life on earth was between thirty-three and thirty-four years. About three and a-half years of those, He devoted to public ministry.¹⁵⁸ His ministry since the cross spans almost two thousand years. Although the Lord’s earthly ministry was necessary and wonderful, what He has accomplished since His death has far more importance than the few years He walked the earth.

Likewise, what happens **after** a bible study, or preached message determines how “good” it really was! One may walk away afterwards feeling pumped-up and motivated, but what does the person do with the material presented? The results are everything. Who cares if a person gets excited for a few hours, or even a few days, but ends up doing nothing in response?

¹⁵⁸ Luke 3:23.

So what are you going to do with this material concerning the eternal purpose and any insight gained? More, much more, writing needs to be done on this subject! There are so many questions yet to be asked and answered. Most of all, a deeper understanding of the eternal purpose should up-grade a person's life; his integrity, holiness, love, and service. The angels are watching! They "long to look" into the things which we have and are as Christians.¹⁵⁹

The church especially needs to get over our petty differences of personalities and opinions, in order to work together effectively in building up the body of Christ. Jesus wants us to hasten His return.¹⁶⁰ And He's not coming back until all the living stones¹⁶¹ are placed in the temple securely. The Lord awaits our progress: "*...the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Forward!

One of the preliminary editors of this paper, after reviewing it, asked: "Why does a Christian need to know about the eternal purpose?" Church leadership needs to know about the eternal purpose, as any and all teachings in the Bible must be expounded. But in reference to the average Christian, consider the following account.

During one of the Allied beach landings on a South Pacific island during World War II, the commanding officer received an urgent radio message. The troops surging onto the beach from watercraft were coming under heavy fire from the well fortified Japanese defenders. The message stated that the military motion picture crew documenting the battle had just run out of film. They asked for orders: "Should we fall back?" The commander roared: "Absolutely not! Don't fall back! Keep your cameras rolling, film or no film!" After signing off, the stunned communications officer asked the commander why he was having that crew stay out there under heavy fire. The commander replied: "Because my troops are more courageous when they know they are being filmed."¹⁶²

Once the church understands and truly discerns what is going on, we too will be more courageous. The film crews in Heaven are documenting our

¹⁵⁹ I Peter 1:12.

¹⁶⁰ II Peter 3:12.

¹⁶¹ I Peter 2:5.

¹⁶² This account has been confirmed, but as yet the documentation has not been secured. Any help in securing a source(s) would be greatly appreciated.

battle as we storm spiritual beaches: “*against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly palaces.*”¹⁶³ *The weapons of our warfare are... divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*”¹⁶⁴

Through it all, as children of light,¹⁶⁵ we are to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers of all the angelic forces who are watching. This is who we are, and why we are here.

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¹⁶³ Ephesians 6:12.

¹⁶⁴ II Corinthians 10:4-5.

¹⁶⁵ Ephesians 5:8.

APPENDIX I—Proof Texts

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APPENDIX II

Why the Church?

Having unlocked God's definition for His eternal purpose in Ephesians chapter three, an obvious question faces mankind front and center. Why does God need the church to "make known" His manifold wisdom to the angels? Don't they see that God's decision making and judgements are the very best possible? Shouldn't the angels trust Him, as they see God face-to-face and are continually in His presence within the spiritual realm? Don't they already know the divine nature and character of God? Haven't they been with God since they were created? What's the problem?

And when one considers the lengths God has gone to in creating the physical universe and mankind, then sending His Son as a sacrifice to redeem mankind, expending vast amounts of time and energy to transform His church on an individual basis for the last nineteen hundred plus years, to say nothing of the personal suffering all mankind has or will endure, these questions become even more pressing!

One plausible answer comes in reviewing the circumstances of Jesus' life here on earth as the Son of God. After all, He represented the Father in every way for mankind.¹⁶⁶ In speaking with His closest disciples, Jesus shared: *"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him... **Have I been so long with you, and you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?"*** (John 14:7,9-10). Jesus modeled God the Father while in the flesh. Could it be that Jesus provides an example for us as to what the Father faces in Heaven with the angels?

In the NT we find that Jesus, the Creator of the physical universe and mankind,¹⁶⁷ was summarily rejected when He became a man and lived amongst us. John 1:10-11 reads: *"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the World did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."* Later in John's Gospel account, Jesus came to His own people in Galilee. The apostle writes: *"After*

¹⁶⁶ Hebrews 1: 1-3.

¹⁶⁷ Hebrews 1:2, Colossians 1:16.

*the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that **a prophet has no honor in his own country***” (John 4:43-44). Likewise, has God lacked honor due Him in Heaven?

Jesus’ statement that “*a prophet has no honor in his own country*” literally came home for Him in an incident at Nazareth, His hometown. Mark’s Gospel gives this account:

*“And He went out from there, and He came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? ‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at Him. And Jesus said to them, ‘**A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.**’ And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief”* (Mark 6:1-6).

Earlier we read that Jesus’ own family even tried to suppress Him and His ministry: “*And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people heard of this, they went out to **take custody of Him**; for they were saying ‘**He has lost His senses**’”* (Mark 3:20-21).

This dynamic which Jesus faced on earth with His own family and town’s people, and eventually he rulers of the nation of Israel, may in fact reflect and exemplify what God faced in Heaven with His angels. If so, God makes His situation known to the church through the example of His Son Jesus. As Jesus’ position and wisdom were rejected by men, so also the position and wisdom of God may have been rejected by a portion of the angels.

If this is the case, then God using Spirit-filled people as third-party, free-will agents to make known His wisdom to the angels makes sense. And when one considers the beauty and perfection of such a plan, it truly epitomizes God’s wisdom!

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