

Ephesians
God's Great Secret (Part 1)
Ephesians 3:1-13
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I invite you to turn with me again to Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, as we begin the third chapter of this great book. If you've been here any time at all, you've heard me mention on several occasions my love of reading. I spend much of my week reading various books and commentaries and reference works and other books as well. Many of you, I know, love to read as well. It's amazing (when you think about the number of books that are published in a typical year in our country) how many of them actually succeed.

Last year, those who are in the industry tell us that in 2007, thousands of hard-cover titles were published for the first time. Of those thousands, only one hundred and forty-three sold more than 100,000 copies. Only a hundred and forty-three really prospered. Last year the best-selling book of the year was a children's book. It was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* which sold thirteen million copies.

But the best-selling non-children's book (the best-selling adult hard cover) was a book that I think was prompted in its popularity primarily by the promotion of Oprah Winfrey. It was *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne. Some 4.5 million copies of that book have been sold. If you've seen it or read excerpts or read it, your first and immediate question is why would four and a half million people buy it? Well, in the end, people love a good secret.

So, what could be better than a secret that will help you get everything you want in life. And what could be better than that, than not only a secret that will help you get everything you want, but a secret of universal cosmic proportions, which is exactly what the book promises to deliver. However, Rhonda Byrne's secret is really no secret at all. It's the old lie that goes back even to the garden of Eden, and to the serpent. But while that's not the universal secret that you need to know, are you ready for this? There is, in fact, a cosmic, universal secret. It is a secret that affects all of time and eternity, and it affects every creature in the universe, including you. And

your life will only be what you were made and created to be as your life is in line with that great secret. And here's the wonderful part. Here in Ephesians 3, Paul tells us what it is.

Today, we begin our study of the third chapter of his letter to the church in Ephesus and the surrounding churches. Let me remind you that the chapter divisions don't go back to the beginning, and in Paul's letter to the church there in Ephesus, there was no break between 2 and 3. And so, you have to remember that the context for the beginning of chapter 3 comes from the end of chapter 2. In the second half of 2:11 - 22, as we've seen, Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that through the work of Christ they have been connected to Christ and to each other. Whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, male or female. And he ends that discussion of that wonderful union that we enjoy with three illustrations. Illustrations of how we now enjoy this union with God and with each other. He says we are like citizens in a new country with a new king. We are like members of a new family with a new Father. And we are like living stones in a new building, designed to be the place where God dwells and is worshipped. That's the context in which verse 1 of chapter 3 occurs.

Notice how he begins. "For this reason, I Paul ..." Now, if you remember, we've seen that expression before. Look back at 1:15. Paul wrote, "... for this reason, I too, having heard of your faith ..." [and he goes on to introduce a prayer, verse 16.] "do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers". And what follows is one of those beautiful prayers of the apostle Paul. You see the same sort of thing in Colossians 1, in a book that was written around the same time, from prison as well. Verse 9 of chapter 1 "... for this reason also, we have not ceased to pray for you". This is often the way Paul introduces his prayers.

So back in Ephesians 3:1, Paul is about to record one of his prayers in response to what he's just taught in the last half of 2. But at the end of verse 1, as he's just sort of getting started with his prayer, he interrupts himself. And he doesn't get back to the prayer until verse 14. Look down in verse 14. "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father." So, you can see then, that verses 2 - 13 are in fact a digression. a long, one-sentence interruption to Paul's prayer. Something Paul says in verse 1 interrupts the prayer he's about to tell them about and causes him to explain this first. What was it that interrupted him?

Well, let's look at verse 1 together. "For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—" As Paul begins to record his prayer for them, he's reminded of the fact that he is, even as he writes this letter, in prison because of his ministry to the Gentiles.

Remember that it was just three or four years before he writes this letter that Paul had been accused of bringing a Gentile past that famous dividing wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of Israel there at the temple of Jerusalem. And because of that accusation, Paul had been arrested. He ended up having to appeal to Caesar because the Jews hated him so much. And what they hated most about Paul was his affinity for, his ministry to, the Gentiles.

Back in Acts 22, as Paul had been arrested and is ascending the stairs out of the temple compound, he speaks to the Jews who were assembled there on the temple mount, and he says this to them, verse 21 of Acts 22, Christ told me that He would send me far away, to the Gentiles. Verse 22 says, "They listened to Paul up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live." They had utter animosity for the ministry that Paul would have to Gentiles.

So, with all of that going through Paul's mind, back in Ephesians 3:1 he writes, "For this reason [because of this new union that exists between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles that I've just explained to you], I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus ..." Now, we read that, and our eyes pass over it without really thinking about it. Paul uses a similar statement some four times, four other times, in his writings, a prisoner of Christ Jesus. It's really a sermon in and of itself.

And at some point, maybe I need to come back and dwell on it, because, you see what's going on here. Paul is interpreting the circumstances of his life through the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Paul saw himself as a slave of Christ. He believed that Christ was in charge of everything. So, in Paul's mind, he is not sitting there in prison getting bitter over the circumstances in his life.

He's interpreting those circumstances through Christ, and Christ's Lordship. And he says, I'm not a prisoner of the Jews. I'm not a prisoner of the Romans. I'm not in prison because of Nero,

the reigning emperor. No, I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I am a prisoner because that was in Jesus Christ's sovereign purpose and plan for me. That, by the way, is how we ought to interpret the circumstances, the difficult circumstances, that come into our lives. Paul found great joy there and so should we.

But why was Paul in prison? Why was he in prison in the first place? Notice what he says at the end of verse 1. "A prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles ... "I'm here in prison because Christ wants me here, and He wants me here because it's for your benefit. And Paul mentions to them that he was a prisoner for their sakes. You remember back to what happened in Acts? He was arrested because he was accused of taking a Gentile, an Ephesian Gentile, an Ephesian believing Gentile from the church in Ephesus, past that dividing wall.

When he thinks of all of that, it reminds him that his entire life and mission is, in fact, about the Gentiles. So, with that, he interrupts himself. He stops what was going to be the beginning of his prayer, and instead, he lays out for us the heart of his ministry. The theme of this interruption that begins in verse 2 and runs down through verse 13; the theme of Paul's interruptions, his digression, is very clear. It's the mystery, the mystery. The word "mystery" occurs six times in Ephesians, more than any other of Paul's writings, and in these twelve verses, the word mystery occurs three times, more concentrated than anywhere else in any of Paul's writings. So, this section, this interruption, is about the mystery.

But before we look at what Paul says here about this mystery, we first have to understand what he means by mystery. The English word "mystery" is not a translation from the Greek. It is, instead, a transliteration. Now, this is confusing because you have the Greek word "mystery", and you have the English word "mystery", and over time, what the word meant in Greek is completely different than what it now means in English. Here is what Mr. Webster says about the English word "mystery". These are the two most common definitions of the word "mystery". "Anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown."

And then the other definition of the English word that's most familiar is, "A novel, short story, play, or film whose plot involves a crime or other event that remains unsettled or unsolved until

the very end.” Think Agatha Christie, or for some of you whose reading level’s a little lower than that, think Nancy Drew or Hardy Boys. So, in English, the word “mystery” refers to one of two things: either something that is still a secret, or something that was a secret, but by my own careful investigation, I have come to know. So, either I can’t know it, or I have come to know it on my own by hard work and research and investigation. That’s the English word.

Now, folks, if you’re going to understand what Paul says, you have to forget everything I just said, because the Greek word has almost nothing in common with the English usage of the word mystery. The Greek word *mysterion* “*musterion*” rather, occurs a total of thirty-six times in the Greek text of the Scripture, in the Septuagint, that’s the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. And the New Testament, thirty-six times in the text of Scripture. Eight of those thirty-six times is in one Old Testament chapter, and that is the only chapter in the Old Testament in which this word occurs. And so, if we want to understand its usage in the New, we need to go back and see how it’s used in that one foundational chapter. And that is Daniel 2.

Turn back there with me for a moment, Daniel 2. You’re familiar with the context of course. Nebuchadnezzar’s great dream that Daniel, by God’s providence is allowed to interpret. Now, I’m not going to touch on all eight times this word occurs here, but let me just give you a sampling. You remember God allows Daniel to understand it, so verse 19 says, “Then the mystery [there’s our word, the *musterion*] was revealed to Daniel in a night vision.” And so, God blessed the God of heaven and the praise follows. Notice verse 28. As he explains it to Nebuchadnezzar, he says,” there is a God in heaven who reveals *musterion*, and he has made known what will take place in the latter days.” Verse 29, “As for you O King, while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future, and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place”. Verse 30 is key in our understanding of this word mystery as well. Daniel says, “but as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me, more than in any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand.”

Now that begins to inform the New Testament usage of the word “mystery”. You’ll notice what’s going on here. It was a secret that God is now revealing by revelation, and the fact that

it's now becoming known, Daniel says has nothing to do with my own intellect, with my own process of discovery. It's strictly God's revealing it. That concept of mystery is what brings us to the New Testament.

Now, it occurs, [the word "mystery" occurs] three times in the gospels, all in parallel passages. I'll have you turn to Mark's version, Mark 4:11. As Jesus begins to speak to His disciples, it says, "He was saying to them, to you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables." He says, listen, I'm going to help you understand the mystery. But people on the outside, they're not going to get it.

There are many other passages I could take you to, that I have here in my notes. I'm not going to take you to all of them. Let me just take you to a couple more. Turn to the end of Romans, Romans 16:25. Paul concludes his great letter to the church in Rome by saying,

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading* to obedience of faith....

First Corinthians 2:1, it's not immediately obvious here in English as it is in Greek, but look at verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 2.

... when I came to you, brethren, [Paul says] I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you ... [And in English it says the testimony of God. In most of your translations there should be a, some sort of footnote that says that literally, it is the] mystery of God. I came to proclaiming ... [church in Corinth,] the mystery of God, for I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Now, with that background, turn to Ephesians, and let me show you how this word occurs in Ephesians. We'll define it in just a moment. Stay with me. Ephesians 1:9, here's the first time it occurs in the letter to the church in Ephesus. Paul says God made known to us the "musterion" of His will. God made it known to us. Chapter 3 in the passage we're looking at this morning, verse 3. "by revelation there was made known to me the mystery...." Chapter 3:4, when you read you'll be able to understand my insight into the mystery. Verse 9, my job is, "to bring to light the administration of the mystery". Now, you begin to get the idea of what this word means?

In biblical terms, a mystery is not something that it is impossible to know. It is not something that you can come to know on your own, however. Instead, in biblical terms, a mystery is a divine secret, a secret that at one time was not known and could not be discovered, but a secret of God that has now been made known to us by revelation. That's a mystery. A secret God once held that nobody else knew, but that God has revealed to us. That's a mystery, and that's the theme of Ephesians 3:1 - 13.

Now, the best way for us to work our way through this passage is by allowing Paul to answer a series of questions about this secret of God. For today, it's my rather ambitious task to come to the first six verses and the first three questions that are answered here. In verses 2 - 4 we'll answer the question "to whom did God reveal His secret?" In verse 5, "when did God reveal His secret?" and as time permits, verse 6, "what is God's secret?" So, God had a great secret that was for millennia unknown and could not be discovered by human ability, but He has now made it known to us by revealing it to us. What is it? And to whom did He reveal it? And when did He do it. Let's look at it together.

First of all, to whom did God reveal His secret. This is in verses 2 - 4. Look at verse 2. He revealed it, simple answer, to Paul. Verse 2 begins, as he interrupts himself here in his prayer, "if indeed you have heard ..." Now, that construction assumes that they had heard. It's a kind of gentle way to remind them all who had been there six years before when he had ministered there, what they had heard from him.

We could say it like this, if you have heard, and of course you have heard, of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you. The word "stewardship" here, means a position of a house-manager. The position or administration of a house-manager. This was a special slave in an ancient first-century household whose duty it was to manage all the affairs of the house. If you want a picture of this, think of Joseph in Potiphar's house. If you're familiar with the story, you get a pretty good glimpse of what a steward was.

Paul says, I am a steward in God's house. Paul's saying that as an expression of grace, God has given me a special assignment. He's given me a special stewardship. God had chosen Paul with a specific purpose in mind, and that purpose was to be a missionary, an ambassador, to the Gentiles. You see this from the very beginning. You remember back in Acts 9 when God is talking to Ananias and sending Ananias from the church there at Damascus to meet with the now newly-converted Paul. He says this to Ananias, when Ananias argues a bit about you know, whether he should go or not out of fear of his own safety. The Lord says this to him in verse 15. "The Lord said go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine [why?] to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel."

Paul had a unique ministry from the other apostles. They ministered before kings, and they ministered before the Jews, but Paul was specifically called to bear the name of Christ to the Gentiles. That was his mission. In Galatians 1, just back a few pages from Ephesians there, Galatians 1:16. He says God "was pleased to set me apart from my mother's womb to reveal His Son in me, so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles". That was Paul's mission in life. Galatians 2:7. He says, listen, God entrusted me with the gospel to the uncircumcised, that is the Gentiles, just as He did Peter for the circumcised, the Jews. I have this unique ministry. So, Paul says, my role is to have this special stewardship to the Gentiles.

This is the reason, by the way, the Jews hated Paul and eventually had him arrested because they believed that he was distorting the Scriptures, he was perverting the Scriptures by reaching out to the Gentiles and arguing that they could have a similar place to God's chosen people. But watch how Paul counters that in verse 3. Look at verse 3 of Ephesians 3. This stewardship that I have, this special stewardship that God has given me, "that by revelation there was made known to me

the mystery ..." Paul says I have come to know God's great secret. Now, the language that we have here can sort of cloud what Paul is saying. Don't miss it. Don't miss the drama of this moment. Paul is saying that the great eternal secret that God has held to Himself, He has now revealed to me. I have come to know God's great secret. How? By revelation. In other words, God told me. I'm not making this up. God told me by direct thought transmission.

One author says, "Paul is at pains to emphasize that all of his understanding is by the gift of God. The knowledge of the mystery is not a personal discovery for Paul. It is only by God-given enlightenment that he possesses the truth." Now Paul ends verse 3 by reminding them that already in this letter, he's already touched on this secret. Notice what he says, "as I wrote before in brief". That's probably not a reference to a previous letter. We have no record of another letter. He's saying, as I mentioned before, in this same letter. Probably a reference back to 1:9 and 10 where the first occurrence of the word mystery is, or it possibly could refer, as some commentators believe, to the end of chapter 2 where he talks about the Jews and the Gentiles.

So, God revealed His secret plan. He revealed it to Paul. But Paul doesn't stop there. He goes on in verse 4 to say God has also revealed it to us, to us. God revealed the secret to Paul not for his benefit, but for all of the Gentile Christians he serves. Notice verse 4, "By referring to this mystery, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ". Notice here that Paul makes two huge assumptions. "When you read." That's a reference to the public reading of this letter in all the churches around Ephesus. Paul anticipated (listen carefully), Paul anticipated that the revelation of the mystery that had been made to him and was recorded here would be read to all the Christians in all the churches. It wasn't just for him.

There's a second assumption that Paul makes in verse 4, "you can understand my insight into the mystery". Paul is saying, listen, you who read this letter or have it read to you, will be able to understand my insight into the secret that God has revealed. You see what Paul is saying here? He wants every Christian who hears this letter or who reads it [that's us sitting here 2000 years later in the Dallas-Fort Worth area], Paul wants everyone who reads this letter to understand the mystery, the secret, that God has revealed to him. So, when we ask to whom did God reveal His secret, the first and most obvious answer is Paul. But not solely to Paul. God's ultimate goal was that all of us would know the secret.

Now that brings us to the second question about this mystery. It's in verse 5. When did God reveal His secret? When did God reveal His secret? Verse 5 says, "which [mystery,] in other generations was not made known to the sons of men...." In other generations, it wasn't revealed—it wasn't made known. "Other generations" refers to all previous generations before the first century, as we'll see in a moment. From the time of creation until the first century (listen carefully, think about this with me) from the time of creation until the first century and the coming of Christ, God held this secret to Himself. From whom did He keep it secret? From the sons of men. That is a comprehensive expression for all human beings, all the sons of Adam. God didn't tell anybody His secret. But he goes on to say, "it was not known as" it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit...." What once God held to Himself, He's now revealed. , by the time Paul writes in the mid part of the first century, God has made the secret known.

Now the word "as" is an important little word in this sentence, because the word "as" could mean as in the sense of degree. This secret was known a little bit before, but it wasn't known as it has now been revealed, as clearly as it has now been made known.

Or it could mean "as" in the sense of contrast. The secret wasn't known at all in the past, as it has now been made known. You see the difference? One is: it was known in the past but not as fully as it is now. The other is: it wasn't known at all in the past as it's now been made known. So those are two options. I think the first option is more likely. That is, Paul intends to say here, that while there was an inkling of the secret in the past, there were hints of the secret in the past, it was not known then as it has now become fully known.

And the reason I think that is in Colossians 1, a parallel passage. Paul says this in verse 26, talking about this same mystery, he says the secret, "the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints," And then he makes this statement, verse 27. "to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles...." You see, it's not that nothing about the mystery or the secret was known before Christ came. It's that no-one really began to understand the riches of the

glory of the secret. There was, in the Old Testament, a clear revelation about the Messiah, the Christ that would come. There was also clear revelation about the salvation of the Gentiles in the Old Testament. I mean, at the very beginning, think back to Genesis 12:3. God shows up to Abraham, and what does He say to Abraham? “In you all nations of the earth will be blessed”. Guess what—that’s the Gentiles. So, from the very beginning, God was saying He was going to bless and save Gentiles.

In the New Testament, the New Testament authors argue that the Old Testament predicts that the ministry of Christ will benefit the Gentiles. Turn to Matthew 12. This wasn’t just for the Jews. Matthew 12, Jesus has this amazing healing ministry, and verse 17 of Matthew 12 says, “*This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES” Verse 21, “AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE.” Matthew, writing to the Jews says, listen, the Old Testament said the Messiah would be a blessing to the Gentiles.

You see the same thing in Romans 15. Paul uses the Old Testament to prove the Gentiles are “in”. Romans 15:9. He says Christ is “for the Gentiles, so that they will glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,” Then he quotes several Old Testament texts, kind of in staccato fashion.

“... I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES” verse 10, “Again he says, REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.” verse 11 “PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.” Again Isaiah says, “THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE.”

You get the point? The Old Testament predicted there would be hope for the Gentiles in Israel’s Messiah. But listen carefully. While there was a hint of what we would enjoy, none of those passages or the myriad of others that we could look at together this morning in the Old Testament, none of them is there so much a hint that we as Gentiles would be indwelt by Israel’s Messiah. Or that we would come to have full equality with the people of God of the Old Testament. It wasn’t even hinted at. But all of that has changed. Look at the second half of

verse 5. The secret “... has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit....” God didn’t just tell Paul. He also revealed it through the work of the Spirit to the same group we met back in 2:20 the New Testament apostles. Those hand-picked men of Christ, and the New Testament prophets, those who were the channels, you remember, of New Testament revelation, on whose messages the foundation of the church was set. So, Paul says, talking in the middle of the first century, in the past nobody knew the secret in its fullness. Nobody fully understood all that was going to happen. But now, it has been revealed. By the middle of the first century Paul says, it’s here. Everybody knows the mystery. So when, in the times of the New Testament. In the coming of Jesus Christ, God revealed His secret.

The third question Paul answers in this passage gets to the core issue, and it’s, “what is God’s secret”. What is God’s secret? There are two answers here in these verses. The first one’s back in verse 4, and I intentionally didn’t comment on a key phrase there. Look back at verse 4. Paul says, I’m telling you about the mystery of Christ. What does that mean, the mystery of Christ? Well, let me take you through a couple of other texts, and I think you’ll begin to see it more clearly. Look with me back at Ephesians 1:9. Here’s the first time the word mystery occurs in Ephesians. “He made known to us the secret of his will which He purposed in Christ....” Verse 10, here’s the secret. “the summing up of all things in Christ.” The secret of God’s will is to sum up all things in Christ. So, the mystery of Christ—the mystery of God’s will which is to sum up all things in Christ. Turn over to Colossians, the parallel book. Colossians 1:27. Keep all these things in your mind now. We’re going to put it together in just a moment. Verse 27 of Colossians 1. “God willed to make known the glory of this mystery which is [here’s the mystery] “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” That’s the mystery, “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. Verse 2 of chapter 2. He ends verse 2 by saying here is God’s mystery, “Christ Himself.”

Now if you put all that together, you compare that back with Ephesians 3, the mystery of Christ, you are left with one very simple conclusion. Listen carefully. Christ Himself is the secret. Christ Himself is the mystery that wasn’t known but was made known. God’s great secret is a person. Foulkes says Paul thought of the mystery as the great purpose of God in Christ. To Paul, his entire message about Christ had been God’s secret that has now been made known. And then, from time to time, Paul would refer to one element or aspect of his message about

Christ, and he would also call that the mystery. Let me illustrate it for you like this. What was one of history's best kept secrets?

Well, if you do any reading at all, you know that D-Day certainly ranks up there. D-Day was one of history's greatest kept secrets. It was, really, though, one great secret, wasn't it? It was only one great secret. The secret of D-Day was the invasion of Europe by the Allies. But that one great secret consisted of various parts or elements. For example, there was the assault by the gunships from the ocean on all of the German outposts there on land. There was the amphibious landing of the troops. There was the extensive air assault. All of those were elements of the secret, but the secret was the invasion of Europe.

In the same way, Christ was God's great secret, and Paul will often refer to it that way. But there were elements of Christ's mission that are also part of the secret, and he will use the word mystery or secret to refer to them as well. He does this here in Ephesians 3. In verse 4, Christ is the secret. The mystery which is Christ. Christ is God's great secret. But in verse 6, Paul touches on one aspect of the mission and work of Christ, which is part of that secret, part of the mystery that wasn't known but now is known. Verse 6, here it is, "*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." Paul says, here's one element of the mystery, the secret that is Christ. Let me tell you the difference Christ has made for you Gentiles.

Now, if you're going to fully appreciate this part of God's great secret, you've got to remind yourself how things have been for Gentiles for thousands of years. God had chosen Abraham and his descendants as the people through whom He would put Himself on display in the world, and He specially dwelt among them. He was physically near them. But in the Old Testament times, for thousands of years, if you were a Gentile, and you wanted to worship the true God of Israel, there was only one way to do that. You had to become a full-fledged proselyte. You had to swear off all of your gods, commit yourself to the true God, and join yourself to the nation Israel.

Picture Ruth in Ruth 1. “Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.” But even if you took that extraordinary step, even if you left everything you knew and connected yourself to Israel, you were still only a second-rate citizen. When you visited the temple in Jerusalem, you were separated from the rest of God’s people by that famous dividing wall, and threatened with death if you crossed over, no matter how sincere you were. That’s the context in which Paul shares this passage. That was the status-quo for thousands of years. And when Paul wrote this letter, it was still physically true. If one of these first-century Ephesian believers had tried to go past that wall in Jerusalem, he would have been killed.

But while they were still restricted, restricted physically by the Jews who controlled the temple, Paul wanted them to know that the spiritual reality had radically changed. That by His death, Jesus had not only torn apart that massive curtain separating them from the presence of God, He had also torn down the wall, the dividing wall, that pictured the physical separation between Jews and Gentiles. This was the specific aspect of the secret in Christ that Paul has in mind in verse 6. So, look at verse 6. Paul explains how things have changed because of the secret, God’s secret, which is Christ.

The change in our status as Gentiles: first of all, we’re fellow heirs. Fellow heirs. This is different, by the way. Same word but different use as Romans 8, where we’re called joint heirs with Christ. Here, we’re told that we are joint heirs, Jewish and Gentile Christians. Jews and Gentiles have equal rights to God’s inheritance. Paul adds in verse 6, we are fellow members of the body. Gentiles are an integral part of the body of Christ. Paul loves this image, and he’ll come back to it in chapter 4, of the church as a body, the body of Christ. And Gentiles are equally members of the body.

But the climax comes in the last expression in verse 6. Gentiles are fellow partakers of the promise. What promise? Remember 2:12? All those covenants of promise that we were excluded from? We’re heirs of the promise of Messiah, of spiritual salvation, of the work and aid of the Spirit, of the new covenant. All of those promises that were made to the true people of God, those spiritual promises. It also includes the future. It includes resurrection. Remember what Paul says, Christ in you [what?] the hope of glory. Of new heavens and a new earth. We

don't just live for this life. We live for eternity, and we are fellow partakers of that promise, with the people of God. And notice, Paul says in verse 6 that all three of these blessings are ours because we are connected to Jesus Christ, in Christ Jesus. And they became ours through the gospel that was preached to us. Folks, Christ is God's great secret. Hinted at in the Old Testament. Known to some degree, but the riches of the glory of the mystery wasn't known until He showed up.

So, how do you respond to the fact that God kept a great secret and has now revealed it to us? How do you respond to the secret who is Jesus Christ? Turn back to Ephesians 1. And I want you to just notice what our response should be. Verse 9 says, God has made known to us the secret of His will which He purposed in ... [Christ]. Verse 10 and "that is, the summing up of all things in Christ," You remember when we studied that we discovered that to sum up implies two things. It means that Christ is the goal of everything. God intends [this is God's secret] that Christ would be the goal of everything, and that Christ would be the Lord of everything. That's what it means to sum up all things in Christ. That He would be the goal for which everything exists, and that He would be the Lord of everything that exists. Folks, that's God's secret plan. It's Christ, and to make everything come under Him.

So, how do you apply God's great secret? Let me just ask you very pointedly this morning. Do you live with Jesus Christ as the goal of your life? Do you live to bring Him glory? Are the decisions you made this week because of Jesus Christ? The reason you do what you do, the reason you get up each day, the reason you live, is it all about you and your life and what you want and your success and your career and your prosperity and your comfort and your ease, or is it about Jesus Christ? And is He Lord? God's great secret is Christ, making Him the goal of everything and the Lord of everything. Let me ask you. Is your life aligned with the universe's great secret?

Let's pray together.

Father, we are overwhelmed by Your goodness and grace to us in opening up Your great eternal plan to our understanding. Lord, we're in awe of Your wisdom and of Your might and of Your

power and of Your grace. We thank You for Christ. We thank You that He is Your great eternal secret, now fully known.

Father, may we who are His people bring our lives into alignment with Your great secret purpose, which is to sum up everything in Him, to make Him the goal of everything's existence, and the Lord of everything that exists. Lord, may that be true of our lives today, tomorrow, and the week that's ahead. Give us grace, Father, not to just forget this truth and march on as if we never heard it. Change our thinking, we pray. Align us with Your great secret.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.