

# An Exegetical – Homiletical Study of Ephesians 3:2-12

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As I began my initial work on this paper, our young exploratory congregation was facing the potential of having its ministry in southwest Las Vegas ended. (Thanks be to God that the synod's BHM has since granted us a twelve-month extension on our work.) As I sat down to type up the rough draft of this paper, I was wrestling with my first call from the field since my assignment from the seminary. (Just this past Sunday I returned that call.) Throughout this period, the portion of God's Word that is set before us today has been a tremendous source of comfort, peace and wisdom. Regularly confronted with my weaknesses, lacking the answers and the talent, I marveled at the grace of God given to me. To me, among the least of all God's people, this grace has been given: to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ!

Unlike most of Paul's other inspired letters, the letter to the Ephesians was not written to address a particular problem or meet a specific need. Paul had an opportunity to have a personal letter delivered to his dear friends in Ephesus (created by the delivery of the letters to nearby Colossae and to Philemon), and we are all richly blessed by it. As Paul sat in Rome under house arrest, he marveled at the grace of God given to him. Paul had not been to Ephesus in perhaps five years; he'd been an "ambassador in chains" (6:1) for at least three years. He wanted to give his Christian friends in Ephesus a window into his heart, that they might share his joy in the Lord's salvation and in God's grace which had gifted him the privilege to serve as an ambassador of the gospel.

Having already written about the source of grace for sinful mankind (God acting through Christ in election) and the recipients of grace (those once dead in sin made alive in Christ), in chapter three Paul turns to the agent through whom God conveyed his grace especially to the Gentiles.

I have purposefully written this paper in the first person, wherever it applies, in an attempt to make application of these inspired words personal. Paul becomes very personal in this section and applies God's grace to himself first. I am not an apostle in the same sense of the word as Paul; yet I am a spokesman of the Lord, called and sent out by God's grace to preach the mystery of the gospel. The objective truths of the Word are not intended to remain objective, a set of doctrinal knowledge to be stored away in the mind. These objective truths are intended to become subjective realities apprehended by faith as the Holy Spirit touches our hearts through them. Since this is an exegetical – homiletical study, I have attempted to conduct this study as I conduct my sermon studies – preaching to myself first.

*2 εἰ γὰρ ἠκούσατε τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς,*

**(My translation: "Surely you heard about the administration of the grace of God, which was given to me for you,")**

*εἰ γὰρ* is here used to express assurance ("surely"), not uncertainty ("if"). "I know that you have heard" (*ἠκούσατε* – aorist, stressing that this is fact). But why does Paul say that the Ephesians had only "heard" of the ministry God gave him? One possible answer is that he was speaking in this way for the benefit of those who had become a part of the church since Paul had personally ministered in Ephesus five years before. A second plausible answer is that this letter was intended from the beginning for a larger audience, intended to be read by a number of churches in the area around Ephesus. There would be many in these congregations who had not directly witnessed Paul's ministry.

τὴν οἰκονομίαν is the word for “stewardship.” The term was used of the administrative responsibility given to a servant over a household. What I am to manage is τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ (τῆς χάριτος is an objective genitive, describing that which is being administered; τοῦ θεοῦ is a genitive of source, since this grace comes from God). The grace (“undeserved favor, love”) of God comes in various forms, in any number of different undeserved gifts of love. That specific grace of God to which Paul here refers is not the gracious attitude of God toward sinners, but a concrete gift: the office of apostleship to the Gentiles which he was given. Like the faithful manager who gave the servants their food allowance at the proper time (Luke 12:42), Paul was to bring the gospel to the world (with a special calling to distribute it to the Gentiles).

As a pastor, God has given me this grace: to manage, plan and direct the affairs of this calling to publicly preach the gospel. As a gift of God’s undeserved love, it is a gracious privilege. As I am a steward of this grace of God, how I conduct my ministry is an awesome responsibility for which I owe accountability to God. (“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” 1 Corinthians 4:1,2. (Consider also 1 Corinthians 9:16,17; Titus 1:7ff.; Colossians 1:25-27.)

τῆς δοθείσης μοι (“which was given to me”) reinforces the idea that this grace of God is a gift, not earned but given to me by the Lord himself. But this grace has not been given to me for my own sake alone, to be selfishly managed for me and my own. This grace was given to me εἰς ὑμᾶς (“for you”, for your benefit). God gave the gracious privilege of being an ambassador of the gospel to Paul to be used especially for the sake of the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 26:16-18; Galatians 2:8); for the Ephesians’ sake, your sake, my sake. Neither are my faith and my ministry of the gospel to be a selfish faith and ministry. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing... and teaching” (Matthew 28:19,20). Stewardship of treasure includes helping the needy. Stewardship of time and talent includes serving others. Stewardship of the treasure of the gospel includes sharing it with the spiritually needy! What a gracious privilege God has given me to possess his love in my heart by faith and, what is more, to be called to publicly witness to his love in Christ to others! May I never be tempted to consider my ministry something I’ve achieved by my effort, something I’ve earned by my faithful studies or years of experience, something I’ve gained by my willingness, natural abilities, leadership qualities or charming personality. My ministry is a grace-gift from God. And by his grace, I administer it well for the sake of others.

3 ὅτι κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον, καθὼς προέγραψα ἐν ὀλίγῳ,

**(My translation: “that by way of revelation the mystery was made known to me, just as I wrote beforehand briefly”)**

ὅτι begins an explanatory phrase, briefly describing the stewardship of grace entrusted to Paul about which the Ephesians had heard. The mystery (τὸ μυστήριον) was made known to Paul so that he knew it in a personal, experiential and unshakable manner (ἐγνωρίσθη – the aorist stressing the fact of the matter; the passive voice here demanding God as the agent of the action). The adverbial prepositional phrase (κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν) expresses the mode of God’s making this mystery known to Paul, namely by means of revelation. The picture in this word is that of unveiling something covered up or hidden (perhaps picture the excitement surrounding the first viewing of a long-awaited work of art or the unveiling of new car models each year). We cannot say exactly how or when this revelation took place in the life of Paul. Concerning the gospel he preached, Paul simply explains “I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Perhaps Paul is referring to the revelation he received at his calling on the road to Damascus (the Lord’s words to Paul are recorded most fully in Acts 26:15-18), or perhaps Paul is referring to

his possible period of training in the Arabian desert (Galatians 1:17). Paul had already written briefly (*καθὼς προέγραψα ἐν ὀλίγῳ*) about the revelation of this mystery in previous portions of this letter (1:9ff., 2:11-22), but he now intends to explain it in further detail.

Let us take up the concept of *τὸ μυστήριον*. We are all familiar with the concept of a mystery. A mystery is “something not understood or beyond understanding” (Webster’s Dictionary). It is interesting to note that the very first definition in Webster’s Dictionary reads, “a religious truth that one can know only by revelation and cannot fully understand.” Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker defines *μυστήριον* as “secret thoughts, plans and dispensations of God which are hidden from the human reason, as well as from all other comprehension below the divine level, and hence must be revealed to those for whom they are intended.”

Every good mystery has a number of possible theories as solutions, many of which appear equally credible. That is, until the truth is found. People may argue over their theories, but in the end theories won’t change the facts. There is truth in the matter, although that truth may not be fully revealed. God is a mystery to natural mankind. Any number of theories exist about his identity and his relation to mankind, many of which appear to have equal credibility. The truth concerning God, however, is not open to debate. There is truth, and public debate does not alter it.

Bernard Loomer, referred to as a “process theologian”, writes: “Final answers are not to be trusted. We are born in mystery, we live in mystery, and we die in mystery.” The authors of *New Again: Re-thinking the Bible for Outreach Today* comment: “By elevating ‘mystery’ to absolute truth, some people choose to give up on ever finding truth. They focus on the tension of seeking and not finding, and create a way of life around that” (page 12). Facts about God are so mysterious to natural man, that a growing segment of society today is making mystery (not knowing) their religion, their truth.

Apart from God’s having revealed himself to me, the God of grace and forgiveness (the God of the gospel) would have forever remained a mystery to me. I by nature don’t know who God is, what he is planning or how to get to him. Ever since the fall into sin, all people have been born spiritually blind and ignorant. “There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God” (Romans 3:11). “Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God... they did not submit to God’s righteousness” (Romans 10:3).

Perhaps I can illustrate it with a birthday analogy. A young boy knows that his birthday is coming up.... He’s got the date circled on the calendar. But as the day approaches, he sees no sign of a birthday celebration. There are no presents sitting out, mom hasn’t made any large purchases, no smell of cake, no sign of ice cream, balloons or party supplies. By mid-day of his birthday he starts to wonder if his parents have forgotten about his birthday. Or worse yet, he’s not getting a party because he was a bad boy. Suddenly, all the ugly things he said to his sister come to mind. He recalls vividly the back talk to his parents, his dirty room, that wicked temper tantrum just last week. By now his anticipation is gone. Excitement has been replaced with guilt, sorrow, and even fear. He’s given up on any birthday party. Now he’s just hoping he doesn’t get a whooping when he gets home. As he walks in the door, suddenly: “Surprise!! Happy Birthday!”

I am that young boy. My parent is my Father in heaven. Through the natural knowledge of God, I know that God exists and that he is good and kind. By nature, I may feel that everything is fine between myself and God. But through my conscience (and perhaps God’s written law), I grow increasingly aware of my sin. I begin to realize that “the wages of sin is death.” Anticipation to meet God is replaced with fear. Expectations of a pat on the back by the Almighty and a “Welcome!” at the door of heaven give way to the feeling that the only thing I deserve is a swift kick in the pants and an endless night out on the streets of hell. Just when I’ve given up all hope, suddenly: “Surprise!” God reveals his love to me in the gospel: “You are forgiven in Christ!”

Had God wanted to, he could have forever left me in the dark about himself. No amount of intelligence work, satellite communication, or special operations forces could have ever uncovered the grace of God. Sure, we could discover God’s kindness in the warmth of the sun and in the protection of our atmosphere. We could see a bit of God’s goodness in the intricacies of the human body and the wonders of the plant and animal kingdoms. But this testimony of the kindness and goodness of God would not lead me to love God. In fact, the

opposite is true. The law written in my heart and my conscience would lead me to fear and hate God. I'd have no concept of the forgiveness of my many sins in Christ. I'd have no clue about who this God really is, how to get right with him or how to get to heaven when I die.

Who would have ever dreamed that God had a plan to rescue me from the hell that I got myself into? And who would have thought he had the concern and the love to carry out such a plan? Who would have thought that God the Son would step in as our substitute – living, dying and rising in my place? The incarnation (God in diapers), the humiliation (God mocked to his face by those whose job it was to lead the people's praise of him), the crucifixion (God dying), and the resurrection (dead men don't walk out of their coffins)! Sinners made holy in the blood of Jesus; natural enemies made the children of God; earth's worst welcomed to enjoy heaven's finest!

There was a court case this past summer in which a newborn baby had been left for dead at the back steps of a house in the middle of winter. The town was in shock! Everyone wanted to know who the baby was. Who could have done such a thing?! The perpetrator of the crime and the identity of the baby remained a mystery for four years. Only one person knew the answer to this mystery... the mother. Not until she told her boyfriend and then her parents, did anyone know. And now millions know!

The gospel of salvation by grace alone, including equally the Gentiles, was a mystery until God the Holy Spirit broke the news to ignorant mankind in his Word. The term "hidden God" refers to those aspects of God's essence and working which he simply has chosen not to reveal to me. Yet, in his love God has revealed a great deal about himself and his relations with me; indeed he's revealed to me everything I need to know this side of heaven, everything I need to know to get to heaven. This truth especially struck home to Paul, a former Pharisee. In spite of all of his effort to gain insight into God through the study of the Law and other sacred writings, he was led further down the path from God in a pursuit after his own righteousness. It could have never occurred to him that God's grace had flung the doors of heaven open to him and to all through the atoning work of Christ. "Isaiah boldly says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me'" (Romans 10:20).

I worked with a gifted individual who once expressed frustration that he wasn't able to find something more in his sermon studies. He was searching for something new, something he hadn't heard or understood before. Now, there is a noble quality in this attitude. That which the Lord has revealed of himself in the Bible is truly profound. There is always room for growth in my understanding of certain doctrines and in specific portions of the Scriptures. But there is a potentially dangerous aspect to this attitude. Caution must be given if I am not satisfied with what God has revealed to me in his Word. My study of the Scriptures won't lead me to any new or further revelations than that which the Church has had and taught all along since the first century AD. The mystery of Christ has been made known; in that sense, no new truths are to be expected or longed for this side of heaven. Likewise, certain mysteries God has simply chosen not to reveal. I will not suddenly happen upon a satisfying answer for why Adam and Eve sinned or a completely logical answer for why some are saved and not others. Don't try to explain the mystery of the Trinity or the incarnation.

Luther wrote: "In so far as God hides himself from us and wishes to be unknown to us, he is nothing to us... we must keep our eyes on the Word and not on that unsearchable will" (*Luther's Works*, American Edition, Volume 33, pages 139-140). "What God does not want revealed, that I am not to know... If I am not to know it, I should be quiet – or else I will break my neck. 'Why does God do this?' Friend, watch out for that 'Why?'... On this apple we all still choke" (*Luther's Works*, Weimar Edition, Volume 47, page 545).

I have to beware of trying to explain specifically why God allowed the terrorist attacks to occur, why God didn't let my relative's marriage work out, why God won't let my member find a job. I will provide the answers, the comfort, and the insight that God reveals to me about such things in his Word. But I will not say, "Thus says the Lord!" where and when he has not spoken.

4 πρὸς ὃ δύνασθε ἀναγινώσκοντες νοῆσαι τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

**(My translation: “with reference to which, when you read it, you are able to gain an insight into my insight in the mystery of Christ”)**

With the prepositional phrase πρὸς ὃ, Paul directs his readers’ attention back to what he had briefly written about in 2:11-22. Just by reading (ἀναγινώσκοντες – a present participle, circumstantial temporal clause) what Paul had written in chapter 2, I can’t help but notice he had a good perception of the mystery of Christ. As I read Paul’s inspired words, I “gain an insight” (νοῆσαι) into his “insight / understanding” (τὴν σύνεσίν μου). I cannot literally crawl around in Paul’s mind to see what he had all been gifted by God to know and understand. But by reading what he has written, like looking through a crack in the door to catch a glimpse of something on the other side, or like looking at selected items of someone’s art collection to get a sense of his style of art, I can mentally perceive (νοῆσαι – “receive into my mind”) the “profound comprehension God grants [Paul]”

(BAGD). Having the ability “to perceive the interrelation of various factors” (σύνεσίν – literally “flowing together”), God gave Paul the ability to put two and two together concerning the mysterious complexities of the gospel. It is by reading, meditating on, and rereading the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit opens my mind and allows me to gain an ever-deeper understanding of the mystery of the gospel. What a blessing it is that God gave this insight to Paul, and that we are now able to have the benefit of it through the study of his Word.

Paul’s insight was into the mystery of Christ (ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ). The mystery of verse 3 is now identified: it is the mystery about Christ, the “Anointed One” (τοῦ Χριστοῦ – descriptive genitive). Jesus is the Christ, the long-awaited (Jewish) Messiah, descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. Paul’s insight (and mine through the Spirit’s working through his writing) is one which grasps by faith the whole mystery of Christ and the gospel – all that Christ is, has done, and is still doing for the Church (to the degree that God has made it known). An insight into the person of Christ (the God-man), into the work of Christ (his life, death and resurrection as the atoning sacrifice for our sins), and into the effects of Christ’s person and work (salvation by grace for all people, Jew and Gentile alike). It is especially this last point, that he understood the long-hidden purpose of God that Christ benefit equally both Jew and Gentile, that Paul is concentrating on in this section of the letter.

This insight is the insight of faith, which God in his free grace discloses only to his elect. In explaining his method of teaching in parables, Jesus explained to his disciples: “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding’” (Mark 4:11,12). The mystery of Christ (“the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints,” Colossians 1:26) can only be perceived by the eyes of faith. (Refer also to 1 Corinthians 2:7,8; Romans 16:25-26; Colossians 1:27).

5 ὃ ἑτέραις γενεαῖς οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις ἐν πνεύματι,

**(My translation: “which in other generations was not known by the sons of men as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”)**

The topic under discussion in this verse, as referred to by the adjectival relative pronoun ὃ, is still the μυστηρίῳ last mentioned in verse 4. The mystery of Christ was not made known (οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη – personal,

experiential, unshakable knowledge) to the sons of men (τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων – a Hebraism for “people”) in other generations (ἐτέραις γενεαῖς here refers to the period(s) covered by a generation of men) as it is now revealed. “Now” (νῦν) is the New Testament era. ὡς is a subordinating conjunction which here has a comparative force. It could be translated “as clearly as” or “as plain to see and well known as.” Those to whom (indirect object) and through whom it has now been revealed are the holy apostles and prophets of the New Testament era (τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις). The apostles here referred to are those special Twelve and Paul himself. The prophets are those who speak the true words of God by God’s commission, passing on the words that they receive from him. They are “men who proclaim the divine message with special preparation and with a special mission” (BAGD). (Note that the temple guards, who would have been familiar with Scripture’s terminology, used the verb “prophecy” in the sense of “to bring to light something that is hidden,” when they demand Jesus tell them who hit him in Mark 14:65.) That these prophets are prophets in the New Testament era is quite clear from the context. New Testament prophecy is mentioned quite often (see Acts 13:1 – “In the church at Antioch there were prophets...”; Acts 15:32, I Corinthians 13:2, 14:1ff.). The agent or instrument for God’s revealing the mystery is the Holy Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι).

The fact that it was revealed in pre-Christian times that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles is not being questioned. The little word ὡς tells us that the matter in view is the manner or the measure of the revelation. The truth that the gospel is also for the Gentiles had not been entirely unknown prior to Christ’s coming. The LORD had spoken clearly through the prophet Isaiah: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6; see also for example Genesis 12:3, Psalm 72 or 87, Isaiah 11:10, 54:1-3, 60:1-3, Hosea 1:10 or Amos 9:11ff.). The question concerning the Gentiles’ place in the church was settled when James quoted the Old Testament prophets. But the truth that with the coming of the Christ a new organism would arise in which the Gentiles and the Jews would be placed on a footing of perfect equality is something so marvelous that, although revealed in the Old Testament, only the apostles and those prophets living in the era of fulfillment could know fully. The Gentiles were in the dark about God’s plan, and by and large the Jews did not make much of an effort to enlighten them. In fact, it is probably safe to say that this truth was not common knowledge even among the Jews.

But by the time of this writing, things had changed drastically! Illumined by the Holy Spirit, the New Testament apostles and prophets were able to proclaim with greater clarity than ever before the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies and their application to the new order of events. (For example, for Genesis 22:13 and 22:19 see Galatians 3:8; for Isaiah 49:6 see Acts 13:47; for Isaiah 54:1-3 see Galatians 4:27; and for Amos 9:11ff. see Acts 15:16-18.)

ὅ ἐῖναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετόχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ εὐαγγελίου,

**(My translation: “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel”)**

εῖναι is an objective infinitive, beginning this exegetical clause, which explains the content of the divine revelation concerning the mystery of Christ. The Gentiles *are*.... Not “should be” or “if they jump through these Jewish hoops they could be,” but they are. This mystery being revealed is a fact, not a purpose or a wish.

Paul uses three words to describe the mystery of Christ equally for Jew and Gentile, each word beginning with the preposition συν (“together with,” sharers in). Through faith in Jesus Christ, Christians of both Jewish and Gentile heritage are the sons of God (Galatians 3:26) and are heirs together in all that God offers in his grace to his children in Christ. Paul wrote to the Romans: “Now if we are children, then we are

heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17; see also Galatians 3:26-29 and 4:7). Through “the word of his grace” the Holy Spirit “give[s me] an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). This inheritance includes: Christ’s righteousness (Hebrews 11:7); salvation (Hebrews 1:14); glory (Romans 8:17); God’s blessing (I Peter 3:9); the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23); the gracious gift of eternal life (Matthew 19:29, Titus 3:7, I Peter 3:7); and the kingdom of God (James 2:5), none of which will ever perish, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:4).

Jews and Gentiles in Christ are “fellow members of the same body” (σύσσωμα). Paul had already written in chapter 2 concerning the redemptive work of Christ: “His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross” (2:15-16). (See 1 Corinthians 12, especially verses 12-13.)

Gentile believers are also “fellow partakers” or “co-sharers of the promise” (συμμέτοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας). συμμέτοχα is used in the papyri of those who were “joint possessors” of a house. They shared the same mortgage, lived under the same roof, both having equal rights to it. The Gentiles now shared fully as equals together with the Jews the fulfilled promise of the Messiah (τῆς ἐπαγγελίας – objective genitive). This specific promise of the Messiah included everything the Messiah would come to offer: forgiveness of sins, citizenship in the Kingdom, eternal life, etc. This promise is unbreakable, as are all of God’s promises, because the faithful Lord cannot go back on his word.

Gentile “sinners,” who were once nothing in God’s eyes (“not a people”) and were not beneficiaries of God’s mercy (“had not received mercy”), were now part of his one great united “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9,10). They had been “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Even those Gentile believers who had gone through the arduous process of becoming “proselytes of the gate” were separated from full participation in the worship of the true God by a thick wall at the temple in Jerusalem. They were treated as a second class citizen; a second son, offered only a smaller portion of the inheritance. But Paul here in a very vivid, emphatic way stresses that Gentile believers share the same blessings as Jewish believers. No longer were the Gentiles “dogs” who could only “eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Matthew 15:27). This is not simply an alliance or partnership between Jews and Gentiles, whereby the Gentiles are now welcomed a bit more freely, yet still through the door of Judaism and the Old Testament covenant. This is a permanent fusion, uniting Jews and Gentiles as full equals into one holy Christian Church.

Of course, this is possible only in the sphere of Christ Jesus (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.... For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:13,18). All the blessings mentioned above are inseparably connected with Christ. He is the meritorious cause, making all this possible for both the Jew and the Gentile. This unity and these gifts of grace are only available within the sphere of Christ, into which we come by faith in him.

Better yet, into which we are brought. God the Holy Spirit accomplished this for me, working through the gospel (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου – instrumental, by what means) in Word and Sacrament. The gospel is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,” both for the Jew and for the Gentile (Romans 1:16).

7 οὗ ἐγενήθην διάκονος κατὰ τὴν δωρεὰν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.

**(My translation: “of which I became a servant according to the gift of the grace of God, which was given to me according to the working of his power”)**

Paul often offered himself up as living proof of the depth and power of God's grace. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15,16). This and the following verse are not to be viewed as remarkable examples of the humility of the highly successful apostle Paul. Rather, let them speak to me as examples of the remarkable grace and power of God.

οὗ ("of which," relative pronoun, genitive of possession) refers back to τοῦ εὐαγγελίου through which the Holy Spirit had made the Gentiles fellow heirs, etc. Paul became (ἐγενήθην – an aorist deponent verb with a passive sense, "was made to be," Christ being the active agent) a servant (διάκονος) of the gospel. A διάκονος was one who served in the interest and for the benefit of another (here the "another" is the gospel). διάκονος conveys the idea of responsibility, whereas δούλος conveys the idea of ownership (however, Paul often uses δούλος in this same context). A διάκονος waited at tables, cared for the needs of his master, served. For the Greeks, service was undignified: "we are born to rule, not to serve." Such is the attitude of my sinful nature. "Label postcards?! Hang flyers?! I'm above all that now!" "Spend another one of my evenings away from my family and with this messed-up couple?! How many times do I have to go over this?" "Not sing this hymn because the people say it's too difficult?! I don't think so. This is my church!"

But Jesus stands this common attitude on its head and preaches (and practices) servanthood as the highest honor. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). Witness Jesus spending long days in the hot sun, preaching and teaching, healing and consoling. Not just the nobility, but the poor and helpless. Not once or twice, but time and again covering the same ground with his slow-to-learn disciples. If I weren't so shocked myself, I'd almost want to laugh when I see the look on Peter's face as Jesus bends down to wash his dusty feet. I want to cry when I stand at the foot of the cross and see my Savior as the Suffering Servant suffers hell for me. "Do as I have done for you," Jesus whispers (John 13:15). This servant attitude and action is to be practiced not only toward God (which most Jews and some Greeks would appreciate), but to my fellow man – even the "sinners" and those "below me" in the social order.

Paul took this attitude of a servant of the gospel seriously. Many examples can be given. Let me simply share 2 Corinthians 6:4-10: "as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

With κατὰ τὴν δωρεάν ("according to the gift," used adverbially, the article noting a specific, special gift) Paul expresses how he obtained this servanthood. He did not take it upon himself. In fact, as a strict Pharisee and open enemy of Christianity, it was the farthest thing from his mind. Paul had not earned or worked for this servanthood of the gospel, nor did he deserve it. It was a gift from God, a grace-gift (τῆς χάριτος – descriptive genitive, what this gift consists of; τοῦ θεοῦ – genitive of source, this grace came from God). Again, grace re-emphasizes that his role as a servant of the gospel was completely undeserved by Paul. Up to the moment of the giving of this gift, Paul was a bloody persecutor of the gospel and the Church. This attitude is one the apostle Paul expressed throughout his letters: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:9,10). When Paul dares to brag, you can sense his embarrassment and almost see his red face as he writes ("In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool," see 2 Corinthians 11:16-33).



Some of my members may think I'm deserving of my calling, but I know better. I know myself – my hidden sins, my failures and faults – all too well. I understand sin at both ends of the spectrum: at times I am filled with selfish pride in “my accomplishments,” and at other times I possess complete lack of confidence in the Lord and utter lack of faith in his ability and willingness to keep his promises to me. This grace, known as the public ministry of the gospel, is a gift of undeserved love from my Savior. Such a view keeps me humble, yet confident.

Yes, confident because God has accompanied this gift with his power. The grace of God was given to Paul (τῆς δοθείσης μοι – attributive adjectival participle, modifying τῆς χάριτος and again emphasizing this grace of apostleship as a gift) according to the working of God's power. With κατὰ Paul introduces a brief phrase describing the method by which God gave his grace to Paul: it was the effective working or operation (τῆν ἐνέργειαν – energy!) of God's power (τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ – dynamite!; descriptive genitive).

God's power has no natural enemies. By that I mean, nothing can stop him from accomplishing what he wants. The Bible very simply states: “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26); or asks the rhetorical question: “Is the LORD's arm too short?” (Numbers 11:23). The power of God has accomplished countless stunning acts, but the Lord likes best to refer to his power as “resurrection power.” In describing God's “incomparably great power for us who believe,” Paul writes, “that power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand...” (Ephesians 1:19-20). The good news for me is that God prefers to exercise his power in the interest of his grace. God's power is always being exerted according to his will; and it is his will to save those who believe (note the context of Jesus' words in Matthew 19:26: God's ability to save versus human inability). Paul was the first to admit (Galatians 1:13ff., Philippians 3:4ff.) that only the power of almighty God could work the change of heart in him. A legalistic Pharisee turned evangelical apostle. Persecutor of Christ and his Church turned proclaimer of Jesus as the world's Savior. Despiser of “sinners” and Gentiles alike turned messenger of the forgiveness of sins and apostle to the Gentiles. Everything changed for Paul one day on the road to Damascus... by the working of God's gracious power.

Paul's conversion (and his servanthood to the gospel) was no more a miracle than my own. It is God's grace which made me a Christian (Ephesians 2:8,9) and grace that made me a servant of the gospel. This verse is very humbling for me as a servant of the Word. God does the work; I by grace am simply his mouthpiece. Yet it is also very comforting: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). And lest my sinful nature use this as a license for laziness, let me be reminded that the cross of Christ may be emptied of its power by my getting in the way or mixing human wisdom with the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Paul continues his praise of God's grace in the next verses. He just can't get over the fact that God chose him!

8 ἐμοὶ τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων ἀγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὕτη, τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαι τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

**(My translation: “to me, to the one less than the least of all saints, was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the untraceable riches of Christ”)**

ἐμοὶ (dative, indirect object) is up front in the position of emphasis. I can almost see Paul, after all these years, still wide-eyed with genuine surprise and excitement: “To me! Hah! Would you believe it?! This grace was given to me!” Like a kid retelling the story of his surprise birthday party, Paul's excitement is even more evident in his made up word τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ, “leastester” (the comparative of the superlative). Again, like a little kid, he stacks up comparatives to express the incomparability of God's grace with his qualifications. Of

all the saints (πάντων ἁγίων – those set apart by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, made holy by the blood of Jesus through faith; an ablative genitive used in comparisons), Paul was led by regular glances into the mirror of God’s law to genuinely consider himself “the worst of sinners” and the least deserving of God’s goodness in any form. Grace was not just a theological term in the heart of Paul.

To Paul was given (ἐδόθη – aorist passive, stressing this as a fact with Christ as the agent) this specific grace (ἡ χάρις αὐτη: to preach Christ to the Gentiles. Again, Paul refers to his apostleship and gospel-preaching ministry as “this grace,” because God’s grace had bestowed it on him. Paul’s office was an undeserved gift of God, and he never tired of saying so!

Let me humbly acknowledge my unworthiness and let the grace of God receive the glory in my ministry. On the other hand, let me not kid myself with false humility, shying away from responsibilities and opportunities because I don’t feel I’m good enough. In times such as these I am directed to God’s grace... to the mystery of how he works. Who would have ever thought that men like Abraham (the liar), Jacob (the cheat), Moses (a murderer), King David (an adulterer) would have played a significant role in God’s plan of salvation? Who would have thought that God would leave the distribution of his grace up to weak and unreliable mortals like Paul (formerly, Saul the persecutor), Peter (you know, “I don’t know the man!” Peter), my parents, me?! God, who has given me the grace to preach the gospel, will give me the gifts, the courage and the knowledge to be a faithful steward of this grace.

Paul’s calling was to preach Christ especially to the Gentiles (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν – up front in the position of emphasis in this phrase). “God... was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Galatians 1:16; see also Acts 14:10, 17:18; Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 15:1). Paul’s amazement at the grace of God did not end with God’s undeserved love for him. Paul marveled at God’s grace and power to make him, the one time self-righteous Jew who despised Gentile “sinners,” their special apostle.

I regularly see the failures of the sinners of which my congregation is composed. I see their sins against their spouses and children, their sins against humanity, their sins against the Lord and his Word. The flaws in many of Paul’s congregations are also apparent in my own. My people grieve me, let me down, and discourage me. I shake my head in disgust and am tempted to weed out the troublemakers. Yet the Lord calls me to keep on ministering to them in love. After all, I am simply a channel through which God’s amazing grace for them flows in my application of both law and gospel.

This grace given to Paul for the sake of the Gentiles is to preach the good news (εὐαγγελίσασθαι – an aorist infinitive absolute, an exegetical parenthetical expression serving as a noun which limits ἡ χάρις). Paul’s God-given task was primarily to preach: “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17). In secular Greek εὐαγγελίσασθαι was used to describe the bringing of good news, especially in the context of a victory in battle or some other joyous event. What is unique in the New Testament’s use of the term is that this preaching of good news carries with it the fulfillment. εὐαγγελίσασθαι is not just speaking, but proclaiming with power. (I refer you to the excellent article in the last issue of *Preach the Word* by John Koelpin, which is actually on the word κήρυσσω.) εὐαγγελίσασθαι carries with it both the offer and the power of salvation. Thus it brings salvation (1 Corinthians 15:1-2), regeneration (1 Peter 1:23-25), and joy (Acts 8:4,8).

The good news that Paul had been sent to preach to the Gentiles is described as “the untraceable riches of Christ” (τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ). ἀνεξιχνίαστον means “not able to track out” (ἶχνος is a footprint). Like a hunter tracking a deer only to find a maze of deer tracks heading off in every direction; like trying to keep track of the exact dollar figure of Bill Gates’ worth without the use of computers, such is the incomprehensibility of trying to fathom the riches of Christ. The mind of man can never fully comprehend the vast abundance of wealth made available to us in Christ. Whether τοῦ Χριστοῦ is a descriptive genitive (the riches being Christ himself and all that owning him by faith means for me) or a possessive genitive (the riches

which Jesus possesses) in the end makes little difference: Jesus does not hoard his riches for his own purposes, but rather shares them with me. His wealth is my wealth! “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus is not a penny-pincher. He gives (redemption, forgiveness of sins) “in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7). As he is wealthy, so he gives. And what he gives me in Christ is always more than enough to meet my every need of body and soul: “my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

As Paul was the hand of God to dispense this wealth without cost to the Gentiles, so may I not be stingy in my dispensation of God’s grace. These riches of Christ are the inexhaustible theme of the preaching I am called to do. Can I ever claim to have said it all already? Can I prepare a text for the fourth time in my ministry and claim that to preach on this again would just be redundant? Although the riches of Christ are too many to track down, this doesn’t mean my members and I can’t keep on searching in an all-out hunt and collect as many of them as possible.

9 καὶ φωτίσαι πάντα τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι,

**(My translation: “and to enlighten all people as to what the stewardship of the mystery is, which has been hidden since the ages in God, who created all things”)**

Ephesians 3:2-12 is the epistle reading for Epiphany in each of the three ILCW series. Perhaps it is this verse that sets it apart from other “revelation” texts as the *crème de la crème* of epistle lessons to kick off the season of Epiphany.

The specific grace-gift given to Paul is further described: “and to enlighten all (people)” (καὶ – coordinating conjunction, tying the two infinitives together; φωτίσαι – another aorist infinitive, used exegetically to explain ἡ χάρις). φωτίσαι means to “shine light upon, illuminate, bring to light.” Jesus is “the true light that gives light to every man” who came into the world for that purpose (John 1:9). Now the time had come to bring this hidden gospel truth to the Gentiles (to all people, not just the Jews – πάντα – accusative object of the verb, the manuscript evidence seems to include this), and Paul was entrusted with this privilege. While it is the Lord himself who illuminates the heart with the eyesight of faith, I am privileged by grace to run with the torch.

What it is that Paul was graced to illuminate everyone about was the stewardship of the mystery (ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου), considered in detail in verses 2-6. This mystery of Christ and the stewardship of it “has been hidden since the ages” (τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων). τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου is a perfect passive participle, attributive adjectival, used to describe the state or condition in which the stewardship of the mystery of Christ had existed up to the present. It had been hidden, kept a secret from all eternity (the meaning behind the temporal phrase ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων). God’s plan in eternity was to save all who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin, Jew and Gentile. The preaching of salvation by grace through Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit on people’s hearts: this has always been God’s plan. This is how God had always planned for the mystery of Christ to be administered. Now it was being set in full motion.

ἐν τῷ θεῷ explains where this secret was hidden: “in the sphere of God” (similar to the idea of means or agent, “hidden by God”). This mystery was exclusively divine knowledge, kept locked up in the mind of God until he was prepared to reveal it. To the degree to which the Gentiles were now being welcomed and received

as equal brothers with the Jews and with Christ, this news that Christ was the Savior also of the Gentiles had up to this point been a mystery. Only God fully understood it and only God could make it known. Yet this was now “the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him” (Romans 16:25-26).

“Who created all things” (τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι – aorist participle, attributive adjectival modifying τῷ θεῷ), stresses God’s right to hide or reveal things as he chooses and to include whomever he wants under the umbrella of his grace. Becker wrote, “When Luther speaks of this hidden God, he emphasizes especially God’s absolute control over all creation” (*The Foolishness of God*, page 13). This phrase stresses God’s power and wisdom over all things, including the Gentiles. Don’t question him! “Mysteries remind us that we are the created, not the Creator” (*New Again: Rethinking the Bible for Outreach Today*, page 12). This phrase may also speak to the magnitude of this revelation: only the almighty Creator-God could devise and carry out such an awesome plan!

In the preceding three verses, Paul marveled at his role in God’s plan of salvation for the Gentiles. This leads me to ask: where do I fit into God’s plan for the salvation of others? I, too, am an instrument of the Lord and of his gospel. It is my responsibility and privilege to fulfill my role in saving lives for eternity by sharing the news of God’s grace with others.

In verses 2-6 Paul addressed God’s eternal purpose concerning the Gentiles. In verses 7-9 the focus was Paul’s instrumentality in God’s plan for the Gentiles. Now in verses 10-12, Paul reflects on the result of his gospel ministry to the Gentiles.

10 ἵνα γνωρισθῇ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ,

**(My translation: “in order that the many-sided wisdom of God may now be made known through the Church to the authorities and the ruling powers in the heavenly regions”)**

God’s purpose and the result (ἵνα) of Paul’s preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (verse 8) and illuminating all people concerning the stewardship of the gospel mystery (verse 9) was that “the many-sided wisdom of God may now be made known” (γνωρισθῇ – aorist subjunctive used in a purpose clause – νῦν...ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ). God’s wisdom (ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ -- genitive of possession or source, “wisdom which God possesses” or “wisdom originating with and coming from God”) is more than just his omniscience (the fact that he knows all things). Wisdom is God’s ability to apply his omniscience in a perfect manner all the time; his ability to make perfect decisions. The wisdom of God in this context (and for the most part throughout the New Testament) is the divine plan of salvation that is fulfilled with the joint entry of Jews and Gentiles into Christ. Christ himself (and him crucified) is the embodiment of the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). God’s wisdom is so tremendous, that it has proven the wisdom of the wise to be foolish (1 Corinthians 1:19-25). Although the world cannot conceive of God’s secret wisdom, he has revealed it to us by his Spirit (2 Corinthians 2:7-10,12).

This wisdom of God is described as being “many-sided, very-varied” (πολυποίκιλος – πολυ – “many;” ποικίλος – “various, diversified, manifold”). πολυποίκιλος was used to describe robes which were “many-colored” or made of many different pieces of fabric (the Septuagint of Genesis 37:3 describes Joseph’s coat as ποικίλον). Perhaps the best picture is that of a diamond, with its infinite diversity and sparkling beauty. “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Romans 11:33) In speaking of the Christian’s stewardship of spiritual gifts, Peter writes that the Christian will “faithfully administer God’s grace *in its various forms*” (1 Peter 4:10). As the entire Bible is just a peek into the infinite wisdom of God, I readily recognize that God’s wisdom is multi-faceted and

impossible to fully understand or appreciate. There is an endless variety in what God plans and in the means he uses to carry out his plans. Yet, like a jeweler who is proud of a particularly valuable diamond, I will let God's Word shine light on God's wisdom to reveal as magnificently as possible its full, multi-faceted beauty.

God's intent is that his wisdom is to be made known "through the Church" (διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας). τῆς ἐκκλησίας consists of all those who have been "called out" of darkness and brought into the light of the gospel by the Holy Spirit. It is the assembly of all those throughout the ages whom God himself gathers in Christ, on whom the Church stands as its sole foundation. In this context the portion of the Church being described is that which exists in the New Testament era. The Church, all true believers individually and corporately, is to make God's wisdom known. People often think of the church as a field in which to do work, rather than the means by which to do work in the world. The privilege and responsibility to make the many-sided wisdom of God known belongs to every disciple of Christ. As an apostle, Paul had a special calling to serve as a Christian steward of the gospel. But he makes it plain in this verse that it was not his privilege and responsibility alone. Each Christian, pastor, teacher and layperson, must continue to see to it that he or she looks for ways to make God's grace known to others.

This verse actually is not an evangelism verse so much as it is a declaration of an amazing fact: namely, that through the Church, God's wisdom is made known "to the authorities and the ruling powers in the heavenly regions" (ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις). ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις are different ranks or classifications of good angels, referred to in any number of different ways in the Bible (angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim), about which we cannot make any real judgments. The fact that these are good angels and that these angels are not omniscient is pointed out in 1 Peter 1:12: "Even angels long to look into these things" (the revelations made by the Holy Spirit through those who preached the gospel). God the Holy Spirit revealed his will directly to the apostles and prophets; then the angels, too, found out. I picture in my mind's eye the angels rushing to the windows of heaven (like a bunch of anxious school children staring out at activity in the playground) excited to watch the activities of the gospel through the work of the Church, rejoicing at the repentance of each and every sinner (Luke 15:7). As they see God's plan unfold, even the angels grow in their understanding of how wise God is. I marvel at the countless details which went into God's plan for my salvation... even the angels are amazed!

11 κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων ἦν ἐποίησεν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυριῷ ἡμῶν,

**(My translation: "according to the design of the ages which he formed in Christ Jesus, our Lord")**

The result that "the many-sided wisdom of God may now be made known..." (γνωρισθῆναι νῦν) is now modified with a κατὰ phrase ("according to," "in line with"), explaining that this was/is God's plan from all eternity. Πρόθεσιν (without the article, stressing the quality of the word) is a plan or design (sometimes translated "resolve"). This plan is more than just a plan designed by God in eternity; the many-sided wisdom of God being now made known is a significant part of "the plan of the ages" (τῶν αἰώνων – descriptive genitive). This plan of the ages isn't just "the best plan we've heard in a long time!" (an over-dramatization often spoken in ignorance), but God's master design for the course of salvation history.

God engineered this design in eternity (ἦν – relative pronoun modifying πρόθεσιν; ἐποίησεν – "made, formed;" aorist indicative speaking of the fact). There is some debate as to whether the point of this verb is the *realization* of the plan ("accomplished") or its *formation* ("formed"). I have opted for formation of the plan. In the end, however, it's all the same. God does everything "according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). The United States' leaders, military, and people are resolved to hunt down and bring to justice those who were behind the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon. President Bush was so bold as to say that he was resolved to not quit

“until evil has been removed from the world!” However, as will be painfully evident in the months and years ahead, resolve is often different than what actually gets accomplished. Many people are telling our leaders to curtail their tough talk, to talk only about what they can actually do. Man is limited in his ability to see a plan through to completion. God is not! God is accomplishing what he resolved in eternity to do in the person and work of Jesus Christ (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν). The prepositional phrase introduced by ἐν explains the sphere in which this plan was formed. If there were no Jesus, there would be no plan and there would be no blessing. Jesus is the contractor, the builder, the author and perfecter of our salvation (Hebrews 12:2). Everything hangs on him.

This plan is not yet fully accomplished. It is still in the process of being accomplished by the Lord through his Church. Not until the Last Day will this plan be fully “accomplished.”

12 ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ προσαγωγὴν ἐν πεποιθήσει διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ.

**(My translation: “in whom we have the boldness and access in confidence through faith in him.”)**

ἐν ᾧ again directs me to the sphere in which I enjoy the following blessings. Jesus is the means by which I have boldness and access to God. It is by virtue of my objective relationship with God in Christ, having been justified by him for Christ’s sake, that “we have” (ἔχομεν – the present tense emphasizing the ongoing nature of this reality) τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ προσαγωγὴν ἐν πεποιθήσει. The root of τὴν παρρησίαν has the meaning “telling-all.” The term originally conveyed the idea of speaking freely: having the freedom of saying anything and everything with the absence of restraint or fear. It was used to describe openness, courage and fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank. It implies courage to speak in situations that ordinarily suggest silence. I picture the teenager who has an excellent relationship with his parents, one in which he feels he can freely “tell all” and knows his parents will treat him with respect no matter what it is he has to tell. In its Biblical use it can be translated: “freedom of spirit, cheerful boldness, the joyful mood of those reconciled to God.” This term here refers to such boldness in our relation to God.

I also have “access in confidence” (προσαγωγὴν ἐν πεποιθήσει). In its verb form προσαγωγὴν means “to bring (someone to someone).” Intransitively, it means “to come near, approach.” “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). In using the illustration of the gate (John 10:7-10), Jesus pictures himself as my access to God. (See also Romans 5:1,2.) ἐν πεποιθήσει (“in confidence, trust”) is used adverbially to express the state of mind in which I enjoy these blessings.

All of this is possible for me only “through faith in him [Christ]” (διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ – objective genitive, Jesus is the object of our faith). Faith is the subjective means of having these possessions. We have free, unrestrained, confident access to God the Father through faith in Christ. Covered in the robes of his righteousness, nothing disturbs my confidence in approaching the holy God. I am acceptable to him and have the assurance that he is favorably disposed toward me in Christ. This implies the objective means of my having these possessions: the gospel. God’s eternal plan (in Christ) and the redemption accomplished by Christ alone make such fearless access possible.

In Christ I am free to “approach the throne of grace with confidence” (Hebrews 4:16) daily in prayer and to speak to him with the confidence of a child talking to his dad. Luther explains in his explanation of the address to the Lord’s Prayer: “we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.” I can fully expect him to hear and answer in love for Jesus’ sake. I can also “be confident and unashamed before him at his coming” (I John 2:28). I can stand before him with “confidence on the day of judgment” (I John 4:17). I can enter the sanctuary of God’s presence “since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain, that is, his body” (Hebrews 10:19,20).

Paul concludes this section, proclaiming the eternal plan of God's grace for the world in Christ, by painting this remarkable picture: the entire communion of saints (consisting of Jews and Gentiles shoulder to shoulder) standing before God with confidence and courage. This picture represents the consummation of God's eternal plan. In faith I view this picture, not from a distance, but up close and personal – rubbing shoulders.

**“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,  
because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned,  
and revealed them to little children.  
Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”**

**Matthew 11:25-26**

## Sermon Outlines

### *We Are Stewards of God's Grace*

- I. God has revealed the mystery of grace to us (vs. 2-6,12)
  - A. Blind to it by nature
  - B. Revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the Word
  - C. This mystery is . . .
    - 1. Salvation for all in Christ
    - 2. Freedom to approach God with confidence
  
- II. God has given us the grace to make it known to others (vs. 7-11)
  - A. Repentance
    - 1. Lack of love for the lost
    - 2. Obstacle within ourselves: fear
    - 3. Forgiveness in Christ
  - B. Marvel and act on God's grace as a steward
    - 1. Proclaim the gospel – make it plain to others
    - 2. God provides the strength, gifts, courage, etc.
    - 3. Recognize the privilege and the responsibility
    - 4. Commit self in the Lord to manage his grace for the sake of others

### *This Grace Was Given Me*

- I. To understand the mystery of Christ (vs. 2-6, 12)
- II. To make this mystery plain to others (vs. 7-11)

### *Mystery Solved*

- I. How the mystery was solved  
(Revealed to us by God's grace) (vs. 2-5, 7-11)
- II. The answer to the mystery is . . .  
(In Christ we are sharers together in the promise) (vs. 6,12)