

Dentwater Bible Church

*Ephesians Message 6*

*The Church, A Mystery in*

*The Old Testament*



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**The Book of Ephesians**  
**Message Six**  
**The Mystery of the Church**  
**Pentwater Bible Church**  
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**Review:**

II. CORPORATE BLESSINGS (2:11-3:22) LIFE WITH BELIEVERS

For those people on this earth who have become spiritually alive, the wonderful workmanship of God we are about to learn is the Great Mystery that was previously unrevealed in Old Testament times. Starting in the eleventh verse of the second chapter Paul enters a new division of this book. We saw in the first chapter how God planned the masterpiece, His called and chosen for His Church. Then in our last session we saw how God deals with us individually as lost sinners who trust Christ to fashion us into His Masterpiece. Now we are to see how all believers of all races, ethnicity, cultures and religions are brought into one unit called the Church of Jesus Christ. This is truly God's "one world government." This is not the pagan one world government, which is coming on the world in the future. This is how God has fashioned for Himself His Chosen to be a single unit all responding to the Holy Spirit that lives within each one of us directing us and uniting all Christians past, present and future until Christ comes for us to take us out of this decaying world.

A. ONENESS OF JEWS AND GENTILES IN CHRIST. 2:11-22.

1. WHAT THE GENTILES WERE WITHOUT CHRIST. 2:11,12.

Previous to Christ's sacrifice there were two people groups in God's economy. They were Jews and the rest of the world's population called the Gentiles or the nations and sometimes the New Testament uses the term Greek. God called the Jews to a special position in this world (*Deuteronomy 7:6*)

Paul makes a clear distinction to the flesh and not the spirit in this delineation by saying "in the flesh." The Jews had been elected as God's chosen people. The males were required to be circumcised on the eighth day of life as a sign of obedience and belonging to the covenanted people and symbolically cutting off the old life of sin, purifying one's heart and dedicating oneself to God. The practice of circumcision provided the visible separation from the Gentiles with whom the Jews lived. It was first given to Abraham by God. Cir. 2350 B.C. (Genesis 17:10) and made part of the Mosaic Covenant for all Jewish males (Leviticus 12:3). So as Paul began this section he wanted to remind the Ephesians that before conversion they had no relationship with God. Paul commanded them to remember that formerly, before their conversions, they were Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by the Jews. Jews looked down at all non-Jews by calling them the "uncircumcised." This physical difference between Jews and Gentiles affected

every area of their lives. A great social and spiritual division existed between them as far as the Jews were concerned. The great error the Jews committed was their reliance on the “physical” and their status as God’s elect as sufficient to make them godly and in God’s good graces for their salvation. They failed in large measure to promote inner renewal by changing their hearts. This is why Paul uses the terms “flesh made with hands.” He knew the Jews hearts were hard and they relied on the physical. When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount He addressed this very issue through out the entire message.

The Gentiles’ lack of the external sign of circumcision also meant that they lacked five privileges that God had given the nation Israel.

1. They were separate from Christ personally and had no national hope of the Messiah as the Jews did.
2. They were excluded from citizenship (commonwealth) in Israel.
3. They were foreigners to the covenants of the promise. They were mostly deprived of direct participation in God’s covenants and thus had no hope of future glory and blessing as Israel did through their “covenants.”
4. The Gentiles were without hope. Unlike Israel they had no expectation of a personal Messiah-Deliverer and the Messianic Age.
5. They were without God in the world. The Gentiles were in a desperate situation. They had no meaning, hope, purpose, or direction in life.

Such is the condition of all peoples in the world who are without Christ. They are without hope and this existence is all they have. It ends when their life ends and they will experience an eternity of pain and suffering. This bleakness *does* have a remedy because God Himself intervened in time and space to provide for the Gentiles.

As the world’s apostasy grows the light of Christ gets increasingly dimmer which will plunge the world into great darkness before the Great Tribulation comes on the earth. We must try and reach all those within our sphere of influence before the apostasy’s dark curtain drops at the final call.

## 2. THE ONE BODY 2:13-18.

Paul spoke of the new nearness to God by bringing them into the fellowship by Christ’s shed blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). This begins the dispensation of grace as the old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant is fulfilled and therefore replaced by the New Covenant. The Gentiles who were far away from both God and the Jews are now brought near. Because of Christ the Gentiles are now fellow heirs of the New Covenant being in one body with the believing Jews. The *now* he speaks of is:

1. The surpassing riches of God’s grace are made known.
2. After corporate Israel rejected the King and Savior.
3. When He is sitting on God the Father’s throne at His right side.
4. When the Holy Spirit is active doing His work on the earth.
5. During the present age.

Christ has done the unifying work of bringing together the world's two people groups Jews and Gentiles. He has given us the peace of God (Philippians 4: 7) and enabled us through belief to finally make peace with God (Romans 5: 1). Further since the Jews despised the Gentiles the so-called wall of partition between the two groups has been removed. In the Church the hostility between Jews and Gentiles has been removed. This of course refers to genuine believers who love God and trust in His Son in *practice* as well as verbal proclamation. Remember the true Church of Christ is invisible. Christ destroyed this enmity so Jewish and Gentile believers must not have any hostility toward each other.

Paul now described how and why this hostility ended. The animosity between *believing* Jews and Gentiles was ended because by Christ's physical death (Colossians. 1:22). He rendered the Law "inoperative." in believers' lives. Jews and Gentiles were enemies because the former sought to keep the Law with its commandments and regulations (Col. 2:14, 21-23), whereas Gentiles could care less about them. This difference was the large barrier between them. But now that the Law is inoperative ("Christ is the end of the Law" [Rom. 10:4]), Jewish-Gentile hostility is gone. The Law was the *cause* of the enmity. Christ "destroyed" the barrier (hostility) by making the Law inoperative.

Christ had two purposes in ending the hostility:

1. The first was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. This "new man" (Eph. 2:15), or "new humanity," is also called "this one body" (16), the church.
2. The second in destroying the enmity was to reconcile both Jewish and Gentile believers to Himself in . . . one body (3:6). This reconciliation was accomplished through the cross, by which Christ killed (put to death).

Not only is Christ "our peace" (v. 14), but He also preached peace. The peace that was preached was on the basis of Christ's death rather than during His life on earth. Peace is supplied both to those who were far away (cf. Eph. 2:13), that is, Gentiles (who were without Christ and alienated from Israel and her covenants, v. 12) and to those who were near, namely, Jews (who have "the covenants of the promise," v. 12).

As a result of this message of peace both Jewish and Gentile believers have access to God the Father by one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). This must be understood that Christ gives believers access.

### 3. THE ONE BUILDING. 2:19-22.

Believing Gentiles become fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, the Church. Gentiles become a part of the company of the redeemed of all ages beginning with Adam. However, this does not mean that the church inherits the blessings promised to Israel.

There are three reasons for this:

1. In the context Paul was discussing the "one new man" (v. 15), the "one body" (v.

- 16). This does not mean that Gentiles are incorporated into Israel but that believing Jews and Gentiles are incorporated into one new “humanity.” The Jews and the Gentiles become spiritually one entity of God’s chosen known as the Church. We each still retain our own identities and heritage as well as prophetic destinies for the unsaved.
2. Paul explained that this new relationship is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief Cornerstone” (v. 20). This began on the day of Pentecost, not in the Old Testament. True, Gentile believers become a part of the redeemed of all ages (v. 19). But their being incorporated with Jewish believers into the “one new man” distinctly began when the church came into being at Pentecost. The cornerstone anchors the building and gives the walls their line.
  3. Paul described the church as a great building, a holy temple in which God dwells. This figure of God dwelling in a temple comes from the Old Testament. Paul wrote of the building’s foundation (v.20), formation (v.21), and function (v.22).

Paul goes on to further describe the building illustration of the Church. The foundation is crucial to any well-built structure, without which it will fail. The reason Gentile believers are “fellow citizens” (v. 19) is that they are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The “prophets” are of the New Testament era, not the Old Testament. “Prophets” follows the word “apostles” here and in 3:5 and 4:11. These men received the revelation of the mystery of the church in the present Age, which had been hidden in Old Testament times (3:5).

Christ Jesus Himself is the chief Cornerstone, that is, He is the *most crucial* part of the foundation. In ancient building practices “the chief cornerstone” was carefully placed. It was crucial because the entire building was lined up with it. The church’s foundation, that is, the apostles and prophets, needed to be correctly aligned with Christ. All other believers are built on that foundation, measuring their lives with Christ.

In Christ the whole building is joined together. The various parts of the building are skillfully fitted to each other, not haphazardly thrown together. This structure rises to become (continually grows into) a holy temple in the Lord. This indicates that the church is a living and growing organism, as new believers are included in this temple’s superstructure (Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5). Both Jewish and Gentile believers are being “joined together” into this one organism labeled “a holy temple” (cf. “one new man” [Eph. 2:15] and “one body” [v. 16]). Solomon’s Temple when under construction gives us an illustration of the building characterization of which Paul refers. During construction no sounds of hammer, axe and tools of iron were heard (I Kings 6:7). Every stone was prepared beforehand and then at the proper time it was fitted in the exact place it belonged. God’s timing and methods are perfect. He is building His Church. He takes living stones prepared before hand and puts each in its proper place (I Corinthians 12). This is in direct contrast to man’s methods of church growth through marketing techniques and strategic plans. This is God’s work and He places Himself in to the building as the Holy Spirit enters the new structure called a Holy Temple of the Lord, The Church.

God places individual believers into the structure; thus it is being built together. The goal of this temple is to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. In the Old

Testament God's glory was in the temple, which represented His presence with the people. In this Age God dwells in His new temple which is constructed not from inanimate materials but of *living* believers. The Holy Spirit indwells each individual believer (cf. John 14:17; Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:2; 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13), who is thus a "temple" (1 Cor. 6:19). But the temple in Ephesians 2:21-22 refers to the Holy Spirit's *corporate* "dwelling" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16), His "temple" composed of *all* Jewish and Gentile believers.

In conclusion, Paul has shown that though the Gentiles were formerly outside God's household, they are now one "new man" with Jewish believers. This new entity is like a temple that is structured on the apostles and prophets, with Christ being the chief Cornerstone; God indwells it through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

### **Today's Message:**

#### B. THE REVELATION OF ONE PREVIOUS MYSTERY, THE BODY OF CHRIST. 3:1-13.

##### 1. THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD. 3:1-6

*Ephesians 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,*

It is true that Paul was in prison in Rome for his teaching about Christ. We know that the non-converted Jews pressured the Romans to arrest Paul for rebellion for bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles and riling the Jewish population. They used Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile, as a ploy to have Paul arrested. The Jews thought that Paul brought this "Uncircumcised Gentile" into the Temple in violation of their "Law." Therefore they appealed to the Romans that Paul be arrested on the basis of civil disorder (Acts 21:21, 28; 28:16-31 etc.). This reference to "the prisoner" of Jesus Christ has stronger ties to the bond that he has with Jesus (see also I Corinthians 4:1; Philippians 1:1; II Timothy 1:8). When one is imprisoned there are severe restrictions placed on behavior. Paul uses this illustration to narrowly define the work Christ had for him. He was to reach the Gentile world for Christ as well as write the majority of the New Testament for the Church. He went at this with singleness of purpose, not diverting his attention to other activities that would not lead to bringing others in to the Church as well as building on the foundation, which Jesus had laid.

*Ephesians 3: 2-4 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)*

Here he is not asking them "if" they have heard, he is saying "surely" as you have heard. He had been preaching God's Word in the general Asia Minor area before he came to Ephesus so they had to have heard the general tenor of what he was speaking. The details of his message and ministry are in verses 3-12. The word dispensation means "administration" (*oikonomia*-English economy) has the sense of stewardship or

management. Paul's was to administer "God's grace" (Eph. 3:7), which was given to him. He elaborated on this in verses 3-6. This grace was given to him to dispense to the Gentiles. God works His creation somewhat differently during each dispensation. A dispensation is God's distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure and judgment. From the divine standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life, or a responsibility for managing God's affairs in His house. From the historical standpoint it is a stage in the progress of revelation. Paul was responsible for applying the massive effort to get the Dispensation of Grace in action and fully activated.

Paul moves into a new component of the "mystery" of the Church as the Body of believers. Remembering that a biblical mystery is not one that remains puzzling which nobody can realize. It is a mystery from the Old Testament that was not revealed until the Dispensation of Grace. It was not revealed in the Old Covenant. That period would also be known as the Dispensation of the Law. The Ephesian Christians would be able to understand his insight (Col. 1:9; 2:2) into the mystery of Christ (Col. 1:27; 2:2) by reading what he had "already written." Each time a letter was received by a church from an apostle they read it aloud to the entire congregation many times.

Paul's next words (Eph. 3:5-6) would develop their (our) understanding of it. This knowledge was not his own; it was revealed by God.

*Ephesians 3: 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;*

Paul then revealed the time when the mystery was disclosed. The mystery was not made known to men in other generations as it is now being revealed. Revealed means, to uncover or unveil something that was previously covered or hidden. In God's divine providence he has gradually revealed increasingly more of Himself since the fall when he cut-off fellowship with the human family. We call this progressive revelation. This "mystery" was revealed by the Spirit (Eph. 2:22), and its recipients were God's holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; 4:11). Verse 3:5 explicitly states that it was *given* to the apostles and prophets and that Paul was one who was to disseminate it. For example we see in Acts 10 Peter receiving a message from God regarding the gospel message that was to go to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

*Ephesians 3: 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:*

Paul reiterates the concept again exactly what the mystery was: that the Gentiles would be equally partakers of the Gospel of Christ. The Jews realized that they would be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49: 6; 56: 6-7) but not that they would be *equal* with them! They thought that the Gentiles would be converts to Judaism. The mystery though as it has been revealed was for both to equally participate in the Church, God's new creation. In order for both parties to be included each is required to accept the finished work of Christ on the cross. Nobody is automatically included because of race, heritage or previous religious experience.

## 2. THE FELLOWSHIP OF A PREVIOUS MYSTERY. 3:7-13.

*Ephesians 3: 7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

The term minister is actually servant in the original language. The word “servant” (*diakonos*) stresses not the idea of subjection (as does *doulos*, “slave”) but the idea of service or serving, as one who is a waiter (John 2:5, 9). This service has its basis in the gift of God’s grace (Eph. 3:2) given to Paul through the working of God’s power (1:19; Col. 1:29). The Greek more clearly implies that Paul’s service was initiated by “the gift of God’s grace” and continues by “the working (*energeian*) of His power” (*dynameōs*). Ministering this grace—by God’s strength, not his own—was Paul’s wonderful privilege of service.

*Ephesians 3: 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;*

Paul considered himself less than the least of all God’s people. (“God’s people” renders *hagiōn*, “saints”; cf. Eph. 1:1, 15). As we know he persecuted the early Church who were all Orthodox Jews, for straying from the Jewish Law and causing a major disturbance. We can see Paul’s deep humility in view of God’s incomparably generous grace. First, he was to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Second, he was to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery. Though Paul ministered to both Jews and Gentiles, he was especially designated as the apostle “to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 1:16; 2:7-8). These unsearchable riches are the greatest treasure for mankind in the world.

*Ephesians 3: 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:*

The Gentiles can know something of the riches of Christ’s blessings (“the riches of God’s grace” in Eph. 1:7 and 2:7 and the richness of His mercy in 2:4). Yet Christ’s unbound spiritual wealth can never be fully comprehended (*anexichniaston*, lit., “not capable of being traced by footprints”; used only here and in Rom. 11:33). Paul was to disclose publicly *to everyone*, not just the Ephesians (Eph. 3:2) this stewardship of God’s sacred secret (vv. 3-4, 6). This secret had been hidden in God (v. 5), the Creator of the universe. Even before creating all things God had in mind this wonderful truth as part of His eternal plan (1:4, 11).

*Ephesians 3: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,*

Paul’s assignment was to build the Church on the foundation (Chief Cornerstone) of Jesus the Christ. The purpose of this was to show the angelic host of heaven God’s



plan on this earth. Therefore Paul's ministry was that the manifold wisdom (*sophia*) of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. In classical Greek the adjective "manifold" (*polypoikilos*) referred to the beauty of an embroidered pattern or the variety of colors in flowers (cf. *poikilēs*, "in its various forms," in 1 Peter 4:10). The "manifold wisdom of God" does not refer to redemption as such but rather to the new relationship between believing Jews and Gentiles in one body. The medium by which this wisdom is communicated is the church; the recipients are the angelic hosts "in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 1:3). These "rulers and authorities" refer to both good and evil angels (demonic 6:12 and angelic 1:21). As the heavenly hosts witness the church, they see God's power to save sinful mankind through the physical death of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Godhead, Jesus the Messiah.

*Ephesians 3: 11 According to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:*

It is only through the Lord Jesus Christ that God's eternal plan formulated before the foundation of the world can occur. The Church continues to rise through the ages since its birth at the first Pentecost after Christ's ascension like a building under construction. The foundation has been laid and the early believers who came in are like to lower stories of a building under construction. We who have come in later are in the upper stories and when the building is complete as the last Gentile has been added then the Lord will remove us from the earth to take us home to be with Him. This eternal purpose is not one where God changed His plan as mankind responded unfavorably to God's commands. God knew all along what we would do and planned accordingly (Isaiah 44: 7-10; 24-28; 46: 9-11; Jeremiah 10: 7, 12 etc.).

*Ephesians 3: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

This boldness Paul speaks of is our invitation to approach God, as He has desired for many centuries since the fall. It is only through the work of Christ that access is open so a Holy God is able to fellowship with sinful humankind. Our faith in Him is the conduit whereby His grace is conveyed and when we believe we are given access. This access is followed by a glad welcome by Him as we approach His presence.

*Ephesians 3: 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

Paul finishes with "do not be discouraged" because of his sufferings for them. His sufferings were for their gain and glory. If Paul had not dispensed to the Gentiles the stewardship of God's grace, then Jews would not have been hostile to him and he would not have been imprisoned. His preaching brought salvation to the Gentiles, but it incurred the wrath of many Jews on him. However, many others became members of the church, Christ's body, and this was their glory. This too should be our prayer for each other that we do not grow weary (faint not) at the tribulations that this world brings our way and continue to teach Christ to this decaying fallen world. Obeying Christ is never easy. It

requires us to take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). When Christ said that he meant exactly what He said, we follow Him until death. This means we will have suffering (Philippians 1:29) in this world as ambassadors of Jesus. We will be rewarded for our perseverance. We can't fall back into the ways of the world regardless of what it wants of us. Many will try and take us back to the "Old Man" and we must resist.

**Please Call or e-mail with any questions or comments.**  
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