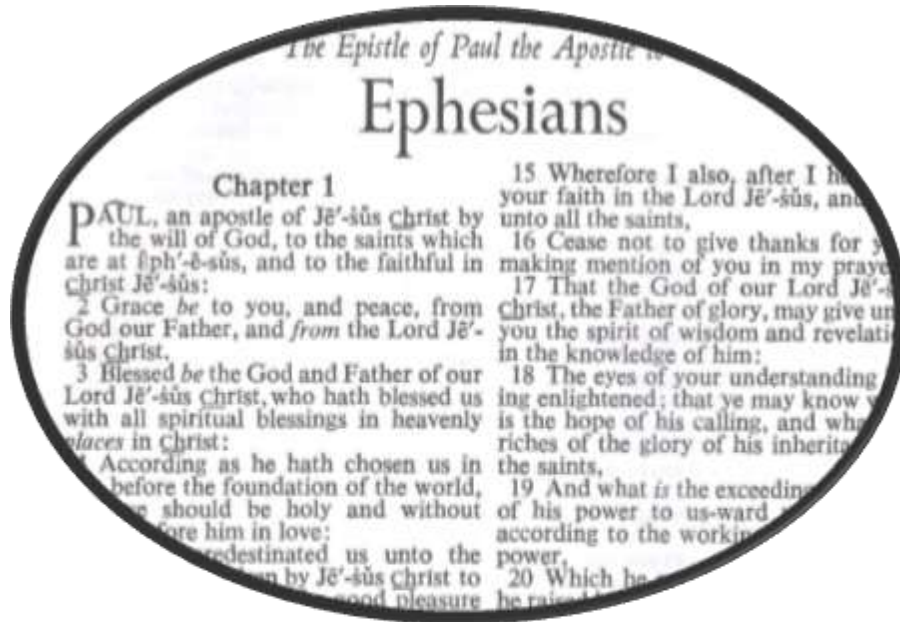


EPHESIANS – WEEK 3

THE NEW MAN



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Ephesians 2:14–3:19 – The New Man

There is now no longer Jew and gentile. There is only the new man in Christ. This new man is fully a part of the church Christ is building. Furthermore, he comprehends God's manifold wisdom and has access to Him through the Holy Spirit.

Even the angels didn't see this one coming.

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1 Ephesians 2:14–18 (ESV)

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

“*That he might create in himself one new man in place of the two,*” is, yet again, a purpose construct. But the mystery here is what does Paul mean by, “*one new man*”?

Well, for starters, the Greek work (kainon) that’s translated as “new” has the sense of unknown or unheard of. It means totally new, totally different, not just refreshed. Also, the dividing wall is a reference to the separation between the Jews and the gentiles – probably specifically to the wall in the temple that keeps out the gentiles.

So, the *one new man in place of the two* is a continuation of the point in the previous passage about the extension of the gospel to the gentiles. There is no longer Jew and gentile, just the new man.

But this new man isn’t like the Jew or the gentile before. It’s something else.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. – 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

And this leads somewhere glorious. Now *through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.* This new man is specially empowered by God.

That’s us.

We’re supposed to be awed by our *access in one Spirit to the Father.* Consider how unreasonable that is.

Why would God have any interest in direct contact with us? Even if He’s gotten over being furious with us over our sin, aren’t we still boring? Wouldn’t a relationship with us be a colossal waste of time?

That’s the great mystery. God has a goal in all this. That goal has something to do with our growth in Christ. Somehow that glorifies Him.

That does make some sense. We don’t start out worth much, but we’re useful displays of His glorious workings. We’re projects.

This is a bit intimidating. The work isn’t finished when we confess Christ as Lord; it’s just starting. Our walk with Christ exists for the purpose of glorifying God.

Walk with purpose.

2 Ephesians 2:19–22 (NKJV)

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The Ephesians knew well what it meant to be a stranger or a foreigner – it meant you were discriminated against. In Ephesus, only citizens had significant rights.

So what Paul is saying is that Ephesian Christians are full-up Christians. They're not second-class.

And, just to hammer this point home, Paul is saying that they are an integral part of the church – the same church that has Christ as its cornerstone and the apostles as its foundation.

Christ is building his church one stone at a time and they are the stones. They are an essential part of it. They are *being fitted together* with all the others. And this is a growing, glorious structure. It is more than just a church really, it's *a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*.

They're important.

We undersell Christianity. We talk about becoming a Christian in terms of our getting into heaven. It's infinitely more important – and more exciting – than that. We're part of something big, something world changing.

The first Christians knew that, and they went out and did big things. That's why it is said that they turned to world upside down. Rome continued to “rule” in the business and military sense of the word, but Christianity took over the hearts and minds of the people. Despite his obvious power, Caesar was really just a figurehead. He didn't matter.

We need to get back to this kind of exciting, world changing Christianity. We need to stop focusing inward. Because Christianity is typically sold in terms of what we get out of it, we only believe in what we get out of it. It has become a self-centered religion.

And notice that this isn't a call to do something; it's a call to be something. We are part of *the whole building ... in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*. We need to think of ourselves and our lives as living stones in a great building project.

It's bigger than we are.

3 Ephesians 3:1–7 (NKJV)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Paul sees his calling – to bring the gospel to the gentiles – as a special *dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you*. In the great plot twist of God expanding His covenant to include the gentiles, He put an exclamation point on it by selecting Paul to carry that message.

No one could have been more ironic for this mission than Paul. He was the leading persecutor of the church. So, of course, God picks him to carry the gospel forth – and, just to add to the irony, Paul doesn't get to carry it to his people (the Jews) but to the last people on earth he would want to carry it to (the gentiles). Plus, Paul gets beaten, stoned and imprisoned along the way.

So, how does Paul react to all this? He takes to it like a duck to water. He gets it. His conversion on the road to Damascus, along with some of the messages he received at that time, warned him of what's coming. He suffers a ton, but he knows it's "for a good cause."

Specifically, he appreciates that God *made known to me the mystery ... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men*. That's a blessing literally worth dying for.

There's a strange psychological phenomenon where pain is, in a sense, not painful. If you know something is supposed to hurt, and that pain isn't a sign of something out of whack, then the pain is easier to bear.

The simplest example comes from weightlifting. A super intense "burnout" set can make you sore as the dickens the next day. But you expect that; you literally volunteered for it. You know it's coming, and you know it's not a sign that something's wrong. This makes the pain somehow not "painful," even if you're so sore you can't get out of bed.

Paul seems to be reacting this way to his trials. We wouldn't say he volunteered for them – it was imposed on him by Christ – but he sees them as appropriate and not mysterious. He also appreciates the gifts that came as part of the deal. So, Paul deals with his deprivations almost as if they don't hurt at all.

That's where we come in. Life in Christ isn't joining a country club. We're supposed to appreciate things that might look, on the surface, to be anything but fun. They will happen. They're supposed to happen.

Keep an eye out for those things. They're clues.

4 Ephesians 3:8–13 (NKJV)

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

This passage contains something shocking – “*the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.*” There’s something even the angels didn’t know until it was *made known* to them, and it was made known *by the church*. That something is *the manifold wisdom of God*. What in tarnation is Paul talking about here?

First of all, the Greek word translated as “*manifold*” (polupoikilos) means multi-faceted or variegated. In other words, God’s wisdom isn’t one-dimensional. It’s complex.

So, what’s the complexity that even *the principalities and powers in the heavenly places* didn’t know about? It’s the same thing Paul’s been talking about all along – the expansion of the covenant to the gentiles. But how is it that this was made known *by the church*? That’s where it unfolded, live.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. – Acts 10:44-45 (NKJV)

So, this adds another layer of impressiveness to the plan of salvation – even the angels didn’t see it coming. That leads to the conclusion of the passage.

Don’t have a cow about Paul’s imprisonment. Bigger things are afoot.

Obviously, we don’t need to *not lose heart at* [Paul’s] *tribulations*. So, what’s our takeaway? Is there something we need to *not lose heart* about?

No. Not if we ignore the persecuted church around the world. Here in our comfy chairs in the US, there’s nothing to *not lose heart* about.

But around the world Christians are kidnapped, enslaved, raped and murdered for their faith. We want to avert our eyes from this nightmare, but we owe it to them, and to our Lord, to get informed and to pray.

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>

<https://www.persecution.com/>

5 Ephesians 3:14–19 (NKJV)

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

This passage climaxes with one word – “*comprehend*.” In a series of purpose constructions, Paul is praying for the Ephesians. He bows his knees to the Father, asking *that He would grant you ... to be strengthened*.

Why? For the purpose *that Christ may dwell in your hearts*.

Why? So *that you ... may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*.

That comprehension is the greatest privilege imaginable. Your eyes and your hearts open to the truth and life becomes alive.

This harkens back to the previous point about pain not being painful. An expanded view of reality changes everything. Pain isn't so painful. Scary things aren't scary. Everything starts to make sense – and that can be super comforting.

But this is inseparable for the doctrine of God's sovereignty. The comforting thing is that God is in control. If you can't accept that – and many people can't – then the comfort that comes with it isn't going to be there.

The problem isn't what the Bible says; that's clear enough. The problem is the tragedies of life – disease, car crashes, other evils. People can't reconcile God's absolute sovereignty with those events. They just “shouldn't” have happened.

If you struggle with this (and who doesn't?) understand that there are no quick answers. You owe it to yourself to work through this. The DEEPs from a few years ago that walked through the book of Job might be worth reviewing.

This can be a lot of work, but it's worth it.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What are your goals for the next year?
2. What excites you?
3. Have you ever suffered joyfully?
4. Have you ever seen persecution firsthand?
5. Are you comfortable with the doctrine of God's sovereignty?

Items for prayer: