

Ephesians

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[0 : 00] We are continuing in Ephesians chapter 3 and we have arrived at a place that is probably very, very little understood. I know it was by me as a young believer when I read Ephesians 3 many, many years ago. It just didn't register.

I suspect it probably never occurred to me to think beyond humanity as being involved in God's ultimate objective because we are endowed with this thing called self-importance and self-serving and all the rest of it.

It's part of the fall and it leads us to think automatically that surely we are the people and there's nobody or nothing that is more important than what we are. But that is not necessarily the case and all I'm suggesting is that God has an even greater, larger, more far-reaching plan in mind than the redemption of humanity.

That we, human beings for whom Christ died, are at least in part going to be directly involved in an objective that even transcends that of humans.

And that we refer to as the angelic conflict. The angelic conflict is a contest that began before heaven and earth were ever created, before there were any humans at all, before there was a Garden of Eden.

[1 : 38] In fact, fellas, this conflict began before there was such a thing as materiality. There was nothing but spirituality or immateriality.

And as I mentioned before, I'm a little reluctant to use that word immateriality because when we think of something being immaterial, we think of it being nothing.

So a more correct term would be spirituality rather than immateriality. Because spirituality is not nothing.

It is something. That which is spiritual is just as real as that which is physical. In fact, its existence vastly predates that which is physical.

Because God is spirit and out of his spirit essence, he created other spirit beings. And these are the angelic spheres.

[2 : 40] We don't know how many he created, but obviously it was a bunch. And within this angelic sphere, there is an order or a rank that is established. It appears that the cherubim were at the peak of that.

And the seraphim, who are the six-wing creatures that appear in Isaiah 6 and will surface again. In the book of the Revelation, they are angelic beings who possess six wings.

And they are wings across the top, wings across the middle, and wings at their feet. We just cannot imagine what we would think of grotesque creatures like that.

But out of all of these spirit beings, one of them appears to have been supreme over all of the others. His name was Lucifer. And you will find his, I guess we could call it a kind of biography that is listed in Isaiah 14.

We'll not take time to go there. But Isaiah 14 gives us a description of the king of Babylon. This was an actual earthly king who was, at the time, king of Babylon during the time that Isaiah was writing.

[3 : 52] And he and his activities apparently are reminiscent of the attitude and activities of Lucifer before heaven and earth was ever created when he challenged the Most High for supremacy.

So here is a creature, Lucifer, challenging the Creator. I want your job. That's what it amounted to.

And Isaiah 14 contains those famous or infamous seven I wills. I will be like the Most High. I will ascend my throne above the throne of the Almighty.

And so on and so on. There are seven I wills there. And he, of course, was brought down. And he also was brought down to the earth. So if you read then Ezekiel 28, you see a counterpart to that.

Not exactly a counterpart, but a follow-up to it in the king of Tyre. Because the king of Tyre was an actual earthly king as well. And his activities were somewhat reminiscent, likewise, of Lucifer.

[5 : 02] So we find those two descriptions in two actual kings who ruled historically. And both of them are reminiscent of the activity and the background of Satan himself.

And when we open our text here in Ephesians chapter 3, And we're talking about Paul's having had committed to him this incredible thing called this mystery, where he is charged to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And verse 9, And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery. And it is so easy to read those words and say to yourself, I wonder what that's all about.

But you don't stop to ask any further questions. You just kind of read on and tuck it in the back of your mind and say, Maybe someday I'll look into that. Fellas, this stuff is monumental.

This is not something to just lightly pass over. This is the essence of what everything is all about. This is headed toward the resolving, the resolution of that great angelic conflict that began before heaven and earth was ever created, or the human beings, or the Garden of Eden, or anything else.

[6 : 24] This goes way back. How far back? We don't know. Because we're talking about stepping out of time. We're talking about that which predated time.

Time and space are continuums that need each other and that go together. But spirituality does not exist in time and space.

So spirituality, of which God is a member, God is spirit. Those that worship him must worship him in spirit. This transcends all of material creation and it goes way back.

I guess we're talking about eternity. And eternity is not way back in time. Eternity is timeless. So try to wrap your brain around that too.

And when Paul talks about here the fellowship of the mystery, look at some of these other translations. There's the dispensation of the mystery. The administration of the mystery.

[7 : 27] The stewardship of the mystery. What is that? It has to do with the fact that God is taking what, according to man, looks like a miscarriage of justice, and arresting and trying the sinless Son of God, putting him on the cross, having the Romans crucified, looks like just a great miscarriage of justice, but its meaning transcends that more than you can imagine.

Because in that miscarriage of justice is the very heartbeat and the seed and the plan for the program of God for all terms, all times.

And it is in that death, burial, and resurrection of this one, Jesus of Nazareth, who in fact was the sinless Son of God, it is through that that God is making available salvation to the entirety of the human race.

And Ephesians, or 1 Corinthians 2, talks about, for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The rulers of this age, those who were responsible for the death of Christ on that cross, had no idea who he really was, or what was really going to be accomplished on that cross.

[9 : 04] And this is the burden that Paul is entrusted to deliver. And this is the essence of the gospel. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

Now, I don't want to labor this point, but it's very important to realize that even though the death of Christ, substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, did not result in the salvation of every human being, it did result in the potential salvation for every human being.

The death of Christ rendered every human being savable. The death of Christ made the grace of God available to every human being.

Now, we all know that a great many, even the majority, do not avail themselves of that opportunity. Do not wish to. That's where the human volition comes in.

That's another matter. But nonetheless, in the death of Jesus Christ, salvation was made a distinct possibility for every human being who ever lived.

[10 : 17] And this is the burden of 2 Corinthians 5, when Paul says, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

And I think the essence of that has to do with everything that Adam accomplished negatively in bringing humanity and all of creation into wreck and ruin, Christ was able to do positively in the death that he died on that cross.

I'm saying that the death of Christ and what it accomplished was just as great in its scope as was the disaster and the ruin that Adam brought upon humanity.

That's the whole purpose of redemption. It is to restore, to buy back, to regain that which was lost. So we are saying that the efficaciousness, the effectiveness of the death of Christ was more than sufficient to counter the negative impact of Adam.

And that resulted in the availability of salvation. And this is why Paul then goes on in the very next verse in 2 Corinthians 5.

[11 : 43] We probably ought to be there, but we're here. We won't go there now. But anyway, in this next verse he says, and he as much as says, because, because God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Well, didn't he just say we were? He just said that all of humanity was. But the appeal that he makes in the next verse is for individuals to realize that in person and to embrace that truth in person.

And you do that by exercising your will and you say, simply, because the entire world was reconciled to God through the death of Christ, I belong to that company.

I am part of that world. And if Christ died for the entire world, that means he died for me personally too.

I want to acknowledge that. I want to appropriate that truth by acting with my will to receive, believe upon, embrace Jesus Christ as my own personal Savior from my sin.

[13 : 07] That's when salvation becomes personal. That's why we insist that salvation, eternal life, is not institutional.

It is personal. And the reason it is personal is because human volition is personal. It is a decision each of us must make and we make it with our will.

It is a decision of the will. So all of that is wrapped up in the administration of the mystery. What is the mystery?

The mystery is God accomplishing through Christ and his death what he actually accomplished for the entire world. That's the mystery.

That's the film. In other words, when you proclaim this mystery to the Jew, it's a stumbling block. He can't get over that.

[14 : 10] He cannot see the possibility of Jesus being God's representative, God's Messiah sent to the earth and then let him die on a cross?

That's crazy. That's unthinkable. God would never do that. Well, that's the mystery part. That's exactly what God did. And the Jews to this day stumble at that.

They fall all over that. They can't get it. They cannot. And this ties in with the Romans thing, chapter 9, 10, and 11, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles become in.

And if you present this thing, if you present this concept of salvation for the entire human race being realized through the death of an individual on a cross, that's just plain nuts.

That's crazy. And the word the Greeks use in 1 Corinthians 2 is, it's moronic. We preach Christ crucified. How does that come across?

[15 : 24] Well, to the Jews, it's a stumbling block. You preach it to the Gentiles or the Greeks, and the Greeks were the intellectual. The Greeks represented the intelligentsia of the day.

And you give them death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and what God accomplished in that. Sending His Son to the earth to die for sinful humanity. The Greeks, the intelligence looks at that and says, that's moronic.

And that's the word that's used. That's moronic. And one reason that they look upon it that way is the ancient Greeks just like so many people today think that God's wisdom, God's intelligence is nothing more than human intelligence on steroids.

That's all it is. God's just smarter than we are and stronger than we are. But that's about it. No, no, no, no, no. Listen. The deity is so radically different, superior, otherworldly, unimaginable than what humanity is.

We tend to reason, as I've mentioned, we reason and think with a warped intellect. Got to keep that in mind. That's part of our fallenness.

[16 : 45] Two things, well, there are a lot more than two, but two things principally characterize our fallenness in Adam. And the first is an unavoidable self-centeredness.

You are self-centered. And so am I. Goes with the territory of being a human being. And in a sense, that's not necessarily all bad because out of that self-centeredness comes a desire for self-preservation.

And it's the basis on which we even defend self-defense. So, it's a good thing that we are self-centered in that regard because we want to perpetuate our own life and save our own life at whatever expense.

that gives us the impetus for living and continuing on. But it also gives us the impetus for being nasty and selfish and unkind and everything else that goes along with it.

That's part of our fallenness. And the other part of that fallenness to which we are all committed is we think with a warped intellect. Our reasoning powers are skewed.

[18 : 00] we reach wrong conclusions about a whole lot of things because we take in information and we assess it but we are always dealing with inadequate information.

You never have the full scoop about anything. So, you reach conclusions on the basis of the information you do have which is sometimes lacking very critical aspects that you don't have.

And it allows you to make wrong decisions wrong conclusions and they issue in wrong actions. And fellas this in a nutshell is what's wrong with the world.

I hope you get the connection. It seems rather obvious. This is what's wrong with the world. It's a fallen world and we are fallen individuals living in it. That's why this fellowship of the mystery what God has done in Christ.

Listen, this for humanity this is God's panacea. This is the only one there is. This is God's remedy.

[19 : 11] It's the only remedy He's provided. And this is why we have no alternative but to insist upon the exclusivity of Jesus Christ or man's problems.

Regardless of how narrow or bigoted or unkind or whatever that makes you look that's what we have to do because Christ and Christ alone is God's answer to a fallen world.

People don't like it but we are charged with the responsibility of preaching it. And I don't know if you're aware of this or not but you probably are. our message is becoming less and less tolerable in our culture.

It is coming into more and more rejection and criticism and it is part and parcel of the political correctness and everything else that goes along with it.

So you can expect the climate to heat up when it comes to what we call religious rights and Christian responsibility etc.

[20 : 21] So to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery the doling out of this mystery this is talking about the giving out of the gospel that's what it's talking about. This fellowship of the mystery is death burial and resurrection of Christ and why it occurred and this is exactly why the apostle Paul said what he did when he wrote to the Corinthians I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Why? Why just that? Because that's it. That's the whole ball game. That's everything. It's all wrapped up in that. And Paul is committed to making all men see the inside and outside of this act.

this redemptive act that was in Christ to make all men see fellowship of the mystery the administration of the sacred secret this sacred secret Paul told us earlier was hidden in the mind and heart of God and never revealed before never revealed for thousands of years until one day God revealed it to this least likely individual in the whole world named Saul of Tarsus and he as much as said to Saul of Tarsus I'm calling you to be the apostle to the Gentiles which in effect was the apostle to the world because you've got a worldwide message now get with it and that's exactly what Paul set out to do and this is what he's talking about when he says in the next verse which from the beginning the sacred secret which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God who created all things by Jesus

Christ to the intent for the express purpose in other words this is what God had in mind all along this was the divine intention and this divine intention was never revealed before it is being revealed now that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places and who are they these are those angelic beings these spirit beings I do not know if they are all around us even now I do not know that they are not spirit beings do not occupy space and time they can be anywhere and they may well be rather than thought of as millions of miles away in outer space they may occupy a dimension that is very close to ours only we can't see them and there is that passage in 2nd

Kings I don't know where it is when you know you've heard me say when you get a few years on you these verses in the Bible move around they don't stay in place well anyway this this Elisha was with his servant and they were being approached by this huge number and they were so vastly outnumbered and Elisha's servant turned to him and said Elas Master how shall we do in other words he was saying how are we going to get out of this look at that army out there and man they're coming our way there's no way we're going to survive this and Elisha said prayed and said Lord open the young man's eyes and God did and the young man saw a vision of a host of heaven far greater than those represented by that physical army and they were there and

[24 : 40] Elisha said those who are with us are far greater than those who are with them so relax son it's going to be okay and that is a representation of the spirit being are they always there I don't know I don't understand that I don't understand the guardian angel concept either all I know is there is a verse there is a verse in Hebrews and I can't pin that down either but it says that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation that's us we are heirs of salvation I don't know how these angels do their thing I don't know what the criteria is I don't know what the assignments are I don't understand any of that but it's an interesting thing to think about so these principalities and powers and those are two different categories two different ranks of angelic beings they are in heavenly places that doesn't necessarily mean the third heaven the dwelling place of

God it simply means in the heavenlies and the Bible refers to heavenlies in three actual segments we ourselves right now exist in what is called the first layer of heaven this is the atmosphere it is the air around us it is the air in which planes fly and birds fly it is the first heaven and there is the second heaven that is stellar it is where way beyond our atmosphere into the weightlessness into the area of planets beyond that's the second heaven and the third heaven is generally described as the dwelling place of the deity but again that's a physical designation and the deity is spirit being so once again I'm in over my head all I know is what I'm telling you but they are the powers and the principalities in the heavenly places and let's turn the page if we may it might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of

God in other words through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ God is putting on display his variegated his manifold wisdom to these spirit beings these angelic powers and the tool that he is using to show them is the church believers individual believers in Christ this means they have already forfeited their position as the A team and this is what I meant when I said we are the B team we are the creation of a lower order we are made a little lower than the angels we do not have the wisdom or the power or the ability that angels have so in a very real sense we are inferior to angels yet we enjoy the benefits of redemption because apparently the redemptive work of

Jesus Christ was accomplished only for human beings was not accomplished for angelic spheres if this be the case and it appears to be the case then there is no redemption for angels they are consigned to their lot and there is no comeback for them like there is for humanity this is all wrapped up in what Paul describes as the manifold wisdom of God in other words the wisdom of God fellas has so many facets to it well you know what a manifold is on a car how it channels power and energy from a central place of gathering to other places to other chambers well the manifold wisdom of God is like like like a like a wheel and we can take this mystery this sacred secret of

Christ and him crucified and put that at the very hub of the wheel that's the center and out from that hub go these several spokes out to the rim just like a bicycle or a tire all of these spokes and each spoke represents a different facet of the wisdom of God and all of these things come together in an incredible display that is going to be made available to the principalities and the powers and God is going to accomplish this through a lesser order of beings and this is why I say we are the B-team and we are going to prevail because of our coach we are going to be victorious in this thing because of the one who is leading us and it will be the angelic spheres the fallen ones who will if you if

[30 : 52] I may use the term are going to have their nose rubbed in it and God is going to use the church to rub Satan's nose in his defeat this is the resolution of the angelic conflict and he's going to use mere flesh and blood human beings to accomplish it wow and verse 11 tells us it is according to the eternal purpose objective goal which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord when he sent him forth the father sent the son to be the savior of the world and Jesus when he was contemplating his death and his separation from his father made that incredible statement he said realizing what was coming what was facing him he said and what what shall

I say what will my response be to what I know is coming down the road by way of a cross and separation from my father in a way that I have never been separated in all eternity what is my response what shall I say father save me from this hour and he as much as said no I can't do that because for this hour came I into the world that's what it was all about now let me tell you fellas this sacred secret which was in the heart and mind of God from eternity past is still very little known very little appreciated matter of fact it doesn't begin to be known even in the Christian community like it should churches and denominations dance all around us and never zero in on it in all too many instances wow it is according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in

Christ Jesus hey can there be any greater objective than this can you think of something to top this this is the ultimate this is the absolute end of the end of everything this is the grand objective this is that besides which nothing else matters everything is all wrapped up in this this is as they say this is the whole nine yards and Paul goes on to say in whom that is in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom in this Christ we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him or by the faithfulness of him through our faith in him and you can read the attendant other readings there and then he's beginning to finish his thought when he says wherefore or therefore or in light of all of this in light of everything

I've told you up to this point Terrell feeling sorry for me don't don't don't take this in the wrong way when he says I desire that you faint not at my tribulations for you Paul is paying horrible price I mean this man is rejected on about every turn by his own countrymen they all consider him a traitor to Judaism? And he's misunderstood by the Greeks. He's threatened.

He's subjected to all kinds of cruel treatment and everything. Why is he willing to go through this? Because he knows what this is all about. This is where his energy and his drive and his determination comes from. He knows what he is about and he knows who is behind it.

[35 : 40] And he doesn't care what the price is to be paid. This is what he meant when he said, so that by life or by death, Christ is magnified in my body. That's all it matters. And man, was he ever paying a price. And you read that litany of things that he experienced and went through. The beatings, the stonings, the shipwreck, the deprivation without food and a drink and one thing after another. Where does this guy get the stamina to keep on with this thing?

Hey, when you know what he knows, you just drive on. And when the time came that he'd laid it all on the line, he was willing to write and say, hey, time of my departure is at hand. You know what?

I've kept the faith. I fought a good fight. I finished the race. There is therefore laid up for me the crown of rejoicing, which the Lord will give me at that day. I'm ready to depart and to be with Christ.

Which is far better. Paid my dues. Fulfilled my obligation. Got no regrets. And I'm ready to go. Last thing that he ever wrote so far as we know, and he wrote it to his young protege by the name of Timothy. And it wouldn't be long, perhaps the next day, when a guard is going to appear at Paul's cell.

Today it's time. And he will escort this apostle out to a little clump of trees. And Paul the apostle will lay his head down, his neck on the chopping block. And a Roman soldier with one fell swoop of the axe will sever his head. And Paul will enter eternity, having fought a good fight. Wow. And it's all because of this secret.

[37 : 45] Joe? So, God did all this, Jesus, so that all these heavenly powers and things up here, God's kind of proven to them that he is the man of faith. He is the leader. He is the most wise. He is the ones deserving of the top spot.

Yep. Yep. That's the manifold wisdom of God. He is using this church, this miracle, so to speak, of Christ and that whole thing to accomplish that, to more or less let them know through that that he is who he is.

Exactly. Exactly. And there will be no doubts. No doubts. It's quite a passage. But you know, it's easy to just read over these. And they're just religious words that don't register.

But let me tell you, fellas, they're far more than that. I mean, what we're talking about is the word of God. So, for this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And he continues on. But I must conclude this now because our food is here and you may have a comment or question. Otherwise, anybody? Roger?

[39 : 13] Yeah. Certainly seems to be. Yeah. Certainly seems to be.

Can we go as far to say that we're pawns in a game? Well, we are. We are kind of. We are kind of. Yeah. And it's a privilege to be a pawn. Yeah. It's a privilege to be a pawn.

And you know what is behind this whole thing is the sovereignty and the wisdom of God. And in Revelation chapter 4, and there may be other places, but this is the only place I know of in the Bible.

And if you can find another, I would greatly appreciate it, but I haven't been able to find it. The only place in the Bible that actually tells us why there is something rather than nothing.

Why there is anything at all that was ever created at all. And it is a testimony that comes from the 4 and 20 elders.

[40 : 24] And I'm sorry, but I haven't been able to identify these either. I don't really know who they are. But the 4 and 20 elders fall down before him who is to be worshipped forever.

And they say, Worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive glory and honor, dominion and majesty and power, for or because thou hast created all things, and for thy good pleasure they were and are created.

God created because He was pleased to do so. He didn't create anybody out of a sense of need or out of a sense of loneliness. Because God is self-sufficient in His being and character.

God has no needs that He cannot and does not meet within His own person. He is a self-sufficient God. And this too is a mind-boggling concept. So, chew on that as you eat your breakfast.