

Sermon #9

Ephesians Sermons

Title: **KNOWING THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL**
Text: Ephesians 1:9-10
Date: Sunday Morning — July 9, 2006
Tape # Z-01b
Readings: *1 Corinthians 2:1-16*

Introduction:

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” Never! The wisdom and power of God are made known to all men in creation, and to some extent even his goodness. But that revelation of God is not enough to satisfy a soul convinced that God is holy, to quieten a conscience convicted of sin, and to soothe a heart bowed down with a load of guilt. A guilty sinner wants to know, “How can I be just with God? How can his justice be satisfied, his wrath appeased, and his anger propitiated? How may I know that he is my God, my Father? How may I be assured that he loves, has pardoned me of all my sin, and accepts me?”

Could you comprehend all God’s great works of creation, were you able at once to “*enter into the treasures of the snow,*” — comprehend “*by what way the light is parted*” and the wind scattered, — were you able to “*bind up the sweet influences of Pleiades*” and “*loose the bands of Orion,*” — give strength to a horse, teach the hawk to fly, and command the eagle to soar on high, — even if you could draw out leviathan with a hook and play with him like a bird, still the question that must be answered before you can live in this world in peace is this — “*How can a man be justified with God? How can he be clean that is born of a woman?*”

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” Never! Even the knowledge of God that you might gain by reading his law is, at best, vague and shadowy. It is true, the holiness of God is set forth in its precepts and the justice of God in its threatenings; but the law can never be more or less than what the Holy Spirit declares it to be — “*the ministration of death and condemnation*” (2 Cor. 3:7-9). The law tells you you must be justified, but can never justify you or show you how you can be justified. It breathes not a sound of mercy to a poor sinner; not one kind, soothing, saving accent falls from its lips. It speaks of death, but not of life; of condemnation, but not of salvation. It asserts the authority, reflects the holiness, and denounces the vengeance of God; but not one beam of hope springing from his mercy, his grace, or his love, does it throw upon the gloomy path of a terrified doomed, damned soul rushing to eternity!

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” Never! — But, blessed be his name, God can be known, known by sinful men, and known with satisfaction, peace and joy. In fact, he is so known by many in this place, to whom he has “*made*

known the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.”

If you will turn with me to Ephesians chapter 1, I want to talk to you about **KNOWING THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL**. My text is Ephesians 1:9-10.

(Ephesians 1:9-10) “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: (10) That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him.”

Proposition: Here the Apostle Paul tells us that there are some people to whom God the Holy Spirit has “*made known the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.*”

If he has not done yet that for you, it is my prayer that he will do so today. If the Lord God has graciously “*made known the mystery of his will*” to you, by the revelation of his grace, I pray that he will allow me this day to show you something of the wonder and greatness of his grace in doing so and flood your soul with the confident joy of faith in Christ.

May he open our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of his Word, as we look at the wonders of the mystery of his will revealed in the gospel and in our hearts by the mighty operations of his grace, the wonders of redemption and grace in Christ...

(Ephesians 1:7-8) “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; (8) Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence”

ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

Redemption by Christ is lavished upon us by all the wisdom and prudence of our God in the revelation of his grace, making known to us “*the mystery of his will,*” making known to us the far reaching effects of God’s redemptive purposes in Christ. Be sure you do not fail to see this. — The revelation or unveiling of his redemptive purpose is entirely according to his sovereign will (vv. 5, 7, 9, 11).

(Ephesians 1:5) “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

(Ephesians 1:7) “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

(Ephesians 1:9) “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.”

(Ephesians 1:11) “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

HIS FRIENDS

The fact that our God and Savior has made known to us the mystery of his will assures us that he has made us his friends, just as he did Abraham (John 15:14-16).

(John 15:14-16) “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. (15) Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (16) Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

When God the Holy Spirit gives sinners faith in Christ, he makes known the mystery of his will, reveals the eternal secrets of God’s heart to his children. And the revelation of the mystery of his will is the God-given assurance of our election and redemption in Christ. He has revealed these secret things to us, “*that we may do all the words of his law*” (Deu 29:29), that we may walk in the Spirit, that we may live by faith, and grow in the grace and knowledge of his Son Jesus Christ.

Now, let’s look at verses 9 and 10. We will concentrate on verse 9 this morning and look more closely at verse 10 on Tuesday, the Lord willing.

(Ephesians 1:9-10) “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: (10) That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”

Divisions: The outline that we will follow will take the form of three questions:

1. What is the mystery of his will?
2. What is the fullness of times spoken of in verse ten?
3. What is the gathering together of all things in Christ?

THE MYSTERY

What is the mystery of his will? Whatever the mystery of his will is, it is something that has been and is being revealed to us. In other words, it is something that God the Holy Spirit has made known by the revelation of Christ in us, something that is spiritually discerned and understood by the gift of his grace.

(Ephesians 1:9) “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.”

The mystery revealed is something that at one time was secret, or hidden, but now is revealed in Christ. The term “*mystery*” refers to God’s secret purpose, once hidden, but now revealed. Paul is talking about something that we did not know and could not know until it was revealed to us and in us, but something that is now known and understood by all who are born of God and taught of him.

Paul is telling us that the gospel of our salvation, is the unveiling a divine secret. It is like the reading of a will (Heb. 9:14-28). The word “*mystery*” means a secret, something into which we must be initiated. It is something, which being undiscoverable by us, can be known only as it is revealed. In this sense the gospel is a mystery. In fact, though the Word of God is written in simple language, everything written in the Book of God is a mystery that lies beyond the reach of human understanding. If you and I understand anything God has revealed in his Word, it must be revealed in our hearts by his Spirit in the experience of grace.

This word, “*mystery*,” is found 22 times in the New Testament. It is always related to the unveiling of God’s redemptive purpose in Christ.

In **Romans 16** the mystery of his will is clearly identified as the gospel of Christ which is being revealed unto all nations by preaching.

(Romans 16:25-26) “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, (26) But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”

In **1 Corinthians 2** the Holy Spirit tells us that the gospel of Christ, the mystery of his will reaches to the unveiling of what God has prepared for those his elect.

(1 Corinthians 2:1-11) “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. (4) And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: (5) That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (6) Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: (7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: (8) Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (9) But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (10) But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (11) For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”

Ephesians 3 declares that the mystery of Christ refers to the fact that Jew and Gentile are one in Christ, that all who trust the Son of God are one in him and one with him, “*heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.*”

(Ephesians 3:1-10) “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, (2) If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: (3) How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, (4) Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) (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; (6) That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: (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. (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; (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: (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.”

Although Israel was typically God’s covenant people in the Old Testament, it was never God’s purpose to save none but Jews. That physical nation was made the beneficiary of God’s goodness that the blessing of grace might be bestowed upon all God’s elect scattered among the nations of the world. God plainly told Abraham that his blessing upon him was that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). And the Apostle Paul tells us that the blessing of Abraham is the gift of God’s Spirit in the new birth, the gift of God’s saving grace flowing to chosen sinners in the fountain of Christ’s precious blood (Gal. 3:13-14).

(Galatians 3:13-14) “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: (14) That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

The physical nation of Israel was only typical of another nation, a chosen, holy nation and royal priesthood, called “*the Israel of God*” (1 Pet. 2:7-9; Gal. 6:16), which is the church of God. This holy, spiritual nation is made up of God’s elect whom he scattered in his wrath but gathers by his grace out of every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue.

Along this same line, in **Ephesians 5**, we see that this mystery of the gospel which is now revealed to us the assurance of God’s eternal purpose of grace concerning his church. It is the revelation of what God Almighty has done and will do for us.

(Ephesians 5:25-32) “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (26) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (28) So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth

himself. (29) For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: (30) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. (31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

I pray for you and for myself, as Paul did for these Ephesian saints, that God may grant us eyes to see the wonders of his grace and love in the redemption of our souls by Christ, that we “*might be filled with all the fulness of God*” (Eph.1:17-19; 3:14-19).

(Ephesians 1:17-19) “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: (18) The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, (19) And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,”

(Ephesians 3:14-19) “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, (16) That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; (17) That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; (19) And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

All these things, revealed in Holy Scripture and proclaimed in the gospel, are mysteries hidden from men “*in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.*” And, until God the Holy Spirit reveals them in the sweet experience of grace, no matter how clearly they are preached, explained and illustrated, they will remain a mystery. But to the heaven born soul, to the sinner called and taught of God, as Christ is revealed with the gift of faith, the mystery is revealed (John 6:45, 47; 1 Cor. 2:1-7, 12-15; Gal. 1:15-16).

(John 6:45) “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”

(John 6:47) “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”

(1 Corinthians 2:1-7) “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. (4) And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: (5) That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (6) Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: (7) But we

speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.”

(1 Corinthians 2:12-15) “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. (13) Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (14) But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. (15) But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.”

(Galatians 1:15-16) “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called *me* by his grace, (16) To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.”

Oh, may God “*give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.*”

GOD’S PURPOSE OF GRACE

Let’s go back to Ephesians 1. The mystery spoken of in verse 9, which God the Holy Spirit makes known in the revelation of grace is God’s eternal purpose of grace in Christ. The gospel reveals the mystery of God and of Christ. The doctrine of the gospel sets before us “*the mysteries of the kingdom of God*” (Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10). The mystery of his will which is revealed to God’s elect in the experience of his grace, the mystery revealed to and apprehended by faith in Christ, specifically makes known...

- **Our eternal union with Christ our Covenant Head, and our election, predestination, and acceptance in him before the world was made** (Eph. 1:3-6; Rom. 8:28-30).
- **Our redemption by Christ, our incarnate God** (Eph. 1:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:15-16).

(1 Timothy 3:15-16) “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (16) And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

- **And our effectual call by God the Holy Spirit, assuring us of resurrection glory with Christ** (Eph. 1:13-14).

(Ephesians 1:13-14) “In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, (14) Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

- **The mystery of God’s will that is manifestly revealed to his saints is the mystery of the new creation** (Col. 1:26-29; 2 Cor. 5:17).

(Colossians 1:26-29) “*Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (27) To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: (28) Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: (29) Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

All of this great work of grace is “*according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself.*” The Lord God has chosen to whom he will make known the wondrous mystery of his grace, when he will make it known, and the means by which he will make it known. — The preaching of the gospel!

THE FULNESS OF TIMES

Now, look at verse 10 just briefly.

(Ephesians 1:10) “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”

What is “*the dispensation of the fullness of times*”? The word “*dispensation*” does not refer to dispensationalism. It simply means “the administration,” “the economy,” or “the stewardship,” of the fullness of times. It refers to the management of household. “*The dispensation of the fullness of times*” is simply the execution of God’s eternal purpose in time, the accomplishment in time of that which God purposed in eternity. Here, it specifically refers to the final, full accomplishment of redemption and grace by Christ.

As I said at the beginning, I hope to preach from verse 10 Tuesday night. For now, let me simply show you that there is a time appointed, called, “*the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:21). **In that great day, our Lord Jesus Christ shall at last redeem, or deliver God’s creation from the curse and all the consequences of sin** (2 Pet. 3:11-13; Rom. 8:18-23).

(Romans 8:18-23) “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (20) For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, (21) Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from

the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (23) And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.”

(2 Peter 3:11-13) “*Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, (12) Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (13) Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

As a result of our Savior’s redemption work this world shall be purged of all sin and restored to its pristine beauty. Not so much as a blade of grass shall be allowed to bear the curse brought upon it by sin. And when all things are created new, righteousness shall again flourish in the earth! The slime of the serpent’s trail shall not be found in God’s creation.

THE GATHERING TOGETHER

But what is the gathering together of all things in Christ?

(Ephesians 1:10) “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”

The words “*gather together*,” literally mean “gather together again.” Here the Spirit of God assures us that all things will be reunited in Christ, all things in heaven and things in earth. Primarily he is talking about the gathering of all God’s elect, but he includes the whole of God’s creation. There is a similar statement in Colossians 1, where Paul is also speaking about this great mystery God has made known to us by the gospel, and assures us of the ultimate glory of Christ our Redeemer in all things.

(Colossians 1:19-20) “For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell; (20) And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven.”

When our Lord Jesus Christ comes in his glory and makes all things new, there will be gathering together of all things in heaven and earth, a complete reconciliation of all things “*in him, even in him*,” to the glory of God. What a day that will be! No wonder John closes the Book of God with this prayer — “*Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!*”

Amen.