

God's Most Glorious Work

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:3-10; 4:11-16

Preached on: Sunday, March 19, 2017

Providence Church

2146 Buford Hwy

Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the second chapter of Ephesians. I mentioned earlier we are continuing a topical series. If you are new to Providence, our normal pattern is to work, or actually if you noticed our sign, it says, "Book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse." That's normally how we do it, so pardon me that we are departing from that for a period of time. But it's an important topic we want to look at and, of course, we want to look at what God's word says whenever we deal with a topic. So we are looking at the issue of discipling and discipleship and trying to get a focus on that as a church body and so we have been looking at that for a number of weeks. We've been looking at a theology of discipleship, starting back in Genesis, looking at how we were created. Several weeks ago in Genesis 1:26 and 27, to be the image and likeness of God; to be like him in relationship is part of what that means, the image of God. It's a very broad concept but at least a major part of it is that as well, that we are, as God is Triune and he says, "Let Us make man in Our image," so he makes man male and female, separate persons, to relate to one another in a way that the separate, distinct persons of the Godhead relate in one God.

So we talked about that and we saw that sin is the great divider, the great problem that keeps us from being in relationship as we ought to be. And we looked last week from Ephesians 2 and Colossians 1 at the reconciling power of the cross. So today I want us to kind of continue that flow of thought. We're going to actually do something a little unique, we're going to look at a passage in Ephesians 2, a passage in Ephesians 3, and a passage in Ephesians 4. So we're not going to really be going very deep into them, we're going to look at sort of the big picture of what's happening here.

But we're really looking at the question of what is the church, and one of the things that is true today is that evangelicalism as a whole is struggling with a low view of the church. A low view of the church. That is, the church is not seen by those who profess to be Bible believing Christians today as a thing of affection and glory as it is in the New Testament, as it is in the Bible. You sort of see this in even the way that worship services are carried on, kind of like it's no big deal, from the way that people dress to... I'm not saying that that's the biggest thing in the world but all these things kind of come together to say, hey, it seems like the goal of so many in leading worship is to say, "It's no big deal. We're no different than you unbelievers. Come in. We'll use your music. We're going to make it look like a place that you would feel comfortable," and so let's really work on the seeker

and the focus is on the seeker being welcomed and there is a loss of reverence, there is a loss of holiness, and there is really not, it's not a blessing to those that come in in many ways because the New Testament pictures that when unbelievers come in among believers, they are to be welcomed, of course, and it is our desire to welcome everyone, but the one that we most want to welcome is God himself. We're here to worship the living God and so as it says in 1 Corinthians 12, when an unbeliever comes into a place where the people are truly worshipping God, the Spirit of God is at work, the unbeliever is struck by the holiness of God and falls on his face and says, "Truly God is among you." That's what we would pray would happen, something spiritually would happen in the heart of the seeker who comes to our church. "Truly God is among you." And that is all contributed to this sense of kind of a low view of the church. I think it's one of the factors that attracts some evangelicals to Catholicism in these days, at least the Catholics have a high view of the church. It's a misguided view but it's one area where the weakness of it, modern evangelicalism, is exposed.

And even in our circles, even in more biblical circles, Reformed circles, Bible believing teaching circles, we have a struggle with having a high enough view of the church. It's something that I struggle with as a pastor, myself. And it really doesn't make sense as a pastor to have a low view of the church. It's like not very smart, "It's not a big deal whether you come or not. It's just not a big deal whether you give or not. That's not a big deal either." Of course, that doesn't make sense practically but it doesn't really matter what I think either way, it matters what God says and the reality is God says the church is something very precious to him. In fact, the title of the message is "God's Most Glorious Work," and I want to submit to you that God's most glorious work in all of the universe, the most glorious and beautiful thing that God has done and is doing in all the universe is building his church. I think that's what the Scriptures teach and the passage that we are going to look at later in Ephesians 3, I think is saying that.

But we struggle with a low view of the church because we look around us and we see other people like us. You know, when you're like me, you're not very impressive and so, then, I look around and I say, "Well, is it really that big a deal that God is doing that? Look." And C. S. Lewis has a helpful section in his book "The Screwtape Letters. The Screwtape Letters" is a book he writes sort of imagining a conversation, a series of letters between two demons. So you've got to get your mind around this. It's one demon writing to another demon and the demon writing is Screwtape and he's writing to his nephew, Demon Wormwood. And what he's doing is he is instructing his nephew in how to be a good demon, how to be a good deceiver, how to deceive his patient, and the patient that he is talking about in the letter is a young man whom Wormwood is trying to keep from faith, and then once he becomes a Christian, he's trying to mess up in his faith. So you see the premise of the book.

So Screwtape writes this letter, finding out after Wormwood has told him that his patient has become a Christian and so he says, "I note with grave displeasure that your patient has become a Christian. Do not indulge the hope that you will escape the usual penalties. I trust you would hardly even wish to do so in your better moments. In the meantime, we must make the best of the situation. There is no need to despair. Hundreds of these adult

converts have been messed up," and I'm changing the wording around a little bit here to help out with the theology of the point. But let me just jump on down to the next part I want to get to. He says, "One of our greatest allies at present is the church itself. In messing with this new Christian, one of the greatest allies we have is the church itself." Now, listen to what he says next. This is a demon talking to another demon. "One of our greatest allies at present is the church itself. Do not misunderstand me, I do not mean the church as we see her, spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy, but fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans." The church as it is versus the church that we see. He goes on to talk about, you know, this new Christian is going to see people with oily complexions, double chins, that sing off key, whose boots squeak, and he's not going to be that impressed. He's not going to understand it when he sees that person that he's looking down on, that the demon may see there a great warrior in the army of God. We don't see things as they are.

One of the purposes in the book of Ephesians is to elevate the view of God's people of the church. One of the major themes in the book is the dignity and glory of the church, now, as it reflects, of course, the greater dignity and glory of the head of the church, Jesus Christ. But if we have a right view of the church, we will have a high view of the church. That's the view that God has.

As we read earlier, it's the church that Jesus himself is building. It's the church that in Acts 20:28 we are told when Paul tells the Ephesian elders, "Be on guard for yourselves and also the entire flock of God among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the flock of God which He purchased with His own blood." The church is precious to God and so we want to have a biblical view of the church and realize that when you and I become a follower of Jesus Christ, we are to unite with the church and we are called then to be a part of building the church. We are called to be a coworker, all by God's grace, all through God's power, all according to his word, but we are called to be laborers in building upon the greatest work the universe has ever seen. When you and I love one another, when we minister to one another, we are doing the most noble and glorious thing that any human being can be a part of. We need to see it like that.

So what I want us to do, I'm going to read, first of all, the Ephesians 2 passage. We're going to read it. We'll talk about it. Then we'll move into the chapter 3 section. We're going to move into a little section of chapter 3 and another little section of chapter 4. Let's read Ephesians 2:11-22 and the question I want you to think about as we read this is: what is this telling us about the dignity and the glory of the church? Each passage, okay? Ephesians 2:11. We looked at these verses, particularly verses 11 to 16 last week. We'll read them in context and you'll see as we get past that, I want you to focus in on verses 18 to 22. Ephesians 2:11,

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands-- 12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel,

and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you now might open the eyes of our hearts, open our understanding, and grant that we might truly receive and believe and obey your word for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, I want us to look at three things. We're basically looking at three things that the church is. The glory of the church is seen in three ways, I think, in Ephesians 2. Then we're going to actually jump ahead to chapter 4 for our second point, and then come back to chapter 3 for our third point. So there are three points and the first point to understand the glory of the church, God's most glorious work is that he, first of all, says that the church is God's temple. So the first point is: the beauty of God's temple. The beauty of God's temple. To understand the glory of the church, we have to understand the beauty of God's temple.

There after he talks about the reconciliation that has happened and we saw last week that the reconciliation that has happened in Ephesians 2, the same words are used that are used in Colossians 1 to speak of our reconciliation to God. The same forceful words for where we were, separate, excluded, are now used here, and then the words "reconcile" are used in the same places. The cross reconciles us to God and to one another. It brings us back across the chasm so that we can be reconciled to one another. Sin had separated us from God, sin separates us from one another, it breeds division and distance. The cross brings back together. The cross removes the distance and makes us one.

Now, having said that, he says, "Now do you understand that you used to be separate from the kingdom of God, you were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, you had no hope, you were without God in the world, and now you are the temple." Really, it's extraordinary. Many commentators

believe that when he's talking about the dividing wall of hostility in verse 14, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall," some translations say "the dividing wall of hostility," that this is speaking possibly of the wall around the temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of women. The way that the temple was set up, remember, you had the most holy place or the Holy of Holies which only the high priest could enter once a year, then you have the holy place which is the court of the priests, only priests can go into the holy place, then outside of the holy place you have the court of Israel where the men of Israel can go. Now we're talking about Herod's Temple. This is the way Herod's Temple was set up. And outside the court of Israel you had the court of women, and the women of Israel could go into the court of the women. So outside of the court of the women, outside of the court of Israel, outside of the court of the priests, outside of the Holy of Holies, way out on the outer edge of the temple you had a wall around it and enclosed inside of that wall was another wall and that outer court was the court of the Gentiles. And the Gentiles could come close to the temple but they could never go into the temple to see the sacrifices, they could never walk into that. In fact, there were signs around and they found signs like this in excavating around the temple, a sign that says, basically the warning is, "If you proceed," and it would be written in Greek and Latin, "If you proceed, if you're not an Israelite and you proceed beyond this border, you are responsible for your own execution which will ensue." For a Gentile to walk past into the court of the women was the death penalty and the Jews would kill them immediately. And this was something that the Romans understood and allowed because the Jews were always rebelling and they were just trying to keep them happy, basically.

So this was the dividing wall of hostility. Some theologians think this is what's being talked about. So think about the irony. A Gentile could not even approach the real temple, because the temple really is, the essential temple, the court is the Holy of Holies and the holy place, and then just outside of that where the altar is for sacrifice, the Gentile was separated from the presence of God by this barrier. "Now," he says, "you Gentiles," verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." You are of God's family. You have been brought into the family room. But he goes on to say, you are built, not just God's household, the family room, you are actually God's house. You are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." The whole building is being built up, "in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God." He says not only you couldn't come near the temple, now you are the temple with the Jews. Every believer who has repented and placed his faith in Christ is a part of the temple of God. This was the glorious thing that God was doing in planning throughout all of redemptive history, looking to the day when he would make his people his temple. And the temple, so, was just a type of that. The tabernacle before, a type of that.

You know, you think about the glory of Solomon's Temple, Herod's Temple had its own sort of glory but it was basically built by Herod and so comparatively Solomon's Temple, that was the glorious temple for the Israelites. You know, Solomon, the son of David. Ted read earlier from 1 Chronicles 29, David is wanting to build the temple. God won't let him, he has blood on his hands. The son of David will build the temple which

ultimately is depicting the true son of David who builds the temple. Jesus said, "I will build my church." The church is the temple, you see.

So he always intended to build his temple with stones from every tribe and nation and kindred and as 1 Peter 2 says, you are living stones being built into a place of worship for God. How amazing. Solomon's Temple was beautiful, it was glorious. In 1 Kings 7, the last verse of that chapter we read, "Solomon finished the work," and, man, he was enabled by God to be so wise, so skillful, and he had skillful craftsman, Hiram working with him, and this temple was fantastic. They finished the work and then in chapter 8, they bring the ark of the covenant in and it says that as soon the priests left the Holy of Holies having left the ark of the covenant, they come out of the holy place, the glory cloud filled the temple so that they could not go back in to do their jobs. How pleased God was when Solomon's Temple was completed. What a thing of glory and beauty. That pales in comparison to the glory and beauty of the temple that is present here today right now. You are a living stone built by God. We, a local expression of the church of God, we are his temple. In his glory, he is more delighted to dwell, he is more delighted when he looks down on this building. Now, I'm not talking about the building itself, I'm talking about you and me and everyone who names the name of Jesus. God is more delighted to look down on this building by far than he was to look upon Solomon's building. You and I are building that when we minister to one another. We are helping one another to become more fashioned into the perfect stone he's making us to be, the perfect building block in what he's doing.

That's the beauty of the temple of God. This is why in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 17 when he is dealing with divisiveness in the body of Christ, remember the Corinthians are dealing with divisions, "I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos." Paul tells them in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, he says, "Do you not understand that you," this is one of those y'all's again, it's you plural, "Do you not understand that you," plural, "are the temple of God and that if any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him." He is saying, "If you mess with the building that I have made and am making, I will mess with you." That's how precious the temple is, how beautiful the temple is. That's what we're doing every time we gather together to worship.

So when we come to worship together, we are coming together, uniting our hearts as a temple. You don't feel like coming to church, you are depressed, isn't it funny how in the times when we don't feel like coming to church are the times we need to go to church the most. I mean, if you're sick and you've got the flu, stay home. Don't spread the wealth on that. That's loving your brothers and sisters, isn't it? But there are times where we just don't feel, we feel listless, we feel down in the dumps. "I don't think I have anything to offer." Well, that's when you need to be there worshipping God and you just come and be the best, give the best worship that you can by God's grace asking him, and just come together with the people of God and see if the Lord doesn't come down and minister to you that day but also allow you to minister to others, to serve others. Just coming is serving others.

The beauty of God's temple. Now, we could stay there a long time but we can't today. We're going to move on to chapter 4 and we are going to see another metaphor that the Lord uses to show us and to lift and elevate our view of the church. We're not just God's temple but what we see in verses 11 to 16, that the church is Christ's body. So the second point, we looked at the beauty of God's temple, that was our first point, the second point is the glory of Christ's body, Ephesians 4:11-16. Ephesians 4:11,

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Now, a very familiar term, the church is the body of Christ and sometimes these things become so familiar that we lose the appropriate sense of awe and wonder. Here as in other places in the New Testament, the church is called the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12, we are members of one another. We are part of the body. One member suffers, all members suffer. Here he's basically drawing a picture for us, a word picture, that as the leaders of the church, the ministers of the church minister the word, that the saints are equipped and the saints work together. Chapter 2, we saw the temple, we worship together. Chapter 4, we're seeing we work together. The word makes us work together. It helps us to develop our gifts, to use our gifts, and as we work together serving one another, what happens he's saying is we are growing up to be a visible manifestation of Christ.

Now, that is staggering. What a high calling. I mean, think about the body of Christ, we are the body of Christ in the same way, think about when God left the glory of heaven and entered into time and space, into the womb of Mary. He is born. She holds in her arms God Incarnate. John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." John says to look at Jesus, though he had no stately form or majesty as Isaiah says, it wasn't his outward appearance that was just especially attractive. No, it wasn't that but to look at the man, Christ Jesus, and to, as John says in 1 John, to hear him, to see him, to behold him, what our hands have touched, handled, he says, concerning the word of life. We heard. We saw. We beheld. We looked into. We touched. And we know that he is God himself, God in flesh.

You think about in the temple when they took the firstborn as the Old Testament told them to do, to be dedicated, and Simeon and Anna, an old prophet and an old prophetess, were daily in the temple encouraging people and looking for the salvation of Israel. Simeon lays eyes upon the baby. He sees this young couple walk in, he sees that little baby and he sees, and he would say as he held that little baby, "I have now seen your salvation, O God. I can depart in peace." To see the physical little body of Jesus was to see God. As the hymn writer says, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail incarnate deity. Jesus man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel." God with us. To have seen the little boy, to have seen the little toddler, Jesus, would have been to see a toddler who had no rebellion. That would be neat to see that, wouldn't it? No defiance. Never sinned. Even as an infant, his crying wouldn't have had the same tone that your and my crying did. Our crying, "Somebody, get to me now!" Isn't that what it sounds like? "I don't like what you're doing! You're wrong!" It's coming out somehow through that little infant's mind, it's coming out. Not in Jesus. He was tempted in every way yet without sin. He experienced all that we experience. He had to cry, he had to cry but it was a different tone.

Those people that saw the 12-year-old Jesus at the temple, the priests and teachers of the law who were confounded by his wisdom. There they had before them a 12-year-old and he was teaching them things and confounding them. What were they seeing? They were seeing God in the flesh.

Or in his ministry, have you not thought before, Christian, how it must've been to be able to look into the eyes of Christ? To feel the touch of his hand as the leper, remember the leper that came to him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can heal me." And Jesus said, "I am willing," and touched him and he was cleansed. He touched the leper. To hear his voice. To hear with your own ears the audible voice of Jesus as people did, because when he was in the days of his incarnation, when he was here with us still incarnated in heaven in his glorious resurrection body, but when he was in his body in his first coming before his resurrection and glorification, to hear him, his vocal cords, his lungs, his tongue, his lips forming the words. People heard him speak and they said things like this, remember in Matthew 7, "the crowds marveled at his teaching, for here is a man who teaches with authority." There is something about the command of his voice.

Or the temple guards, remember they were sent to arrest him in John 7. The Pharisees and the chief priests send them to arrest Jesus, "Go, arrest him. We want to put him on trial now." And they go and they come back empty-handed and the chief priests say to them, "Why have you not brought him back?" And the temple guards, those who were his opponents say, "Never did a man speak as this man speaks."

Or the disciples who heard his voice so many times but they heard his voice on one fateful day when they found themselves imperiled thinking they were about to die, the sea was crashing against the boat and they heard the man, Christ Jesus say, "Peace. Be still." And the wind and the waves obeyed him instantly and the disciples said to one another, "What manner of man is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

Or for those that heard his voice standing by a tomb, the place of death, a place of mourning, when he uttered those three words, "Lazarus, come forth!" into death and death could not resist the power of his voice. And Lazarus came forth alive.

Or to hear the words on that early morning when the woman was weeping, to hear him call your name, "Mary," and Mary Magdalene knew it was her Lord. What an amazing thing to be in the presence of the physical body of Christ.

Now, he's saying that in the economy of God in the plan of redemption, that he has now chosen to fill his people with his Spirit and to make us his body. People say, "I would have loved to have heard his voice." Yes, of course, but the closest thing that they will ever experience to it and something that is very close and a lot closer than we imagine, is to see the body of Christ ministering and using our gifts, they are seeing Jesus. We are the visible manifestation of the second person of the Godhead. That's what he's saying.

What a high calling. So when you and I use our gifts, when we serve one another, when we work together, when we are loving one another, we are manifesting Christ. We talked about this a while back when we were talking about spiritual gifts. I can't remember how many months ago it was. You know, in Romans 12 you have a list of gifts, you have a list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, but in Romans 12, you have like the gift of administration, the gift of teaching, the gift of prophecy, the gift of service, the gift of giving, the gift of mercy, and there is one other one. Anyway, all seven gifts there, basically we are given different gifts and different perspectives that God gives us by the Spirit so when we see a problem and a need, we come at it with a different approach. The person with the gift of, I use the illustration and I'll go ahead and just quickly do it because I've got to. Sorry if you were here before. Just be reminded of it. I shouldn't even have told you. You wouldn't have remembered that you heard it from me, you would just think, "Oh, that's like the thing we heard from the other guy." I heard the illustration of eight Christians who were having dinner together and one of them is bringing in the main dish and she drops it and it breaks on the floor and the other seven people each have those seven gifts, you know, each a different sort of motivational spiritual gift. So what happens when that falls? Well, the person with the gift of administration says, "Bob, if you'll go get a mop and, Sally, you get a broom and, Jim, if you'll call for pizza." The person with the gift of giving says, "I've got plenty of money. Don't worry about it. I will pay for the pizza. I'm happy to do it." The person with the gift of service has already got half of it cleaned up. You know, it's just that kind of thing. Mercy, "Oh, I know you feel terrible about this. I'm so sorry you did that." The gift of teaching, "I think what happened was you had it a little weighted on one side and if you held it in the right place, it would have been okay." The gift of prophecy, "You should be more careful."

Now, think about that. When that happens, the person actually receives the ministry of all of those gifts. Someone to weep with them, I mean, figuratively. You shouldn't really weep over that meal, right? Pizza is pretty good. But all the gifts are basically aspects of the glory of the person who exhibited all those gifts in perfection, Jesus Christ, and so that as we minister together, we are making visible the beauty of Christ. And we're also supposed to learn from each other, we are not supposed to just stay in our gift only, we're

supposed to learn to be, if you are a prophet, you're supposed to learn to be more merciful and to be a better servant. And if you're an administrator, you're supposed to learn to be a servant too. And we are supposed to learn all those things, to be more like Jesus. But the glory of that, and so when unbelievers see us, this is one of the ways that the world sees the glory of Christ. When they see a Christian, they know at their workplace, in their family suffering and they see the body move into that situation and meet various needs and with various gifts, what they are seeing is, though they cannot understand it and the Spirit has to open their eyes to really receive it in a saving way, but they are seeing a visible testimony of the glory of Jesus Christ. That's what he's saying. Now, doesn't that elevate your view of making that phone call? Baking that casserole? It's a part of unveiling the glory of our Savior. He delights in it. We are his body.

Now, the glory of Christ's body. The third point, we're going to look back in chapter 3. We've looked at the beauty of God's temple, the glory of Christ's body, to see just the most glorious work of all is the church. Now in chapter 3, verses 1 to 10, we see the third point: the majesty of God's wisdom. The majesty of God's wisdom. The supremacy, the glory of his wisdom. The majesty of God's wisdom. Now, what we're going to see here is that Paul is basically going to talk about the mystery of Christ. I'm going to read the passage in a moment. I want to kind of help us because it's a little bit technical as we go through it and we don't have time to really parse it carefully out, but essentially what he's saying is, "Listen," he's reminding the Gentiles, "I told you now you are a part of the temple of God. You have been reconciled by the cross. You are a part of his house. I'm going to tell you in a little bit that you're his body but I want to tell you this now, that you understand that I am the apostle to the Gentiles. I was the one that God chose to make known the riches of Christ to those outside of Israel. And then in doing that, I am unveiling a mystery." Now, a mystery biblically, the word "mysterion," it means "that which was hidden in the past in the secret counsel of God but is now made known." It's not like a mystery that hasn't been figured out, like a mystery novel. It's not that way, it's something that was hidden but is now fully declared and made known. The mystery. And he said, "Listen, I'm declaring the ministry." What was the ministry? You'll see it as we read it. The mystery is that God always intended to save all people through the same avenue, through Christ; that he was always building a temple that was Jew and Gentile together, he was always making a body that would be Jew and Gentile together, and he was going to unite those who were separated by hostility, by the dividing wall of hostility. He's going to bring them in one man to himself. That's the mystery.

Now look with me as we read it and you'll see that unfold. Chapter 3, verse 1,

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific [here's the mystery], that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and

fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

He is saying, as I just said, the mystery is that we are all going to come to God one way. The mystery is that he was going to reconcile Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ and make us one. He was going to reconcile those who have been separated by sin through Christ and make us one. And that the reconciling of us before God and to one another is something that God was using this vehicle to declare his glory and the glory of his wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. He's saying that the demons themselves, the angels themselves, that one of God's purposes in reconciling us to each other and to himself is to show the glory of his manifold wisdom. Manifold wisdom, the idea is variegated, manifold. It was used for a piece of art that had lots of different color. You've seen a beautiful work of art and the color is just dazzling. He's saying this is essentially the kind of the word he's trying to describe. The manifold wisdom of God, God's multifaceted wisdom, God's gloriously beautiful wisdom would be set on display and the angels and the demons in the heavenly places would see it, and where do they see God's glory most supremely, the greatest work of all, is in the church, particularly when we are reconciled to one another. That is the thing that causes them the most amazement.

I want to read to you from Charles Hodge. He speaks of this in his commentary on Ephesians 3. He says that essentially the brightest display of the divine perfections, he's saying, is made in this act of bringing Jew and Gentile together, bringing diverse people together at the cross. This is the brightest display of the divine perfections. "This gives us our highest conception of the dignity of the church." Listen to this, "The works of God manifest his glory by being what they are. It is because the universe is so vast, the heavens so glorious, the earth so beautiful, that they reveal the boundless affluence of their Maker. If then it is through the church that God designs specially to manifest to the highest order of intelligence." Did you get that? If God is choosing to manifest to the highest order of intelligence, the demons and the angels, if he is basically showing them through the church, "his infinite power, grace and wisdom, then the church in her consummation must be the most glorious of all his works." Those who have the greatest ability to discern and to taste. It's like, you know, you show me a piece of art, I can appreciate it at some level, listen to music, I love music, but if someone has a discerning ear, they can tell you, "That was excellent, or that, look at the brushstrokes, look at the color." You see, a person that is more skilled, an artist can tell you that.

The principalities and powers, the angels of God, they see the glory of his work in the church. Now, think about that. I remember the first time I saw the Grand Canyon. Patti and I and the kids saw the Grand Canyon. It's been about 10 years, 12 years ago. You

hear about it and you see pictures of it. It's really one of those things when somebody says you can't do justice to it with a picture, it's true about the Grand Canyon. I remember walking up and it's one of those, it literally was breathtaking, and stood there in stunned silence just pondering and looking at the vastness of it. One of God's glorious works. One of God's glorious works.

Think about this, that when two believers deal with sin because we are all going to sin against each other, sin is inevitable, and when there is division between two believers in the body of Christ, and when sometimes that situation goes from bad to worse, doesn't it? It's not accidental that the idea of sin and forgiveness in the New Testament is the idea of debt. To forgive is to release a debt, to no longer count that debt on the balance sheet. Think about a debt that you just ignore: credit card statement. Do you ignore it? The credit card people don't ignore it, do they? They slap that late fee on you and then the interest begins accruing and isn't it amazing the interest rates they have? And before long, a small debt becomes a big debt. It can feel insurmountable and you want to ignore it because you don't want to think about it. How much more is it true when divisions happen in the body and they are untended? Whether they are real offenses or perceived offenses, if they are not resolved, they are not reconciled, they continue to divide and separate. What he's saying is that when you and I moved by the Spirit of God, walking in the truth of God, pursue peace, chase after it as Hebrews 12:15 says, chase after peace and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord, or as Ephesians 4:3, the next chapter here says, "Be diligent to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," literally, "Speed up, hasten to guard the peace, the unity of the Spirit." When you and I reconcile, when we make peace among one another, when we put down the offenses and we call sin what it is, we don't just ignore it or pretend that the debt is not there, no, we deal with it. This is why Matthew 18 says, "If your brother sins, go to him and show him his fault." Matthew 5:23 says, "If you remember that your brother has aught against you when you are offering a sacrifice," in Jerusalem, you've gone all the way to Jerusalem to offer your sacrifice, you've gone down the mountain, up the mountain, across the miles and you are there offering your sacrifice and you remember that your brother has aught against you, Jesus says, "Leave your gift at the altar. Go home and be reconciled to your brother. Then come back and offer your gift." That's how important reconciliation is to God.

He says, "Do that." Now, when that happens, though, when we actually do what he says and we speak the truth in love, and when there is reconciliation, when real forgiveness happens, he's saying that when real forgiveness happens and when real love happens, it takes the angels' breath away. The angels stand in stunned silence at the wisdom of Almighty God. "How can he reconcile these creatures of dust that have sinned against each other and look at what he's doing?" The demons see and tremble.

I want to read to you a story in conclusion here. Corrie ten Boom, she was a lady, a Dutch lady who along with her sister, were unmarried adult women who lived with their father in Holland during World War II. The book "The Hiding Place," the movie, "The Hiding Place," is about their lives, the true story of their ministry to Jews, and protecting Jews. They were Christians. They loved Jesus Christ. And so they did what they could to

deliver Jews from the threat of death in the concentration camps. They hid them in their house until they could then be taken to the next place and then escape the tyranny of Nazi Germany and Hitler's final solution. Well, then later, they were discovered. They were betrayed and Corrie and her sister and her father went to the concentration camp and her sister and her father died in the concentration camp. Corrie experienced indescribable agony and yet God sustained her.

Now, the story I'm going to read you is about forgiveness and it's in her own words. The power of God's forgiveness. The breathtaking power and glory of reconciliation. The war ended in 1945. She was set free when the war ended. This is 1947, two years later.

"It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken. They were moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. It was the truth that they needed most to hear in that bitter bombed-out land and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I like to think that's where forgiven sins were thrown. 'When we confess our sins,' I said, 'God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever.'

"The solemn faces stared back at me not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

"And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat he was wearing; the next moment, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the room, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

"Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent. Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out, 'A fine message, Fraulein. How good it is to know that as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea.' And I who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course. How could he remember one prisoner among thousands of women, but I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying. 'I was a guard in there.' No, he did not remember me. 'But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, will you forgive me?' Again, the hand came out.

"And I stood there — I whose sins had every day to be forgiven — and could not. Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

"It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

"For I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. 'If you do not forgive men their trespasses,' Jesus says, 'neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.' I knew it not only as a commandment of God but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war, I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness, remained invalids. It was as simple and horrible as that.

"And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion — I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Jesus, help me!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling.'

"And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart!'

"For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then in that moment."

That makes the angels stand in awe and that's what you and I are called to do to one another. There is nothing that can divide us. There is nothing so great that we can do to one another that the blood of Jesus is not able to bridge that distance and God help us to

do that. The church is, it is the temple, it is the body of Christ, and it is the place of reconciliation that makes the angels and the demons stand up and take notice. That's what you and I are called to be. It's not something small or insignificant. Let's get together and work to build his church by his grace.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you are a God of incredible wisdom, that your ways are not our ways, your thoughts are not our thoughts. Truly as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are your ways with our ways and your thoughts with our thoughts. We marvel at your grace that has reconciled us and we ask you for grace to be about making every effort to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Help us be like our Savior. Help us see your glory. Help us understand that as we work together, as we build together, we're going to offend one another. We shouldn't be surprised at that, but it's an opportunity to see your glory. It's not an obstacle to your glory but an opportunity to manifest it. Thank you for the glory of Jesus Christ's shed blood, that it makes us one with you and one with each other. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.