

“The Manifold Wisdom of God”
Ephesians 3:8-10
(Preached at Trinity, August 3, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen, **Chapter 3** begins with prayer but Paul immediately digresses to remind his readers of his calling to evangelize the Gentile world. In **Verses 3-6** Paul shares specifically about this calling. It was a particular stewardship that he refers to as “the mystery” which he had received by Divine revelation.
Verse 3 - " that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery"
2. The great mystery that had been hidden was that Jesus Christ would be a Light to the Gentiles. The mystery that had been kept secret from the beginning of the world was that true Israel would include even the Gentiles.
Ephesians 3:6 NAU - "*to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"
3. But, as I've pointed out, Paul is actually speaking of two profound mysteries that encapsulated his ministry. The greatest mystery that Paul spent his life proclaiming was Christ Himself; what he referred to as “the unfathomable riches of Christ.” Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's purposes. All of the OT covenants find their fulfillment in Christ. All of the ceremonies of the OT point to Christ. All of creation finds its fullness in Christ and is in subjection to Him.
4. In **Verses 8-9** Paul is saying that God has raised him up to preach the unsearchable, the unknowable, the glorious riches of Christ to the Gentiles—that which from the beginning of the world has been left hidden in the infinite mind of God but now revealed in the Gospel.
5. As we come to **Verse 10** Paul concludes God's grand design in it all:
"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*."
6. Paul is saying that God's grand design was to make known his manifold wisdom—to make known the unknowable so that all of creation might gaze with wonder and awe and glorify God. In **Verse 9** Paul describes God as the “Creator of all things.” He is the source of everything. All things find their existence in Him according to His infinite wisdom. God's wisdom is infinite and beyond our comprehension.
Calvin: “All God's works, being carefully considered, have the power to draw us to wonderment. And why? Because they proceed from his righteousness, justice, goodness, and wisdom, which are all of them infinite things. When we speak of God's wisdom, power, or justice, they are not things that we can define, as though we had full knowledge of them, or as we can do of the things we see below” (Commentary on Ephesians, page 250).
7. The glorious task of proclaiming God's manifold wisdom has been granted to the church.
Ephesians 3:10 NAU - " so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church "

8. Paul adds: "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*."
The phrase "rulers and the authorities" is translated "principalities and powers" in the KJV. It is the exact phrase used in **Chapter 6 Ephesians 6:12 KJV** - "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*."
- A. In **Chapter 6** the reference is clearly pointing to demonic forces that constantly attack us with temptations and deceits in order to derail us from following the way of righteousness.
 - B. There is an entire spiritual realm of the unseen, both demons and angelic powers. Paul may be speaking of Satan's demonic forces or he may speaking of the entirety of the heavenly host. Paul is saying that one of the duties of the functions of the church is to reveal the manifold wisdom of God to the spiritual realm.
 - C. How is it that the church makes the manifold wisdom of God known to these spiritual beings? Through the Gospel. Every time a sinner comes to faith in Christ the manifold wisdom of God is displayed. For the angels they rejoice to see God's power displayed. Peter described God's salvation as something the angels longed to see and marvel at.
1 Peter 1:12 NAU - "these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look."
 - D. We must not exclude the fallen angels here. Every converted soul is a reminder of Christ's sovereign reign and of their doom.
9. This morning I'd like to set before you the manifold wisdom of God in the Gospel. The word "manifold" is from a Greek word used only here. Its carries the basic meaning: "of different colors." In other words the wisdom of God is multi-faceted, diverse, and infinitely varied according to God's infinite mind.
- A. We seldom consider the greatness of God's eternal purpose; how intricate and detailed with great variety and diversity. Every detail of history is unfolding according to God's foreordained purpose; all pointing to His redemptive work in Christ.
Nothing is left to chance or without God's sovereign hand upon it.
God raised up the Jewish nation and has added to it the Gentiles that He might have one people in Christ.
 - B. God has worked many mysteries in His creation. The universe is a vast display of God's infinite wisdom. The angels have seen it all but nothing amazes them quite like the redemption of men.
John Eadie wrote: "*The angels* have seen much of God's working—many a sun lighted up, and many a world launched into its orbit. They have been delighted with the solution of many a problem, and the development of many a great mystery. But in the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles, with its strange preparations, various agencies, and stupendous effects—involving the origination and extinction of Judaism, the incarnation and the atonement, the manger and the cross . . . these principalities and powers in heavenly places behold with rapture."
 - C. The demons tremble at the display of God's display of His wisdom. It is beyond their comprehension and continually pronounces their doom.
 - D. Paul is saying that the great work of the church is to make this mystery known.

- I. First of all, we need to compare the manifold wisdom of God with all other wisdom. The wisdom of man in comparison is nothing but foolishness.
- 1 Corinthians 3:19-20 NAS** - "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "*He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness*"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless."
- A. Lost humanity is hopeless drowning in the slough of foolishness.
- The lost man actually believes it to be wise to disregard the commands of God
1. They are completely oblivious to God's redemptive purpose. They blindly live their lives as if everything is encompassed in this life.
 2. They believe following God will restrict their happiness and that disregarding the Law of God is the best course of life.
 3. This is because God has given them over to a reprobate mind
Romans 1:21-25 NAS - " For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. ²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever."
 4. The lost man is oblivious to the spiritual realm that keeps his eyes upon this world.
2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
- B. The lost man believes he can forge the path back to God
1. The landscape is littered with false religions, each forged in the pit of hell and fashioned at the hand of man.
 2. But the one true way they despise. It remains forever the only way
John 14:6 NAS - "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."
Acts 4:12 NAS - "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."
 3. They even try to refashion the one true way by softening its demands. Jesus says forsake all and follow Me.
 - A. The world has embraced the lie that Jesus accepts us as we are. There is a sense where this is true. You don't have to clean up your life before coming to Christ. Jesus receives sinners.

B. While Jesus receives the worst of sinners, we cannot keep our sin. He lovingly saves homosexuals but they cannot hold onto their homosexuality. He saves murders, liars and thieves but they must forsake their sin.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NAS - "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

4. The angels marvel at God's infinite wisdom displayed in His transforming grace. It is all according to God's sovereign purpose which He ordained before the world began.

Ephesians 3:11 NAU - " *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord"

5. And the demons flee as their schemes are exposed by the manifold wisdom of God.

II. Gaze upon the manifold wisdom of God in your salvation

A. The cross of Christ is the glory of God's wisdom

1. Who could devise such a plan? Who would ever consider that a bloody cross would be the way for sinful men to be reconciled to God?

Romans 11:33 NAS - " Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

2. The wisdom of God seems foolish – Through death comes life, through humiliation comes glory, through the curse comes blessing, through weakness comes strength

3. The cross will always appear foolish to the lost. The bloody cross is appalling to them. The suffering Savior is has no value

1 Corinthians 1:18 NAS - "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 NAU - "we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

4. We stand in wonder at the cross

In the cross justice and mercy have been married

In the cross the sinner has been made triumphant over sin

5. This is the message of the church – we preach Christ and Him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:2-5 NAS - " For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴ And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

- B. This is also the great paradox of Christianity – it seems so foolish.
1. To give up your life is to find it
 2. To be last is to be first
 3. To be greatest is to be least
 4. The church may appear weak today, but it is marching forth with invincible power.
 5. To the world Christians may appear insignificant – but we have the infinite favor of God and we are the heirs of all things.
- C. What is the only proper response to God’s wisdom in the cross?
1. We must lay down all of our own schemes and trust in Christ alone
 2. God implores sinners to come and partake of these riches
Isaiah 55:1-3 NAS - "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. ² "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. ³ "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *According to* the faithful mercies shown to David."
 2. Jesus declares, give up all that you might have all.
Matthew 16:24-25 NAU - "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."
 3. God demands that we follow in the words of the Apostle Paul
Philippians 3:8 – “Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,”

Conclusion:

1. Have you witnessed the manifold wisdom of God in Christ? Most reject Him. We find Him marvelous.
Psalms 118:22-23 NAS - "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner *stone*. ²³ This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes."
2. Have you witnessed God’s transforming grace?
 - a. What is it that causes such a change in a man?
 - b. What is it that would bring a missionary to forsake all comforts to live with uncivilized natives in the jungle?
 - c. What is it that would bring a martyr strength and joy as he burns at the stake?
 - d. What is it that can bring a smile through all of life’s adversities?
 - e. Have you seen this power?
3. Does the cross bring you to your knees in gratitude and praise?
Is the sacrifice of Christ, the Gospel, your chiefest treasure?
Galatians 6:14 NAS - "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."
4. Don’t forget. It is the duty of the church to proclaim the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers. It is the glorious declaration that our God reigns.