



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Divine Purpose

TRANSCRIPT

The Nature of the Present Age (6): The Viewpoint of Paul - III

[Prayer] Father we are grateful for the privilege that is again ours to look into the Scriptures to seek to discover the teaching that Thou hast given us through the Apostle Paul. We thank Thee for the purpose of the ages as the apostle puts it and we ask, Lord, that Thou would give us insight into it. Enable us by thy grace to live in accordance with that which we seek that Thou art doing the things that are of particular interest to heaven. And we ask, Lord, that in our daily lives there may be reflected something of the greatness of beloved grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. May this hour contribute to our spiritual well being.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we're continuing our study of the nature of the present age. And we have looked at James' view of the present age and we are looking at Paul's view of the present age and we looked at Romans chapter 11 and then we have been looking at Ephesians chapter 2. In our last study and tonight we want to look at Ephesians chapter 3 verse 1 through verse 13. So will you turn in your New Testaments to Ephesians chapter 3.

Now, as we have been thinking about James’ view -- whom I didn’t mention -- and Paul’s view of the present age, we have noticed some of these things and, specifically, with reference to Paul we noticed Israel’s national rejection is characteristic of this age. That’s evident from Romans chapter 11 verse 11 through verse 15, and if when you go home remember that passage I suggest you look it up.

The second thing that we have noted about the present age is Gentiles acceptance as Gentiles. That is Gentiles make come into the body of Christ without undergoing circumcision, without being put under the Mosaic law as Gentiles always have to be in old covenant times.

And the third thing that we have noted, incidentally, we saw those things in Romans chapter 11, and we also saw those things, at least, in a brief way or in a small way in Ephesians chapter 2, and we’ll see tonight again some indication of that. And then finally, from Romans chapter 3 verse 1 through verse 4, and Romans 11 again verse 16 through verse 27, we saw that Israel’s national predominance is not something that is cast away forever or cancelled by Israel’s disobedience but that Israel’s national predominance is something that the future holds for the nation. That’s spelled out for us in Romans 3:1-4, where the apostle plainly states that unbelief will not make void the promises of God and then in Romans 11 verse 16, in the parable or the illustration of the olive tree on through verse 27, which includes and so all Israel shall be saved.

We have some indications of this even in our study that we are going to look at tonight and while it’s indirect I want you to be sure and see it. The apostle highlights two aspects of the age in the passage before us in Ephesians chapter 3, and the two aspects that he highlights are the nature of the present age, Gentile salvation as Gentiles and then also Israel’s primacy in the divine plan and this we will see only indirectly. The connection of chapter 3 to chapter 2, is rather easy to follow. You’ll notice the apostle begins, “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.”

Now, in order to understand better what I want to try to point out. Now, I'd like for you to also notice verse 14, and notice the similarity of expression, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, it so happens that the expression in the original text translated for this cause here while not one that we would call extremely rare is relatively rare in the New Testament and, yet, the apostle uses that expression both in verse 1 and in verse 14.

Now, if you remember chapter 2 he has just outlined the new relationship of Jew and Gentile in the new man. Verse 15 reads of chapter 2, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.” So he's been talking about in the previous context the relationship of Jew and Gentiles and the one new man. He finished the chapter by pointing out in verse 19, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints.”

Now, of course, in the context that's Israelitish saints. You Gentiles are, “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” That's evident, particularly, too when you look back and read in verse 11, “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh.” Well, at that time verse 12, “you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” and so on. So here in verse 19, when he says they are now “fellowcitizens with the saints” it's clear that he's talking about the saints of Israel that they have come to be fellow citizens with.

Now, we know enough about Paul from reading his epistles to know that it would be in his manner to break out in prayer for the practical expression of the things that he's been talking about and he's just stated in verse 22, “In whom ye also the holy temple of the Lord are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Now, I can just imagine Paul as he reached this climax and said to his Gentile readers that he had in mind you have become a habitation of God through the Spirit that he would immediately want to lay practical stress upon that and pray for them to that

end. They were the habitation of God he would want their hearts to be not only acquainted with that fact but have the experience of being indwelt by God in that sense. So in verse 1 of chapter 3, he says, “For this cause,” and I would fully have expected if I’d thought about this when I first read Ephesians and know what I know about Paul then that I know now I would have expected him to pray immediately that this might be our experience.

Now, you will notice if you will look down at verse 14, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,” and so on. He goes on to express a prayer with reference to their spiritual experience, but now I want you to notice what he has said in verse 22. He said, “You also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” The word that is used there is the Greek word and I’m going to pronounce it for you so because, I think, you can tell when pronounce it I do it, of course, with a southern accent but that’s pure Greek and you will, I think, catch the connection. *katoikbthvrion* now, that’s the word for habitation. It’s related to a word that means to dwell deep down. *Katoikeo* means to dwell deep down to reside and so it’s a more intensive word then the simple *oikeo* which means to dwell. This is one that means to dwell sometimes permanently sometimes deeply. It means literally to dwell down that’s how it came to have that intensive force. But now, in verse 17, when he says, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,” the infinitive of the verb *katoikeo* is used there and it’s *katoikesai*. So you can see *katoikbthvrion*, *katoikesai*. These two words are very closely related coming from the same intensive root. So I suggest to you since verse 14, begins with for this cause verse 1, begins for this cause that what Paul intended to do was to utter a prayer right at that point and it would be the content of the prayer that is found here in verse 14 through verse 21. But now Paul was a very human man and there is one

thing you learn about reading Paul if you read him carefully. He is a person who often diverges from what is obviously his intention being thrown off by some word that he has used.

Now, you know people that you talk to who do that all the time and the apostle was one just like that. He can write sentences even in this epistle and one of the sentences of the first chapter it's the equivalent of about eleven verses one sentence. He just goes. He mentions a word that reminds him something else and he goes on from there. Of course, he has something to say. We do that without anything to say. We just keep talking, but Paul was a person who did that and so notice what threw him off. He says, “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.” That threw him off the mention of the word Gentile because you see he's the apostle to the Gentiles and he values very highly, as we shall, see the ministry to the Gentiles. And so the mention of the fact that he is the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles led him then to go on to talk about that ministry before he got around to the prayer which begins in verse 14.

Now, Mr. William Kelley, one of the interpreters of the Epistle to the Ephesians, says it's very fitting to introduce God's parenthetical dealing with a parentheses. Well, that's an interesting observation. The question is whether parenthetical dealing is really proper. I don't really think it quite proper but we could say diversion and the apostle introduces a diversion. That is, God's dealings with the Gentiles in the present age looked at from the human standpoint, as we shall see, with a diversion from his purpose of prayer. It's no wonder that the Gentile acceptance of the gospel is very glorious to Paul. You'll notice the infinite distance between their condition described in verse 1 through verse 3 of chapter 2, described there and what they are now. Just think in your minds of Gentiles, “Dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of

the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” These people the apostle describes in that way he describe in verse 6 of chapter 3 as, “fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” What a tremendous transformation has taken place in the Gentiles and the apostle of the Gentiles is the Apostle Paul. No wonder that this marvelous work of the saving of Gentiles all over that part of the world was such a marvelous thing to the apostle. He was in a sense he was the key to what had happened all over that western world. So I can see the apostle rejoicing in the grace of God that took him and used him as such an instrumentality.

Now, we look on at chapter 3 verse 1 through 6, that you’ll look at the outline I’ve entitled this. My outlines are not inspired, of course, and sometimes I sit at my desk maybe for an hour or two thinking about just exactly how I word this and then after I’ve done it I say well that wasn’t too good. So I hope you realize these are not attempts to give you an outline that’s absolutely inspired. I’m just entitling the six verses Paul and the mystery and here we have a brief outline of his ministry to the Gentiles. And he first speaks about the revelation of that mystery or secret to himself. In verse 2, he says, “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words,” and let me just say this that when he says, “as I wrote afore in few words” he’s speaking about the preceding context of this epistle. He’s not talking about some other epistle an epistle that he knows they have read for he doesn’t even know that but there are indications already in this epistle of the truth about which he’s going to speak in more detail now.

Now, I think two points deserve comment in this brief section. And the first is a comment concerning the phrase in verse 1, “The prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.” Well, actually Paul was a prisoner of Nero, but Paul never did think of his experiences primarily in human terms. He could have written I Paul the prisoner of Nero for you Gentiles but he looked upon his imprisonment by Nero in Rome as really

ultimately the imprisonment by Jesus Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. In other words, everything that he had done led up to this imprisonment and it was, ultimately, something that was directed by the Lord Jesus Christ. So looking at it from the divine standpoint he's a prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.

Now, another thing that we perhaps should make a brief comment concerning is the expression in verse 2, “The dispensation of the grace of God.” That word dispensation means something like administration of the grace of God which is given to me to you. He's talking about the fact that God called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Now, of course, grace is the way God saves people in all ages. He saved people by grace in the Old Testament. He saved Abraham by grace. He saved Abraham before he was circumcised and so he saved him by grace through faith. That's always been God's method of salvation. When he speaks of the dispensation of the grace of God, he's thinking about the fact that there was committed to him an administration of the grace of God directed toward Gentiles. Now, he may have also been thinking about the fact that it's contrary to the dispensation to the Law of Moses. That is the administration of the law but since that's not real big in this chapter the chances are that he's just talking about the administration of God's grace to the Gentiles through his apostleship. One might also speak of the dispensation of the grace of God in contrast to the dispensation of the kingdom, the administration of the kingdom but Paul again only alludes, as we shall see later on to aspects of the kingdom of God.

Well, let's move on now to the newness and this is capital B in our outline under roman I, it's newness verse 4 verse 5, and here we have a couple of things that we want to lay a bit of stress on. “Whereby,” Paul says, “when ye read.” Now, that's put in such a construction that indicates that he expects them to be reading this along with him. It's the present tense. “Whereby, when ye read or as you read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” Well, that's the first thing. What is the mystery of Christ concerning which he's speaking? Well all of you in this auditorium and most of you been

in a number of meeting of Believers Chapel and perhaps other churches as well when these subjects have come up you know that the term mystery in the New Testament is not to be equated with something mysterious. It's not the kind of thing that suggests, should suggest to you something that Agatha Christie has read. The word mystery is a word that simply means secret and it refers to a divine truth. A fact the truth that usually is truth that has been revealed but it can only be understood by divine revelation. This word is usually associated with that, “the truth revealed by the divine revelation,” or a truth that can only be understood by divine revelation but it is now it has now been disclosed by God in this age.

Now, what is the mystery here? Well it becomes evident from the verses that follow that the mystery or the secret is the relationship of Jews to Gentiles in the one body, in the church. That's the secret. That's something was not known. That is something that has come to be known by divine revelation. So the mystery then is the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the one body. So he says, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” or the secret of Christ. “Which in other ages,” he says, “was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

Now, last time we commented upon the expression apostles and prophets and we pointed out that that expression by reason of the way it is written in the Greek text and by reason of his context chapter 2, chapter 3, and, specifically, perhaps even more importantly in chapter 4, is a reference to New Testament apostles and New Testament prophets. The order of the words would suggest it. It's not prophets and apostles. It's apostles and prophets and when we read the Book of Acts references are made to prophets of the New Testament. Prophecy was the ability to express new revelation from the Lord God. In the early days of the Christian church when they didn't have the whole of the Bible the whole of the New Testament it was very useful for prophets in the local church. They had freedom to stand up. They had freedom to give a revelation that came

to them from the Lord God. They were submissive men, spiritual men and the things that they revealed were things that came true.

Now, not everybody who stood up was a genuine prophet. For those who were true prophets gave true messages. We have, for example, in the New Testament Silas as a prophet and then also we a couple of other occasions another prophet who made prophecies concerning the Apostle Paul which came to pass. Agabus was his name. You remember, his prophecies are set forth in the New Testament. They are specific prophecies. That gift was a temporary gift. No one today is exercising the gift of prophecy. Lots of people are claiming to be exercising it however. You don't want to get off on that now because that's not our subject, but you can be sure if you study it carefully you'll come to the same conclusion that so many in the Christian church have is that they are making claims for that which they do not have.

Now, the second question is this to what extent then was this mystery known in Old Testament times because in verse 5, it states, “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.” Some covenant theologians but, I think, some wiser ones have drawn back from this view. Some covenant theologians have used the text to say to see the church in the Old Testament and so they feel that if they can show that this mystery was known in Old Testament times then we cannot really say that the church is a New Testament work of God.

Now, I think, that sensible covenant theologians have withdrawn from that claim but many still do make it. Personally, I think, it's wrong. It's not really the teaching of the New Testament. One can turn the pages of the Old Testament over and over and over again and you will never find any reference to the mystery in the Old Testament. Now, you think the mystery is simply the Gentiles will be saved. Well, of course, you can find that but that's not the mystery. The mystery is not the salvation of Gentiles. The

mystery is the salvation of Gentiles as Gentiles and the incorporation of Gentiles and Jews in one body possessed of equal privileges. That’s the mystery.

Now, though we’ll dispense with that because many of the covenant theologians have abandoned that view themselves. So we’ll come to more serious attempts to interpret, in my opinion, or more attempts that can be supported with more evidence. And first, what I would just call for the sake of a term the comparative view. Please do not. I made these terms up. I don’t even know anyone who’s said this is the comparative view but you will see that what I’m trying to say here is that some say this little word as in verse 5, is a comparative adverb and so I’ll call it the comparative view and what they contend here is that the mystery in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets. And if we lay stress upon the heirs, as it should be then we must acknowledge that there is some partial knowledge conveyed. Now, all admit that it was very little but some cling to a partial knowledge of the mystery in Old Testament times. In other ages was not made known unto the sons of men.

Now, I would like to let that rest right now and go on to a view, which I will call again for the sake of distinguishing this from the comparative view the restrictive view. That is that what we have here is an affirmation by Paul that the mystery was not made known unto the sons of men in other ages at all as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. And I’ve thought a lot about this, in fact, for forty years about it, which doesn’t mean I’m right. I’ve known who’ve been wrong for longer than that fifty years. Some die wrong. So that doesn’t mean anything. I just want you to know I really have thought about this considerably. In fact, I used to teach the Epistle to the Ephesians in Greek exegesis every year and many years I did that. So I had to think about it even if I didn’t want to.

Now, I’d like to suggest that all in all it’s safer to take the restrictive view and here are some of the reasons why I would say that. First of all, I’d like to suggest that the

context is more suitable for this. That if you read verse 14 through verse 18, and you read about one new man well that in itself suggests that what you have is not something that is owed. But then if you will also look at chapter 3 verse 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.” Well, that seems to suggest that it has not been revealed. So I’ll just call that one reason. The context suggests newness but not only the context in the Epistle to the Ephesians but take a look at the Epistle to the Colossians. In Colossians chapter 1, I knew I was going to say it something about this one when we expounded Colossians. So I didn’t say anything about it on Sunday. So we’ll introduce you into this here. So you’ll know more than those people who just come on Sunday.

So in Colossians chapter 1 and verse 24, the apostle talks about the mystery. He says, “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you.” You notice he’s just said that he’s been a minister. He’s talking about the gospel preached to every creature under heaven. He’s talking about the same thing he’s just putting it in a different with different literary skill. He said, “And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, that is you Gentiles, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:”

Now, notice there is no comparative adverb here at all. He just says it has been hid from ages and from generations but is now made manifest to his saints. So the parallel passages then support the newness of this revelation concerning the mystery. You might compare a Romans 16:25, for another passage in which silence concerning that period is mentioned. A third reason the word revelation, which is opposed to that which is hidden or covered, suggests that this is new. It means to unveil. So if this is something that has been unveiled to Paul the suggestion surely is that it has not been unveiled up to this time. So the very word revelation, which means to unveil, suggests that this is

something new. Of course, we also have the emphatic adverb and it is emphatic in this text in the Greek text as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets. The same now that was found in Colossians chapter 1 in verse 26, is found here. It's now a revelation of God.

Now, I would like to say this just to in a sense round out what I'm saying. If we were to admit that there was some revelation of the mystery and you might admit there was some anticipation of it, it would be only in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ who in Matthew chapter 16 in verse 18, did prophesy that he would build a church. He said, “upon this rock I will build my church.” Now, I don't think Paul was thinking about that. There's no indication that he was but conceivably it's a possibility. Now, that would explain the “now” as it is now revealed explain the” as,” as it is now revealed, because that would certainly be a only an implication of what the apostle states here or perhaps our Lord's statement in John 10:16, when he says other sheep I have which are not of this fold, that is, Jewish fold, them also I must break, but then that's not under figure of speech of shepherd, sheep, flock, fold. So it's possible that that is explanatory of the “as” but even if it is then what you have is something new. You have there only a figurative prophecy of what is going to take place. There will come a time when there's one flock one Shepherd and Jews and Gentiles will be together in that flock. So that's possible.

But now, I want to throw out a challenge to you as a further reason. In my text, this is the sixth reason. No Old Testaments texts can be cited that say what Paul says here that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. Not a single passage in the Old Testament states that Gentiles are fellow heirs with Israel, are fellow members of the body with Israel, are fellow partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. I challenge you to find a single text. For forty years, I've been trying to find it. So I'm confident you'll have a difficult time finding that and I think that's a very good empirical test to put yourself to and I challenge all of my friends who like to find this particular truth anywhere else to find me some texts. And I

hope I'll have the grace. I don't always have the grace to do it immediately because you know like everyone else I want to be right, competitive spirit. You know. That touches even interpreters of the Bible.

Now, I hope I would have the grace to say yes you did find one and I'll have to change my views. Now, can we give this little word “as” a restrictive sense? Well, I think we can. I cannot we must be honest with you I cannot. Now, I haven't looked very far for this. I didn't think it was necessary after all these reasons. Maybe I should. I haven't looked at all of the instances of hosts in the New Testament much less all the instances of hosts in Greek literature which are literally thousands and thousands and thousands of instances, but I am almost certain that you find the same thing that you will find in English with our “as” which is a comparative word.

Now, let me make a statement to you. The sun does not shine in the nighttime as it does in the daytime. Now, do you think that I mean by that that the sun shines at night but it shines more in the daytime? Why no. The sun doesn't shine at all in the nighttime but we can say the sun does not shine in the nighttime as it does in the daytime and it makes perfectly good sense to us. We understand that “as” a restrictive “as” and, therefore, if that's the sense in the context in the Pauline usage, Old Testament texts all seem to support this and what Paul is saying is that this is something new that was given to him by divine revelation; the relationship of Jew and Gentiles in the one body, the church of Jesus Christ. So, I think, that that's what Paul was talking about.

Now, let's look at the content because there's something else here I'd like for you to get. I'm going to throw this out and try it out on you. He says in verse 6 and here's the content, “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and fellow members of the same body, and fellow partakers of his promise.” Now, you can tell by the way I'm translating that because I'm avoiding the translation of the Authorized Version that I'm trying to lay stress upon the fact that Paul uses the preposition “sum” which means with and he attaches to all of these words. We are rendering it “fellow,” “together” that's what it

means. So he says fellowheirs but then the very next expression of the same body is fellow members of the body. That's what the New American Standard Bible has and then fellow partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel so three fellows, three withs.

Now, this tells us what the content of the mystery is and essentially it consists in this the theocracy. Now, when we say theocracy we are talking about Israel as a people ruled by God. He was their king, remember. The theocracy is terminated not totally but terminated in the sense of being the mediators of divine truth, terminated and replaced by a new international body sharing covenantal blessings with the remnant of the theocracy. Let me say it again. Essentially, what Paul is saying is that the theocracy of Israel. You remember they terminated themselves from the human standpoint but they said we have no king but Caesar. Their king was the Lord God. They denied their king in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, but theocracy was terminated and replaced by new international body made up of Jews and Gentiles actually scattered over the earth and they share, as we read here, covenantal blessings with the faithful remnant of Israel.

Now, our studies you can see if you've been following us in James' use of Amos in Acts chapter 15, and Romans 11, and Ephesians chapter 2, you'll see that I've filled in certain things from those chapters, but now notice the key aspects. Number one, the Gentiles should be fellow heirs. Now, if you look through the New Testament particularly the Pauline sections of the New Testament heirship is often linked with the kingdom. Heirs of the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians chapter 6 in verse 9, for example, I'll read it for you. 1 Corinthians 6:9, the apostle states, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” Galatians chapter 5, verse 21, the apostle writes something similar he says, “They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” But what he is saying here is that Jew and Gentiles are fellow heirs of the blessings of the kingdom of God.

Now, to spell that out that means simply fellow heirs of the Abrahamic covenant blessing and the Davidic covenant blessing and the New covenant blessing, fellow heirs.

That which Israel inherits Gentiles now inherit, believing Gentiles of course. Secondly, fellow members of the body not attached to the body like an excrescences nor incorporated like a foreign substance but fellow members. Someone has used the term concorporated. That is you are really part of it in every way a person is part of it. A kind of perfect amalgamation is the sense fellow members of the body. And finally, thirdly, fellow partakers of the promise. What promise? Well, the term promise is of a saving part in the Messiah's kingdom. So they have the saving promise of Messiah's kingdom and these three fellows, these three withs, emphasize the equality between Jew and Gentiles. That was all anticipated in chapter 2, verse 6, where the apostle says, “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” So we united and we are united with believing Israelites and we share in all of the blessings been promised to them in the word of God.

Now, the way I've put that you would if you're thinking and you haven't fallen asleep in your mind at this point. I've been going for about forty minutes. If you see the way the apostle puts this, it fits in, I think, not explicitly but perfectly with what he said in Romans 11. Remember in the illustration of the olive tree, he said, “the olive tree was their own olive tree.” Israel's olive tree, Israel has the promises. Israel has those great national promises that shall still be fulfilled. They belong to Israel. And then I made reference to the fact that a contemporary New Testament scholar --he actually is from a seminary in Richmond, Virginia, of the Presbyterian Church. Professor Achtemeier has said in one of his reviews of a book that I was reading. He has said us union theological seminary of Richmond not New York City. Professor Achtemeier has made the comment that if you want to have Christian blessing you must give it through Abraham and that that's biblical teaching. If you want to get the blessings of the divine salvation you must get it through Abraham. That's why they church and the members of the church and you if you're a Christian are called children of Abraham, seed of Abraham. The writer of the

epistle of the Hebrews speaks up. Well, now notice what Paul is saying here. He's saying that Gentiles don't make up a new body here.

Now, he said new man. The result will be that but notice what he says. He says that they have become fellow heirs heirs with whom? Believing Israelites. Further fellow members of the body. Fellow members with whom? With Israel, that is believing Israel. The remnant according to the election of Grace that has persisted through the national disobedience of the nation but have nevertheless maintained faithful responsiveness to the word of God. People like when our Lord came Anna and Simeon and the apostles and the disciples and those converted through them on the Day of Pentecost a Jewish church, largely. So fellow members of the body, that is you become one of them. Fellow partakers of the promise. Fellow partakers, partakers with whom? With the remnant of believing Israelites. So you see what Paul is saying that when Gentiles are saved they are incorporated into the believing Israelites that company and together they make one new man. They make up the church. The church composed of Jews and Gentiles. We don't have a Gentile church. People often use that expression. The church is not a Gentile church. You won't find that expression. That's Charles Feinberg that -- he is a Jewish man converted to Christianity -- has been a very useful servant of the Lord and I've made reference to him; his two sons were on the faculty with me and one of them was my former student. Dr. Feinberg would get his Hebrew dander up when some Gentile would say Gentile church. He said wait a minute. You can't find that in the Bible. It's not a Gentile church. It's a church of Jews and Gentiles.

Now, Dr. Feinberg would admit of course, that the mass of the church today is Gentile but he was making the point that Paul makes in Romans 11, “Even so at the present time there's a remnant according to the election of grace.” He said, “it's we that join them not they who join us.” Don't forget that. So see that's what Paul is talking about here.

One of the commentators, surprisingly coming from him, says, “It’s the distinctive message of Ephesians that no Gentile can have communion with Christ and with God unless he also has communion with Israel.” You know who said that? It might make you want to question it if I tell you who said it. He’s a Christian man. It’s the son of Karl Barth, Marcus Barth. Here in the two-volume commentary in the Epistle to the Ephesians and what he said here is absolutely right. He goes on to say in each case the body to which the Gentiles are joined is none other than Christ and the first members of the body are the Jews.

Now, this ought to give us a different idea of what the Christian church is. We are the recipients of the grace of God by which we have come to be joined to God’s election. We become one new man because the distinctions have been wiped away now so far as entrance into the body is concerned. We believe in Christ. We are part of the body. We share the same blessings with them. That makes the church something new. That is in makeup and in the sharing of blessings but we participate with them.

Now, Paul goes on and I that’s the major thing I wanted to say because that’s the major contribution of this passage but I’ll go on and make just a few more comments before we close. This is Roman II in the outline. Paul and the ministry of the mystery verses 7 through 9. And the source of Paul’s ministry and you catch something of the flavor of the apostle here when he says, “Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God.” You would think if he said grace of God that would be enough but Paul likes to emphasize that what he became he became by God’s gift of grace, which itself is a gift given. He says, “The gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given.” So you can see that over and over here in this context Paul says the source that of the ministry that came to me is the Lord God and it was measured out to me as a gift of grace and one of my tasks is to evangelize the untraceable riches of Christ, “That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” This is capital B the

purpose of Paul’s ministry. I love that expression where he says the “the unsearchable riches of Christ” because that word is a word that means something like untrackable. It’s a word that comes from making tracks and the untrackable riches of Christ.

Theodoric was one of the early Christian preachers in the fifth or sixth century and someone asked him are you preaching if the riches are unsearchable? I can imagine all kinds of objections people give to preachers and the questions they ask. Every question you would think that have ever been thought of has been asked. So here is a person who comes up to Theodoric, who’s preaching about the unsearchable riches of Christ, well if they’re unsearchable why are you preaching them? And he said, “For this very thing. I preach because they are unsearchable. They are so marvelous. They cannot be tracked at you can preach them for all of your life and you still have not exhausted the riches of God.”

J.H. Jowett, who was a great preacher of a few generations back, he illustrated by a man who was tracking out the confines of a lake and he was trying to discover everything about the lake but when he got around to one part of the lake he discovered it wasn’t a lake at all but it was part of the ocean. And so what he was faced with was the immeasurable sea and in that sense Paul talks about the untrackable riches of Christ. And he speaks about the purpose of his ministry in the latter part of verse 8 and 9, “And 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.” So the purpose of his ministry included preaching unsearchable riches and enlightening them with respect to the mystery.

Listen this is part of the way you grow up to find out what is the character of the present age of which we are a part. So to preach those riches and then to enlighten them with regard to the mystery is to explain what God is doing and so I’m not surprised then that Paul will say in verse 10 through verse 13, he’ll talk about the motivation of the mystery and say, “To the intent” that is, in order that, “that now unto the principalities and

powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,” Incidentally, that word manifold is a word that means multiformed and to spell it out exegetically and expositively it would be simply this; the manifold wisdom of God is his wisdom in the way in which he has dealt with the nation and the way in which he has dealt with the nations and the way in which he will bring his plan to its glorious climax and conclusion as set out in Romans 11 in verse 25, and following. So that adjective, “the manifold wisdom of God,” is designed to express the way in which God has been working his magnificent purpose. And if you’ve been reading or listening to any of the messages on KRLD you’ll know that about two months ago I dealt with Romans 11, in got to this section verse 28 through verse 32, in which he dealt with just this very point. And you remember to that when Paul gets to the end of Romans 11, he expresses the very thing that he’s talking about here. He says, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” So he’s talking about the same thing. The way in which he deals with the nation and the way in which he deals with the nations.

But notice verse 10, carefully he says, “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,” well, the church becomes the instructor of heaven. “To the principalities and powers in heavenly places,” that’s the angelic intelligences. “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,” and so can you think of the angels as they look out and see the things that are happening. The New Testament speaks about that. The New Testament says when Peter is talking about the saving ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Peter chapter 1, he adds, “Which things the angels desire to look into.” The Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 in verse 9, this is a very comforting verse but also is a very challenging verse. He says, “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world,

and to angels, and to men.” A theater. So the things that God is doing today are things by which the angelic world is to be enlightened: Evil, the fall, the redemption through Christ, the national program for Israel, the national program for the nations, these are lessons for the universe and the angels want to see where everything is, ultimately, going to reach its conclusion. Well, that’s a challenging thing isn’t it to think that the angels are looking at all of the things that characterize the life of the church and the life of the church is characterized by your actions. So even the angels are looking. That’s appalling in one sense isn’t it? Of course, when we realize that the Lord God is looking and knows the thoughts in our hearts that’s the most solemn of all.

So Paul finally concludes in verse 11 through verse 13, by saying that the ultimate concern of the wisdom of God is the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. That’s literally the purpose of the ages or the purpose running through the ages is the sense of it. Tennyson once wrote out through the age’s one increasing purpose runs and this is the purpose and Paul concludes by saying I don’t want you to be to lose your heart over what has happened I’m imprisoned. “Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” What I’m doing I do as the apostle of the Gentiles and it’s done ultimately for you. Don’t faint over the things that have happened to me.

So I conclude by saying that it’s obvious that these texts are harmonious with the other Pauline texts. Emphasis is again on the fact that the status is ultimately Israel’s. She has the dominance we share, however, as Gentiles in her blessings when we are born again through responsiveness through divine truth. We have a picture of the angel’s observation as important new thought. The theater is the history of the world. The stage is the world. The actors are members of the body. The author the director and the producer is God. The audience is the cosmic intelligences and so we play that significant part in what God is doing. You can see why Ephesians in some sense is probably the most advanced of all of the apostolic ministry.

“The Nature of the Present Age: The Viewpoint of Paul, part III” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Let's close in a word of prayer. Time is up.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous passages from the Apostle Paul, which so enlighten us with regard to the things that are important to heaven. And, Lord, help us to remember that in our daily life we are part of the purpose of God; that principalities and powers in heavenly places and Paul locates them there in other places; that our activities are means by which the principalities and powers come to know the manifold wisdom of God through the church, how important it is that we be responsive to the word of God and seek to follow it by Thy grace. Use each one of us, Lord, each one of us individually and may we accomplish that which Thou hast in Thy mind. [End of Tape]