

# Ephesians 3:8-9 Commentary

PREVIOUS

EPHESIANS - CHRIST AND THE CHURCH  
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NEXT

Ephesians 3:8 To me, the [very least](#) of [all saints](#), [this grace](#) was [given](#), to [preach](#) to the [Gentiles](#) the [unfathomable riches](#) of [Christ](#), ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [emoi to elachistotero panton hagion edothe \(3SAPI\) e charis aute, tois ethnesin euaggelisasthai \(AMN\) to anexichniaston ploutos tou Christou.](#)

**Amplified:** To me, though I am the very least of all the saints (God's consecrated people), this grace (favor, privilege) was granted and graciously entrusted: to proclaim to the Gentiles the unending (boundless, fathomless, incalculable, and exhaustless) riches of Christ [wealth which no human being could have searched out], ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** It is to me, who am less than the least of all God's consecrated people, that this privilege has been given—the privilege of preaching to the Gentiles the wealth of Christ, the full story of which no man can ever tell; ([Westminster Press](#))

**NET:** To me--less than the least of all the saints--this grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ ([NET Bible](#))

**NLT:** Just think! Though I did nothing to deserve it, and though I am the least deserving Christian there is, I was chosen for this special joy of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Yes, to me, less than the least of all Christians, has God given this grace, to enable me to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** To me, the one who is less than the least of all saints, there was given this grace, to the Gentiles to proclaim the good news of the incomprehensible wealth belonging to the Christ ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** to me--the less than the least of all the saints--was given this grace, among the nations to proclaim good news--the untraceable riches of the Christ

**TO ME, THE VERY LEAST OF ALL SAINTS: emoi to elachistotero panton hagion:**

- **To me, the very least of all saints** Proverbs 30:2,3; Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Philippians 2:3; 1 Timothy 1:13,15; 1 Peter 5:5,6
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:8 The Unsearchable Riches of Christ](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:9-13 God's Eternal Purpose and You](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:7-13 The Mystery Revealed, Part 3](#) - John MacArthur

Remember that Ephesians 3:2-13 is a single sentence in the original Greek text and as such represents a "parentheses" in which Paul digresses to explain the origin of the Church composed of believing Jew and Gentile who are now one body in Christ.

**To me, the very least of all saints** - Paul is saying he is "more least than all the saints". In fact, **elachistos** means "less than the least" and expresses Paul's honest, deep self-abasement. In other words, Paul is not exhibiting a sense of false humility but a true self-estimate from a man filled with the Holy Spirit and one who knew his true unworthiness in face of "**gift of God's grace**" and the perfect righteousness of God. Paul wrote a similar self-estimate in other letters in which there seems to be a progression (see table below). Anyone who sees Christ in His glory realizes his own sinfulness and uselessness. As Christ increased in Paul, Paul decreased (cf John 3:30). Understanding the deep truths of God's Word does not give a man a big head; it gives him a broken and contrite heart.

Christ was an unsurpassable teacher and many were those who resorted to Him for instruction. But when He

wanted through His servant to teach humility, the ordinary terms of grammar would not do, and a new degree of comparison had to be introduced—little, less, least, and “less than the least.”

Paul (Paulus) means “little” in Latin, and perhaps Paul bore this name because he realized how insignificant he really was.

**Hughes on very least** - "Again Paul bends the language. He takes the Greek word for “least” or “smallest” and adds an ending which is impossible linguistically, so that he comes out with the word “leaster.” Some think he was playing off his Latin name Paulus, which meant “little” or “small,” so that the idea is, “I am little by name, little in stature, and morally and spiritually littler than the least of all Christians.” I am Small Paul. ([Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ](#))

**Johnson on very least** - "By the way, Paul’s Latin name, “Paul,” means “little.” And what he has done here is to take the word least in the Greek text and make it a comparative. Now least is a superlative. But he has said, “I who am leaster”; that’s what he’s done in Greek. So he’s taken a superlative and made it a comparative. It’s as if he’s to say, “I’m not simply the littlest, but the littlester of all the saints.” He really feels that way because he persecuted the church of God. ([Ephesians 3:1-13 Dispensation of Grace](#))

**John Eadie** - He was a minister of the gospel through the gracious power of God. This reflection ever produced within him profound wonder and humility; and though in one sense he was greater than the greatest of all saints, yet the consciousness of his own demerit stood out in such striking contrast with the high function to which he had been called, that he exclaims—“To me, who am less than the least of all saints”—emoi (to me) being emphatic from its position (note it is first in the Greek sentence).

**Vincent** on very least - "A comparative is formed upon a superlative: "more least than all the saints".

**NET Notes** comments that "for Paul to view himself as less than the least of all the saints is to view himself as the most unworthy object of Christ’s redemption."

**Very least** ([1646](#)) (**elachistos** superlative of **elachus** = little, short) describes the least important, the lowest in status. It can describe being relatively the smallest in a specific class such as the rudder (compared to the tongue) in Jas 3:4. Finally it can pertain to being considered of very little importance and thus insignificant or trivial (Lk 12:26, 16:10, 19:17, 1Co 4:3, 6:2)

**Eadie** writes that in this verse "**elachistotero** is a comparative, founded on the superlative **elachistos**—“less than the least;” a form designed to express the deepest self-abasement.

**Elachistos** - 14x in 12v - least(6), smallest(1), very least(1), very little thing(4), very small(1), very small thing(1). Matt. 2:6; 5:19; 25:40, 45; Lk. 12:26; 16:10; 19:17; 1 Co. 4:3; 6:2; 15:9; Eph. 3:8; Jas. 3:4.

PROGRESSION of PAUL'S ESTIMATE OF SELF	
55AD	1Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am <b>not fit to be called an apostle</b> because I persecuted the church of God.
61AD	Eph 3:8 To me, <b>the very least of all saints</b> , this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,
63-66AD	1Ti 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save <b>sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.</b>

**See Related Exposition - 1Corinthians 15:9 Commentary**

As you examine this chart, you see that we come face to face with the phenomenon which is frequently seen in the great leaders and saints of the past. It is that the older they grow, the more acute is their own sense of sin and of weakness in themselves. They see that what they once thought to be natural strengths are really weaknesses that emanate from our fallen flesh. So if this (an increasing sense of the corruption of your old flesh nature) is beginning to happen to you, you are growing as a Christian. Paul never forgot the wonder of being chosen to be a custodian of divine truth. To reiterate, the most godly men in the Bible were deeply aware of their own utter depravity in the presence of God (see Ge. 18:27; Job 42:6; Isa 6:5; Dan. 9:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; Ezek 1:28-note, Luke 5:8, 9, Re 1:17-note). It is significant that in none of these cases did the Lord say, “That’s not true! You need to see yourself as a saint, not a sinner!” Once the man (saint) realized the truth of his sinfulness, the Lord graciously gave words of encouragement to restore (e.g., see Job 42:7, 8; Is 6:7; Da 9:23; Lk 5:10). On the other hand, it can be argued that God’s specific intent in each of these men was to bring these sinner/saints to a lower and more accurate estimate of themselves in God’s holy presence. Notice in John the baptizer’s last recorded words (before he was beheaded) he affirmed that...

He (Christ) must (not an option but an obligation, present tense = continually) increase (present tense =

continually), but (note the dramatic contrast) *I must* (not in Greek - added by translators but reasonably parallels the meaning of the first verb *dei* [must]) decrease (present tense = continually).

**Comment:** Note the order for it is very significant. First, Christ increasing, then John decreasing. This is the natural (supernatural) order for when we see Christ in His majesty, beauty, perfection, glory, etc, we can do nothing but see ourselves for who we really are with the result that we are humbled in His presence. In fact many times in Scripture, those who saw the glory of Christ, were soon on their face on the ground! Considering John the baptizer's mindset in relation to his Lord, is it any wonder that Christ Himself said that "among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Mt 11:11). May his tribe increase!

As **Donald Guthrie** states in his comments on Paul's declaration of his status in 1Timothy 1:15 "Paul never got away from the fact that Christian salvation was intended for sinners, and the more he increased his grasp of the magnitude of God's grace, the more he deepened the consciousness of his own naturally sinful state (The Pastoral Epistles, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Eerdmans], p. 65) ([See a "real life" example in the testimony of the great hymn writer and preacher, John Newton](#))

Paul's experience is also the experience and teaching of the most godly men in church history, including men like Calvin, Luther, John Owen (the great Puritan theologian), Jonathan Edwards (the greatest American theologian), Charles Simeon, J. C. Ryle, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and many others all taught the ongoing depravity of the human heart, even after conversion. This same experience (an increasing awareness of one's sinfulness) has also been part of every revival in church history. In his book entitled **Revival**, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones emphasizes that...

there has never yet been a revival of religion, but that the moment that God's people have this experience, though they may have been Christians for years and years, they feel utterly unworthy, they see themselves as sinners as they have never done before. Some of them have even doubted whether they have ever been Christians. They are wrong, of course, but the sight of the holiness of God, the realisation of it, has made them see nothing but their own sinfulness and their own unworthiness. It is invariable.

**Saints** (40) (**hagios**) is literally holy one and refers to that which is set apart (sanctified) from profane or common purposes and for a special purpose. **Hagios** describes every saint's position **in Christ** -- set apart from that which is secular, profane, and evil and on the other hand dedicated to worship and service of God (see purpose in 2Ti 2:21). We are **holy ones** both in character and conduct set apart by God to be exclusively His, dedicated to Him and manifesting holiness of heart and conduct. **Hagios** was used throughout the NT to speak of anyone or anything that represents God's holiness: Christ as the **Holy** One of God, the **Holy** Spirit, the **Holy** Father, **holy** Scriptures, **holy** angels, **holy** brethren, and so on.

The Gentiles understood this term because among the pagans, *hagios* signified separated and dedicated to the idolatrous gods and carried no idea of moral or spiritual purity. The manmade gods were as sinful and degraded as the men who made them and there simply was no need for a word that represented righteousness! The worshipper of the pagan god acquired the character of that pagan god and the religious ceremonies connected with its worship. The Greek temple at Corinth housed a large number of harlots who were connected with the "worship" of the Greek god. Thus, the set-apartness or holiness of the Greek worshipper was in character licentious, totally depraved, and sinful.

**Barclay** writes - If ever we are privileged to preach or to teach the message of the love of God or to do anything for Jesus Christ, we must always remember that our greatness lies not in ourselves but in our task and in our message. Toscanini was one of the greatest orchestral conductors in the world. Once when he was talking to an orchestra when he was preparing to play one of Beethoven's symphonies with them he said: "Gentlemen, I am nothing; you are nothing; Beethoven is everything." He knew well that his duty was not to draw attention to himself or to his orchestra but to obliterate himself and his orchestra and let Beethoven flow through. Leslie Weatherhead tells of a talk he had with a public schoolboy who had decided to enter the ministry of the Church. He asked him when he had come to his decision, and the lad said he had been moved to make it after a certain service in the school chapel. Weatherhead very naturally asked who the preacher had been, and the lad answered that he had no idea; he only knew that Jesus Christ had spoken to him that morning. That was true preaching. The tragic fact is that there are so many who are more concerned with their own prestige than with the prestige of Jesus Christ; and who are more concerned that they should be noticed than that Christ should be seen. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**THIS GRACE WAS GIVEN TO PREACH TO THE GENTILES THE UNFATHOMABLE RICHES OF CHRIST: edothe (3SAPI) e charis aute tois ethnesin euaggelisasthai (AMN) to anexichniaston ploutos tou Christou:**

- **This grace** - 1 Chronicles 17:16; 29:14,15; Acts 5:41; Romans 15:15, 16, 17
- **To preach** - Eph 3:2 Ga 1:16 2:8 1Ti 2:7 2Ti 1:11
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:8 The Unsearchable Riches of Christ](#) - Steven Cole
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**This grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ-** Notice how even the phrase grace given clearly implies grace is a gift because if it's given, it's not earned or merited! The first specific aspect of God's grace to Paul was it gave him the privilege to preach Christ in all His majestic glory.

**THOUGHT** - Ponder for a moment, that here Paul, once a Gentile hating Pharisee of Pharisees (Php 3:5), now because of the supernatural transformative power of God's Gospel of grace actually considers it a privilege to preach to the (once despised) Gentiles. Beloved, this is the power of the Gospel of grace to change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). Has this happened in your life? If not may God's Spirit sweep in and circumcise your hard heart, so that old hatred will be supernaturally transformed into new love, all for God's glory and through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

**Unfathomable** - Translators have used words like inexorable, or untraceable, inexhaustible, illimitable, inscrutable, incalculable, and infinite.

**MacArthur on unfathomable riches** - The **unfathomable riches of Christ** include all His truths and all His blessings, all that He is and has. The purpose of every preacher is to declare those riches, to tell believers how rich they are in Christ. That is why it is so important for Christians to understand the greatness of their position in the Lord. The obedient, productive, and happy Christian life cannot be lived apart from understanding that glorious position. Before we can do what the Lord wants us to do for Him, we must understand what He already has done for us. We have riches beyond measure in the One of whom it was said, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3) and in the One in whom we have "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). (See [Ephesians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Hughes** asks "What are the implications of this? Primarily, that Christ always enriches life. How mistaken the young man was who rejected the gospel saying, "Don't preach Christ to me. I've got enough problems already." Christ never subtracts from life; he always enriches it with untrackable riches. A corresponding implication for us is that we have a responsibility to share these riches with others. ([Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ](#))

**Steven Cole on unfathomable riches** - But, we have these transforming truths revealed to us in the New Testament as a precious treasure! If it was revealed to you that somewhere in your back yard, a strongbox with a million dollars was buried, you'd be out there this afternoon with pick and shovel, and you wouldn't stop digging until you found it! Well, you've got something far greater than money—you've got "the unfathomable riches of Christ" (3:8), hidden in your Bible! Start digging! ([The Unsearchable Riches of Christ](#))

**Grace (5485) (charis)** in simple terms is God's unmerited favor and supernatural enablement and empowerment for salvation and for daily sanctification. **Grace** is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything. Jowett defined grace as "holy love on the move".

1Cor 15:10-note But by the **grace** of God I am what I am, and His **grace** toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the **grace** of God with me.

Note that Paul uses **charis** 12 times in Ephesians (compare 24 times in the 16 chapter epistle to the Romans) - Eph. 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24. Note especially the 2 other uses in this same chapter...

Ephesians 3:2-note if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's **grace** which was given to me for you;

**Comment: John Eadie** writes of charis in Eph 3:2 - "The idea is either that the oikonomia (stewardship) had its origin in that charis, or rather that the charis was its characteristic element. That grace was given him, not that he might enjoy it as a private luxury, but that he by its assistance might impart it to others —*eis humas*—"to you," (cp similar use of charis/grace in Gal. 1:15, 2:9; Acts 22:21)

Ephesians 3:7-note 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.

**Given (1325) (didomi)** means to grant someone an opportunity or occasion to do something. The **passive voice** indicates God was

the Giver and Paul was the recipient.

**Eadie** comments that "That special branch of the apostolate which was entrusted to Paul had the following end in view **"to preach among the Gentiles."**... The phrase *tois ethnesin* (to the Gentiles) emphatic from its position, describes the special or characteristic sphere of the apostle's labours. The apostle, however, never forgot his own countrymen (the Jews). His love to his nation (Israel) was not interdicted (forbidden) by his special vocation as a missionary to the heathen world. And the staple of that good news which he proclaimed was **"the unsearchable riches of Christ."** Riches (ploutos) is rightly read in the neuter. The adjective occurs in Rom. 11:33, and has its origin in the Septuagint, where it represents the Hebrew formula in Job 5:9, 9:10 and in Job 34:24 (Septuagint uses of "unsearchable"). The riches of Christ are not simply "riches of grace"—"riches of glory"—"riches of inheritance," as Pelagius, Grotius, and Koppe are inclined to restrict them, but that treasury of spiritual blessing which is Christ's—so vast that the comprehension of its limits and the exhaustion of its contents are alike impossible. What the apostle wishes to characterize as grand in itself, or in its abundance, adaptation, and substantial permanence, he terms **"riches."** The riches of Christ are the true wealth of men and nations. And those riches are **"unsearchable."** Even the value of the portion already possessed cannot be told by any symbols of numeration, for such riches can have no adequate exponent or representative. Their source was in eternity, and in a love whose fervour and origin are above our ken, and whose duration shall be for ages of ages beyond compute. Their extent is boundless, and the mode in which they have been wrought out reveals a spiritual process whose results astonish and satisfy us, but whose inner springs and movements lie beyond our keenest inspection. And our appropriation of those riches, though it be a matter of consciousness, shrouds itself from our scrutiny, for it indicates the presence of the Divine Spirit in His power—a power exerted upon man, beyond resistance, but without compulsion; and in its mighty and gracious operation neither wounding his moral freedom nor impinging on his perfect and undeniable responsibility. The latest periods of time shall find these riches unimpaired, and eternity shall behold the same wealth neither worn by use nor dimmed by age, nor yet diminished by the myriads of its happy participants. ([Ephesians Commentary](#))

We see Paul's missionary zeal in this verse, a zeal which should stimulate those of us who have been chosen, adopted, redeemed and sealed by the Spirit to carry this same message of untraceable spiritual riches of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard His glorious name.

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## THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST Ephesians 3:8 - James Smith

What are the riches of earth, or sea, or sun, compared to these. Yet all are His.

I. What these Riches are. Unsearchable—

1. RICHES OF HIS WISDOM (Rom. 11:33). Evidenced in creation, providence, redemption.
2. RICHES OF HIS GRACE (Eph. 1:7). Evidenced in His love, sacrifice, mercy.
3. RICHES OF HIS GLORY (Phil. 4:19).

II. Who these Riches are for. "Gentiles." These riches are offered to us—

1. Through His HUMILIATION (2 Cor. 8:9).
2. Through His EXALTATION (Phil. 2:9).
3. Through His INHERITANCE (Col. 1:18, 19)

III. How these Riches may be had. "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich (Rev. 3:18).

1. Buy of HIM.
2. Buy WITHOUT MONEY (Isa. 55:1, 2).

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## QUESTION - [What are the unsearchable riches of Christ \(Ephesians 3:8\)?](#)

**ANSWER** - The phrase *unsearchable riches of Christ* comes from Ephesians 3:8–9: "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things" (ESV). The Greek for "unsearchable riches" is translated "boundless riches" in the NIV.

The Greek word translated "unsearchable" describes something that cannot be fully comprehended or explored. In other words, there is no limit to the riches of Christ; they are past finding out. Try as we might, we can never plumb the depths of Christ's worth. Paul delineates some of these riches in Ephesians 1:7–14: redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge of the mystery of His will, the message of truth, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and the guarantee of our inheritance. These are spiritual riches with eternal benefits, and we cannot fully comprehend them.

Jesus taught [two short parables](#) that emphasize the value of eternal life and the kingdom of God: "The kingdom of heaven is like

treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44–46). Like a hidden treasure or a pearl of great price, admission to the kingdom is of incalculable worth—and it is Jesus Christ who grants the admission. The unsearchable riches of Christ are on display in every believer's heart.

The unsearchable riches of Christ cannot be fully traced out. "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9), so the riches of Christ include all that God is. The unsearchable riches of Christ are the Glory of God, the Truth of God, the Wisdom of God, the Life of God, and the Love of God. In Christ, God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing" (Ephesians 1:3). In Christ are hidden "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). In Christ, God "has given us everything we need for a godly life" (2 Peter 1:3).

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul refers to himself as "less than the least of all the Lord's people." This humble statement is then contrasted with "the boundless riches of Christ." Paul describes himself as the lowest of believers while lifting Jesus up as the greatest of all. Every believer, in like humility, acknowledges the all-surpassing goodness and grace of God: "The LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless" (Psalm 84:11).

Christ's riches that He makes available to us are not material but spiritual. The unsearchable riches of Christ provide salvation to everyone who believes (John 3:16; Romans 1:16). We may be the worst of sinners, yet Jesus can forgive us and transform our lives (Romans 12:1–2). It is the gift that truly keeps on giving, as we are changed, by God's Spirit, into "loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled" people (Galatians 5:22–23, GEV).

[King Solomon](#) was a man of great riches and wisdom, and his fame spread throughout the known world. Dignitaries from other countries came to hear his wisdom and see his lavish display of wealth (1 Kings 10:24). Scripture says that Solomon had no equal in the earth at that time: "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth" (verse 23). Yet, for all that, Solomon's riches were not unsearchable. They could be quantified; the gold bars could be counted, and he had no inexhaustible supply of silver. Besides that, Solomon's riches were only the temporal treasures of this world. Jesus is "greater than Solomon" (Luke 11:31). The treasures of Christ are inexhaustible, they are unsearchable, and they are forever. [GotQuestions.org](#)

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**Poor Man's Evening Portion** - My soul! hear what the great apostle to the Gentiles speaks of himself. He calls himself "less than the least;" a thing almost impossible in itself: but he doth it with a view to magnify the riches, the exceeding great riches of grace. And in the same moment that he views himself so low and abject, he is lost in amazement at beholding the exalted office to which he was called. So that Paul cries out, "Unto me," a poor, sinful, unworthy creature of the earth, "to me was this grace given." My soul! leave for a moment the view of the apostle, and make the subject personal, by looking to a renewed instance of that grace, most freely given, in a case so far surpassing Paul in the greatness and undeservedness of it, as the imagination can conceive. Perhaps every sinner feels the same: this at least is certain, all may well feel the same. But the subject is not properly improved, either in the apostle's instance, or any other, unless there be connected with it the one great object of the whole,—the Redeemer's glory. This was, and is, the first and ultimate design for which grace was given. "This people," saith Jehovah, speaking of the redeemed in Christ, "have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise." (Isaiah 43:21.) And how do they show forth the Lord's praise, but by the gifts of the Lord's grace? When Jesus calleth a poor sinner, and manifests himself to him, this is the display of his grace: for it is on such, more especially, that he maketh his grace to shine. It would have been no grace had we merited his favour. But because we merit nothing, yea, are justly entitled to punishment, and yet God gives mercy, grace, and favour, this is what illustrates the exceeding riches of his grace, and demonstrates God's love to be indeed the love of God which passeth knowledge, because it differs altogether from creature love. And what tends yet more to display the riches of grace, that the glory of God in Christ, in following up the blessed plan of redemption, may be great indeed, the crown of Jesus, as Mediator, depends upon bringing to glory the objects of his love, on whom he hath made that grace to shine. And who shall calculate the rich revenue of love, adoration, and praise, in glory, which Jesus will have, and be for ever receiving, from the millions of redeemed souls gathered from sin and Satan, by the alone sovereignty of his grace? My soul! it is truly blessed thus to contemplate the person and work of Jesus, and the sweet effects of his grace. And what an addition to the subject is it, to say, with the apostle, each poor sinner for himself, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given!

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### James Smith - THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8).

This may be regarded as the explanatory title of Christ's great atoning work. All the difficulties and mysteries of redemption are met and revealed in the "unsearchable riches of Christ." How can a sinner's guilt be put away and the sinner justified? How can a heart at

enmity with God be changed and filled with the love of God? How can the righteous claims of a holy law be satisfied with regard to those who have no power and no desire to yield to its claims? How can God be just and yet justify the ungodly? How can the poor soul of man be possessed with the Spirit of God and brought into the fullness of Divinity, being conformed into His image? The answer to all this, and infinitely more, is found in these wonderful words: "The unsearchable riches of Christ."

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**Preach** (2097) (**euaggelizo/ euangelizo** from **eu** = good, well + **aggéllō** = proclaim, tell; English = evangelize) means to announce good news concerning something. **Euaggelizo** was often used in the Septuagint for preaching a glad or joyful message (cf. 1Sam. 31:9; 2Sa 1:20; 4:10) of God's kindnesses especially as they related to the promised Messianic blessings. In the NT **euaggelizo** was used especially of the glad tidings of the coming kingdom of God and of the salvation through Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God Who took away the sins of the world. **Euaggelizo** in Ephesians Ep 2:17; 3:8

**Euaggelizo/ euangelizo** in its original sense could be used to refer to a declaration of any kind of good news, but in the NT it (with 2 exceptions discussed below) refers especially to the glad tidings of the coming kingdom of God and of salvation obtained through Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Most of NT uses of **euaggelizo** are translated "preach" or "preach the gospel," whichever fits more smoothly into the context.

There are two passages that illustrate the **original meaning** of simply to "bring glad tidings" or "good news" of any nature...

Lk 1:19 And the angel answered and said to him (Zacharias), "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to **bring** you this **good news**. (that he would have a son, John the Baptist).

1Th 3:6 (note) But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has **brought us good news** (**euaggelizo**) of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you

Aside from these two passages the NT uses of **euaggelizo** usually have the technical meaning of publishing the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the **NAS**, in the NT **euaggelizo** is translated - bring glad tidings(1), bring good news(2 - one referring to birth of John the Baptist and the other to the birth of Jesus, so that the latter would in a sense refer to "preaching the good news"), brought good news (1Thes 3:6), good news preached(2), gospel preached(4), preach(4), preach good news(1), preach the gospel(12), preached (m) (9), preached the gospel(4), preaching(8), preaching a gospel(1), preaching good news(1), preaching the gospel(4).

**Gentiles** (1484) (**ethnos**) refers to non-Jews or the heathen. When **ethnos** is preceded by the definite article ("the") in the Greek, it means "the nations" which is synonymous with the **Gentiles** marking them out as a distinct class. **The Gentiles** implies those who practice idolatry and are ignorant of the true God.

All of mankind can be divided into Jew and Gentile and thus "**Gentile**" is a synonym for anyone who is non-Jew, who is not a member of the "chosen people". The Hebrew word corresponding to Gentile is **goyim**. From Genesis 12 onward the majority of the Scriptures are about the Jews, with the Gentiles mentioned as they interface with the Jews. The NT does have more mention of the Gentiles after the formation of the Church, but the last book, the book of Revelation is predominantly Jewish with over 200 OT quotes or allusions to OT passages.

**Johnson** explains that "Here Paul speaks of the mystery of that ministry. The divine power is measured out unto Paul, and the gift of grace has been given him to evangelize the untraced riches of Christ and to illuminate this arrangement ([Ephesians 3:1-13 Dispensation of Grace](#))

**Unfathomable** (421) (**anexichniastos** from **a** = without + **exichniázo** = explore) means past finding out, impossible to comprehend, immeasurable, unsearchable, impossible to be traced out. The **riches of Christ** cannot be traced out step-by-step. The word means they cannot be tracked out ("untrackable"), that they are so vast you cannot discover their end. It suggests a labyrinth or maze.

The only other use of this word in the NT is "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (Ro 11:33)

There are 3 uses in the **Septuagint** (Job 5:9; 9:10; 34:24) ...

Job 5:9 Who does great and **unsearchable** things, Wonders without number.

Job 9:10 Who does great things, **unfathomable**, And wondrous works without number.

**Theodoret**, one of the earlier church fathers, said "And why are you preached if the riches are unsearchable? For this very thing," he says, "I preach because they are unsearchable."

**Riches** (4149) (**ploutos** from **pletho** = fill) defines a plentiful supply, an abundance, plentitude. Ploutos literally describes material prosperity riches or wealth. It refers to an abundance of possessions exceeding the norm of a particular society. Figuratively, as used in this verse, **ploutos** describes spiritual abundance in Christ in Whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col 2:3-note) When a person trusts the Lord Jesus, he immediately becomes an infinitely rich spiritually for in Christ he possesses inexhaustible treasures. We can never find that wealth apart from Christ. **Ploutos** in Ephesians - Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16

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In his work [Meditations on Ephesians](#), Henry Law has these words on Ephesians 3:8...

Paul's eye continues to be fixed on his high calling to be a Minister of Christ, and on the glorious subject which it was his privilege to unfold. He speaks of himself and of his Lord. His view is twofold. When self (**flesh** - remove the "h" and spell it backwards!) appears, he sinks into the lowest depths of humiliation and of shame. When Jesus is discerned, his mind ascends with rapid wing to the heights of unbounded praise. Thus two points are before us. (1.) The Minister as viewed by himself. (2.) Jesus as a treasury of celestial gifts.

**(1.) Paul calls upon His followers to be clothed with humility.**

He here shows that this was the clothing in which he was clad. He appears as the follower of Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart. Humility is indeed a precious grace. It thrives not in nature's rank soil. The heathen had no term to depict it. How could they speak of that which to them was utterly unknown! It is a grace which the Spirit deeply implants, when He reveals the misery and filth of indwelling sin. It grows with the growth of faith, and ripens as the celestial home is approached. Paul is a notable example. With what shame he viewed himself when writing to the Corinthians! He says, "I am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." When writing to the Romans he humbles himself as the very bond-slave of iniquity. He states that when he would do good evil was present with him. He finds a law in his members bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members. In the passage before us he gives precedence to all the people of God, and by invention of a new word in language, he calls himself "less than the least of all saints." Can he sink lower in self-estimation? When his long career of service had reached its close he casts his eye along his life of labor, and humbly bewails that of sinners he is the chief. Far be from us the thought that he did not recognize God's gracious work within. He truly felt, by the grace of God he was what he was, and with ascending step he pressed toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. His was no mock humility. He did not disparage self that he might win applause. But the more the light of heaven shone inwardly, the more it revealed the continuance and the vileness of inbred corruption. The more he knew God the more he loathed himself. The branch laden with abundance of fruit bends beneath the load. The barren twigs shoot upwards. Thus Paul deeply felt and humbly avowed that he was less than the least of all saints.

**(2.) From these depths of humility he uplifts his eyes to Christ.**

He strives to behold unsearchable riches. What an object here meets our gaze! We approach hallowed ground. Let us take off earthly sandals and approach with hallowed minds. Angels veil their faces when they contemplate the heavenly glory. Into what abasement and reverence should we poor sinners sink! But we are bid to search the field in which Christ the boundless treasure is hid. He is indeed a treasure-house in which all-surpassing wealth is amassed. (Col 2:3-note) Who can measure the infinitudes of thought contained in the revelation, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily!" (Col 2:9-note) He is great as God can be, He is Jehovah's Fellow; co-equal, co-eternal with the Father—God of God—Light of light—very God of very God. Mark the attributes which are revealed to us. His power is omnipotence. His wisdom is omniscience. His presence—it is everywhere—without center, without circumference. Vain is the imagination which strives to embrace such object—vain the utterance, which would venture to depict it! These riches are indeed unsearchable.

But He takes the manhood into God. He humbles Himself and becomes bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh. What motive urges Him to such condescension? It is zeal for His Father's glory, and love for sinners of our vile race. Behold again these marvelous riches! They are verily unsearchable. Shall we think of the merits of His cleansing blood, which obliterates forever the crimson-dye of our iniquity—the beauteous robe of perfect righteousness in which He decks His bride, and presents her faultless in the courts of heaven (1Co 1:30, 2Co 5:21, Ro 3:24-note)? Shall we speak of His prevailing prayers which solicit and obtain all the blessings which heaven can bestow? (He 7:25-note, Ro 8:34-note) Shall we speak of His coming glory? (Mt 24:30, Rev 1:7, Rev 19:11ff-note) Vision indeed is dazzled. We can only exclaim, The riches of Christ are unsearchable. But though the search can never reach an end, for while upon earth we can only see through a glass darkly (1Co 13:12), we should daily strive to advance more and more in the pursuit—to dig more deeply in this field—to



draw water more and more from these unfathomable wells (Php 3:13-note, Php 3:14-note). Let too the truth be devoutly pondered that all that Christ is, is for His people—all His possessions are for them—His riches are their inheritance (1Co 2:9, Re 3:21-note, Ro 8:17-note). True is His Word in supplication to the Father, "The glory which You gave Me I have given them." (Jn 17:22) He reveals that His Gospel is for them—that the love with which the Father loved Him, may be in them, and He in them (Jn 17:25, 26). Such is the subject which Paul was called to preach unto the Gentiles, and which the faithful Pastor is privileged to unfold unto his flock. What a subject is here before us! How vast—how boundless—how limitless—how inconceivable—how inexhaustible—how infinite! Let it not then be thought that matter for the pulpit is scanty and barren. Let not the preacher speak of littleness—of frivolity—of earthly speculations. Let him preach Christ—Christ only—Christ fully.

**The theme will be ever new. Hearers will never weary. They will be cheered, and gladdened, and saved**

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### **The unsearchable riches of Christ!**

- There is everything in Christ to encourage the greatest sinners to believe on Him, to rest and lean upon Him for all happiness and blessedness. Christ is ...
- the greatest good,
- the choicest good,
- the chief good,
- the most suitable good,
- the most necessary good;
- a pure good,
- a real good,
- a total good,
- an eternal good,
- a soul-satisfying good!
- Sinners, are you poor? Christ has gold to enrich you.
- Are you naked? Christ has royal robes, and white clothing to clothe you.
- Are you blind? Christ has eye-salve to enlighten you.
- Are you hungry? Christ will be manna to feed you.
- Are you thirsty? He will be a well of living water to refresh you.
- Are you wounded? He has a balm under his wings to heal you.
- Are you sick? He is a physician to cure you.
- Are you prisoners? He has laid down a ransom for you.

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### **Unfathomable Riches -**

A. T. Pierson was powerful preacher, educator, and missionary statesman at the turn of the 20th Century. He once tried to preach on God's blessings as described in Ephesians 1-3, a section of Scripture that continually talks about our unsearchable wealth and riches in Christ. Pierson said:

In the words of the text, **"the unsearchable riches of Christ,"** "unsearchable" literally means riches that can never be explored. You not only cannot count or measure them, but you can form no estimate of them; and you not only can form no estimate of them, but you never can get to the end of your investigation. There is a boundless continent, a world, a universe of riches, that still lies before you, when you have carried your search to the limits of possibility. I feel as though I had a theme, about which no man ought to speak. An archangel's tongue could do no justice to it.

Pierson nevertheless tried to point out the truths about the believer's wealth as described in these three chapters. Then he told his congregation:

I sink back exhausted, in the vain attempt to set before this congregation the greatest mystery of grace that I ever grappled with. I cannot remember, in thirty years of Gospel preaching, ever to have been confronted with a theme that more baffled every outreach of thought and every possibility of utterance than the theme that I have now attempted in the name of God to present.

**Blaikie** expresses it well:

Two attractive words, **riches** and **unsearchable**, conveying the idea of the things that are most precious being infinitely abundant. Usually precious things are rare; their very rarity increases their price; but here that which is most precious is also boundless—riches of compassion and love, of merit, of sanctifying, comforting and transforming power, all without limit, and capable of satisfy ([Blaikie, W G: Ephesians in The Pulpit Commentary. Ages Software](#))

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**From Rags To Riches**-During the Great Depression, a man named Mr. Yates owned a huge piece of land in Texas where he raised sheep. Financial problems had brought him to the brink of bankruptcy. Then an oil company, believing there might be oil on his land, asked for permission to drill.

With nothing to lose, Mr. Yates agreed. Soon, at a shallow depth, the workmen struck the largest oil deposit found at that time on the North American continent. Overnight, Mr. Yates became a billionaire. The amazing thing, though, is that the untapped riches were there all along. He just didn't know it!

Are you a spiritual "Mr. Yates" who is unaware of the riches you already own in Christ? When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he revealed hidden treasure by preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). His goal was to make all Christians see how wealthy they actually are (Ephesians 3:9-[note](#)).

Paul not only preached but also prayed that believers might recognize and use their spiritual wealth, that they would be strengthened within, established in love, powerful in prayer, and filled with God Himself.

Read Ep 3:14, 15-[note](#), Ep 3:16, 17-[note](#), Ep 3:18, 19-[note](#), Ep 3:20, 21-[note](#) again, and claim your unlimited spiritual resources today. --J E Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Why do we live like paupers,  
When riches we possess?  
We have become joint heirs with Christ  
With blessings measureless.  
--Sper

To be rich in God is far better than to be rich in goods.

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**He Has What We Need**- What makes the gospel such good news? Paul summarized it in Ephesians 3:8 as "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Those who receive the living Christ into their lives are free to enjoy His spiritual riches. But are we using all that He has given to us?

Author Bob George has observed that it's possible for a Christian to live as a "practical atheist." That's a person who, despite right doctrine, "approaches life as if he were the only resource available." Such an approach is as unnecessary and impractical as buying a powerful car and then pushing it.

The apostle Paul's passion for the Ephesian believers was that they might realize that all their needs could be met by Christ's resources. He prayed for them and asked God the Father to give them spiritual strength, close fellowship with Christ, and better understanding of His love for them, resulting in greater Christlikeness (Ep 3:16, 17-[note](#), Ep 3:18, 19-[note](#)). He prayed because he believed our God is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ep 3:20, 21-[note](#)).

Are you enjoying Christ's treasures? Or are you pushing on in your own strength? Paul's prayer gives us reason to be thankful. God has everything we need. --J E Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Empty hands I lifted heavenward,  
And He filled them with a store  
Of His own transcendent riches  
Till my hands could hold no more. --Nicholson

**C H Spurgeon's devotionals from *Morning and Evening* on Ephesians 3:8...**

The apostle Paul felt it a great privilege to be allowed to preach the gospel. He did not look upon his calling as a drudgery, but he entered upon it with intense delight. Yet while Paul was thus thankful for his office, his success in it greatly humbled him. The fuller a vessel becomes, the deeper it sinks in the water. Idlers may indulge a fond conceit of their abilities, because they are untried; but the earnest worker soon learns his own weakness. If you seek humility, try hard work; if you would know your nothingness, attempt some great thing for Jesus. If you would feel how utterly powerless you are apart from the living God, attempt especially the great work of proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ, and you will know, as you never knew before, what a weak unworthy thing you are. Although the apostle thus knew and confessed his weakness, he was never perplexed as to the subject of his ministry. From his first sermon to his last, Paul preached Christ, and nothing but Christ. He lifted up the cross, and extolled the Son of God who bled thereon. Follow his example in all your personal efforts to spread the glad tidings of salvation, and let "Christ and him crucified" be your ever recurring theme. The Christian should be like those lovely spring flowers which, when the sun is shining, open their golden cups, as if saying, "Fill us with thy beams!" but when the sun is hidden behind a cloud, they close their cups and droop their heads. So should the Christian feel the sweet influence of Jesus; Jesus must be his sun, and he must be the flower which yields itself to the Sun of Righteousness. Oh! to speak of Christ alone, this is the subject which is both "seed for the sower, and bread for the eater." This is the live coal for the lip of the speaker, and the master-key to the heart of the hearer. (March 2, Evening)

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My Master has riches beyond the count of arithmetic, the measurement of reason, the dream of imagination, or the eloquence of words. They are unsearchable! You may look, and study, and weigh, but Jesus is a greater Saviour than you think him to be when your thoughts are at the greatest. My Lord is more ready to pardon than you to sin, more able to forgive than you to transgress. My Master is more willing to supply your wants than you are to confess them. Never tolerate low thoughts of my Lord Jesus. When you put the crown on his head, you will only crown him with silver when he deserves gold. My Master has riches of happiness to bestow upon you now. He can make you to lie down in green pastures, and lead you beside still waters. There is no music like the music of his pipe, when he is the Shepherd and you are the sheep, and you lie down at his feet. There is no love like his, neither earth nor heaven can match it. To know Christ and to be found in him—oh! this is life, this is joy, this is marrow and fatness, wine on the lees well refined. My Master does not treat his servants churlishly; he gives to them as a king giveth to a king; he gives them two heavens—a heaven below in serving him here, and a heaven above in delighting in him for ever. His unsearchable riches will be best known in eternity. He will give you on the way to heaven all you need; your place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks, your bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure; but it is there, there, where you shall hear the song of them that triumph, the shout of them that feast, and shall have a face-to-face view of the glorious and beloved One. The unsearchable riches of Christ! This is the tune for the minstrels of earth, and the song for the harpers of heaven. Lord, teach us more and more of Jesus, and we will tell out the good news to others. (August 22, Evening)

**Honoring God with Humility - John Calvin**

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ephesians 3:8  
SUGGESTED FURTHER READING: Romans 12

Paul's example warns us that the more someone is exalted by God's hand, the more he should humble himself. Truly, even those who are most backward have reason enough to magnify God's goodness for his calling them into his church. For what a wonderful thing it is for us to be reckoned as God's children, heirs of his kingdom, and members of our Lord Jesus Christ to be partakers of the glory into which he is entered (Luke 24:26)!

The Christian who is supposedly inferior to others, is a nobody and a fool, and is contemptible in this world's eyes, is nevertheless adopted by God into the number of his children to be part of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even the least of us has enough to glorify God's grace. Those who have advanced to any degree of honor then have less of an excuse if they do not honor God for what he has bestowed upon them above others.

For example, if a person has knowledge and grace to use in serving the church, he becomes doubly guilty if he does not

acknowledge that he is even more indebted to God for these abilities. Also, those who by their strength or skill are able to do more than poor folk who have nothing more than what they need to look after themselves, ought to humble themselves before God and to stoop in such a way that there is no presumption or pride in them to puff them up.

In short, just as every person has received grace through God's goodness, so every person's aim always ought to be to honor God. We should confess that we are more indebted and bound to him because he has dealt so liberally with us.

FOR MEDITATION: Remembering that those who have been doubly gifted are doubly indebted to God is an excellent way to foster humility. Paul was greatly gifted by God and could easily have been consumed with pride. Yet he remembered where the gifts had come from and remained humble. We ought to do the same. [365 Days with Calvin](#)

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**Whose Prisoner?**- A story is told of Scottish minister Alexander Whyte, who was able to look at the bleakest situation and yet find something to be thankful for. On a dark Sunday morning when the weather was freezing, wet, and stormy, one of his deacons whispered,

"I am sure the preacher won't be able to thank God for anything on a day like this. It's absolutely horrible outside!"

The pastor began the service by praying,

"We thank Thee, O God, that the weather is not always like this."

The apostle Paul also saw the best in every situation. Consider his circumstances as he wrote to the church in Ephesus while he awaited trial before the Roman emperor Nero. Most people would have concluded that he was a prisoner of Rome. But Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Christ. He thought of his hardship as an opportunity to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

These words of Paul should challenge us:

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

Paul, a prisoner of Christ, saw himself as being given the privilege to serve God and present the "riches of Christ" to many.

Whose prisoner are we? —Albert Lee ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Afflictions may test me,  
They cannot destroy;  
One glimpse of Thy love  
Turns them all into joy. —Willett

**The trials that imprison you need not limit God's work in you.**

## Unsearchable Riches J C Ryle

Chapter 18 from his book [Holiness](#)

IF we heard that sentence read for the first time, I think we should all feel it was a very remarkable one, even though we did not know by whom it was written. It is remarkable on account of the bold and striking figures of speech which it contains. "Less than the least of all saints;"—"Unsearchable riches of Christ;"—these are indeed "thoughts that breathe and words that burn."

But the sentence is doubly remarkable when we consider the man who wrote it. The writer was none other than the great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul,—the leader of that noble little Jewish army, which went forth from Palestine eighteen centuries ago, and turned the world upside down,—that good soldier of Christ who left a deeper mark on mankind than any born of woman, except his sinless Master,—a mark which abides to this very day. Surely such a sentence from the pen of such a man demands peculiar attention.

Let us fix our eyes steadily on this text, and notice in it three things:—

I. First, what St. Paul says of himself. He says, "I am less than the least of all saints."

II. Secondly, what St. Paul says of his ministerial office. He says, "Grace is given unto me to preach."

III. Thirdly, what St. Paul says of the great subject of his preaching. He calls it "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

I trust that a few words on each of these three points may help to fasten down the whole text in memories, consciences, hearts, and minds.

### **I. In the first place, let us notice what St. Paul says of himself**

The language he uses is singularly strong. The founder of famous Churches, the writer of fourteen inspired epistles, the man who was "not behind the very chiefest apostles," "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft,"—the man who "spent and was spent" for souls, and "counted all things but loss for Christ,"—the man who could truly say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,"—what do we find him saying of himself? He employs an emphatic comparative and superlative. He says, "I am less than the least of all saints." What a poor creature is the least saint! Yet St. Paul says, "I am less than that man."

Such language as this, I suspect, is almost unintelligible to many who profess and call themselves Christians. Ignorant alike of the Bible and their own hearts, they cannot understand what a saint means when he speaks so humbly of himself and his attainments. "It is a mere fashion of speaking," they will tell you; "it can only mean what St. Paul used to be, when he was a novice, and first began to serve Christ." So true it is that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 2:14.) The prayers, the praises, the conflicts, the fears, the hopes, the joys, the sorrows of the true Christian, the whole experience of the seventh of Romans,—all, all are "foolishness" to the man of the world. Just as the blind man is no judge of a Reynolds, or a Gainsborough, and the deaf cannot appreciate Handel's Messiah, so the unconverted man cannot fully understand an apostle's lowly estimate of himself.

But we may rest assured that what St. Paul wrote with his pen, he really felt in his heart. The language of our text does not stand alone. It is even exceeded in other places. To the Philippians he says, "I have not attained, nor am I already perfect: I follow after." To the Corinthians he says, "I am the least of the apostles, which am not meet to be called an apostle." To Timothy he says, "I am chief of sinners." To the Romans he cries, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Phil. 3:12; 1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 7:24.) The plain truth is that St. Paul saw in his own heart of hearts far more defects and infirmities than he saw in any one else. The eyes of his understanding were so fully opened by the Holy Spirit of God, that he detected a hundred things wrong in himself, which the dull eyes of other men never observed at all. In short, possessing great spiritual light, he had great insight into his own natural corruption, and was clothed from head to foot with humility. (1 Peter 5:5.)

Now let us clearly understand that humility like St. Paul's was not a peculiar characteristic of the great apostle of the Gentiles. On the contrary, it is one leading mark of all the most eminent saints of God in every age. The more real grace men have in their hearts, the deeper is their sense of sin. The more light the Holy Ghost pours into their souls, the more do they discern their own infirmities, defilements, and darkness. The dead soul feels and sees nothing; with life comes clear vision, a tender conscience, and spiritual sensibility. Observe what lowly expressions Abraham, and Jacob, and Job, and David, and John the Baptist, used about themselves. Study the biographies of modern saints like Bradford, and Hooker, and George Herbert, and Beveridge, and Baxter, and McCheyne. Mark how one common feature of character belongs to them all,—a very deep sense of sin.

Superficial and shallow professors in the warmth of their first love may talk, if they will, of perfection. The great saints, in every era of Church history, from St. Paul down to this day, have always been "clothed with humility."

He that desires to be saved, among the readers of this paper, let him know this day that the first steps towards heaven are a deep sense of sin and a lowly estimate of ourselves. Let him cast away that weak and silly tradition that the beginning of religion is to feel ourselves "good." Let him rather grasp that grand Scriptural principle, that we must begin by feeling "bad;" and that until we really feel "bad," we know nothing of true goodness or saving Christianity. Happy is he who has learned to draw near to God with the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13.)

Let us all seek humility. No grace suits man so well. What are we that we should be proud? Of all creatures born into the world none is so dependent as the child of Adam. Physically looked at, what body requires such care and attention, and is such a daily debtor to half creation for food and clothing, as the body of man? Mentally looked at, how little do the wisest men know (and they are but few), and how ignorant the vast majority of mankind are, and what misery do they create by their own folly! "We are but of yesterday," says the book of Job, "and know nothing." (Job 8:9.) Surely there is no created being on earth or in heaven that ought to be so humble as man.

Let us seek humility. There is no grace which so befits an English churchman. Our matchless Prayer-book, from first to last, puts the humblest language into the mouths of all who use it. The sentences at the beginning of morning and evening prayer, the General Confession, the Litany, the Communion Service,—all, all are replete with lowly-minded and self-abasing expressions. All, with one

harmonious voice, supply Church of England worshippers with clear teaching about our right position in the sight of God.

Let us all seek more humility, if we know anything of it now. The more we have of it the more Christlike we shall be. It is written of our blessed Master (though in Him there was no sin) that "being in the form of God He thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:6–8.) And let us remember the words which precede that passage,—“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Depend on it, the nearer men draw to heaven, the more humble do they become. In the hour of death, with one foot in the grave, with something of the light of heaven shining down upon them, hundreds of great saints and Church dignitaries—such men as Selden, Bishop Butler, Archbishop Longley—have left on record their confession, that never till that hour did they see their sins so clearly, and feel so deeply their debt to mercy and grace. Heaven alone, I suppose, will fully teach us how humble we ought to be. Then only, when we stand within the veil, and look back on all the way of life by which we were led, then only shall we completely understand the need and beauty of humility. Strong language like St. Paul’s will not appear to us too strong in that day. No: indeed! We shall cast our crowns before the throne, and realize what a great divine meant, when he said, “The anthem in heaven will be, What hath God wrought.”

## **II. In the second place, let us notice what St. Paul says of his ministerial office**

There is a grand simplicity in the Apostle’s words about this subject. He says, “Grace is given unto me that I should preach.” The meaning of the sentence is plain: “To me is granted the privilege of being a messenger of good news. I have been commissioned to be a herald of glad tidings.”—Of course we cannot doubt that St. Paul’s conception of the minister’s office included the administration of the sacraments, and the doing all other things needful for the edifying of the body of Christ. But here, as in other places, it is evident that the leading idea continually before his mind was, that the chief business of a minister of the New Testament is to be a preacher, an evangelist, God’s ambassador, God’s messenger, and the proclaimer of God’s good news to a fallen world. He says in another place, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.” (1 Cor. 1:17.)

I fail to see that St. Paul ever supports the favourite theory, that there was intended to be a sacerdotal ministry, a sacrificing priesthood in the Church of Christ. There is not a word in the Acts or in his Epistles to the Churches to warrant such a notion. It is nowhere written, “God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, then priests.” (1 Cor. 12:28.) There is a conspicuous absence of the theory in the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, where, if anywhere, we might have expected to find it. On the contrary, in these very Epistles, we read such expressions as these, “God hath manifested His Word through preaching.” “I am appointed a preacher.” “I am ordained a preacher.” “That by me the preaching might be fully known.” (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:17; Tit. 1:3.) And, to crown all, one of his last injunctions to his friend Timothy, when he leaves him in charge of an organized Church, is this pithy sentence, “Preach the Word.” (2 Tim. 4:2.) In short, I believe St. Paul would have us understand that, however various the works for which the Christian minister is set apart, his first, foremost, and principal work is to be the preacher and proclaimer of God’s Word.

But, while we refuse to allow that a sacrificing priesthood has any warrant of Scripture, let us beware in these days that we do not rush into the extreme of undervaluing the office which the minister of Christ holds. There is some danger in this direction. Let us grasp firmly certain fixed principles about the Christian ministry, and, however strong our dislike of priesthood and aversion to Romanism, let nothing tempt us to let these principles slip out of our hands. Surely there is solid middle ground between a grovelling idolatry of sacerdotalism on one hand, and a disorderly anarchy on the other. Surely it does not follow, because we will not be Papists in this matter of the ministry, that we must needs be Quakers or Plymouth Brethren.\* This, at any rate, was not the mind of St. Paul.

(a) For one thing, let us settle it firmly in our minds that the ministerial office is a Scriptural Institution. I need not weary you with quotations to prove this point. I will simply advise you to read the Epistles to Timothy and Titus and judge for yourselves. If these Epistles do not authorize a ministry, there is, to my mind, no meaning in words. Take a jury of the first twelve intelligent, honest, disinterested, unprejudiced men you can find, and set them down with a New Testament to examine this question by themselves: “Is the Christian ministry a Scriptural thing or not?” I have no doubt what their verdict would be.

(b) For another thing, let us settle it in our minds that the ministerial office is a most wise and useful provision of God. It secures the regular maintenance of all Christ’s ordinances and means of grace. It provides an undying machinery for promoting the awakening of sinners and the edification of saints. All experience proves that everybody’s business soon becomes nobody’s business; and if this is true in other matters, it is no less true in the matter of religion. Our God is a God of order, and a God who works by means, and we have no right to expect His cause to be kept up by constant miraculous interpositions, while His servants stand idle. For the uninterrupted preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments, no better plan can be devised than the appointment of a regular order of men who shall give themselves wholly to Christ’s business.

(c) For another thing, let us settle it firmly in our minds that the ministerial office is an honourable privilege. It is an honour to be the

Ambassador of a King: the very PERSON of such an officer of state is respected, and called legally sacred. It is an honour to bear the tidings of a victory such as Trafalgar and Waterloo: before the invention of telegraphs it was a highly coveted distinction. But how much greater honour is it to be the ambassador of the King of kings, and to proclaim the good news of the conquest achieved on Calvary! To serve directly such a Master, to carry such a message, to know that the results of our work, if God shall bless it, are eternal, this is indeed a privilege. Other labourers may work for a corruptible crown, but the minister of Christ for an incorruptible. Never is a land in worse condition than when the ministers of religion have caused their office to be ridiculed and despised. It is a tremendous word in Malachi: "I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways." (Malachi 2:9.) But, whether men will hear or forbear, the office of a faithful ambassador is honourable. It was a fine saying of an old missionary on his death-bed, who died at the age of ninety-six,—“The very best thing that a man can do is to preach the Gospel.”

Let me leave this branch of my subject with an earnest request that all who pray will never forget to make supplications and prayers and intercession for the ministers of Christ,—that there never may be wanting a due supply of them at home and in the mission field,—that they may be kept sound in the faith and holy in their lives, and that they may take heed to themselves as well as to the doctrine. (1 Tim. 4:16.)

Oh, remember that while our office is honourable, useful, and Scriptural, it is also one of deep and painful responsibility! We watch for souls “as those who must give account” at the judgment day. (Heb. 13:17.) If souls are lost through our unfaithfulness, their blood will be required at our hands. If we had only to read services and administer sacraments, to wear a peculiar dress and go through a round of ceremonies, and bodily exercise, and gestures, and postures, our position would be comparatively light. But this is not all. We have got to deliver our Master’s message,—to keep back nothing that is profitable,—to declare all the counsel of God. If we tell our congregations less than the truth or more than the truth, we may ruin for ever immortal souls. Life and death are in the power of the preacher’s tongue. “Woe is unto us if we preach not the Gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16.)

Once more I say, Pray for us. Who is sufficient for these things? Remember the old saying of the Fathers: “None are in more spiritual danger than ministers.” It is easy to criticise and find fault with us. We have a treasure in earthen vessels. We are men of like passions with yourselves, and not infallible. Pray for us in these trying, tempting, controversial days, that our Church may never lack bishops, priests, and deacons who are sound in the faith, bold as lions, “wise as serpents, and yet harmless as doves.” (Matt. 10:16.) The very man who said, “Grace is given me to preach,” is the same man who said, in another place, “Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.” (2 Thess. 3:1, 2.)

III. Let us now notice, in the last place, what St. Paul says of the great subject of his preaching. He calls it “the unsearchable riches of Christ”

That the converted man of Tarsus should preach “Christ,” is no more than we might expect from his antecedents. Having found peace through the blood of the cross himself, we may be sure he would always tell the story of the cross to others. He never wasted precious time in exalting a mere rootless morality, in descanting on vague abstractions and empty platitudes,—such as “the true,” and “the noble,” and “the earnest,” and “the beautiful,” and “the germs of goodness in human nature,” and the like. He always went to the root of the matter, and showed men their great family disease, their desperate state as sinners, and the Great Physician needed by a sin-sick world.

That he should preach Christ among “the Gentiles,” again, is in keeping with all we know of his line of action in all places and among all people. Wherever he travelled and stood up to preach,—at Antioch, at Lystra, at Philippi, at Athens, at Corinth, at Ephesus, among Greeks or Romans, among learned or unlearned, among Stoics and Epicureans, before rich or poor, barbarians, Scythians, bond, or free,—Jesus and His vicarious death, Jesus and His resurrection, was the key-note of his sermons. Varying his mode of address according to his audience, as he wisely did, the pith and heart of his preaching was Christ crucified.

But in the text before us, you will observe, he uses a very peculiar expression, an expression which unquestionably stands alone in his writings,—“the unsearchable riches of Christ.” It is the strong burning language of one who always remembered his debt to Christ’s mercy and grace, and loved to show how intensely he felt it by his words. St. Paul was not a man to act or speak by halves. (*Quicquid fecit valdè fecit.*) He never forgot the road to Damascus, the house of Judas in the street called Strait, the visit of good Ananias, the scales falling from his eyes, and his own marvellous passage from death to life. These things are always fresh and green before his mind; and so he is not content to say, “Grace is given me to preach Christ.” No: he amplifies his subject. He calls it “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

But what did the Apostle mean when he spoke of “unsearchable riches”? This is a hard question to answer. No doubt he saw in Christ such a boundless provision for all the wants of man’s soul that he knew no other phrase to convey his meaning. From whatever standpoint he beheld Jesus, he saw in Him far more than mind could conceive, or tongue could tell. What he precisely intended must necessarily be matter of conjecture. But it may be useful to set down in detail some of the things which most probably

were in his mind. It may, it must, it ought to be useful. For after all, let us remember, these “riches of Christ” are riches which you and I need in England just as much as St. Paul; and, best of all, these “riches” are treasured up in Christ for you and me as much as they were 1800 years ago. They are still there. They are still offered freely to all who are willing to have them. They are still the property of every one who repents and believes. Let us glance briefly at some of them.

(a) Set down, first and foremost, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in Christ’s person. That miraculous union of perfect Man and perfect God in our Lord Jesus Christ is a great mystery, no doubt, which we have no line to fathom. It is a high thing; and we cannot attain to it. But, mysterious as that union may be, it is a mine of comfort and consolation to all who can rightly regard it. Infinite power and infinite sympathy are met together and combined in our Saviour. If He had been only Man He could not have saved us. If He had been only God (I speak with reverence) He could not have been “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” nor “suffered Himself being tempted.” (Heb. 2:18; 4:15.) As God, He is mighty to save; and as Man, He is exactly suited to be our Head, Representative, and Friend. Let those who never think deeply, taunt us, if they will, with squabbling about creeds, and dogmatic theology. But let thoughtful Christians never be ashamed to believe and hold fast the neglected doctrine of the Incarnation, and the union of two natures in our Saviour. It is a rich and precious truth that our Lord Jesus Christ is both “God and Man.”

(b) Set down, next, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the work which Christ accomplished for us, when He lived on earth, died, and rose again. Truly and indeed, “He finished the work which His Father gave Him to do,” (John 17:4.)—the work of atonement for sin, the work of reconciliation, the work of redemption, the work of satisfaction, the work of substitution as “the just for the unjust.” It pleases some men, I know, to call these short phrases “man-made theological terms, human dogmas,” and the like. But they will find it hard to prove that each of these much-abused phrases does not honestly contain the substance of plain texts of Scripture; which, for convenience sake, like the word Trinity, divines have packed into a single word. And each phrase is very rich.

(c) Set down, next, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the offices which Christ at this moment fills, as He lives for us at the right hand of God. He is at once our Mediator, our Advocate, our Priest, our Intercessor, our Shepherd, our Bishop, our Physician, our Captain, our King, our Master, our Head, our Forerunner, our Elder Brother, the Bridegroom of our souls. No doubt these offices are worthless to those who know nothing of vital religion. But to those who live the life of faith, and seek first the kingdom of God, each office is precious as gold.

(d) Set down, next, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the names and titles which are applied to Christ in the Scriptures. Their number is very great, every careful Bible-reader knows, and I cannot of course pretend to do more than select a few of them. Think for a moment of such titles as the Lamb of God,—the bread of life,—the fountain of living waters,—the light of the world,—the door,—the way,—the vine,—the rock,—the corner-stone,—the Christian’s robe,—the Christian’s altar. Think of all these names, I say, and consider how much they contain. To the careless, worldly man they are mere “words,” and nothing more; but to the true Christian each title, if beaten out and developed, will be found to have within its bosom a wealth of blessed truth.

(e) Set down, lastly, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the characteristic qualities, attributes, dispositions, and intentions of Christ’s mind towards man, as we find them revealed in the New Testament, In Him there are riches of mercy, love, and compassion for sinners,—riches of power to cleanse, pardon, forgive, and to save to the uttermost,—riches of willingness to receive all who come to Him repenting and believing,—riches of ability to change by His Spirit the hardest hearts and worst characters,—riches of tender patience to bear with the weakest believer,—riches of strength to help His people to the end, notwithstanding every foe without and within,—riches of sympathy for all who are cast down and bring their troubles to Him,—and last, but not least, riches of glory to reward, when He comes again to raise the dead and gather His people to be with Him in His kingdom. Who can estimate these riches? The children of this world may regard them with indifference, or turn away from them with disdain; but those who feel the value of their souls know better. They will say with one voice, “There are no riches like those which are laid up in Christ for His people.”

For, best of all, these riches are unsearchable. They are a mine which, however long it may be worked, is never exhausted. They are a fountain which, however many draw its waters, never runs dry. The sun in heaven above us has been shining for 6,000 years, and giving light, and life, and warmth, and fertility to the whole surface of the globe. There is not a tree or a flower in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America which is not a debtor to the sun. And still the sun shines on for generation after generation, and season after season, rising and setting with unbroken regularity, giving to all, taking from none, and to all ordinary eyes the same in light and heat that it was in the day of creation, the great common benefactor of mankind. Just so it is, if any illustration can approach the reality, just so it is with Christ. He is still “the Sun of righteousness” to all mankind. (Malachi 4:2.) Millions have drawn from Him in days gone by, and looking to Him have lived with comfort, and with comfort died. Myriads at this moment are drawing from Him daily supplies of mercy, grace, peace, strength, and help, and find “all fulness” dwelling in Him. And yet the half of the riches laid up in Him for mankind, I doubt not, is utterly unknown! Surely the Apostle might well use that phrase, “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Let me now conclude this paper with three words of practical application. For convenience sake I shall put them in the form of questions, and I invite each reader of this volume, to examine them quietly, and try to give them an answer.



(1) First then let me ask you what you think of yourself? What St. Paul thought of himself you have seen and heard. Now, what are your thoughts about yourself? Have you found out that grand foundation-truth that you are a sinner, a guilty sinner in the sight of God?

The cry for more education in this day is loud and incessant. Ignorance is universally deplored. But, you may depend, there is no ignorance so common and so mischievous as ignorance of ourselves. Yes: men may know all arts, and sciences, and languages, and political economy, and state-craft, and yet be miserably ignorant of their own hearts, and their own state before God.

Be very sure that self-knowledge is the first step towards heaven. To know God's unspeakable perfection, and our own immense imperfection,—to see our own unspeakable defectiveness and corruption, is the A B C in saving religion. The more real inward light we have, the more humble and lowly-minded we shall be, and the more we shall understand the value of that despised thing, the Gospel of Christ. He that thinks worst of himself and his own doings is perhaps the best Christian before God. Well would it be for many if they would pray, night and day, this simple prayer,—“Lord, show me myself.”

(2) Secondly, what do you think of the ministers of Christ? Strange as that question may seem, I verily believe that the kind of answer a man would give to it, if he speaks honestly, is very often a fair test of the state of his heart.

Observe, I am not asking what you think of an idle, worldly, inconsistent clergyman,—a sleeping watchman and faithless shepherd. No! I ask what you think of the faithful minister of Christ, who honestly exposes sin, and pricks your conscience? Mind how you answer that question. Too many, now-a-days, like only those ministers who prophesy smooth things and let their sins alone, who flatter their pride and amuse their intellectual taste, but who never sound an alarm, and never tell them of a wrath to come. When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” (1 Kings 21:20.) When Micaiah was named to Ahab, he cried, “I hate him because he doth not prophesy good of me, but evil.” (1 Kings 22:8.) Alas, there are many like Ahab in the nineteenth century! They like a ministry which does not make them uncomfortable, and send them home ill at ease. How is it with you? Oh, believe me, he is the best friend who tells you the most truth! It is an evil sign in the Church when Christ's witnesses are silenced, or persecuted, and men hate him who reproveth. (Isaiah 29:21.) It was a solemn saying of the prophet to Amaziah: “Now I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou has done this, and not hearkened to my counsel.” (2 Chron. 25:16.)

(3) Last of all, what do you think of Christ Himself? Is He great or little in your eyes? Does He come first or second in your estimation? Is He before or behind His Church, His ministers, His sacraments, His ordinances? Where is He in your heart and your mind's eye?

After all, this is the question of questions! Pardon, peace, rest of conscience, hope in death, heaven itself,—all hinge upon our answer. To know Christ is life eternal. To be without Christ is to be without God. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:12.) The friends of purely secular education, the enthusiastic advocates of reform and progress, the worshippers of reason, and intellect, and mind, and science, may say what they please, and do all they can to mend the world. But they will find their labour is in vain if they do not make allowance for the fall of man, if there is no place for Christ in their schemes. There is a sore disease at the heart of mankind, which will baffle all their efforts, and defeat all their plans, and that disease is sin. Oh, that people would only see and recognise the corruption of human nature, and the uselessness of all efforts to improve man which are not based on the remedial system of the Gospel! Yes: the plague of sin is in the world, and no waters will ever heal that plague except those which flow from the fountain for all sin,—a crucified Christ.

But, to wind up all, where is boasting? As a great divine said on his death-bed, “We are all of us only half awake.” The best Christian among us knows but little of his glorious Saviour, even after he has learned to believe. We see through a glass darkly. We do not realize the “unsearchable riches” there are in Him. When we awake up after His likeness in another world, we shall be amazed that we knew Him so imperfectly, and loved Him so little. Let us seek to know Him better now, and live in closer communion with Him. So living we shall feel no need of human priests and earthly confessionals. We shall feel “I have all and abound: I want nothing more. Christ dying for me on the cross,—Christ ever interceding for me at God's right hand,—Christ dwelling in my heart by faith,—Christ soon coming again to gather me and all His people together to part no more, Christ is enough for me. Having Christ, I have ‘unsearchable riches.’ ”

“The good I have is from His stores supplied,  
The ill is only what He deems the best;  
He for my Friend, I'm rich with nought beside,  
And poor without Him, though of all possess'd:  
Changes may come, I take or I resign,  
Content while I am His, and He is mine.”

“While here, alas! I know but half His love,  
But half discern Him, and but half adore;

But when I meet Him in the realms above,  
I hope to love Him better, praise Him more,  
And feel, and tell, amid the choir divine,  
How fully I am His, and He is mine.”

**Ephesians 3:9 and to [bring to light what is the administration of the mystery](#) which for [ages](#) has been [hidden in God](#) who [created all things](#); ([NASB: Lockman](#))**

**Greek:** [kai photisai \(AAN\) \[pantas\] tis e oikonomia tou musteriou tou apoekrummenou \(RPPNSG\) apo ton aionon en tow theo to ta panta ktisanti. \(AAPMSD\)](#)

**Amplified:** Also to enlighten all men and make plain to them what is the plan [regarding the Gentiles and providing for the salvation of all men] of the mystery kept hidden through the ages and concealed until now in [the mind of] God Who created all things by Christ Jesus. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** the privilege of enlightening all men as to what is the meaning of that secret, which was hidden from all eternity, in the God who created all things. ([Westminster Press](#))

**NET:** and to enlighten everyone about the divine secret's plan--a secret that has been hidden for ages in the God who has created all things. ([NET Bible](#))

**NLT:** I was chosen to explain to everyone this plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** and to make plain to all men the meaning of that secret which he who created everything in Christ has kept hidden from the creation until now. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which has been kept covered up from the beginning of the ages in the God who created all things, ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** and to cause all to see what is the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ,

**AND TO BRING TO LIGHT WHAT IS THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE MYSTERY: kai photisai (AAN) [pantas] tis e oikonomia tou musteriou:**

- **and to bring to light** Matthew 10:27; 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; Ro 16:26; Col 1:23; 2Ti 4:17; Rev 14:6
- **what is the administration of the mystery** Eph 3:3-5; Eph 1:9,10; 1Ti 3:16
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:9-13 God's Eternal Purpose and You](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:7-13 The Mystery Revealed, Part 3](#) - John MacArthur

#### Related Passages:

Ephesians 1:9; 10+ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

In the final few verses of this parenthetical section (Ep 3:2-13) the Apostle speaks of the motivation of his ministry for preaching the mystery.

**And to bring to light ([photizo](#)) what is the administration ([oikonomia](#)) of the mystery ([musterion](#))** - This is the second result of God's gift of grace (Eph 3:7, 8), the first being to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8). Now Paul exults in the privilege he had been given by grace to shine light on God's mystery that had previously been concealed from view. Administration () is easier to understand when translated as God's **plan** (ESV) or as the NET says **God's secret plan**.

**John MacArthur** - Paul is saying, in effect, "I am not only called in the vertical area to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ, but in the horizontal area to teach about the administration, the stewardship or dispensation, of the mystery of the church age." The first area deals with our relationship to God and the second with our daily living and our ministry to each other as fellow believers. (See

**Wuest** - It was given to Paul to bring to light the arrangement, the way this mystery was administered, namely, the admission of the Gentiles on equal terms with the Jews... This mystery was formed before the ages of time began, and kept secret since they started "Through Jesus Christ" is a rejected reading. ([Wuest Word Studies - Eerdman](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Gilbrant** comments on **bring to light** - "to turn on the light." This Greek infinitive comes from the word which translates into English as *photo* and serves as the prefix for many English terms. Paul did not picture himself in some small room turning on a light. His vision went far beyond that limited idea. The apostle pictured himself in the center of the earth, exposing to the entire world the revelation that God had made known to him. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**NET Note** states that this verse could be translated "*what is the plan of the divine secret.*" Earlier the author had used **oikonomia** (here "**plan**" - see **NET** below) to refer to his own stewardship (Ep 3:2). But now he is speaking about the content of this secret, not his own activity in relation to it...and to enlighten everyone about God's secret **plan**— a secret that has been hidden for ages in God who has created all things.:

**Charles Ellicott** notes that **administration** refers to "the mystery (the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, Ep 3:6), which was to be humbly traced and acknowledged in the fact of its having secretly existed in the primal counsels of God, and now having been revealed to the heavenly powers by means of the Church. ([St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** favors the translation of **administration** as "stewardship" - Ephesians 3:9 should read, "And to make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery." Here is an amazing truth: Now *all believers* are to be faithful stewards of this great truth! This "sacred secret" that was so important to Paul, and to the Gentiles, and to angels, is now in *our* hands!

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**Bring to light** (5461) (**photizo** from **phos** = light <> from **phao** = to shine) means to give light or to cause light to shine upon some object, in the sense of illuminating the object (see below for Eadie's description of the effect of photizo). Figuratively, it means to cause something to be fully known by revealing clearly and in some detail. It means to shed light upon or to illuminate.

**BDAG** ([Ref](#)) (summarized and modified) has the following meanings...1) to function as a source of light, to shine, Rev 22:5 2) to cause to be illumined, give light to, light (up), illuminate (of the sun), Lk 11:36, 22:5, 21:23 3a) to make clear, to make known in reference to the inner life or transcendent matters and thus enlighten, enlighten, give light to, shed light upon, Jn 1:9, Eph 1:18, 3:19, He 10:32. 3b) To bring something to light or to reveal, make known what is hidden -1Co 4:5, 2Ti 1:10

**Eadie** comments on Paul's use of the verb **photizo** - The verb **photizo**, followed by the accusative of the thing, denotes to bring it into light; but followed by the accusative of the person, it signifies to throw light upon him—not only to teach (*didasko*), but to enlighten inwardly—to give spiritual apprehension (*photisai*). If one gaze upon a landscape as the rising sun strikes successive points, and brings them into view in every variety of tint and shade, both subjective and objective illumination is enjoyed. No wonder that in so many languages light is the emblem of knowledge. That mystery which was now placed in clear light was not discerned by the Jew, and could not have been perceived by the Gentile for the shadow which lay both on him and it. But the result of Paul's mission was, that the Jew at once saw it, and the Gentile plainly understood its scope. They were **enlightened**—were enabled to make a sudden discovery by the lucid and full demonstration set before them. The point on which they were instructed was this— "**what is the economy of the mystery.**" (*Ibid*)

**Vine** has an interesting note on the root word **phos** (light)...**phos** (5457), akin to *phao*, "to give light" (from roots *pha* and *phan*, expressing "light as seen by the eye," and, metaphorically, as "reaching the mind," whence *phaino*, "to make to appear," *phaneros*, "evident," etc.); cf. English, "phosphorus" (lit., "light-bearing"). Primarily light is a luminous emanation, probably of force, from certain bodies, which enables the eye to discern form and color. Light requires an organ adapted for its reception (Mt 6:22). Where the eye is absent, or where it has become impaired from any cause, light is useless. Man, naturally, is incapable of receiving spiritual light inasmuch as he lacks the capacity for spiritual things, 1Co 2:14. Hence believers are called 'sons of light,' Luke 16:8, not merely because they have received a revelation from God, but because in the New Birth they have received the spiritual capacity for it. Apart from natural phenomena, light is used in Scripture of (a) the glory of God's dwelling place, 1Tim. 6:16; (b) the nature of God, 1Jn 1:5; (c) the impartiality of God, Jas 1:17; (d) the favor of God, Ps 4:6; of the King, Pr 16:15; of an influential man, Job 29:24; (e) God, as the illuminator of His people, Is 60:19, 20; (f) the Lord Jesus as the illuminator of men, John 1:4, 5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 36, 46; Acts 13:47; (g) the illuminating power of the Scriptures, Ps 119:105; and of the judgments and commandments of God, Is 51:4; Pr 6:23, cf. Ps.43:3; (h) the guidance of God - Job 29:3; Ps 112:4; Is 58:10; and, ironically, of the guidance of man, Ro 2:19; (i) salvation, 1Pe 2:9; (j) righteousness, Ro 13:12; 2Co 11:14, 15; 1Jn 2:9, 10; (k) witness for God, Mt 5:14, 16; Jn 5:35; (l) prosperity and general well-being, Esther 8:16; Job 18:18; Is. 58:8, 9, 10.

**Photizo** - 11x in 11v - Lk. 11:36; Jn. 1:9; 1 Co. 4:5; Eph. 1:18; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 6:4; 10:32; Rev. 18:1; 21:23; 22:5. The **NAS** translates **photizo** as bring to light(2), brought to light(1), enlightened(3), enlightens(1), illumine(1), illumined(2), illumines(1).

Luke 11:36 "If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it shall be wholly illumined, as when the lamp **illumines** you with its rays."

John 1:9 There was the true light which, coming into the world, **enlightens** every man.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both **bring to light** the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Ephesians 1:18-note I pray that the eyes of your heart **may be enlightened**, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

**Eadie** commenting on **photizo** in this verse: The "heart" belongs to the "inner man," is the organ of perception as well as of emotion; the centre of spiritual as it is physically of animal life... The verb **photizo**, used in such a relation, has a deep ethical meaning. **Light** and **life** seem to be associated in it—as, on the other hand, darkness and death are in Hebrew modes of conception. Thus Ps 13:3, 36:9; Jn 1:4, 8:12. The light that falls upon the eyes of the heart is the light of spiritual life—there being appreciation as well as perception, experience along with apprehension. Matt. 13:15; Mark 6:52; John 12:40. The figure is common too among classical writers. If the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God (Ep 1:17) be conferred, then the scales fall from the moral vision, and the cloudy haze that hovers around it melts away. It is as if a man were taken during night to a lofty eminence shrouded in vapor and darkness, but morning breaks, the sun rises, the mist departs, rolls into curling wreaths and disappears, and the bright landscape unfolds itself. Such is the result, and the design, is that they may obtain a view of three special truths (in Eph 1:18, 19a).

Ephesians 3:9-[note](#) and to **bring to light** what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;

2 Timothy 1:10-note but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and **brought** life and immortality **to light** through the gospel,

Hebrews 6:4-note For in the case of those who **have** once **been enlightened** and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

Hebrews 10:32-note But remember the former days, when, after **being enlightened**, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

Revelation 18:1-[note](#) After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth **was illumined** with his glory.

Revelation 21:23-[note](#) And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God **has illumined** it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Revelation 22:5-[note](#) And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God **shall illumine** them; and they shall reign forever and ever.

There are 26 uses of **photizo** in the non-apocryphal **Septuagint (LXX)** - Exod. 37:17; Num. 4:9; 8:2; 1 Sam. 29:10; 2 Ki. 12:2; 17:27f; Ezr. 2:63; 9:8; Neh. 7:65; 9:12, 19; Ps. 13:3; 18:28; 19:8; 34:5; 76:4; 105:39; 119:130; 139:12; Prov. 4:18; Eccl. 8:1; Isa. 60:1, 19; Dan. 4:11; Hos. 10:12; Mic. 7:8. Below are some of the "enlightening" uses of **photizo** in the Old Testament...

Ezra 9:8 "But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may **enlighten** (Lxx = **photizo**) our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. (Beloved, read this awesome, majestic, doctrinally rich verse again and be blessed!)

Nehemiah 9:12 "And with a pillar of cloud Thou didst lead them by day, and with a pillar of fire by night **to light** (Lxx = **photizo**) for them the way in which they were to go.

Nehemiah 9:19 Thou, in Thy great compassion, Didst not forsake them in the wilderness; The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, To guide them on their way, nor the pillar of fire by night, **to light** (Lxx = **photizo**) for them the way in which they were to go.

Psalms 13:3 **Consider** (imperative - now this is approaching God's throne with confidence and boldness!) and **answer** (imperative) me, O LORD, my God; **Enlighten** (Lxx = **photizo** = imperative in both Hebrew and Greek) my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

**Comment:** What an incredibly bold prayer! What a needful prayer for all God's saints. **Spurgeon** eloquently expounds this verse...

**Consider and hear me.** He remembers at once the root of his woe, and cries aloud that it may be removed. The final absence of God is Tophet's fire, and his temporary absence brings his people into the very suburbs of hell. God is here entreated to see and hear, that so he may be doubly moved to pity. What should we do if we had no God to turn to in the hour of wretchedness? Note the cry of faith, **O Lord MY God!** Is it not a very glorious fact that our interest in our God is not destroyed by all our trials and sorrows? We may lose our gourds, but not our God. The title deed of heaven is not written in the sand, but in eternal brass. **Lighten mine eyes:** that is, let the eye of my faith be clear, that I may see my God in the dark; let my eye of watchfulness be wide open, lest I be entrapped, and let the eye of my understanding be illuminated to see the right way. Perhaps, too, here is an allusion to that cheering of the spirits so frequently called the enlightening of the eyes because it causes the face to brighten, and the eyes to sparkle. Well may we use the prayer, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord!" for in many respects we need the Holy Spirit's illuminating rays. (Amen!) **Lest I sleep the sleep of death.** Darkness engenders sleep, and despondency is not slow in making the eyes heavy. From this faintness and dimness of vision, caused by despair, there is but a step to the iron sleep of death. David feared that his trials would end his life, and he rightly uses his fear as an argument with God in prayer; for deep distress has in it a kind of claim upon compassion, not a claim of right, but a plea which has power with grace. Under the pressure of heart sorrow, the psalmist does not look forward to the sleep of death with hope and joy, as assured believers do, but he shrinks from it with dread, from which we gather that bondage from fear of death is no new thing.

Psalm 18:28 For Thou dost light my lamp; The LORD my God **illuminates** (Lxx = photizo) my darkness.

**Spurgeon:** For thou wilt light my candle. Even the children of the day sometimes need candlelight. In the darkest hour light will arise; a candle shall be lit, it will be comfort such as we may fittingly use without dishonesty -- it will be our own candle; yet God himself will find the holy fire with which the candle shall burn; our evidences are our own, but their comfortable light is from above. Candles which are lit by God the devil cannot blow out. All candles are not shining, and so there are some graces which yield no present comfort; but it is well to have candles which may by and by be lit, and it is well to possess graces which may yet afford us cheering evidences. The metaphor of the whole verse is founded upon the dolorous nature of darkness and the delightfulness of light; "truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun;" and even so the presence of the Lord removes all the gloom of sorrow, and enables the believer to rejoice with exceeding great joy. The lighting of the lamp is a cheerful moment in the winter's evening, but the lifting up of the light of God's countenance is happier far. It is said that the poor in Egypt will stint themselves of bread to buy oil for the lamp, so that they may not sit in darkness; we could well afford to part with all earthly comforts if the light of God's love could but constantly gladden our souls.

Psalm 19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, **enlightening** (Lxx = photizo) the eyes.

**Spurgeon: The commandment of the Lord is pure.** No mixture of error defiles it, no stain of sin pollutes it; it is the unadulterated milk, the undiluted wine. **Enlightening the eyes,** purging away by its own purity the earthly grossness which mars the intellectual discernment: whether the eye be dim with sorrow or with sin, the Scripture is a skilful oculist, and makes the eye clear and bright. Look at the sun and it puts out your eyes, look at the more than sunlight of Revelation and it enlightens them; the purity of snow causes snow blindness to the Alpine traveller, but the purity of God's truth has the contrary effect, and cures the natural blindness of the soul. It is well again to observe the gradation; the convert becomes a disciple and next a rejoicing soul, he now obtains a discerning eye and as a spiritual man discerns (judges, appraises) all things, though he himself is discerned of no man (cp 1Co 2:15)

Psalm 34:5 They looked to Him and were **radiant** (Young's Literal = "they became bright", Lxx = **Photizo** = is in the imperative so reads "be enlightened"), And their faces shall never be ashamed.

**Spurgeon: They looked unto him, and were lightened.** The psalmist avows that his case was not at all peculiar, it was matched in the lives of all the faithful; they too, each one of them on looking to their Lord were brightened up, their faces began to shine, their spirits were uplifted. What a means of blessing one look at the Lord may be! There is life, light, liberty, love, everything in fact, in a look at the crucified One. (Isa 45:22KJV = the verse that the Spirit of God used to save Spurgeon! see C.H.Spurgeon's Testimony) Never did a sore heart look in vain to the good Physician; never a dying soul turned its darkening eye to the brazen serpent to find its virtue gone. And their faces were not ashamed. Their faces were covered with joy but not with blushes. He who trusts in God has no need to be ashamed of his confidence, time and eternity will both justify his reliance.

Psalm 119:130 The unfolding (Lxx = delosis = a pointing out, manifestation, explaining, showing, revelation, interpretation) of Thy words **gives light** (enlighteneth; Lxx = photizo); It gives understanding to the simple.

**Spurgeon: The entrance of thy words giveth light.** No sooner do they (God's Words) gain admission into the soul than

they enlighten it: what light may be expected from their prolonged indwelling! Their very entrance floods the mind with instruction for they are so full, so clear; but, on the other hand, there must be such an "entrance," or there will be no illumination. The mere hearing of the word with the external ear is of small value by itself (Jas 1:22-note), but when the words of God enter into the chambers of the heart then light is scattered on all sides. The Word finds no entrance into some minds because they are blocked up with self conceit, or prejudice, or indifference; but where due attention is given, divine illumination must surely follow upon a knowledge of the mind of God. Oh, that Thy words, like the beams of the sun, may enter through the window of my understanding, and dispel the darkness of my mind!

**It giveth understanding unto the simple.** The sincere and candid are the true disciples of the word. To such it gives not only knowledge, but understanding. These simple hearted ones are frequently despised, and their simplicity has another meaning infused into it, so as to be made the theme of ridicule; but what matters it? Those whom the world dubs as fools are among the truly wise if they are taught of God. What a divine power rests in the word of God, since it not only bestows light, but gives that very mental eye by which the light is received -- "It giveth understanding." Hence the value of the words of God to the simple, who cannot receive mysterious truth unless their minds are aided to see it and prepared to grasp it.

Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom **illuminates** (Lxx = photizo) him and causes his stern face to beam.

Micah 7:8 Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is **alight** (Lxx = photizo) for me.

**Administration** (3622) (**oikonomia** from **oikos** = house + **némo** = manage, distribute) (See study of related word **oikonomos**) in secular Greek referred literally to the management of a household by the **oikonomos**, the **steward**, the one who managed the house and was accountable to the owner (including the necessity to present to the owner the management records, receipts, disbursements, cash on hand and the settlement of accounts). Our English words "economy" and "economic" are derived from **oikonomia** and this usage in secular Greek helps one see the association. **Oikonomia** indicates the task given to responsible and faithful servants who were appointed over the economy or an area of responsibility in the household. Thus **oikonomia** stresses **obligation, responsibility, and faithfulness** of the servant to his master in carry out the entrusted task. **Vincent** distinguishes Paul's 2 uses of **oikonomia** in Ephesians writing that "In Ephesians 3:2, the word is used of the divine arrangement or economy committed to Paul. In Ephesians 1:10 of the divine government or regulation of the world."

**Oikonomia** - 9v - administration(3), stewardship(6). Lk 16:2; Lk 16:3; Lk 16:4; 1Co. 9:17; Ep 1:10; Ep 3:2; Ep 3:9; Col 1:25; 1Ti 1:4

**TECHNICAL NOTE on administration** - Note that the **KJV** (Eph 3:9KJV) translates this phrase as "**the fellowship**" because the Greek manuscript used to translate the KJV has the word **koinonia** (2842), while the more accepted modern manuscripts have the Greek word **oikonomia** (3622) which is translated **administration** ("plan" in the NET - see below).

The respected Scottish expositor **John Eadie** has this (somewhat technical) explanatory note regarding the differences in the **Greek manuscripts** "what is the economy of the mystery." That **oikonomia** (NAS) should supersede the gloss **koinonia** of the Elzevir text (KJV) is established by the concurrent authority of A, B, C, D, E, F, G, J, supported by a host of the Fathers and by the early versions. The preaching of Paul enabled all to see "what is the arrangement or organization of that mystery which, from the beginning of the world, had been hid in God."... The mystery must be the same as that described in Eph 3:6, for the same course of thought is still pursued, and varied only by the repetition. That mystery now so open had been long sealed. ([Ephesians Commentary 3 - online](#))

**Albert Barnes** - Instead of fellowship here (koinonia) most manuscripts and versions read (oikonomia) dispensation. ([Ephesians - Chapter 3 - Barnes' Notes on the New Testament](#))

**Mystery** (3466) (**musterion** from **mustes** = one initiated [as into the Greco-Roman religious "mystery" cults] from **mueo** = to close or shut) as used in classical Greek conveyed the idea of silence in the rites of the "mystery" religions so common in the Greco-Roman Empire. **Musterion** referred to religious secrets which were confided only to the initiated. Thus in Paul's day, **musterion** embrace ideas such as "a secret rite," "secret teaching," and "a divine mystery which is beyond human comprehension." The "mystery-religions" had their secrets and signs as modern secret societies have today. Those initiated into these pagan cults, knew these secret signs.

**Musterion** - 28x in 28v - mysteries(5), mystery(22). Matt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10; Rom. 11:25; Rom. 16:25; 1 Co. 2:7; 1 Co. 4:1; 1 Co. 13:2; 1 Co. 14:2; 1 Co. 15:51; Eph. 1:9; Eph. 3:3; Eph. 3:4; Eph. 3:9; Eph. 5:32; Eph. 6:19; Col. 1:26; Col. 1:27; Col. 2:2; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 1:20; Rev. 10:7;

**Musterion** in Scripture takes on a completely different meaning and does not refer to truths known only to a select, initiated few but in contrast was a previously hidden purpose of God which when uncovered is understood by the Spirit-taught believer. In other words, **musterion** signifies those truths which are part of God's plan and can only be understood as He reveals them by His Spirit through His Word. **Musterion** is a truth which without special revelation would have been unknown and thus is commonly used with words denoting revelation or knowledge (e.g., "to know the mysteries", (Mt 13:11), "revelation of the mystery", (Ro 16:25-note) or "made known... the mystery", Eph 3:3-note)

The secret counsels of God remain hidden from the ungodly (to them they are a true "mystery" as the word is commonly used in English) but when these truths are revealed to the godly, they are understood by them. The **mystery** is not in the fact that the truths are difficult to interpret, but that they are impossible to interpret until their meaning is revealed at which time the truth becomes plain.

**Mysteries in the Scripture** fall into two categories. Some have already been revealed, and among these are the incarnation of Christ and the salvation of sinners. Others are yet to be seen, such as the general resurrection, the coming Antichrist, and the evil of the last day. It is comforting to realize that all the mysteries which bear on our salvation are already revealed to readers of Scripture.

**Vincent** defines **musterion** as that "which was kept hidden from the world until revealed at the appointed time, and which is a secret to ordinary eyes, but is made known by divine revelation." (Vincent, M. R. *Word studies in the New Testament*. Vol. 4, Page 234-235).

**MacArthur** adds that "**musterion** does not carry the connotation that word has in modern English, as used, for example, of a mystery novel. In the New Testament it refers to something hidden in former times but now made known. Specifically, it refers to a part of God's truth that was not revealed, or was only partially revealed, in the Old Testament." ([Romans 1-8](#). Chicago: Moody Press)

**Unger** says that "The NT use of the term 'mystery' has reference to some operation or plan of God hitherto unrevealed. It does not carry the idea of a secret to be withheld, but of one to be published... The term mystery, moreover, comprehends not only a previously hidden truth, presently divulged, but one that contains a supernatural element that still remains in spite of the revelation." ([Unger, M. F., Harrison, R. K., Vos, H. F., Barber, C. J., & Unger, M. F. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary](#))

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**Steven Cole** commenting on Eph 3:9-11 notes that...

**This is not an easy topic, so track with me!** I will try to explain it under five headings:

#### **A. God has an eternal purpose and nothing can thwart it.**

We saw this in Ephesians 1:9-12: "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

God's eternal purpose is to sum up all things in Christ. He is the centerpiece of history. All of the Old Testament looks forward to Christ. All of the New Testament testifies of Him. All of history will climax when He returns in power and glory to reign. Since He is the head of His body, the church, it is central to God's purpose. It is in the church that God is bringing together both Jews and Gentiles, reconciling them to one another and to Himself through the cross (Eph 2:11-22). Paul says (Eph 3:8) that his ministry, in addition to preaching to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, is also (Eph 3:9) "to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things."

**What does he mean?** One key to understanding Paul here is to resolve why he refers to God as the one "who created all things." If we go back to Genesis (Eph 1:26, 27), we learn that God created man as male and female to rule over creation and to reflect His image. You have to ask, "Reflect His image to whom?" There weren't other people on the earth yet. I believe that God wanted Adam and Eve to reflect His image to "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places," that is, to the angels, both good and evil. Behind the scenes of human history is this cosmic spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil. God's purpose for man (male and female) was to rule on earth and reflect His image. That purpose was temporarily thwarted by the fall, but it is being recovered by the new creation, the church (Eph 2:15).

While books have been written on what the image of God in man means, at least part of that image includes the unity and love that exists between the members of the Trinity. Thus when Paul discusses Christian

marriage (Eph. 5:22-33), where husbands are to love their wives and wives are to submit to their husbands, he ties it all in to the original creation of man and woman (Eph. 5:31) and then adds (Ep 5:32), "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church."

He is saying that Christian marriage is a smaller picture of Christ and the church, and that both marriage and the church are linked back to God's purpose in creation, that we would rule on earth under His lordship and that we would reflect His image to the angelic hosts.

There are some further parallels to consider. Just as Eve was taken from Adam's body in his sleep and then given back to him as his wife, so the church was brought forth through Christ's sleep (death) and given to Him as His bride. Just as Eve was a part of Adam's body, so the church is Christ's body. Just as male and female together were to reflect God's image in the original creation (Gen. 1:27), so now it is the Bridegroom (Christ) and His bride (the church) that are to reflect His image as we dwell in His love and willingly submit to Him. It is in this sense that we are His fullness (Ep 1:23) and that Paul can pray that we would be filled up to all the fullness of God (Ep 3:19), so that there will be glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations (Ep 3:21).

This is all kind of mind-bending! What Paul is doing is elevating our understanding and vision for what God is doing through the church. Stay with me!

### **B. God's purpose was a mystery hidden for ages, but now brought to light through Paul.**

"Mystery," as we have seen, refers to something that was previously unknown, but now has been revealed. "The mystery of Christ" (Ep 3:4) refers to God's eternal plan to sum up all things in Christ, the Savior (Ep 1:9, 10). But, one application of this mystery was the previously hidden aspect of God's uniting the Jews and Gentiles on equal standing in the one body of Christ (Ep 3:6). The Old Testament predicted the salvation of many Gentiles, but it did not reveal that God would unite them as one body with the Jews in the church, seat them with Christ in the heavenly places, and display His manifold wisdom through them throughout the ages. If we ask the question, "Why did God hide this truth for thousands of years?" the answer is, "Because He so willed." He is the Sovereign of the universe, and as the Sovereign, He has the right to do as he pleases. In Acts 14:16, Paul tells the pagans of Lystra, "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways." He could have intervened much sooner and made known His way of salvation if He had chosen to do so, but He didn't. As Paul puts it in Galatians 4:4, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son...." God knew the right time to send His Son and He did it right on schedule. He has a purpose and nothing can thwart it. Although His purpose was hidden for ages, now it has been revealed. With Paul, we should always be amazed that we have become the objects of His grace!

### **C. God's purpose was carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

"Carried out" translates the Greek aorist tense of the verb, "to do." It points to an accomplished action. God's purpose was accomplished through Christ Jesus our Lord through His death and resurrection. It was at the cross, especially, that God demonstrated His manifold wisdom. People often wonder, why did God allow the fall of man into sin? He easily could have made man like the elect angels, so that we would not have sinned and then would be incapable of sinning.

While we need to be careful not to press the issue too far, we can say that God permitted the fall and ordained the cross because it demonstrated His wisdom and glory in a way that no other plan would have shown. God's sending His own Son to bear the penalty that we deserve displays His wisdom, love, and justice in ways that would not have been seen otherwise. His wisdom is displayed in choosing a person who is both divine and human, because no other person could have fulfilled the role of mediator and substitute for our sin. He had to be infinitely holy and apart from all sin. He had to be a person infinitely dear to the Father, to give infinite value to His sacrifice. No created person, whether man or angel, would have been fit for this task. Only Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, qualified. (I am indebted here to Jonathan Edwards, "The Wisdom of God displayed in the way of salvation," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Banner of Truth]*, 2:142-144.)

### **D. God's purpose is to make known His manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**

Most of us don't often think about the angels, but Paul brings them into the center of God's eternal purpose! We know that the holy angels are in God's very presence (Isa. 6:1-3). They are at war with the fallen angels (Dan. 10:13). The holy angels were especially involved in praising God at the birth of the Savior (Luke 2:13-14; Heb. 1:6). They have a special interest in the church, so that Paul tells the Corinthian women to wear long hair (or a head covering) in the assembly because of the angels (1 Cor. 11:10). They rejoice at the salvation of



sinner (Luke 15:10). Throughout eternity, we will join the angels in heaven, singing praises to God because of the salvation that the Lamb secured for us (Rev. 7:9-12).

Some scholars think that Ephesians 3:10 refers only to the holy angels, some think it refers to the fallen angels, and some to both. I think it probably refers to both. (The fallen angels are referred to by the same terms in Ep 6:12; in Ep 1:21, it probably includes both.) To the fallen angels, the church, which exists because of Christ's triumph at the cross, displays God's wisdom and reminds them of their impending doom. The fallen angels thought that they had triumphed at the cross, but God displayed His wisdom by using that very means to gain ultimate and final victory (Col. 2:15). As for the holy angels, through the cross they "see a great and wonderful manifestation of the glory of God" (Edwards, p. 147).

Edwards points out that the happiness of angels, as well as of people, consists very much in seeing the glory of God. And, he says (ibid.), "Perhaps all God's attributes are more gloriously manifested in this work, than in any other that ever the angels saw." God's mercy, grace, love, justice, and power are all magnified in the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus Peter tells us that the angels long to look into the matter of our salvation (1Pe 1:12).

#### **E. God's purpose is to make His wisdom known through the church.**

F. F. Bruce (The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians [Eerdmans], pp. 321-322) says, "The church thus appears to be God's pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future, the mystery of God's will 'to be administered in the fullness of the times,' when 'the things in heaven and the things on earth' are to be brought together in Christ (Eph. 1:9, 10)." He adds that the church, created by God's reconciling the Jews and Gentiles into one body, is God's agency to help bring about the final reconciliation.

John MacArthur explains (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians [Moody Press], p. 97), "Every sinner who repents and turns to Christ adds another spiritual stone to God's temple, another member to His Body, and becomes another forgiven and cleansed sinner who is made eternally one with every other forgiven and cleansed sinner."

We show this wisdom of God to the principalities and powers by being the church that God created.

John Piper says ([Cosmic church - Piper](#)), We don't usually hit targets that we are not aiming at. And the target for the church is to demonstrate to the evil powers of the cosmos that God has been wise in sending his Son to die that we might have hope and be unified in one body, the church. Therefore, when we fail to live in hope and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we send this signal through the galaxies: God's purpose is failing; he was not wise, he was foolish.

Again, the overall point that Paul is driving home is to elevate our understanding of the importance of the church in God's eternal purpose, so that we will give it the proper priority in our lives. He wants us to understand what a great privilege it is that God has chosen us to be the agents of carrying out His eternal purpose through the church. The church is not just a nice place to drop by on Sundays if you're not doing anything more interesting! The church is God's vehicle for making known His manifold wisdom, not only on earth, but also to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. So we must see how our lives count for eternity. ([God's Eternal Purpose and You](#))

**WHICH FOR AGES HAS BEEN HIDDEN IN GOD WHO CREATED ALL THINGS: tou apokekrummenou (RPPNSG) apo ton aionon en to theo to ta panta ktisanti, (AAPMSD):**

- **Which for ages** - Eph 1:4; Mt 13:35; 25:34; Acts 15:18; Ro 16:25; 1 Co 2:7; 2Ths 2:13; 2 Ti 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Pe 1:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8
- **Has been hidden** - Colossians 1:26-27; 3:3
- **Who created all things** - Ps 33:6; Isa 44:24; Jn 1:1, 2, 3; 5:17,19; 10:30; Col 1:16,17; Heb 1:2,3; 3:3
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:8 The Unsearchable Riches of Christ](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:9-13 God's Eternal Purpose and You](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:7-13 The Mystery Revealed, Part 3](#) - John MacArthur

**Related Passages:**

Colossians 1:26-27 that is, the **mystery** which **has been hidden** (apokrupto in perfect tense) from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Psalm 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made (Heb 11:3), And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Isaiah 44:24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the One Who formed you from the womb, "I, the LORD, am **the Maker of all things**, Stretching out the heavens by Myself and spreading out the earth all alone."

**Which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things** - **Which** refers to the **mystery** of Jews and Gentiles in one body in Christ. The expression of time "**for ages**" is literally "from the ages." The **NLT** paraphrases it "from the beginning," presumably the beginning of creation which could explain Paul's affirmation of God as Creator of all things, including this new body the church, for the same verb ktizo is used here as in Eph 2:15+ ("He **might make** [create - ktizo] the two into one new man, establishing peace") Notice also that this passage underscores the previous statement that this **mystery** "in other generations **was not made known** to the sons of men." (Eph 3:5+)

**John Eadie** - During this interval of four thousand years God's purpose to found a religion of universal offer, adaptation, and enjoyment, lay unrevealed in His own bosom. Glimpses of that sublime purpose might be occasionally caught, but no open or formal organization of it was made. There were hints and pre-intimations, oracles that spoke sometimes in cautious, and sometimes in bolder phrase; but till the death of Jesus, the means were not provided by which Judaism should be superseded and a world-wide system introduced. Then the Divine Hierophant (An ancient Greek priest who interpreted sacred mysteries) disclosed the mystery, after His Son had offered an atonement whose saving value had no national restrictions, and acknowledged no ethnographical impediment, and when He poured out His Spirit on believing Gentiles, and commissioned Saul of Tarsus to go far from Palestine and reclaim the heathen outcasts.

**Ages** (165) (aion) denotes duration of time. The point is that this mystery was formed before the **ages** of time began, and kept secret since they started. It could be rendered "for eternity" or perhaps "from the Aeons."

**Has been hidden** (613) (apokrupto form apó = from, away + krúpto = hide, conceal by covering) means to hide away from the common gaze, and therefore secret. **Apokrupto** is used by Paul here (and 1Cor 2:7, Col 1:26) in a figurative sense to describe knowledge that cannot be known except through divine revelation. It is used in secular Greek writings of a "hidden trade (craft or skill)".

Paul uses the **perfect tense** which emphasizes the longevity of the hiding of the mystery of the Church. Once again Paul is pointing out the fact that the church universal is something new, unique, unprecedented and was not known before to anyone but God. It was certainly not known in the OT, which is significant in that many commentators interpret the OT passages given to Israel as if they were given to the church. While the OT Scriptures have many applications, including application to the NT church and NT believers, there is only one valid literal interpretation and that interpretation relates to the nation of Israel and not to the NT church (see the related topic - **Israel of God** - Is God "Finished" with Israel in His prophetic plan?)

**Apokrupto** - 4x in 4v in the NT -

Luke 10:21 At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst **hide** these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.

1Corinthians 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the **hidden** wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

Ephesians 3:9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages **has been hidden** in God, who created all things;

Colossians 1:26-note that is, the mystery which **has been hidden** from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints (What is the mystery in this case? Col 1:27 = Christ in you, the hope or absolute certainty of future glory!)

**Apokrupto** is found 8x in the Septuagint (LXX) - 2 Ki. 4:27; Ps. 19:6; 119:19; Prov. 27:12; Isa. 26:20; 40:27; Jer. 32:17; Zeph. 3:5

2Kings 4:27 When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came near to push her away; but the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is troubled within her; and the LORD **has hidden** (apokrupto) it from me and has not told me."

Psalms 19:6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing **hidden** from its heat.

Psalms 119:19 I am a stranger in the earth; Do not **hide** Thy commandments from me.

Proverbs 27:12 A prudent man sees evil and **hides** himself, The naive proceed and pay the penalty.

Isaiah 26:20 Come, my people, enter into your rooms, And close your doors behind you; **Hide** for a little while, Until indignation runs its course.

Isaiah 40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way is **hidden** from the LORD, And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God "?

As **Barclay** reminds us "Sometimes the history of Christianity can be presented in such a way that it sounds as if the gospel went out to the Gentiles only because the Jews would not receive it. Paul here reminds us that the salvation of the Gentiles is not an afterthought of God; the bringing of all men into his love was part of God's eternal design. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**Created** ([2936](#)) (**ktizo**) means to bring something into existence or call it into being something that has not existed before. To make habitable, to people a place (as used in secular Greek). The meaning of **ktizo** in this context describes the founding of a place, a city or colony. In the NT **ktizo** is used only of God's creativity (man = Mt 19:4, 1Co 11:19, Dt 32:6, creation = Mk 13:19, Col 1:16, Re 4:11, Ex 9:18, Dt 4:32, Creator = Ro 1:25, "re-creation" of men, of his dead spirit = regeneration = Eph 2:10, 4:24, of the church = Eph 2:15).

**Gilbrant** - In classical Greek the word ktizō is used to talk about something that is "conceived" or existing in the mind. It also refers to things actually "brought into being" or "established." It could refer to the establishment of a city, a building, a town, or some other structure. Ktizō is used by Homer (ca. Seventh Century B.C.) to talk about the settling or populating of a piece of land. It is also used to refer to an intellectual act that produces an invention (cf. Liddell-Scott). In the Septuagint ktizō generally means "to create" and is used in reference to the creative activity of God. Thus in Genesis 14:19,22 God is spoken of as the One who created (and is the possessor of) the heavens and the earth. In Deuteronomy 32:6 God is described as having made (created) Israel. Ktizō is also used to refer to the "setting up," "establishing," or "founding" of something such as the tabernacle or a nation of people (Exodus 9:18; Leviticus 16:16). In the New Testament and other Christian literature ktizō is used to speak only of God and His creative activity (cf. Mark 13:19; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 10:6). There are a series of statements in the New Testament which carefully point out the fact that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is to be found therein. Ktizō is used several times to refer back to the beginning of the world (Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6; Romans 1:20; 2 Peter 3:4). All of these statements are designed to point out that there was nothing in existence before God created it. Paul made it clear that the creative activity of God was due to His spoken word by which He created something out of nothing (Romans 4:17; 2 Corinthians 4:6). Ktizō is also used to describe the creative activity of God in the making of spiritual (new) men in Christ (Ephesians 2:10; 4:24). (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Ktizo** is found 12 times in the NT and is translated create(1), created(12), Creator(1), make(1).

Matthew 19:4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who **created** them from the beginning made them male and female,

Mark 13:19+ "For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God **created**, until now, and never shall.

Romans 1:25-note For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the **Creator**, who is blessed forever. Amen.

1 Corinthians 11:9+ for indeed man was not **created** for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

Ephesians 2:10-note For we are His workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:15-note by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might **make** the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

Ephesians 3:9-note and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who **created** all things;

Ephesians 4:24-note and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been **created** in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Colossians 1:16-note For by Him all things were **created**, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been **created** by Him and for Him.

Colossians 3:10-note and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who **created** him

1 Timothy 4:3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has **created** to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

Revelation 4:11-note "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst **create** all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were **created**."

Revelation 10:6-note and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who **created** heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there shall be delay no longer,

**Ktizo** is found 67 times in the non-apocryphal Septuagint (LXX) - Gen. 14:19, 22; Exod. 9:18; Lev. 16:16; Deut. 4:32; 32:6; Ps. 33:9; 51:10; 89:12, 47; 102:18; 104:30; 148:5; Prov. 8:22; Eccl. 12:1; Isa. 22:11; 45:7f; 46:11; 54:16; Jer. 31:22; Ezek. 28:13, 15; Dan. 4:1; Hos. 13:4; Amos 4:13; Hag. 2:9; Mal. 2:10. Note especially the use in Psalm 51...

Psalm 51:10+ **Create** (Ktizo - aorist imperative; Heb = bara = create) in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

All ([3956](#)) (**pas**) means all without exception were created by God.

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### John Calvin - Understanding Mysteries

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:9

Scripture offers some rather mysterious teachings which are not easily understood. Have we perceived that? To understand, we must first humble ourselves and pray God to enlighten us by his Holy Spirit so we may profit from all his works and words. Moreover, let us yearn to learn the things that he shows us and be content with the understanding he gives us without yearning to know any more than what we learn in his school.

When we have such humility, our Lord will give us a sure resting place. Although his secrets are incomprehensible, and the teachings of the law and the gospel are mysteries above the grasp of the world, yet they are sufficient for our welfare and salvation. So that there is no muddle, no confusion, and no obscurity for us, God will guide us by his Holy Spirit, giving us the wisdom and discretion to know whatever he deems is for our profit.

But if we are unteachable and behave like runaway horses to search farther than we are allowed, God's wisdom will certainly prove elusive. There will be such a diversity of things and so many subjects that we will be at our wits' end. We shall remain utterly confused.

Even the faithful will clearly perceive what Paul says here so that they may ever be mindful to walk in awe and fear, not giving themselves too much rein or taking too much freedom to know more than our Lord wants them to know. Any doubt we might have entertained about how God will amaze us with his works is removed. Yet he will not have us wonder at those unless we allow ourselves to be taught by him.

FOR MEDITATION: It is foolish to presume that a creature should comprehend everything the Creator does. We think of ourselves far too highly if we rebel against the parts of God's Word that we cannot understand. Our hearts should be overtaken with awe, not rebellion. Be aware and in awe of God and his work today. [365 Days with Calvin](#)

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### F B Meyer writes the following note in "Our Daily Homily"

This chapter is parallel with Colossians 2. To the stewardship of the apostle Paul two mysteries were entrusted, with the intention that he should unravel and explain them to our race.

**The mystery.** — A mystery is a hidden secret. The word does not imply that there is no solution, but that the solution has not yet been communicated. God has many secrets, which unfold as the ages are ripe for them,

but not before. This secret, which was hid in the Divine heart from all ages, was that the Gentiles are on an equality with the Jews in the Church. Under the old covenant they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; but under the new they are fellow-heirs, fellow-members, and fellow-partakers of the blessings of the Gospel.

**The stewardship of the mystery.** — The apostle felt that whatever had been communicated to him was not for himself alone, but for all his fellow-disciples. Hence he was ever accounting himself a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). This is the clue, also, to his assertion that he was a debtor to all men for Christ's sake. What was given him was on deposit for others. See to it that you count nothing you possess or know as your own; look on all as a sacred trust.

**The exercise of his stewardship.** — "To preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men know." It is not enough to proclaim, as a herald might; we must stay with the dull of wit and slow of thought, elaborating, explaining, and insisting, till we have made them see what a Savior Jesus is, and how rich the soul may be that uses his unsearchable wealth.

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## The Unsearchable Riches of Christ Ephesians 3:1–13 - Floyd Strater

### I. Paul's view of himself

- A. A prisoner of Christ for the sake of the Gentiles (v. 1).
  - 1. Held by the Roman government under Nero the emperor.
  - 2. His view of his circumstances—a prisoner for Christ.
  - 3. The purpose of his suffering—for the sake of the Gentiles.
- B. A servant of this Gospel (v. 7).
  - 1. Not high rank, not an officer, not important.
  - 2. Serving the Gospel to get the message out.
  - 3. Lifting up Christ—He will draw all men.
- C. I am less than the least of all God's people (v. 8).
  - 1. Do you ever feel unworthy?
  - 2. Do you feel insignificant?
  - 3. Less than the least ... who is the least of all people you have met in the church?
- D. Do not be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory (v. 13).
  - 1. I am suffering for you Gentiles.
  - 2. Don't feel guilty or be discouraged.
  - 3. Glory will come out of my suffering; in fact, it is to your glory—it gives you worth.
  - 4. How much are you worth?
    - a. To God, all of heaven, earth, and the power involved in your salvation.
    - b. You are worth God's love, the death of Jesus, the Bible, the church, and all the \$\$\$\$ to win your soul.

### II. What Paul received and shared

- A. The mystery of Christ.
- B. By the grace of God the mystery made known to me by revelation (v. 4).
- C. Reading this you will understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.
- D. This mystery was not made known to men in other generations (v. 5).
- E. It has now been made known by the Spirit to God's apostles and prophets (v. 5).
- F. The mystery: through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel. They are members together of one holy body—sharers together in the promises of Christ.
- G. Through Grace I am privileged to preach the good news—to make plain the unsearchable riches of Christ.
- H. God's intent: through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

- I. His eternal purpose was accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.
  - J. In Christ and through Christ we can approach God with freedom and confidence.
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In his work [Meditations on Ephesians](#), Henry Law has these words on Ephesians 3:9...

The eyes of Paul were widely opened to his wondrous call. He deeply felt what mercies had been given unto him. He realized the blessed work committed to his diligence and care. There was a time when he was dead in trespasses and sins; but now he lives unto God. His eyes had been fast locked in darkness; but now he saw Christ in all the glories of His finished work. His heart had been hard with enmity and rebellion; but now he loved the Savior who had loved him before the world began. He realized still higher blessings. He knew that it was his privilege to testify of Jesus to a world lying in the wicked one. Not only the darkness of unregeneracy was past, but the darkness of contempt of the Gentile world. As a Jew he had regarded all other members of the human race as odious, contemptible, vile—scarce worthy of the name of men—the off-scouring of all things. But this prejudice had vanished before the revelation of Gospel-truth. He now knew that the wall of partition was broken down—that an unseen hand had rent the veil from the top to the bottom, and that the Gentiles were admitted to direct communion with God through the knowledge of His Gospel-love. He knew that God from the very stones beneath his feet could raise up children unto Abraham. He knew that all severance had ceased, and that God was the God of the circumcision through faith, and of the uncircumcision by faith. He realized the amazing grace which now commissioned him to cry unto every human being, Look unto Jesus and be saved. Flee unto Him and find refuge. Receive Him, and accept the privilege of adoption. Come unto Him, and be translated from darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan to the happy family of faith. He realized his station as standing between the living and the dead, that the plague might be stayed. Thus he went forth enlightened by super-abounding grace—strong in the Lord and in the power of His might—to call men everywhere to the saving Cross; "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."

(1.) We see Paul's estimate of his high commission. It leads to a general contemplation of all ministerial work. This is the noblest work to which the faculties of man can be devoted. It is the grandest employment which earth can witness. It is to follow closely in the footsteps of our Lord who said, "As You have sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them." The pulpit is the highest throne on earth. No monarch has a seat so glorious, or wields a scepter of such potency. The faithful minister of Christ is called to make men see the wonders of the Gospel of God's grace—to remove scales from the benighted eyes—to cause the blind to see the wonders of redeeming love. The ministers of Christ are thus employed by God the Holy Spirit to give light to them who sit in darkness and the shadow of death—to cry in the regions of spiritual gloom, "Arise, shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon You. Awake you that sheep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

The means which the faithful pastor uses are very simple though they are omnipotent. It requires little strength to use them—but much strength goes forth from them. The statement of Paul is very clear. "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto those who are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." The mandate is "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Success will surely follow. The Word of God can never go forth in vain. It shall prosper in that whereto He sends it. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name—for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Converts shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. They shall fly as doves to their windows. Many an enlightened soul shall testify, I was blind, but now I see. We see then the happiness of those ministers who make the blessed Jesus and His finished work, and all the wonders of redeeming love, and the unsearchable riches of the covenant of grace their main proclamation. They are not called to elaborate new thoughts and invent another Gospel. There is woe, indeed, unto them who practice such folly, and occupy time in searching for man-wrought wisdom. The Gospel is a proclamation. All its waters flow in the broad, deep channel, "Thus says the Lord."

It is true indeed that this Gospel has existed from all eternity in the purpose of God. It originated in Christ before the world began. But now it shines forth in ineffable brightness, and men are called with open eye to view it—with open hand to receive it—with open heart to embrace it. It is not their work to fabricate a new sun, but with open eye to gaze on the Sun of righteousness, which has arisen with healing on His wings.

Paul sweetly adds when stating that the Gospel was hid in the ages past in the purposes of God, that He

created all things by Jesus Christ. We learn hence that He is conjoined with the Father, as Creator of the whole human race. Hence the Ministers of the Gospel cease not their labor of love, but strive to approach every woman-born, and to cause all to hear the glad tidings of salvation. Hence, too, the fervent missionaries go forth into the dark places of the earth, calling the poor benighted heathen to cast their idols to the bats—to turn from them to serve the living and true God—to wash out all their sins in expiating blood—to hide all their iniquities beneath the covert of justifying righteousness, and to receive Jesus as all salvation and desire.

## The Unfathomable Riches of Christ

### Pastor Steven Cole's sermon on Ephesians 3:8

It is my normal, weekly experience to feel overwhelmed by inadequacy as I attempt to preach God's Word. But when I come to a subject as vast as the unfathomable riches of Christ, I am almost paralyzed! It makes me realize how little of these immeasurable riches of Christ that I experience personally. It overwhelms me to think about what I can say on so profound a subject. So I am unusually aware that unless God anoints His Word with power, my feeble words will surely fail.

You would think that if you announced on the sign out front and in the newspaper that someone was speaking on the unfathomable riches of Christ, people would line up hours before the services, waiting to get in. "Free eternal riches will be given out at Flagstaff Christian Fellowship! Come and get all that you can!" But, as far as I know, no one had to wait in line to get in the door.

Even among the Lord's people, some had "more important" things to do today than to come and explore more deeply the unfathomable riches of Christ. Some were too tired or too busy. I hope not, but perhaps some saw the title and thought, "Ho hum! That doesn't sound very practical! Why doesn't he talk about more relevant things?"

Maybe Jonathan Edwards sheds some light on this when he observed (The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Banner of Truth], 2:147), "The more holy any being is, the more sweet and delightful will it be to him to behold the glory and beauty of the Supreme Being." He was preaching on Ephesians 3:10, where Paul says that the manifold wisdom of God is now made known through the church to the angelic hosts. The angels, who are perfect in holiness, greatly delight in the manifold wisdom of God as seen in the unfathomable riches of Christ. So if the subject bores you, you had better check your heart. The glory and beauty of Jesus Christ should captivate us so that out of great joy, we sell everything in order to gain the treasure of Christ (Matt. 13:44, 45, 46).

I was going to preach on Eph 3:8-13, which are a unit, but Paul not only talks about the unfathomable riches of Christ, but also of God's eternal purpose as it relates to the church and of two practical consequences of these mind-boggling truths. So I had to limit myself to Eph 3:8, which shows us that...

### Sinners may freely partake of the unfathomable riches of Christ.

#### 1. The unfathomable riches of Christ are offered only to sinners.

Luke 1:53 states, "He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed." The spiritually hungry are sinners who see their need for forgiveness. The rich see no need for salvation. Bill Gates doesn't spend his time standing in line at the welfare office. He doesn't need their help. If you think that you have enough righteousness on your own to get into heaven, then you will not see your need for the unfathomable riches of Christ. Three things in our text show that these riches of Christ are offered only to sinners:

##### A. Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles.

The Gentiles were not godly people! The religious Jews despised them as filthy dogs. They did not obey the Jewish Law. They made up their own standards for morality, which were abominable in God's sight. The Ephesians, as we've seen, were steeped in the occult, and so many of them were plagued by demons that it spawned an industry for professional exorcists (Acts 19:13, 14, 15, 16). They "worshipped" at the pagan Temple of Diana, which involved immorality with the temple prostitutes. They did a thriving business selling idols, which ignorant people bought in hopes of solving their problems. These Gentiles were about as far from the living and true God as anyone could be.

And yet, when Paul came to Ephesus and preached the unfathomable riches of Christ, so many got saved that it threatened the idol-makers' business. The same thing happened when Paul preached the gospel to the notoriously immoral Corinthians. He wrote to them (1Co 6:9, 10, 11):

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters,

nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 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.

Or, as he wrote to the Christians in Rome (Ro 1:16-note),

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek

In fact, the most difficult sinners to reach are religious sinners, because they do not see their desperate need. If God has opened your eyes to see that you have sinned against Him and are guilty of eternal judgment, then He offers to you the unfathomable riches of Christ in exchange for your spiritual poverty.

### **B. Paul saw himself as the least of all saints.**

Paul coins a word that means, "I am less than the least." This was not a mock humility on Paul's part, but rather his honest feelings as he thought about his sinful past. In his self-righteousness, he had persecuted the church. His spiritual pride led him to think that he was doing God a favor by killing sincere, innocent believers! So, after God graciously stopped him in his tracks, Paul never got over the great mercy that God had shown to him. In 1Co 15:9, he said,

For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Here, he sees himself as the least of all the saints. And, later in life (1Ti 1:15), he says that

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

He uses the present tense.

The closer you draw to God and see His holiness, the more aware you become of the sinfulness of your own heart. We see this with Isaiah, who instantly became aware of his sinfulness when he saw the Lord. Job, the most righteous man on earth, repented in dust and ashes when he had his encounter with God (Job 42:6). That has been the uniform experience of every saint throughout history. The closer they are to God, the more they lament their own sinfulness. John Calvin points this out often in his writings. For example, he wrote (Calvin's Commentaries [Baker], on Psalm 32:1, p. 526),

The more eminently that any one excels in holiness, the farther he feels himself from perfect righteousness, and the more clearly he perceives that he can trust in nothing but the mercy of God alone.

The point is, the unfathomable riches of Christ are only offered to those who see themselves to be poverty-stricken sinners. The only servants that God uses are those who see that they are inadequate clay pots, but that God has put His treasure in them (2Co 2:16; 3:5; 4:7).

### **C. Paul could only preach Christ because God had given him grace.**

As we saw last week, Paul was so overwhelmed by God's grace that he couldn't stop repeating himself. He mentions it in Eph 3:2-note and Eph 3:7-note, as well as here in Eph 3:8: "this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." Paul knew that the only reason he could preach Christ was that God had given him grace.

Paul was like the workers in Jesus' parable (Matt. 20:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) who got hired late in the day. The story involved a landowner who went into the marketplace early in the day and hired some workers, agreeing to pay them a denarius for their day's labor. Later in the morning, he hired some more, promising to give them whatever is right. He did the same thing in the early and mid-afternoon. Finally, an hour before quitting time, he hired some others.

When it came time to pay the workers, those who were hired at the last hour were paid a denarius. Those who had worked all day thought that they would get more, but they just got the denarius that the owner had promised them. When they grumbled, the owner told them that they had no right to grumble. He gave them what he had agreed on. But, if he wanted to be generous with what is his, why should they be envious?

That parable illustrates God's grace. We wrongly start thinking that God owes it to us because of our hard work for Him. But if He owes it, it's not grace. Grace is always undeserved. Since we did nothing to deserve it, we can't demand it. So, if we grew up in the church and God saves us and calls us to preach His good news, it is pure grace. If we grew up in the streets as gang members and God saves us and calls us to preach, it is pure grace. As someone has well said, when we share the gospel with others, it is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

**Before we leave this point, that the unfathomable riches of Christ are offered only to sinners, note three applications:**



When you present the gospel, you must speak about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

<> If the person you are talking with is clearly broken and repentant over his sin, you don't have to hammer it so hard. But in my experience, most people think of themselves as basically good. They think that God will let them into heaven because they aren't as bad as the child molesters and terrorists of the world. If you tell these people that God loves them and recite John 3:16, they think, "Yes, of course, I am so loveable! But, thank you for reminding me!" But if they are not convicted of sin and do not see the absolute righteousness of God and do not fear His impending judgment on their evil thoughts, words, and deeds, then they do not see their need for the Savior. Take them to the Sermon on the Mount and show them that in God's sight, anger is murder and lust is adultery.

<> When you pray for the lost, pray that they will come under conviction for their sin.

Unless, as Spurgeon put it, they feel the rope around their neck, they will not weep for joy when the Savior cuts it and frees them. Pray that unbelievers will read God's Word and that the Holy Spirit will convict them of their guilt in God's sight.

<> After you have trusted in Christ, you become a saint who is yet at the same time a sinner. Don't lose the balance.

There is some popular, but badly unbalanced teaching on this matter. **Neil Anderson's** books emphasize that as a believer, you are not a sinner, not even a sinner saved by grace. Rather, you are a saint who occasionally sins (see, *Victory Over the Darkness* [Regal Books], pp. 44-45; [see my review \*Steak and Arsenic - A Review of Neil Anderson's "Victory Over the Darkness"\*](#)). He is rightly trying to present our new identity in Christ, but he denies what every godly person in the Bible and down through history has affirmed, that we are both saints and yet sinners. The closer we draw to God, the more we feel the tension. If we let go of either side, we are out of balance spiritually. The unfathomable riches of Christ are offered only to sinners. Second,

## 2. The unfathomable riches of Christ center on the person of Jesus Christ.

If we have Jesus Christ, then we have every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3-note). All of God's promises are "yes" in Christ (2Co 1:20). God's "divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2Pet. 1:3-note).

Note two things:

### A. The gospel is not about rules, regulations, or religious rituals, but rather about knowing Jesus Christ Himself.

Paul did not proclaim to the Gentiles the moral rules of Christianity, although there are obviously moral standards in the Bible. He didn't proclaim to them how they could go through baptism or receive the Lord's Supper or pray the rosary or go through any other religious ceremonies or rituals to get right with God. Rather, he proclaimed to them the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ.

Paul himself had sought to please God by keeping all of the Jewish rituals. In fact, he prided himself in how well he observed the Jewish law (Phil. 3:5, 6-note). But he said of these things (Phil. 3:8-note), "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." Christianity is at its heart a matter of knowing Jesus Christ personally. If you do not know Him, then all of the religious rituals in the world will be of no value to you. You must know Christ and be growing to know Him more deeply.

### B. Jesus Christ possesses in Himself unfathomable riches and He gives these riches to all that call upon Him.

Here is where I'm in way over my head! Jesus Christ is the infinite, eternal God who took on human flesh so that He could give Himself as the only satisfactory and perfect sacrifice for our sins. As Paul expresses it (2Co 8:9),

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

The person of Christ is **unfathomable**, in that we can never completely get to the bottom of who He is and what He did for us on the cross. The word, **unfathomable**, is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Romans 11:33 (note), where Paul exclaims,

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

The word is used twice in the Greek Old Testament to describe God's **unfathomable** ways in His creation (Job 5:9; 9:10). One preacher compared it to a man who was tracking out the confines of what he thought to be a small lake. But he discovered that it was an arm of the ocean, and so he was confronted by the immeasurable sea (J. H. Jowett, *The Passion for Souls*, p. 10, cited by

Francis Foulkes, Ephesians [IVP/Eerdmans], p. 97).

**Riches** refers to true, lasting, eternal spiritual wealth that we have in Jesus Christ. Jesus told the parable of the rich man who decided to build bigger barns to hold more wealth, but God required his soul of him that very night. Jesus said (Luke 12:21),

So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich to-ward God.

He instructed us not to lay up treasures on earth, which can and will be taken from us,

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal (Matt 6:19-note).

The fact that Christ possesses in Himself unfathomable riches and that He gives these riches to all that call upon Him means that He can and will supply our every spiritual and personal need. He allows trials into our lives to drive us to a deeper experience of His all-sufficiency for our needs. Are we depressed? He is our joy! Are we discouraged? He is our hope! Are we troubled, anxious, or fearful? He is our peace! Are we weak? He is our strength! I could go on and on, but for sake of time, I just went through Ephesians up to where we're at and came up with these ten needs that Christ richly supplies:

## **TEN NEEDS THAT CHRIST RICHLY SUPPLIES**

### **(1) We need redemption and forgiveness; He is our redemption and the substitute for our sin penalty.**

Ephesians 1:7, 8a (note): "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us."

### **(2) We need love; He predestined us in love to adoption as His children.**

Ephesians 1:4, 5 (note), "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."

### **(3) We need holiness; He chose us to be holy and blameless in Him.**

Although we formerly lived according to the lusts of the flesh (Ep 2:3-note), Ephesians 1:4 (note) tells us, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

### **(4) We need a sense of purpose; He made known to us the mystery of His will and created us in Christ for good works.**

Ephesians 1:9 (note), "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him." And (Ep 2:10-note), "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

### **(5) We need an eternal inheritance; He predestined us to obtain that inheritance in Christ.**

Ephesians 1:11 says that in Him we have obtained an inheritance, while Eph 1:14 (note) adds that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as the pledge of our inheritance.

### **(6) We need hope; God has made us fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel(Eph 3:5-note).**

### **(7) We need power; the surpassing greatness of His power brought us from death to life(Eph 1:19, 20-note; Eph 3:7-note).**

### **(8) We need life; He raised us from death to life(Eph 2:1-note, Eph 2:5-note).**

### **(9) We need peace with God and with one another; He Himself is our peace(Eph 2:14-note, Eph 2:16-note).**

### **(10) We need access to God for all our needs; He is our access through the Spirit to the Father(Ep 2:18-note; Ep 3:12-note).**

If you want to read more about the unfathomable riches of Christ, read Spurgeon or Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who are far more eloquent than I am and who both experientially knew the riches of Christ far better than I do. But I hope that from this brief survey, you can see that we do not need to turn to the worldly insights of psychology to meet our deepest needs. We need to go deeper in our knowledge of the unfathomable riches of Christ for our souls.

One final thing to consider:

## **3. Christ invites you to come and partake freely of all that He is.**

The word translated **preach** is literally, "to proclaim the good news." It would not be good news to hear that Christ has unfathomable

riches to offer, but you must earn them. It would not be good news to hear that you must first clean up your life to qualify for these riches. It is only good news if, as is really true, Christ offers these riches freely to all that call upon Him. He invites sinners (Matt. 11:28),

**Come** (functions as an imperative) to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

He promised (John 6:37),

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

Will you come to Christ?

It would be unthinkable foolish to hear that a treasure is available for the taking, but to say, "Sorry, I'm too busy!" It would be an insult if a wealthy man sent his limousine to bring a hungry beggar to his lavish banquet, and the beggar said, "I can't come until I can pay for it."

Christ offers Himself freely to every sinner. He has **unfathomable riches** to bestow on you for the asking. Come to Him and begin to enjoy the treasure that you will go on discovering more of throughout all eternity!

## Conclusion

[John Newton](#), a drunken slave trader who experienced the unfathomable riches of Christ and became a pastor and the author of [Amazing Grace](#) put a plaque with Deuteronomy 15:15 over his mantle:

Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.

Late in life, a pastor friend noticed that Newton was showing signs of old age and urged him to stop preaching and take life easy.

"What!" he replied, "shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak at all?"

He wrote his own epitaph:

John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had so long labored to destroy.

Late in life he said,

My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!

(In *A Frank Boreham Treasury*, compiled by Peter Gunther [Moody Press], pp. 72, 77, 78.)

**Newton knew that sinners may freely partake of the unfathomable riches of Christ. Do you?**

## Application Questions

Can conviction of sin and repentance come after conversion or must these things be present for conversion to take place?

Neil Anderson argues that if you see yourself as a sinner, you will sin. Thus we should see ourselves only as saints who occasionally sin. Agree/disagree? Why?

Christian psychologists argue that sometimes a Christian needs more than the Bible to help with severe emotional problems. Agree/disagree? Why?

Discuss: God permits problems in our lives to teach us more about the all-sufficiency of Christ. If true, what implications does this have for "Christian psychology"? ([The Unfathomable Riches of Christ](#))