



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 3.1-13

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I. Introduction to this Study

Our fall series continues with the revealing of a “mystery” and a call to arms!

II. Connecting With One Another

What is one dream you’ve had that has come to fruition?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Ephesians 3.1-13. What was God’s secret plan (vv. 1-6)?
- b. How did God reveal this plan (vv.2-5)?
- c. What three great privileges did the Gentiles attain (together with the Jews) in this plan (v.6)?

Imagine hearing the news that a family down the street has come into a large and wealthy inheritance—and then being told that you are to become full members of that family, with instant privileges identical to theirs! That’s the situation that Christian Gentiles now find themselves in.

- d. How did God accomplish this plan (v.7-9)?
- e. What does this plan of God’s—the plan itself, the fact that God kept it hidden and then revealed it, the way he accomplished it—reveal about the character of God?
- f. What task did God give Paul (vv. 8-9)?

Paul was the one chosen by God to pioneer this plan. But he hadn’t been expecting the localized and family-based company (Israel) to expand like this (to reach out to include non-Jews on equal terms).

- g. What are the “boundless riches of Christ” mentioned in verse 8? How can you and our church community enjoy them?
- h. How does Paul describe God’s secret plan (v.10)?

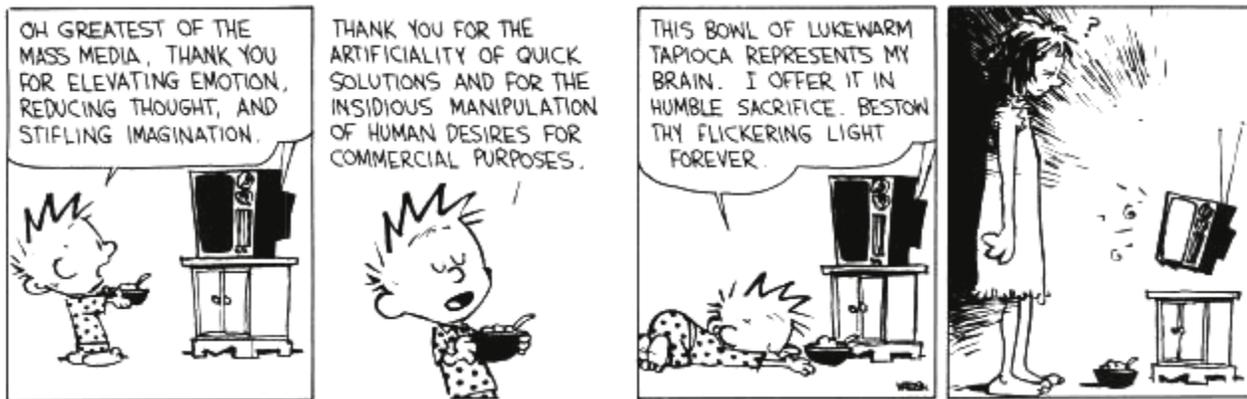
N.T. Wright writes: *The heart of this passage is verse 10, which is one of the New Testament’s most powerful statements of the reason for the church’s existence: the rulers and authorities must be confronted with God’s wisdom, in all its rich variety, and this is to happen through the church! Not, we should quickly add, though what the church says, though that is vital as well. Rather, through what the church is, namely, the community in which men, women and children of every race, color, social and cultural background come together in glad worship of the one true God.*

It is precisely this many-sided, many-colored, many-splendored identity of the church that makes the point. God’s wisdom, Paul is saying, is like that too: like a many-faceted diamond which twinkles and sparkles with all the colors in the rainbow. The “rulers and authorities,” however—both the earthly authorities and their shadowy heavenly

counterparts—always tend to create societies and social structures in their own flat, boring image, monochrome, uniform and one-dimensional. Worse: they tend to marginalize or kill people or groups who don't fit their narrow band of acceptability. The church is to be, by the very fact of its existence, a warning to them that their time is up, and an announcement to the world that there is a difference way to be human.

- i. What does it mean to approach God with confidence and assurance (vv. 11-12)?
- j. How can these two characteristics (confidence & assurance) potentially change your prayer life and the prayer life of Good Shepherd?
- k. Why does Paul describe his sufferings as his readers' "glory" (v. 13)?
- l. The fact that Paul is in prison is a sign that the Christian way is indeed posing a decisive threat to the rule of evil in the world. In what specific ways can we, as God's people, challenge the power of evil today in a way that provokes a reaction?

Read the Calvin & Hobbes cartoons below. What types of "powers and authorities" is creator Bill Watterson lampooning here? Where else in the world do you see "powers and authorities" that need to be challenged?



IV. Pray

- a. Take a few moments to consciously rest in acceptance you receive through Jesus...then approach God with confidence and assurance....

- b. Thanking God for revealing his secret plan and for the incredible riches he has given you in Christ...
- c. Praising God for the diversity of people and cultures in our church and in the Church in every nation...
- d. Asking God that this diversity might grow to fulfill its purpose of making his wisdom known around the world...
- e. Finally, praying for strength to remain steadfast, holding onto and proclaiming the Good News over and against the "powers and authorities"...