



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 1:1-14, 2:8-10, 3:1-6

Ephesians

"Review Trinity, Mystery, Grace"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well, it's good to be back. Had a nice rest, and I trust you had a good rest from me. And I know you had some good teaching while I was gone. I thank Dr. Johnson for standing in and Randy Wood. I heard good things about both of their lessons with you. But it's time to get back into the ministry again, and we're going to do that by resuming our study in the book of Ephesians.

We broke off our study back in May, toward the end of the month. And so it's been some three months since we have been studying this book. And because of the length of time that we have spent outside of the book of Ephesians, I thought it might be good, as you might have noticed from the title of the lesson this morning, to do some review. And so we're going to do that. We're going to look at chapters 1 through 3 and cover it – not in detail.

I told Mark Newman that we were doing that this morning. He said, "Well, don't go too long. We get hungry around noon." So I want to be sensitive to that. And he was serious.

I won't touch on everything. I'm not going to read every verse, but I do want to read some portions of each chapter. We'll look at verses 1 through 14 in chapter 1, where we have indications at least of the Trinity. And we will deal with that in some detail in our lesson. And then in that section we have a anticipation of one of the major themes of this book: the mystery that had been revealed to Paul, which is the nature of the church. And he will develop that in chapter 3.

And then in chapter 2, we have the grace of God. The grace of God is seen throughout the book of Ephesians. But we see it very clearly in chapter 2, and so we'll spend some time in that with verses 8 through 10 in our reading. And then in chapter 3, we'll read verses 1 through 6. So, if you have your Bibles open, follow along as I begin reading in chapter 1, verse 1 through verse 14.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 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. In all wisdom and insight 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 heaven 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. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."

In chapter 2, verses 8, 9 and 10, we read:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one

should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Now, he concludes chapter 2. He begins chapter 1 with a prayer. At least that's how he starts off.

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – " and evidently, that word, "Gentiles," caused Paul to pause. And he wanted to say something to them about his ministry to the gentiles. Paul was the apostle to the gentiles and he had a ministry to them, what he calls, in verse 2, a stewardship. And in that stewardship, he was given a mystery. And he's going to explain that mystery, the nature of the church. And then he will resume again his prayer in verse 14. You can see that he broke this off, just reading verses 1 and 14.

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – " and then in verse 14 – "For this reason – " repeats that phrase – "I bow my knees before the Father." So he pauses in this prayer to explain to them the ministry that had been given to him, and in that ministry to the gentiles, the revelation of the mystery which reveals the nature of the church.

Verse 2: "If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific –" and this is the content of the mystery, the revelation – "that Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the great privilege we have to come together as a people who have been chosen by you from the foundation of the world, purchased by your Son, redeemed in time at the cross, and in successive generations brought to you by the Spirit and sealed by Him. And so, Father, we praise you, as Paul does, for your great work of redemption. We have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. And we have them not because of anything we have done, but because of your sovereign work of grace in our salvation. And so, Father, we pray that you would give us the great sense of the grace that you have bestowed upon us.

We can never fathom its depth. But, Father, we can begin to do that, and we pray that you would give us a deep insight into that this morning, and may it have its good impression upon us and may it have its good influence upon us that we might live lives that are pleasing to you, lives that are lived with a sense of gratitude for all that we have received freely from you and a sense of love motivated by devotion to you because of what you have done. We thank you, Father, for your grace, and we praise you for who you are, the Triune God who is sovereign, unfrustratable. So, Father, bless us in our understanding of these things. Paul prayed that the eyes of the Ephesians' heart would be opened, and we pray that for ourselves as well.

Enlighten us this morning; teach us and guide us in these things. We pray, Father, for those who have special needs. We pray for those who are sick, for those who are unemployed, for those who are grieving and ask that you would give blessing and encouragement, opportunities. Father, we pray that you give a sense of your presence and encouragement. Give each of us a sense of our dependence upon you.

And may we continually look to you, the one who does exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. We pray you bless our meeting tonight. We pray you would bless all who

participate. We pray that it would be a time of worship, genuine worship and learning. Bless out throughout the week.

And to that end we pray that you bless us now. We commit our time to you. Bless our hymn that it would be good preparation for our hearts as we study your Word together. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] Around the turn of the century, a German biographer of John Calvin wrote, "People today turn up their noses at the many sermons in Geneva and the 'intellectualist' instruction. But we should realize that on this intellectualism depends a good deal of the penetrating power of Calvinism. The Calvinist knows *what* he believes and *why* he believes it." That's a good definition of a Calvinist and it should be true of every Christian. We should all know what we believe and why we believe it. We should all know the great doctrines of the Christian faith.

And yet, evidently, many Christians today don't. That, at least, is the observation of a Jewish man, Dennis **Prager**, who is a very knowledgeable man, an author and a popular talk show host in Southern California, who said in an interview: "One thing I noticed about evangelicals is that they do not read. They do not read the Bible, they do not read the great Christian thinkers. When I walk into an Evangelical Christian's home and see a total of 30 books, most of them best sellers, I do not understand.

"I have bookcases of Christian books, and I am a Jew. Why do I have more Christian books than 98 percent of the Christians in America? That is so bizarre to me." Well, if that is characteristic of Christians today, then it cannot be said that very many of them know what they believe and why they believe it. Christians today – and I think this is a fair statement to make – Christians today are not nearly as concerned about what is true as they are about what is practical, what they feel is practical.

And they feel that it is the exhortations of Scripture that are most important, and the doctrine is just sort of incidental and

something for the theologians to worry about. We're more concerned about how to live life in this world. It is said that modern Americans are activists, given more to action than thought. And that seems to be true of North American Christians as well. There is an impatience with substance, with theory, with doctrine.

And yet, when we come to the New Testament, a great deal of emphasis is put on what we are to believe. A great deal of emphasis is put upon doctrine. You see that, for example, in the book of Romans. You know that the first exhortation in the book of Romans comes in chapter 6 in verse 11. That's the first command, the first imperative, the first instruction on how to live.

"Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive **to righteousness.**" There are five and a-half chapters of doctrine before there is instruction on how to live, because Paul knew that spiritual growth, Godly living must be based upon fundamental teaching, upon doctrine. Before we can act like Christians, we must first know what a Christian is. We must first know what Christ has done for us and who we are in him.

And we see the same thing in the book of Ephesians. There are six chapters in this book and they divide easily into two sections. In chapters 1 through 3, Paul teaches us doctrine. In chapters 4 through 6, he tells us our duty. So before we ever come to Christian conduct, Paul sets forth the Christian creed, what we are to believe.

Well, we want to review the creed that he gives in the first three chapters and look at the doctrine that Paul sets forth, which is fundamental doctrine to the Christian faith. Very simply, there are two basic themes, two major themes in this book. Those of Christ and the church; the mystery of the church which is Jews and gentiles joined together in a new society in the body of Christ with Christ as the head of the church, the head of the body. Two major themes, but there is more in Ephesians than the doctrines of Christ and the church.

Because in developing those main themes, Paul brings in other fundamental doctrine, such as the grace of God which we see very

prominently in chapter 2 – but we see also throughout the book – and in the first chapter, the doctrine of the Trinity, that there is one God who subsists in three persons. Now, Paul doesn't use the word, "trinity." And he doesn't develop the doctrine in the theological terms in which it was later formulated at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, where the church affirmed its belief in God the Father and God the Son, and said that Christ is of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father. Paul, I'm sure, would have agreed with that definition, because he taught the deity of Christ. In Titus 2:13, he writes of "our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

But here, instead of defining the Trinity, he describes the work of each person of the Godhead in our salvation. After a brief greeting in verses 1 and 2, he gives a doxology in verses 3 to 14, in which he praises God for blessing us in Christ "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." Now, that expression, "in the heavenly places," is a very prominent expression in these first three chapters; it occurs four times. And then in chapter 1, it occurs once. So it's a significant expression.

We are rich in Christ, Paul is saying, and our great position and our great wealth are all of God. And so Paul praises God for it, praises God for what we are and what we have. He says we were elected by the Father, we were redeemed by the Son and we were sealed with the Spirit. All our blessings originates with God, and all of our blessings originate in eternity past with election. Paul writes in verse 4 that believers in Jesus Christ were chosen by God from all eternity "before the foundation of the world."

Now, some argue that when Paul writes that God chose us in Him, that is chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that "in Him," means God foresaw who would have faith in Him, who would have faith in Christ, and on that basis, chose him, on the basis of foreseen faith. But that can't be the meaning here. First of all, that brings in something to the text that is not present there. It adds to

what Paul has said. And, also, it is in complete contradiction to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, where Paul says that we were chosen to be in Christ.

We weren't chosen having been seen to believe in Christ. We were chosen for that position. We were chosen to be in Christ, he says. By His doing you are in Christ Jesus. In other words, it was by God's decision – if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, by God's decision, that you've believed and were represented by Christ on the cross.

So election is not conditioned upon what we do, upon our faith or our foreseen good works. But it is upon God's grace, upon His unearned, undeserved love. And that's made very clear in verse 5, where Paul writes: "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Now, if words mean anything, then what he's saying is God predetermined our salvation. And it was not according to our will; it was not according to our choice. It was according to His own will.

In verse 6, he says that grace is "freely bestowed," not conditioned upon something we've done. It's free, freely bestowed, free grace. And then, in verse 11, he says that we have "obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will," not according to our will. According to His will, not ours for our purpose. And so we belong to God, and we have blessings, first, because God chose us.

And second, he says in verses 7 through 12, because Christ redeemed us. Redemption means deliverance by a ransom or by the payment of a price. And this was a word that was used in the ancient world of freeing a slave from his slavery or freeing captives who had been taken captive in battle. A price was paid and freedom was attained in that way. And we, like slaves or like captives, were at one time in that enslaved condition, to sin, to Satan, under judgment, but God paid a price for our freedom.

He obtained our deliverance through the payment of a ransom, and that payment was the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Verse 7: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." So we have been greatly blessed by God. We have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, in Christ, among which is forgive of all of our sins.

And it has all been freely bestowed on us. We do nothing to obtain that. There is no work that we can add to what God has done; it is freely bestowed. Free to us, but not free to God. It cost Him the life of his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. By sending His Son into this fallen world to suffer our death in our place, His justice was fully satisfied for His people.

The wages of sin, which is death, was fully paid on the cross. And so Paul praises Christ for the forgiveness that we have through His redemption. But the Lord not only gained for us redemption and forgiveness, but in that redemption and in that forgiveness, He also obtained wisdom for us, the wisdom that comes with revelation. In verses 9 and 10, Paul says that God has "made known to us the mystery of His will," meaning He has made known to us the purpose of His redemption in Christ, the purpose of what He has done in saving sinners. And that is bringing all things into harmony under Christ's rule.

Now, this word, "mystery," is another important term in the book of Ephesians, particularly in chapter 3. Very simply, it means a revelation. A mystery is something that was previously unknown. A great deal of revelation was given in the Old Testament. The prophets gave that to the people of Israel.

But this is something that they didn't know; they had not received this revelation. So it is something that previously was unknown, but in the present time has been made known. And the content of the mystery is given in verse 10. It is "the summing up of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things upon the earth." In

other words, saving people for Himself to dwell with Him in a regenerated universe, a new heavens and a new earth for all eternity.

That's the goal of history and that is a great privilege. That is a great blessing to know where history is going, to know what life is about. History is not a series of endless cycles going nowhere, amounting to nothing. There is purpose, there is direction. It has a permanence which is in the glory of age to come.

And we know that. That's been revealed to us. And those in Jesus Christ have been saved to inhabit that coming universe, that new heavens and new earth. And the people who have been redeemed to inhabit that are both Jews and gentiles. That's what make us a church.

In verse 7, Paul writes: "In Him we have redemption." That is, we Jews have redemption. Now, that's not a totally unexpected thing. If we read the Bible we think that the Jews have redemption. They're God's chosen people, His blessed people, privileged people.

You would think that they would have redemption. Our Lord said to the woman of Samaria, in John chapter 4, "Salvation is of the Jews." So we expect the *we* in His statement, but this great work of redemption is not limited to the Jews. Paul says, in verse 13, "In Him, you also – " that is, you gentiles – "were sealed with the Holy Spirit with a view to the redemption of God's own possession." So gentiles also are redeemed.

And as Paul will explain in chapter 3, they are "fellow heirs" with the Jews, – " that's the great mystery – "fellow partakers of the promises – or the promise of Christ." Here, he says that they have the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Verse 13: Upon believing in the gospel, "the message of truth," as he calls it, the Ephesians were "sealed in Him," sealed in Christ, "with the Holy Spirit of promise." That's the third work of the Trinity that the apostle praises here and the third reason for his praise. Believers in Jesus Christ have been sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Sealing in the ancient world was a way of showing ownership, much like branding cattle is today. A king would use his signet ring

or perhaps an instrument of some kind that had on it his seal, his sign. And with that, he would put an indelible impression on an object, and in so doing, mark it out as his own, so his own possession of it. And the Holy Spirit is that, an internal seal upon our hearts, marking out every believer as God's possession. But the Holy Spirit is not a thing like a seal is.

The Holy Spirit is a person. And that's very clear from chapter 4 in verse 30 where Paul speaks in very similar words. He writes: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." The fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved shows that He has personality and He is a person. And so God's mark of ownership on us is the third Person of the Trinity who lives within our hearts and is the guarantee that we will be claimed by God in the last day, the day of redemption.

All of His children, all of His people, all of the ransomed of God will be claimed in that final day. Till then, every believer in Jesus Christ is absolutely secure. We are forever God's possession. He guarantees that with the seal that He's placed upon us, the Holy Spirit. We can never be taken from Him.

No one can ever be snatched from the Father's hand, no one can ever be snatched out of Christ, no one can ever break the seal of the Spirit. We are absolutely secure. But the Holy Spirit is also a foretaste of what we will receive on the day of redemption, because Paul goes on to state that He is the "pledge of our inheritance." A pledge is a down payment, a deposit, or the first installment of the full amount.

And so with the Holy Spirit, we have the first installment on our spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. In other words, we don't have to wait until the future to receive all of these blessings that are ours. We don't have to wait until that day of redemption to enjoy them. We have a foretaste of them now through the Holy Spirit, through the life that He generates within us, what Paul describes in

Galatians 5:22, as the fruit of the Spirit. We have it – well, in my text, on the facing page at the end of Galatians in verse 22.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Those are things that money can't buy. How many men, wealthy men – wealthy or poor – how many men, women, children would not love to have in their life love, joy, peace, patience, all of this. That's what the Spirit of God produces within us. That's the life of heaven that He produces within us.

That's some of the blessings that we have in the heavenly places, but that we have now is an earnest as a down payment of that life to come. We have great riches in Jesus Christ, riches to use and enjoy. And, as Paul adds, we have the very power of God working within us. And he's very eager that the Ephesians know this. And so he concludes the chapter with a prayer that their knowledge of these things would increase.

Verse 18: "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, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." One of the most important truths that we can know that will help us in our walk of faith, is that we have the very power of God within us in the Holy Spirit. And to make clear the greatness of that power, Paul illustrates it in verse 20. It is the power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places. We have within us resurrection power, power that conquers death, and not only that, exalts the Son of God over all of the powers and the authorities of the universe.

And that very power, that same power is at work within us. And that is certainly reason for confidence in the Christian life. The provisions of salvation are more, infinitely more than sufficient for all of the challenges that we face in this life. Paul wants them to know these things before he gets into the instruction on how to live in this

hostile world, how to live a difficult life. He wants to assure them that they have sufficient provision in salvation for that.

And so he goes over these great doctrines; who we are and what we have in Christ. We have power. And Paul continues with this encouragement in chapter 2 where he develops further the power of verse 19. It's not only been witnessed in the physical resurrection of Christ, but also, these Ephesians experienced it personally in their own spiritual resurrection. And Paul describes the great change that God produced in them by first reminding the Ephesians of their condition before salvation.

How, he says in verse 1, they were spiritually dead without ability to believe or to understand the truth of God, without any interest in the things of God. In verses 2 and 3, he describes their former manner of life as one of complete rebellion, how they were under the influence of three powers: the world, the devil and the flesh. They were "sons of disobedience," they were "children of wrath." They were in a willful, rebellious state and under the very wrath of God; unable to come to God, unable to – unwilling to come to God and completely undeserving of His love. And that is the condition of all men outside of Jesus Christ.

It was the condition of these Ephesians. But it is true of every person who has not believed in Jesus Christ. They are, humanly speaking, helpless and hopeless and don't even know it. That's how dark the spiritual realm is in which they are in. Well, this is where Paul introduces the great sayings, the effect of the mighty power of God, because what man cannot do, God can and does.

"You were dead," Paul says, "but God – " And that word, "but," in verse 4 has been called a mighty adversative. It marks the contrast between what we were and what we deserved on the one hand, and what we now have and are by God's grace. Verses 4 through 6, we read, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us – " Now, notice that.

I don't want to major too much on this, but it's hard not to. What is the reason for this great grace? What is the reason for God doing this. It's because of His great love with which He loves us. That's the reason. There's no reason beyond that.

It is certainly not because of anything in us. "You were dead," he said, "but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us – " unconditional love, unmerited love, undeserved love – "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." We, who at one time walked according to the course of this world are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We are there because our representative, Jesus Christ, is there. And because of what He has done and because of where He is, we have been made by Him citizens of heaven.

And so while we live on this earth, we have the life of heaven within us and we have the protection of heaven working for us. We have all of the rights and the privileges of sons of God, of heavenly citizenship. Now, you might wonder why does God do this. Why did He save rebels like us, and not only save us but bless us. Because it's not as though He simply redeemed us from the judgment to come and snatched us as a brand from the fire, so to speak, and then gave us a sort of lower level in the universe under the angels.

Now, that would be a great blessing in and of itself, to be delivered from the wrath to come. But He didn't do that. He didn't simply save us from judgment, but he exalted us over the angels and has seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. We are seated beside Him. Why would He do all of this?

Now, that's a natural question. That's a question that Paul anticipates here because he answers it in verse 7, where he gives the purpose of our salvation, which very simply is the glory of God. "In order that in the ages to come – " Well, let me read – set the context a little bit by reading 5 and 6, or portions of it. He says, He's "made us

alive together with Christ, raised us up with Him, seated us with Him in the heavenly places," in order that "in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The church is God's great masterpiece.

He gave life to dead people and made saints of rebels. And you see the greatness in it with that which He had to work with, the dead the rebellious. And out of that He made something pure and glorious. And for all eternity we will show forth the glory, the greatness of His power and grace. That's the purpose of salvation.

In verses 8, 9 and 10, Paul confirms that with his great statement on salvation. The manifestation of God is the great end of salvation because salvation's entirely of grace. If you look at salvation, if you look at those who are saved, all you can see is grace if you truly understand it. Well, that's Paul's explanation. He says, "For – " in explanation of what he's been saying – "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

We can't take credit for our salvation. We can't take credit for one aspect of our salvation. It is entirely of God. We who were dead were made alive, and spiritual life and understanding are a gift of God, as is our faith in Him, which was given in regeneration by the Holy Spirit, purchased by Christ in His death. Even our good works which are the inevitable result of this new life that we have, even those good works are a gift of God.

That's what Paul says in verse 10. "For we are His workmanship." And we're His workmanship from beginning to end. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." So right there we can stop and say if this idea of unconditional grace presents a problem, and the problem is, "Well, if I'm saved by grace and it doesn't – it's nothing that I do, then it doesn't matter what – the way I live. Let's sin and grace might abound."

Paul rejects that in Romans 6. How can "we who died to sin still live in it? And here points out the purpose of our salvation,

another purpose, a purpose that leads to the greatest purpose of glorifying God. And that purpose for us is good works. We're to live a righteous life. We're to conform in our conduct to that which we have been created to be, new creatures in Christ.

He says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." God prepared those beforehand and gave them to us that we should walk in them. What is very clear from this is men desperately need salvation, but salvation is God's work. Man cannot earn it. We can only receive it through faith, receive it as a free gift.

Last week, or maybe two weeks ago now, *The Wall Street Journal* ran a very interesting article on a well-known businessman and a former government official, former cabinet official, a man who had been very much in the public eye in the '70s and early '80s. Since leaving government, he has accumulated a great fortune. And the article examines the business side, and then what the article calls his warmer side.

And in his warmer side, he gives a lot of money and time to charity. He's a Roman Catholic and, of late, has become a very devout Roman Catholic.

He makes annual pilgrimages to the shrine in Lourdes, France, and there he worked as a helper assisting handicapped pilgrims. Every Christmas day he goes to a home for troubled children in New York City and gives presents and serves food. He worked with AIDS patients. His office in New Jersey distributes a very brief biography on him that the article says, "overflows with foundation and charitable fundraising work." And as I read the article, I was impressed with the things that he did.

But if anyone should think that that's what gains salvation – and I don't know that that man thinks that. But those are the kinds of things that we want to look at and say, "Now this is going commend a man to man's God in the day of redemption." If anyone thinks that, Paul says, for salvation it counts for nothing. "Salvation is by grace,

he says. "Salvation is a gift received through faith, not of works that no one should boast."

All a person can do is turn to God with empty hands for salvation, and know that he or she can only do that by the grace of God. Well, the Ephesians had done that. Paul reminds them of that. He says back in chapter 1 in verse 13, that they had listened to the gospel and believed it. And they had done that, we know from chapter 2, because by God's grace He had changed their spiritual condition and given them life.

Well now, in the remaining verses of chapter 2, Paul describes how God had worked other changes in them, how he had changed their relationships – their relationship to the people of God and their relationship to God Himself. In the past, he says in verses 12 and 19, they were – they, that is the gentiles, we're "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel." They were strangers and aliens to Israel. In relation to God, he says in verse 12, they were far off, "separate from Christ," without a knowledge of Him, without an interest in His promises, without God in the world. Separation, alienation from God and from His people and from His promises; that is what characterized the gentiles.

That's what characterized these Ephesians in times past, but God brought them "near," Paul said. Verse 13: But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." They have been brought near to God because Christ's death satisfied the demands of justice and thereby reconciled them to God. And in bringing them near to God, Christ brought them near to God's people, making, as Paul says, "both groups into one." Because by His death, He abolished the law of Moses which separated the Jew and the gentile.

Verses 14, 15 and 16: "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might

make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity." And so a double reconciliation has occurred. Jews and gentiles were united into one body, and both were reconciled to God. That's the church; that's the new society that God has established and created through the redemption of His Son.

And in verses 19 through 22, Paul describes this union of Jews and gentiles, the church in three ways. He says in verse 19 that they are "fellow citizens with the saints, and God's household." And in verses 20 through 22, describes the church as the "temple," God's temple. So we are a new nation. We are a new household. We are a new temple of God.

And then in chapter 3, Paul explains further this union of the Jews and the gentiles in the church. In verse 4, he calls it a "mystery," which was made known to him. It was a mystery in the sense that it had not been revealed in the Old Testament. This is new revelation. And in verse 6, he gives the content of it.

"To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." And the mystery that was revealed to Paul was not that gentiles would be saved. The Old Testament promised the gentile salvation. It's promised in the Abrahamic covenant, and there are examples of gentiles being saved throughout the Old Testament, such as Rahab and Ruth. But they became Israelites when they were saved and they came under the law.

The mystery that was revealed to Paul and of which he was made a minister is something new. Gentiles are now spiritual equals of the Jew and enter into the blessings of salvation independent of Israel. Gentiles are not second-class citizens in the church, in the household of God, but co-heirs, "fellow partakers of the promises." They are not greater than the Jew. They are equal, co-heirs, fellow partakers of the promises.

Now, the significance of that I suspect is hard for us to realize. Today the church is largely gentile. But in Paul's day it was Jewish, and the idea of Gentiles being equal with Jews was unthinkable. The gentiles were spiritual pariahs, and the Jews called them dogs. They were unclean.

And there was good reason for those kinds of descriptions because the gentiles were heathens, idolaters. And you get a picture of that attitude in the book of Acts with the debates that arose when gentiles began coming to faith, made to deal with a situation they were not used to. And when the church in Jerusalem learned that Peter had actually gone into the house of Cornelius in Caesarea – Cornelius was a gentile – many of the Christians there demanded an explanation. And Luke writes, in Acts 11, that they took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

And they wanted an explanation for his conduct. Peter responded by saying, in effect, "Yes, I did. The Spirit of God told me to do it. And so I went and I preached the gospel. And he said, "The Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning," the Day of Pentecost.

And Luke writes that when they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life." In other words, God has even given faith to gentiles, the dogs, the idolaters, the aliens, the outcasts. And they understood that to be an amazing work of God's grace just as Paul did. And Paul felt greatly privileged to be a man who had been entrusted with this ministry, to go to the gentiles and preach the gospel.

And he says so in verse 8. "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ," Now, he concludes the chapter and this doctrinal section of the book with a prayer. He offers, essentially, one petition that the Ephesians be strengthened in the Holy Spirit in the inner being that Christ might dwell more richly in their hearts through faith. And then

he concludes with verses 20 and 21: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

There are no limits to what God can do. If He can save gentiles out of paganism, if He can save Paul, the persecutor of the church out of Phariseism, He can provide for you in your greatest need. He can give you strength, wisdom, opportunities. He is the God of the impossible who does exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. And so we should be asking and we should be looking to Him.

And that's what Paul assures the Ephesians of as he concludes this section. It's very clear, isn't it, that Paul had a very high view of God, that he knew God to be absolutely sovereign and holy, transcendent, yet imminent, the personal God who saves and blesses His people with unconditional grace. And that wasn't just abstract theology with Paul. It had a powerful influence on him. How can we explain the uncommon energy of the apostle and the accomplishments of the apostle, the greatest evangelist, the greatest missionary and theologian of the church?

What moved him to give his whole life in service for Christ, to sacrifice everything for our Lord? Well, I think it was his knowledge of God. It was his theology, his understanding of how great, infinitely great God is and how sufficiently He has supplied and equipped each of us to do His will. That gave Paul confidence to walk by faith and not by sight. That gave him the confidence to enter pagan cities with the gospel and face angry mobs with courage.

He knew who his God was and he knew what he had provided the apostle. It was his understanding of sovereign grace and divine forgiveness that moved him to act out of a deep sense of gratitude with real love and devotion. Theology, the knowledge of God does that, and we impoverish ourselves if we don't know it. It has a transforming effect on God's people. Theology is very practical.

That's why Paul spends three chapters on doctrine. That's why he prays that the eyes of the Ephesians heart would be enlightened to these truths. When they are, when we come to understand these things, when we know what we believe and why we believe it, then – like those old Calvinistic churches that listened intently to long, theological sermons – then we, too, will be strong and have penetrating power. I'm afraid, however, that the church today is more like Israel in Hosea's day than the churches of Calvinists. In Hosea 4:6, God says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

And the evangelical church today is weak for its lack of knowledge. Most Christians spend very little time reading and meditating on the Bible, God's Word. And a number of men have observed the tragic irony of our day, that in the years after World War II there was great effort in the evangelical world to defend and propagate the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible through writings and debates. And all the while, the Bible was falling into disuse in the church. People who will confidently affirm that the Bible is God's inerrant Word don't read it, and that has some bad results.

Some 30 years ago, A.W. Tozer observed that "the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity." Well, why is that? Is it because of a lack of study and discipline, a lack of discipline, a willingness to sit down every day and study and think and meditate? It's an important question. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

It's as we know God, know the things of God, that we grow in our reverence for God, understand life, understand what is right and wrong and what is important, and have the motivation and courage to serve Him. That comes through a knowledge of the things of God. It's as we know what we believe and why we believe it that we have a penetrating influence on our world. It's as we do that that we really become light and salt. And so as we resume our study in the book of

Ephesians and learn about Christ and learn about the church and learn about grace and our Triune God, and all of the blessings that we have in the heavenly places, our prayer for ourselves and for one another should be that God will teach us about Himself.

And in teaching us, change us and use us. If you're here without Christ, you need Him. You are lost and you are under judgment. But you can escape that through faith in Christ and through faith alone. Not through any works that you do but simply turning to Him and trusting in Him.

As the apostle writes in chapter 2 in verses 8 and 9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no one may boast." So if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, recognize that you are a sinner and that Christ is your Savior. Trust in Him and receive the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Shall we stand now for the benediction.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the rich truth, the great doctrine that is contained in these first three chapters, in fact, in all six chapters, because it's all filled with doctrine, with theology. And, Father, as we think about these things and consider what you have revealed through the apostle, we are humbled by your greatness and by your kindness to us, your grace, which has taken dead men and women, dead in trespasses and sins and given them life and forgiveness and lifted us out of the grave. And not only lifted us up, but exalted us into the heavenlies, seated us with your Son. Thank you, Father, for that.

We praise you for your greatness. You are absolutely sovereign, the unfrustratable Deity. And we praise you for that and ask you to teach us more about yourself, and in so doing, change us. If there be any in attendance, Father, who don't know you, we pray for their salvation and ask you to open their eyes, the eyes of their heart, they might know their lost condition and turn to Christ, the only remedy, the only Savior of the world. In His name we pray. Amen.