

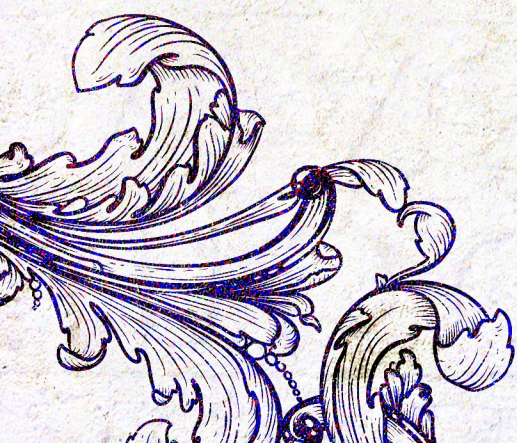


A COLORFUL MYSTERY

# CHURCH

.....  
A STUDY IN EPHESIANS  
.....

*a field guide*



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EPHESIANS 2:11-3:21

# A COLORFUL MYSTERY

DRAWING  
NEAR

**1] It is part of our sinful nature to build protective barriers that shut out other people. What examples of disunity and division, segregation and schism, have you observed within the last month?**

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**2] Is the local church today known more for division, splits, withdrawals, pride, and conflicts or community, biblical solutions, patience, humility and a Christ-like spirit? Please Explain.**

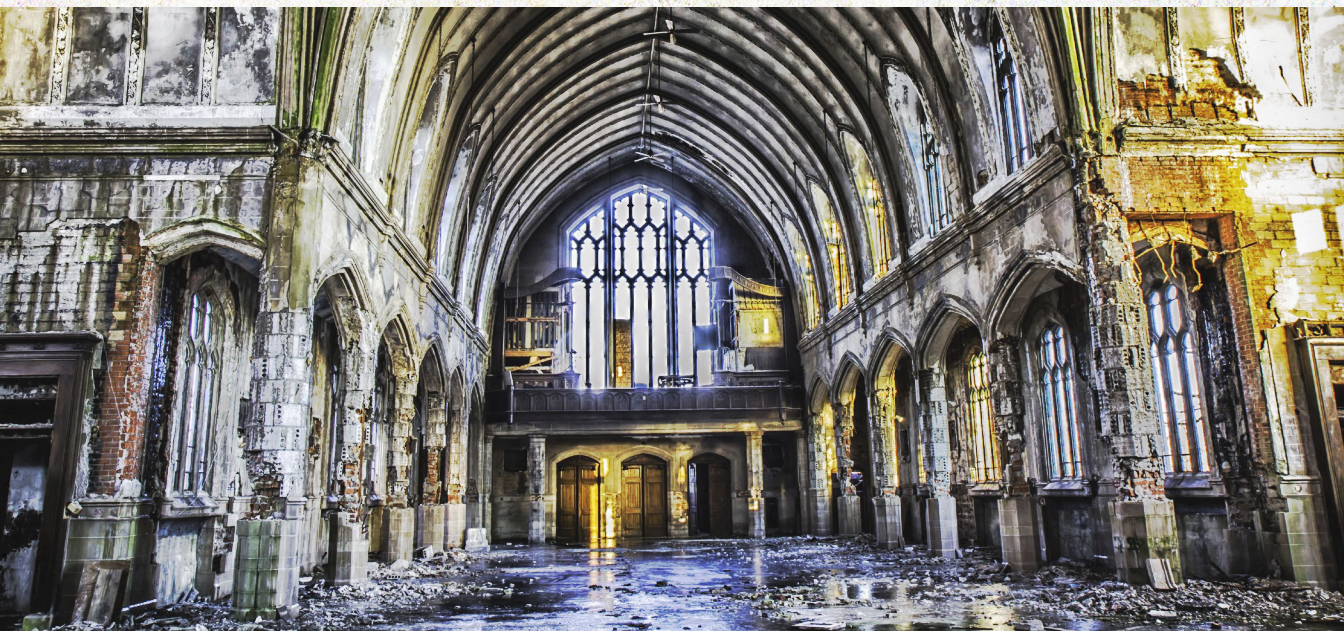
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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John. Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

\*Photo credit: *Abandoned St. Agnes Church* by Roel Paulme Detroit, MI. Accessed October 28, 2019. Shutterstock.com.



## Q THE CONTEXT

Ever since the rebellion in Eden shattered the relationship between humans and God, people have found it difficult to coexist peacefully. Every marriage, family, church (including the church at Ephesus), community, and nation struggles to maintain harmony and peace. Humanity's fallenness creates powerful feelings of alienation and suspicion, leading to prejudice, misunderstandings, disagreements, conflict, and even outright war.

It was no different in Paul's day. The early church consisted of Jewish people who believed in Jesus. Yet they still struggled to overcome prejudice against the Gentiles, the non-Jews, who were also becoming Christians. Paul showed them that Christ is the Prince of Peace and the key to unity in the church. He alone can bring us into right relationship with God. He alone can shatter the walls of prejudice and malice that separate human beings. The colorful mystery was that God was extending His grace not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. These two groups were being brought together, in Christ, into a new entity of the church, by the pure gospel.<sup>1</sup>

## KEYS TO THE TEXT

**GENTILES:** There Greek word used here is *ethos*, from which we get our English term *ethnic*, and it signifies the non-Jewish world. In Paul's day, the Gentiles (the "uncircumcision") experienced two types of alienation. The first was social, resulting from animosity that had existed between Jews and Gentiles for thousands of years. Jews considered Gentiles to

be outcasts. Objects of derision, and reproach. The second and more significant type of alienation was spiritual because Gentiles as a people were cut off from God in five different ways:

- 1 They were "*without Christ*," the Messiah, having no savior and Deliverer and without divine purpose or destiny.
- 2 They were "*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*." God's chosen people, the Jews, were a nation whose supreme King and Lord was God Himself, and from whose unique blessing and protection they benefited.
- 3 Gentiles were "*strangers from the covenants of promise*," not able to partake of God's divine covenants in which He promised to give his people a land, a priesthood, a people, a nation, a kingdom, and a King—and to those who believe in Him, eternal life and heaven.
- 4 They had "*no hope*" because they had been given no divine promise.
- 5 They were "*without God*" in the world."

**THE COLORFUL MYSTERY WAS THAT GOD WAS EXTENDING HIS GRACE NOT ONLY TO THE JEWS BUT ALSO TO THE GENTILES, TO MAKE ONE PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF, THE CHURCH.**

<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John. *Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.



# UNLEASHING THE TEXT

## Key Terms

Read 2:11-3:21, noting the key words and definitions next to the passage.

## Ephesians 2:11-22<sup>1</sup>

### One In Christ

**11** Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- **12** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

### DIVIDING WALL OF HOSTILITY (v.14)

an allusion to a wall in the Jewish temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the areas accessible only to the Jews

### ONE NEW MAN (v. 15)

The Greek word translated “new” refers to something utterly unlike anything before it. The idea is that all who come to Christ comprise a new entity in which all previous labels are secondary at best. The believer is different in kind and quality

**KILLING THE HOSTILITY(v.16)** The death of Christ put to death the hostility between a holy God and sinful people

**MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD (v.19)** God’s family in the earth

### A DWELLING PLACE FOR GOD BY THE SPIRIT (v.22)

In contrast to Old Testament times when God’s presence was temporarily localized in the temple, now God takes up residence permanently in His

<sup>1</sup>ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

# Ephesians 3:1-21<sup>1</sup>

## The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed

**1** For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles-- **2** assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, **3** how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. **4** When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, **5** which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. **6** This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. **7** Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. **8** 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, **9** and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, **10** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **11** This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. **13** So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

## Prayer for Spiritual Strength

**14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15**

from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **16** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. **20** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

people, the church

## PARTAKERS OF HIS PROMISE

**(v.6)** The Gentiles share in the grace of God; this word was used in extra-biblical Greek to describe the "joint possessor" of a house

**MANIFOLD (v. 10)** - marked by a great variety of colors

**BOLDNESS AND ACCESS (v. 12)** - Faith in an all-sufficient Savior makes us acceptable to God and is the basis of our access into the presence of God

**TRIBULATIONS (v. 13)** - the frequent pressures and troubles that Paul encountered as he carried out his apostolic task

**FATHER - (v.14)** Our awesome Creator is simultaneously a tender, loving, concerned, compassionate divine Parent who welcomes and invites His children to come to Him.

**ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY (V.16)** - The limitless riches of God's power are available for the spiritual welfare of every believer

**STRENGTHENED (v.16)** - fortified, braced, invigorated

**INNER MAN (v.16)** - the real person as opposed to merely the outer physical appearance

**DWELL (V. 17)** to live in, to settle down in, to take up residence

**EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANTLY (v. 20)** - beyond all measure, the highest comparison imaginable

**3] There is only one imperative verb in Ephesians 2-3, and it is found in 2:11-12, the word *remember*. How does it affect you to remember your situation before you knew Christ?**

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**4] H.B. Charles, Jr. says that you cannot have a high view of Christ and a low view of the church at the same time.<sup>1</sup> Do you agree? If so, why do you think it is important for every believer to have a high view of the church?**

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Paul uses three illustrations to describe what it means to be a Christ-follower, and all three of them speak to the importance of our relationship to other Christians. In verse 19, he states that Christians are “citizens with the saints.” In the same way that one might identify with

others from the same country or state, so Paul says Christians relate to one another. The second metaphor in verse 19 intensifies the relationship: we are “members of God’s household.” We are to view our relationship with other Christians as we do our closest family members. Verses 20-22 drive the point home even further, pointing out that believers in Christ are “put together” or “built together” by God. Christians are not only citizens of the same country and members of the same family: they are “mortared” together permanently by God for His purpose and glory. The only question is whether we live like it.<sup>2</sup>

**5] How do these three illustrations of the church in 2:19-22 describe our unity in Christ, both in our experience with the Lord and with one another? Which of the three makes the biggest impact on you?**

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<sup>1</sup> Charles, H.B. “H. B. Charles Jr.” H. B. Charles Jr. (blog), May 20, 2019. <https://www.hbcharlesjr.com/2019/05/20/why-the-church/>.

<sup>2</sup> Merida, Tony, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014.

# TRUTH FOR TODAY

## Let Us Elevate Our Concept of the Local Church

An obvious implication from these three pictures is that Christ wants to create a people, not merely isolated individuals who believe in Him. This passage confronts Western evangelism. To be separate from the church is to say, "I want to be a stone apart from a building" or "a son or daughter separated from my family" or "a refugee away from my country." Many people treat the church as something that is unnecessary, unimportant, or even a hindrance to doing great things for God. I used to believe this. I did not want to pastor. I felt I was superior to others, not needing the church. I felt I could do more apart from the church. I hopped around visiting different churches, but did not have community. That is not God's design for the Christian.

Some think the church is fine for others, but they do not feel the need to take membership seriously. The New Testament positions it as our fundamental identity. Belonging to a local church should be more important than where you go to school, where you work, or to what club you belong. Sometimes people ask whether college students should join a church. I think students should consider the church they may belong to before they go off to school. If we are apart from community, we are not following the New Testament pattern, and we are not helping ourselves. It is not good to be apart from the oversight of shepherds or apart from the accountability and support of brothers and sisters.

The New Testament assumes every Christian is part of a local church. It knows nothing of lone-ranger Christianity or the position that claims, "I'm a member of the universal church; I don't need to join a local, visible church." We show we are part of the universal church by identifying with a tangible people locally. Is this not what we do in our union with Christ? We live out spiritual union with Christ visibly. In the same way, we should live out our union with other believers visibly. Identify yourself with a people. Avoid being a "ninja Christian," just slipping into a worship service and leaving without a trace. Be a family member instead.

Church discipline assumes local church members are identifiable (Matt 18:15-17). When Paul directs the Corinthians to expel the immoral brother, he assumes there are people who are in and people who are out (1 Cor 5:9-13). In 2 Corinthians 2:6 the "majority" of members voted to remove a man from its membership. The New Testament also mentions lists, which illustrates that people were identifiable (e.g., 1 Tim 5:9). The book of Acts counts people (e.g., Acts 2:41). People knew who was part of the church. The writer of Hebrews says overseers will give an account for their people (Heb 13:17). If there are no identifiable members, then there is no one for whom to give an account. Electing leaders (Acts 6; 13), submitting to them, regulating membership, keeping lists, and voting only make sense if there is an identifiable group of members. The metaphors for the church – stones in a temple, members of a family, citizens of a kingdom, members of a body – all assume individuals are part of an actual church.

There is certain flexibility as to how one works out the membership process in a local church, but the New Testament emphasis on the importance of belonging to a local church is abundantly clear. We cannot read this passage honestly without seeing the importance of the church.

This is how God intends for us to live out our faith and love one another: in community. It is an incredible gift of God's grace to have a family of faith. It is a gift of grace to gather corporately and stir up one another to faith and good works (Heb 10:24-25). It is a gift of grace to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34-45). It is a gift of grace to carry one another's burdens (Gal 6:2). It is a gift of grace to encourage one another and to be encouraged by one another (1 Thess 5:11). It is a gift of grace to be taught and admonished by one another (Col 3:16). It is a gift of grace to be allowed the privilege to give financially to further the gospel (2 Cor 8-9). It is a gift of grace to come to the table for communion (1 Cor 11:26). All of these privileges have come to us via the cross-work<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Merida, Tony, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin. Exalting Jesus in Ephesians. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014.