

# **This is a Great Mystery**

## A Study of Ephesians

### Week 4 – Ephesians 1:7-10

#### **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, we cannot come even close to fully grasping your wisdom and understanding. And yet, we thank and praise you for telling us as much as we need to know about your plan of salvation through Christ and his work for us. Make us even more thankful for all that you have done as we study another section of your Word. Amen.

#### **From Last Week**

This will be a staple of every class; it's always good to review where we've been. Hopefully, that will help shape our discussion for each week and keep the big picture of Paul's line of thought in mind as we go. So, last week, we discussed:

- Predestination as a source of comfort
  - Predeterminism and its hypothetical impact on our lives
  - Double predestination (Romans 9)
  - Hardening of Pharaoh's heart
- Letting God be God in his decisions

I also had some homework to do:

- What do Methodists believe about predestination?
  - They believe in conditional election, which basically says that because God knew you would choose to believe in him, he predestined you. That's not a biblical view of predestination. Where does the onus of believing fall in that doctrine?
- Which came first: the Greek punctuation or the Greek verse numbers?
  - The modern division of chapters that we have was established in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Archbishop Stephen Langton
  - The most widely used division of verses came in 1551 from French printer Robert Estienne.
  - As far as punctuation and spacing is concerned, that came in around the eighth century, according to changes in the sources that are available from those times.
- Rather than an “in Christ” counter, we will shift to a simple “Christ” counter. Whether it's through, in, by, for, under, or of—we will keep track of just how Christocentric this letter is.

Is there anything I forgot about or that you would like to discuss further?

**Verse 7** – ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ

**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the abundance of his grace...**

1. Again, “in him” refers to Christ; that's another tally.
2. τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν – literally, “the buying back from captivity by paying a ransom”
  - The same root (λύτρον) is used when Jesus spoke in **Matthew 20:28**

- This concept comes up a lot in our hymnody:
  - At least 30 hymns in *Christian Worship* and *Christian Worship Supplement* use “ransom.”
  - 121 hymns make mention of “redeem” or “Redeemer”
  - 18 hymns use “redemption”
- This “buying back” concept is one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith.
- Paul summarizes how God carried it out in **Colossians 2:13-14**.
- What illustrations have you heard to describe this concept? OR What illustration could you use when describing to someone else what it means that Christ has redeemed us?

3. διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ - “through his blood”

- Blood has always had a close connection to the forgiveness of sins. In fact, look up **Hebrews 9:22** to see how strongly God speaks about blood and forgiveness.

- This is why the sacrificial system was put into place in the Old Testament. Look at **Leviticus 17:11**. For what purpose did God give the Israelites the blood of animals?

- What’s the problem with animal blood, according to **Hebrews 9:25**?

- What does **1 Peter 1:17-19** say is different about the blood of Jesus?

4. τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων – “the forgiveness of sins”

- ἄφεσιν has its roots in letting something go free; it’s can also be used to refer to a legal pardon
- παραπτωμάτων refers to a “violation of moral standards” or “wrongdoing”
  - Some translations take this word as “trespass,” others use the more generic “sin.” What’s communicated through each choice?

5. κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ - “according to the abundance of his grace”

- My mind thinks of grace overflowing in this verse. **Romans 5:15-21** speaks about that, as well as **Psalms 23:5**. Let’s read those to get a more comprehensive view of this “overflowing” idea.

6. Χάριτος counter – 3

What comments or questions do you have?

**Verse 8** – ἤς ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει,

**...which he lavished on us in all wisdom and understanding.**

7. God took the abundance of his grace...and he caused it to abound on us. This continues the thought of overflowing from verse 7. This is a typical ancient way of emphasizing something in ancient language (both Greek and Hebrew do it). The more descriptors that repeat the thought, the more emphatic it is!

8. What do we know about God's wisdom and understanding from Scripture?

- **Romans 11:33** –
- **1 Corinthians 1:23-25** –
- **Colossians 2:3** –
- **Isaiah 40:13-14** –

What comments or questions do you have?

**Verse 9** – γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ

**He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he planned in him (Christ).**

9. Here's our first look at "mystery" (μυστήριον)

- This is a secret; one dictionary said that it refers to God's private counsel or God's plan which is "too profound for human ingenuity"
  - Anyone need/want that unpacked a little further?
- We might think of God's hidden will, drawing on the theology of the cross discussions.
- Oddly enough, to tie in our predestination and hardening-of-heart conversations from last week, Paul uses μυστήριον in Romans 11:25 when talking about "part of Israel" being hardened.

10. And yet, this mystery isn't a secret, because God has revealed (γνωρίσας) it.

- Something can be revealed in a lot of different ways
  - Tell others something (Luke 2:15)
  - Something is being revealed through the Scriptures (Romans 16:26)
  - Make known through prayer (Philippians 4:6)
  - Unveil an identity (Acts 7:13, where Stephen goes through Israel's history and, here, speaks about Joseph revealing himself to his brothers)

11. Who is this mysterious plan centered in?

- In fact, read **Colossians 2:2**, which takes this point a step further.

12. Notice how Paul tends to keep some terms together. God's "will" (θελήματος) and "good pleasure" (εὐδοκίαν) were used together in 1:5.
13. προέθετο – this word shares a root with the "adoption" word used earlier. Adoption is son-placing; a plan is setting something in place beforehand.

**Verse 10** – εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ.

**For the arrangement of the fullness of the times, in order to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth in him.**

14. First phrase is difficult; translations do some different things with it.
  - Part of the reason it's a little strange is that the second word, οἰκονομίαν, is the word we use for stewardship. That's a strange way for us 21<sup>st</sup> century English speakers to use the word; all the same, that's the word the Holy Spirit wanted to be used here. It can be translated as "arrangement" or "order" or "plan," all of which seem to work a little better.
15. "Fullness of time" is the Bible's way of saying that thing happened at exactly the \_\_\_\_\_ time.
  - See how the term is used in **Galatians 4:4** and **John 13:1**.
16. ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ - in order to bring all things together in Christ
  - What does "all things" refer to? Look at **Psalms 8:6-8** and **Colossians 1:16-20**.

What comments or questions do you have?

**Closing Prayer** CW 377 v. 4

**But God beheld my wretched state  
Before the world's foundation,  
And, mindful of his mercies great,  
He planned my soul's salvation.  
A Father's heart he turned to me,  
Sought my redemption fervently;  
He gave his dearest treasure. Amen.**