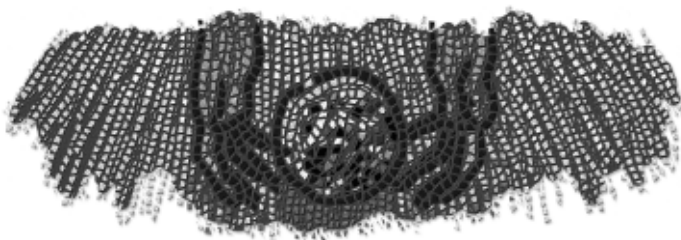


# God's Mystery:<sup>1</sup> The United Fellowship



## SABBATH—NOVEMBER 5

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matthew 10:5; John 4:9; Acts 10:26-28; Ephesians 3.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “God is able to do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine. He does everything by his power that is working in us. Give him glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Give him glory through all time and for ever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20, 21, NlrV).

**MYSTERY SHOWN AND PREACHED.** With the Holy Spirit's leading, Paul already has written about the special unity Christ has established in the church. Writers before Paul have written about unity. But usually these writers wrote about unity among one group of people, not among different groups, races, and nationalities. Unity among different groups of people is an idea that the people of long ago did not have. But Paul wrote about a different kind of unity. (The unity Paul wrote about had never been seen before.) This unity comes only through Christ.

Paul also talks about the church being made of Jews and Gentiles<sup>2</sup> and about what Christ will do through this church. Most important, Paul points his readers to God's love. God has done so many things for us through Christ's sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice shows how much God loves us.

**A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Why did Paul call it a “mystery” (Ephesians 3:3) that Gentiles could also have God's promises in Christ? Why should this not be such a mystery to Paul? What does the church show about God? What are the things God has done for us through Christ? What is Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 12.

<sup>1</sup>mystery—a religious truth we cannot fully understand.

<sup>2</sup>Gentiles—people who are not Jews.

**SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 6****WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE MYSTERY (Ephesians 3:1-6)?**

**How do the following verses help us understand why unity in the church was such a mystery for Paul? Deuteronomy 14:2; Matthew 10:5; John 4:9; Acts 10:26-28; Galatians 2:11-14.**

Mystery in the New Testament is not some hidden secret. Mystery in the New Testament is a truth. God has shown this truth in His own time through the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks of receiving this truth in Ephesians 3:3. "Into Paul's life had come the truth of God's great secret. That secret was that the love, mercy,<sup>3</sup> and grace of God were not meant for the Jews alone, but for all people. . . . In the world of long ago, the barriers (walls) were powerful. No one had ever dreamed that God's gifts were for all people."—Adapted from William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1976), pp. 122, 123.

Years ago, American patriot<sup>4</sup> Thomas Jefferson wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident [clear], that all men are created equal. . . ." This is a nice idea. But history shows that this idea was not always clear. All through history, different groups believed themselves better than other groups. This idea was

so popular with people that even the Israelites of long ago thought of themselves as better than other peoples. They should have known this was wrong, because God had warned them not to believe they were better. Someone as smart as Paul needed a special vision from God to help him understand he was not better than other people (Acts 9). The idea that Jews and Gentiles would be one was so strange that Paul called it a mystery. Today, many people think it is in very bad taste for one group of people to think they are better than other groups of people. So it is hard for us to understand why Paul thought it was such a mystery that the Jews and Gentiles could be one group. But if we understand a little of the thinking of Paul's time, we can better understand how strange this idea of unity between Jews and Gentiles was to Paul.

**How do you think you are better than other people? (Few cultures are without this problem.) Why is being better than other people so strange to the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

**MONDAY—NOVEMBER 7****PROOF OF THE MYSTERY (Jeremiah 16:19).**

**Paul talks about the gospel going to the Gentiles as a mystery.**

<sup>3</sup>mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

<sup>4</sup>patriot—a person who loves and supports her or his country.

But proof of this promise is in the Old Testament. How do the following Old Testament verses show the truth about God going to all nations?

Genesis 18:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 56:3-8 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 16:19 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 42:6 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 49:6 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Zechariah 60:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Zechariah 8:23 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Paul probably knew all about these verses. But he still thought it a great mystery that Gentiles should also receive God's salvation. Again, it can be hard for us to understand why Paul found it so difficult to believe the Gentiles also could be saved.

But why should we be surprised that Paul found this hard to understand? God was asking him to give up his prejudices.<sup>5</sup> We also find it hard to give up our prejudices. God asks us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), bless those who curse us (Matthew 5:44), to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39), and not to give

<sup>5</sup>prejudices—judgments based on feelings without knowing facts; prejudged feelings against a certain group of people because of their color or strange beliefs.

back evil for evil (revenge) (1 Peter 3:9). These teachings are impossible for us to follow without God's help, because they go against our sinful human nature. If Jesus has not stepped on our toes, then we probably have not been following Him as we should.

**When was the last time Jesus stepped on your toes? When was the last time you felt the teachings of the gospel cut deep into some of your prejudices or feelings? How did you answer?**

## TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 8

### THROUGH THE CHURCH (Ephesians 3:9-13).

**What wonderful message is Paul giving us in Ephesians 3:10?**

**Read Ephesians 3:9-13. What theme does Paul compare<sup>6</sup> to the plan of salvation in Ephesians 3:9? Why is this theme so important?**

We are new creations in Christ (Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 4:24; 2 Corinthians 5:17). We are also part of the church that God Himself has created. He made us. He remakes us. And He made the church. We, as new created people, are a part of that church. Through this church, God

shows His wisdom to the universe (Ephesians 3:10).



**God made us. He also remakes us to be part of His church.**

This new church community becomes a showcase of God's power, grace, and wisdom. "That was God's plan from the beginning. He has worked it out through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11, NIV). Through creation, God shows His power to us. So it is through a new creation that God shows His wisdom and justice to "rulers and authorities in the heavenly world" (Ephesians 3:10, NIV). Among these are fallen and unfallen angels.

"It is to this world and to the universe, too, that we are to show clearly the principles<sup>7</sup> of God's kingdom." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>compare—show how things are the same.

<sup>7</sup>principles—basic general rules that form the basis of specific rules. Love and peace are two principles of God's kingdom.

In Ephesians 3:10, we have another look at the war between Christ and Satan. God shows us that all the people and angels are interested in the end of our world here. The surprise is that Ephesians 3:10 shows that God plans to make His wisdom clear to the people and angels in the universe through the church.

**Imagine you are part of the people and angels in the universe who are watching the church. Write a diary entry about what you see there. Compare notes in class this Sabbath.**

### WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 9

#### “WHEREFORE” (Ephesians 3:13).

Notice the wonderful promise in Ephesians 3:12. Paul says that through Jesus we can go to God Himself. This is what Jesus was talking about when He said, “I am the gate” (John 10:7-9). Adam could go to God at first. But then he sinned. Then he hid among the trees because he could no longer face God with a clear conscience.<sup>8</sup> The result of Jesus’ sin-payment on the cross is that we can again go to God without fear and without priests or saints.<sup>9</sup> God is always available to the trusting soul, through Christ’s sacrifice.

<sup>8</sup>conscience—a knowledge of right and wrong with an urge to do right; moral judgment.

<sup>9</sup>priests or saints—some people believe we must go to God through priests or people their church has declared to be saints.

<sup>10</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.



Jesus is the gate to God and His salvation (John 10:7-9).

In many Bible versions, Ephesians 3:13 begins with the word “wherefore.” In the Greek language, this word means “on account of” (because of). Paul is saying that on account of something, he does not want the Ephesians to worry about him. What is he talking about?

The Gentiles now belong to the body of Christ. The eternal<sup>10</sup> purpose is being fulfilled through Jesus. God’s wisdom is being shown to the universe. We can reach God any time. For these reasons Paul asks his readers not to worry about his sufferings. His sufferings have come to him on account of (because) he has brought the gospel to them.



We can reach God at any time.

Paul is saying, “Do not worry about me or my troubles.” Think about the great news of what God has done for the world through Christ. The good news is far more important than anything I might be going through.

**Are you struggling? Are you worried? Are you afraid of the future? Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the things shown to us so far in Ephesians. Let the promises we have been reading about become important in your life.**

### THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 10

#### THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST'S LOVE (Ephesians 3:14-21).

**Read Paul's prayer in Ephesians**

**3:14-21 over and over. Then rewrite the message of his prayer. Why do you think he would offer such a prayer?**

Paul prays that Christ would live in the Ephesians' hearts. The Greek word used for “live” is *katoikem*. *Kat-oikem* means a “permanent home.” Christ is not a guest. He is a permanent part of our lives.

Paul prays for Christ to live in the Ephesians' hearts. The spiritually strengthened person may understand more fully the width, length, depth, and height of Christ's love when Christ lives in the heart. Paul is praying to understand what is not possible to understand. But he knows the faith of believers depends on God's love. Believers must know they have been blessed with a great love. We cannot measure Christ's love. But His love is wide enough to circle the globe and reach every sinner. His love is high enough to reach God's throne. Christ's love is deep enough to reach Satan's deepest ditch. Christ's love can pull out any sinner who calls upon Him for help. Christ's love can bring that person to stand under God's sunshine. His love is long enough to stretch from “before the beginning of the world” (Ephesians 1:4) to the endless ages of eternity.<sup>11</sup> In eternity, Christ's love will be the subject of the saints' study. His love “passes all knowledge.” His love fills all believers “with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19, NKJV).

<sup>11</sup>eternity—life without end; forever.

The words “fullness of God” are filled with great promise and hope. These words are common to the books of Ephesians and Colossians. These words show that God is unlimited. He “is able to do far more than we could ever ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20, NIV). God is rich in mercy, unlimited in love, unlimited in grace, and full of power. “God is able to do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine” so that His glory may be “clearly shown in the church . . . through all time” (Ephesians 3:20, 21, NIV).

**How certain (sure) are you that God’s love is real? How would you answer someone who asks, “Why do you believe your God is so loving?”**

### FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 11

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** *Going to God:* “We can go to God through Christ. God invites us to bring our troubles and frustrations to Him, because He understands them all. He would not have us pour out our sorrows to human ears. Through the blood of Christ, we may come to the throne of grace. And we may find grace and help in time of need. . . . Earthly parents encourage their child to come to them at all times. In the same way, God encourages us to come to Him with our wants and problems, our thanks and love. Every promise is sure. Jesus is our Substitute.<sup>12</sup> He has

given us everything we need to have a perfect character. The cleansing blood of Christ is our only hope, because through His sacrifice alone we have pardon and peace.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1116.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. A preacher once said, “We have not just been saved that we might escape hell. We have been saved so God may present a people which will surprise the whole world.” How well do you think the church has succeeded in doing what this preacher has said?
2. Compare your diaries from the last part of Tuesday’s lesson with other class members.
3. In class, compare Ephesians 3:10 with the war between Christ and Satan. How do Job 1 and 2 compare with Ephesians 3:10?
4. Let each member of the class share his or her own experience with knowing God’s love. What can you learn from each one’s experience?
5. Suppose someone who had been attending your class is no longer coming. As a class, what can you do to show that person some of the love Paul talks so clearly about in Ephesians 3?

<sup>12</sup>substitute—someone who takes another person’s place. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.