

“The Church and God’s Wisdom” | Ephesians 3:7-13

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(Discussion questions on page 7)

I was recently back home in the parts of Pennsylvania where I grew up. I drove around on roads and through towns that have memories for me from earliest childhood through school and through trips back home ever since.

What struck me as I drove these old roads was something I’d previously paid no mind: *all the churches*. Bergstrasse Evangelical Lutheran Church; Hinkletown Mennonite Church; Pike Meeting House; Cedar Grove Presbyterian Church; Bridgeville Evangelical Church; Honey Brook Presbyterian Church; Mount Zion United Methodist. Some brick, some stone, some dilapidating wood paneling. All small.

It's not that I hadn't seen these. I had—going past them on my bike or in a car hundreds of times. But now I was seeing them as a man who is himself a pastor. I was drawn toward them, wondering what their Sunday mornings were like, what their pastor was like—was their pastor encouraged or discouraged these days? What were the congregants like?

These little churches with their steeples and graveyards seemed precious to me now. But in my earlier years—and for most people even today—they were ignorable. We zoom past them on our way to the more important matters of life.

Not so for Paul. And not so for Angels and Demons. According to Ephesians 3:10, these churches are at the epicenter of the universe. They are the prisms through which God displays his “manifold wisdom.” In Paul’s words,

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. (Eph 3:7-10).

Paul tells us “that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (v.10).

The heavenly beings, with their spiritual sight, are stunned by what they witness happening through a church. Why aren’t the rest of us?

Today we take up this relationship between the church and the wisdom of God. We do so asking two questions: First, **does the church really display a unique vista of divine wisdom?** Second, if it does, **what are some ways by which this wisdom shines?**

I. The Church Is the Supreme Display of God’s Wisdom

God is not someone we can see. He is “spirit” (Jn 4:24); he is invisible. But he does reveal things about himself through the things he creates and things that he does.

You might think of an analogy with the **laws of physics**: we cannot see the laws of gravity or motion in their own right; but we can see them when they show up in things created according to them—like a bridge or a car. These things *reveal* or *display* the truths of these laws.

God reveals things about himself in various ways.

Through creation—the world he has made: “[God’s] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20).

Through His law: His law is “perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant” and able to make “wise the simple” (Ps 19:7-8). By keeping it, we see and experience God’s righteousness and holiness.

Creation reveals the attributes of God the creator—his “eternal power” and brilliance. God’s law reveals God’s righteousness and ways.

But Paul seems to be saying here that the church reveals something more, something beyond this. We see this in two ways:

Manifold Splendor in Christ

First, by the term “manifold.” In Ephesians 3:10-11, Paul tells us that God reveals his “manifold wisdom” through the church. The term rendered “manifold” means rare and variegated, many-colored. At times it referred to “an intricately embroidered pattern of many-colored cloaks or the manifold hues of a garland of flowers. It is used here in a figurative sense to speak of the richly diversified nature of the divine wisdom.”¹

This many-colored display involves what God has revealed in Jesus Christ and through the Church created through him. As Paul says in verse 11, this is all “according to the eternal purpose that [God] has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:11).

The church not only reveals God’s power as creator; it also reveals God’s power as redeemer. The church uniquely displays the attributes of God’s mercy and kindness—and his wisdom in upholding both his mercy and righteousness together in Christ.

Splendor that Dazzles Heavenly Beings

The second uniqueness about the wisdom revealed by the church involves the audience Paul has in mind here: “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10).

I think we can imagine heavenly beings here, both good and fallen angels, angelic beings and demons. They are the ones amazed and stunned by what is on display in the church.

Throughout Scriptures we see angelic beings interested in happenings on earth:

In Job, the great accuser, Satan—who says he has been “going to and fro on the earth, and walking up and down on it” (Job 1:7)—accuses Job before God (Job 1:10-11).

¹ Peter O’Brien, *Ephesians*.

In Luke, speaking of good angels, Jesus says “there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

The angels are sapient beings who see and understand things that we humans cannot. They were created before the world was, and we can be sure they delight in God’s wisdom in creation and history and his law.

But there are things that angels have not understood; things that are now revealed in the church. Peter writes to the church of

things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, **things into which angels long to look**” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Here, then, is our first point: The God who reveals various things about himself in various ways, has made the church and her Lord his supreme revelation of his wisdom.

Somme implications:

First, how is our spiritual sight? When we see a small church alongside the road, do we see something that reveals more splendor than the Grand Canyon or the Milky Way? Most people zip by churches and think nothing of them, but Angels and Demons stoop down and study, amazed. What are the things that we find so impressive on a daily basis?

Second, how does the perspective of angels regarding the church impact how you think of your role here; or how you think of a Sunday morning?

Let us ask now our second question: more specifically, how does the wisdom of God shine through the church. Here are three ways.

II. The Wisdom of God Shines through the Church by Her Message; Oneness; and Satisfaction

(1) God’s Wisdom as the Church’s Message

If you look up a definition of wisdom in dictionaries, you see it involves aspects of both *insight* and *execution*.

Insight, in that wisdom is the ability to truly see and understand something. Wisdom is the **doctor** who considers his patients many symptoms and make right judgments and a right diagnosis as their problem.

Execution, then, is wisdom’s ability to act rightly to bring about the desired ends. It is the **doctor’s** ability not only to diagnose, but then to perform surgery, or to prescribe treatment, in a way that brings about the most good in the best way.

Church’s Message Is Wisest Diagnosis

Through the church, God displays his diagnoses of the ultimate human problem: sin. There have been other diagnoses given for humanity’s problems—lack of resources, lack of education, lack of technological advancement. But the message God speaks through the church is that these are not root problems but symptoms of something deeper.

In the church God reveals his plan of salvation, which centers on the “mystery that had been hidden God for ages” but now has been revealed in Christ (Eph 3:9). What has been revealed in Christ?

The great diagnoses of humanity’s problems. The crucifixion of the Son of God is the great statement that all human beings are under God’s judgment—not merely because we commit sins, but because we are in our deeper nature, sinners.

If the Law saved us and reformed us, there would have been no need for Jesus’ to die in our place. The church preaches the message that humanity’s problem lies in her fallen nature—she is incapable of not sinning, incapable of rightly honoring God and others.

That is the wisdom of God’s diagnoses—we are spiritual dead.

How will God solve this problem? We might say—if we can speak of God facing problems!—that humanity’s sinfulness is the most difficult problem he faces. It was not difficult for God to create the world—he did it by merely speaking. It was not difficult for God to call Abraham—he did it by speaking. It was not difficult for God to deliver Israel from the Egyptians—he did it by sending a few plagues and pestilence. But what was God to do about the problem of human sinfulness?

Some might say that solving this problem would be easy for God also. He is so loving he can just wave his hand and forgive us. As though forgiveness of sins is an easy or light thing.

But God’s love must be balanced with God’s righteousness—he is just. God loves human beings in a special way—they are created in his image, the crown of his creation. But God loves justice, too, and therefore must judge rightly sinful human beings. And the wages of sin against God is death.

The problem of humanity’s sinful nature would require a more profound act of wisdom than creation and providence had yet revealed. The angels who looked into all things could not imagine a way of solving this problem. Remember, the good angels have witnessed God throwing the rebellious angels out of heaven and binding them in chains for judgment.

Church’s Message Is Wisest Solution

We come now to see the great wisdom in God’s solution to this greatest of problems—His Son. Back in chapter 1 Paul writes,

In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight. (Eph 1:7-8).

You see the theme of wisdom appear here—and it is in reference to Christ coming and dying for our sins that is this wisdom.

The wisdom God manifest in sending his son is impossible to fully plumb. It involves the incarnation, the life Jesus lived, the Cross he died on. No angel could have imagined this plan.

And consider God's wisdom in this: that on the Cross, at the very moment Satan and demons thought they were winning, they were being defeated. By paying the penalty for our sin on the Cross, God was removing all leverage they had to accuse us.

Sum: The church displays God's manifold wisdom by her message of salvation: here is your real problem, sin. Here is your real solution, Christ.

(2) God's Wisdom as the Church's Oneness

Another manifestation of God's wisdom through the church has to do with the quality of its community—it's unique oneness. In the church Jew and Gentile become one.

And this does not mean simply that Gentiles become Jewish by observing the law. It is a deeper oneness than that.

Both Jew and Gentile undergo a transformation.

They both must be brought down to the dust—to see (as Paul had to see—that Christ died for them. To repent of their sins at a new depth.

And they both now see the extent of God's love toward them—that he not only would send his law to guide them, but His only begotten Son to die for them.

They are, now, one new humanity. Consider how the Gospel creates a uniquely deep community.

Humility: The Gospel involves repentance of our sins. This means members enter the community in a posture of humility. The Gospel breaks us of our pride. Thus, the church is not a community of oppressors and victims, not a community of like-minded friends, not a community who share a passion for a common cause; the church is a community of sinners who needed saving.

Honor: The Gospel also, however, uniquely lifts each person up. The Gospel says that you are more loved than you ever imagined. The Gospel teaches us to see each other in this love. Therefore, the community created by the Gospel is not only humble, but flooded with a divine dignity: each individual church member is a dazzling object of God's extravagant love.

(3) God's Wisdom as the Church's Satisfaction

The principalities of darkness chiefly imprison human beings by playing upon their desires. They entrap them in passions. The church is a place where slowly but surely the human soul comes to drink from a richer foundation. In the church, people come to delight in God. Notice what Paul says in verse 12,

in [Christ] we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him (3:12)

This is about having access to God. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we can be bold in our approach to God.

If we think of God's deliverance of sins as the opening of a jail door, we might think of having access to him like the freed prisoner being reunited with his family. In other words, forgiveness of sins is not the main point—reunion with the family is.

Jonathan Edwards has said,

We needed not only to be delivered from hell, but to have some satisfying happiness bestowed. Man has a natural craving and thirst after happiness; and will thirst and crave, till his capacity is filled. And his capacity is of vast extent; and nothing but an infinite good can fill and satisfy his desire.... Here [in access to God] is food procured to answer all the appetites and faculties of our souls²

Love desires not only to hear from the person we love, but to see them, and to be near them. Such is what the church offers her members: not only the word of God, but to see him in Christ, to receive him in the sacraments, to be near unto him as his very own son or daughter.

Close: Let me close with a word of encouragement—for that is where Paul closes. After offering this vast perspective on what the church is, Paul closes, "So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory" (3:13).

If you are laboring for Christ's church—if you are part of spreading its message, part of caring for its community, part of learning the way of its delights—you may at time feel that your efforts are small. You may be a weary missionary like Paul, a frustrated parent, a worn down saint—a weary pastor of a small country church that most cars whiz past. You may feel these ways. But know this: *Angels do not—they are stunned, amazed, taken back*. For they understand what really matters; they see as with an eternal eye. They know, of all the things that we could put our wisdom and efforts towards, there is nothing as dazzling as what God has done, is doing, and will do, through His Church.

Small Group Questions

² Jonathan Edwards, "The Wisdom of God, Displayed in the Way of Salvation," March 1733. Accessed online July 5, 2025: <https://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/wisdom.htm>

1. Read Ephesians 3:7-13. Take a few minutes to pray, asking God to speak to you through His Word. What stands out to you most about vv 10-11 and Paul's comments about the church?
2. What are some ways that the created world—nature in particular—displays God's wisdom? Paul says that "through the church God's manifold wisdom is made known" (3:10). What are some ways that God's wisdom is displayed through the church that you cannot see through nature?
3. Paul has been talking in Ephesians 2-3 about the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church. How does this new "oneness" display the wisdom of God? How is the nature of Christian unity in the church different than unity in other communities (whether political, social, or biological)? What are some threats to this unity?
4. Paul speaks of "access" we have to God in verse 12. In what ways does the church show us the way to drawing close to God? How does this offer a deeper satisfaction than the world?
5. Have you ever felt like your church, or your work in the church, is overlooked? How does this teaching in Ephesians 3:10 impact your understanding of your church and your role in it? How does the perspective that angels are amazed by the church impact your view of Sunday mornings?