

The Foundation of the Church

Ephesians 3:1–4:3

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles -
² if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which
was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me
the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read,
you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵ which in
other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been
revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶ that the
Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His
promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷ of which I became a minister
according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective
working of His power. ⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the
saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the
unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make all see what is the
fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has
been hidden in God who created all things ^[c]through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to
the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known
by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,
¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ
Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence
through faith in Him. ¹³ Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my
tribulations for you, which is your glory. ¹⁴ For this reason I bow my
knees to the Father ^[f]of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole
family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you,
according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might
through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your
hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may
be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length
and depth and height - ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes
knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to
Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or
think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the

church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. 4 I, therefore, the prisoner ¹of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

In our last study of this epistle we looked at the great difference in the attitudes of Law and grace. We talked about the fact that we are God’s “workmanship” or His “masterpiece.” We also looked at the fact that “...the law was given my Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” And we concluded that the attitude of *Christ* is also the attitude of *grace*.

From the scriptures, we know the Church was born on the Day of Pentecost, but in this week’s study we are going to look at *The Foundation of the Church*.

We will begin by looking at Ephesians 3:1-7, “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles - if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”

Chapter three is a continuation of chapter two, and must be related together as we study this epistle. The truth of the matter is that without the truth of chapter three, this epistle would be an unknown and fragmented book, for it is here that Paul brings to our attention the answer to the great mystery that has been kept on the heart of God down through the ages.

Therefore, before we can go any further in our study, we must stop and ask ourselves, “What is this mystery?” Someone has said, “The mystery is that God was going to include the Gentiles in the kingdom of

God.” But that is no mystery, for God told us in Genesis 12:3 that Abraham’s lineage was going to include all the families of the earth, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” It is no mystery that God is going to use Israel to be a blessing to the whole world.

Someone has said, “The sufferings of Christ for our sins is the mystery.” But, that is no mystery, for it was 750 years before even the birth of Christ that Isaiah predicted the great sufferings of Christ, as well as the glories as seen in Isaiah 9:6, “...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” So the sufferings and glories of Christ were no mystery.

The great mystery that God revealed was that He was going to create something new: the Jew and the Gentile alike should belong to the household of faith, commonly known as the Church.

It is certainly true that the Church of the Living Lord is not perfect because it is made up of imperfect people. But I would also be the first to confess that there are some things that are right with this divine establishment. So look with me for the next few minutes, as we study the fact that God was right in the revelation and the establishment of the Church.

Notice first of all the foundation of the church was right as seen verse 9, “And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.” This is what we have been told in 1 Corinthians 3:11 concerning the foundation, “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

This man Jesus who is called “the Christ” never painted a picture, He never wrote a book, He never composed a song, He never founded a university, but it was this Jesus that told us in Matthew 16:17-18, “Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Notice, first of all the foundation of the church is right. If Jesus, then, is the foundation of the Church, I would like for you to look with me at the statement, "...and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." **The word "Hades" is always associated with death, and Jesus is saying that death might come to Him, and to His disciples, but the Church would live on.** You see, the Church was founded on the *Giver of life* and it cannot be destroyed by the *angel of death*. Death, hell, and all its demons cannot wreck the Church of God. **Someone, has said, "I'm afraid the church is going down." But that simply is not true, for the church is going up.**

Second, you will notice that the church is right in her membership. Look at verse 17, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love." **Go back with me to Ephesians 2:19-22,** "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

The church is not a continuation of the old dispensation, it is something new. It is not the kingdom of God, for the kingdom is coming. **This is what Jesus had in mind when He told us in Matthew 9:16-17,** "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

The church is made up of all of those who have been saved from Pentecost until right now, and on until the Rapture. The church is the one organization where no one is excluded regardless of race, creed or color. **The only requirement is simple child-like faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.**

Although it is true that church membership is right, it is a long shot from being perfect. As we have already said, the church is made up of imperfect people, just like you and me. But what we also need to realize tonight is that we are in a war with Satan and his forces, and the need for the church membership is to ban together for the common cause of victory for Christ.

Third, you will notice that the church is right in her message. Look at verses 18-21, “(That you) may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.” The message of the church is one of hope and redemption, as seen in Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty for the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound.”

The message of the church is salvation to a lost and dying world. The world today needs a change – but we need more than a *social*, and more than a *political* change. We need more than a changing of the living conditions for the poor. **We need more than a better Social Security Law for the elderly.** We need more than a better Civil Rights bill for the races. We need more than an Equal Rights Amendment for the woman. **We need more than a better school system for our children.** The world needs the kind of change that only Jesus can bring about, as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.” **The message of the church to the lost person is there is hope, salvation and redemption in Christ Jesus.** The message is you don’t have to stay in your failed position of sin and destruction. The message of the church is Jesus “yesterday today, and forever.”

But there is more, for the otherside of the church's message is one of righteousness and guidance, as seen in verse 19, “And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.” Following the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost and the completion of the book of Acts, there are 21 Epistles directly addressed to churches, or to Christians, filled with doctrine giving us biblical instruction and promises designed to help us live the victorious Christian life. There is no doubt this is what Jesus had in mind when He instructed men like Peter, “Feed my sheep.” You see, the Christian life is not a life that is simply a “Get out of Hell Free” card. It is a life of *responsibility* and *spiritual growth*.

With that thought in mind, look at Ephesians 4:1-3, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

It seems to me that too many times we tend to forget that we are the church – you and me. If the church is weak, it is because we are weak; if the church is strong, it is because we are strong.

As I study the scriptures, I find that as members of the church, we have certain responsibilities. First, I find in Hebrews 10:23-25 that we are responsible to be faithful in our attendance. Listen to what we have been told in the New Living Translation, “Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”

The turn of the new century, and the experience of 911, has been marked by the resurgence of religious interest. In 1900 less than 35% of the population of the United States claimed membership in any kind of church. Since the turn of the new century

more than 63% of our population claim to be members in some church and say that their faith is important to them.

Despite these impressive statistics and polls, we are told that two-thirds of the members of Protestant churches are absent on any given Sunday. There has come a distressing erosion of loyalty and faithfulness. Church attendance is partly habit, and church people are out of the habit.

The church has never had such impressive buildings and programs, and yet, the writer of Hebrews is simply saying that people are watching us. If our lives reflect our faithfulness we will be an encouragement to others as they look at how we live the Christian life. Conversely, our lack of faithfulness will be a discouragement to others. The Bible teaches us that the Church is the “Bride of Christ.” Now folks, I love my bride and will defend her in the face of opposition. It is hard for me to believe that a fellow believer can love God and not be faithful to His Bride.

Second, I find in Matthew 25 that we are responsible to be faithful with our talents, and in Malachi 3 we are responsible to be faithful with out tithe. In other words, the Bible is simply teaching us that stewardship involves the total person. Christian stewardship is much more than just dropping some money in the Offering Chest as you walk by. It involves our *faithfulness* to the *work* of Christ and the *Body* of Christ.

Third, I find in 2 Peter 3:18 that we are responsible to be faithful in our *spiritual maturity*. Listen to what Peter says, “Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” How do we “grow in the grace and knowledge of...Christ”?

The two most basic ways are: the *Word of God* and *living by faith*. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is

right.” It is impossible to live the victorious Christian life and not feed on the Word.

And we must claim God’s victory in our lives by faith. Jesus said this in Matthew 9:29, “According to your faith be it unto you,” and Paul said in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Four, I find in James that we are responsible to be faithful in our prayer life. James simply says, “The prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Child of God, the greatest weapon that we have against the enemy is when we are on our knees in prayer.

Therefore, let me remind you that the Christ of yesteryear is the Christ to today, and the Christ of this church wants your life.