

**Ephesians 3:1-13<sup>1</sup>**F. The Mystery Explained ([3:1-13](#))1. The mystery ([3:1-6](#))

When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles ... <sup>2</sup>assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. <sup>3</sup>As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. <sup>4</sup>As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. <sup>5</sup>God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.

<sup>6</sup>And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.

**Notes****[3:1](#)**

**When I think of all this.**—The Greek text begins this verse with the prepositional phrase “for this reason” (*toutou charin* [<sup>TG</sup><G3778>/<G5484>, <sup>ZG</sup>4047/5920]); it points the reader back to [2:11-22](#), which was concerned with Jewish and Gentile believers who had been made into a new humanity in Christ. It appears that Paul was just about to begin a prayer for these believers ([3:1](#); see NLT mg), but he stopped in the middle of his sentence and digressed to the subject of the mystery of Christ, giving an explanation of the mystery and speaking of his responsibility to make it known. This digression forms a part of the fourth long sentence in this epistle ([3:2-13](#); cf. [1:3-14](#), [15-23](#); [2:1-7](#); [3:14-19](#); [4:1-6](#), [11-16](#); [6:14-20](#)) with 189 words. Even today it is not unusual for digressions to involve one long and cumbersome sentence. After the digression, he commences his prayer, beginning with [3:14](#).

**[3:2](#)**

**that you know.**—This is a good rendering of “if indeed you heard,” which has reference to Paul's ministry among the Ephesians and his ministry elsewhere. However, the omission of “if” makes it difficult for the reader of this translation to recognize that Paul was introducing a conditional sentence, which will conclude with [3:13](#).

**God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles.**—The words “special responsibility” is actually “administration” (*oikonomia* [<sup>TG</sup><G3622>, <sup>ZG</sup>3873]), which indicates Paul's God-given activity of administering grace. This administration has the sense of stewardship or a trust to be dispensed (in [1 Cor 9:17](#) *oikonomia* is translated “sacred trust,” and in [Col 1:25](#) it is rendered “responsibility”).

---

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 63-71.

### [3:3](#)

**As I briefly wrote earlier.**—This could be a reference to Paul’s earlier writings, but it seems that he was referring to an earlier portion of this letter, more particularly [2:11-22](#).

**God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me.**—The word “reveal” means the unveiling of something that was previously hidden. “His mysterious plan” is a good rendering of the Greek word “mystery” (*mustērion* [<sup>TG</sup><[G3466](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>3696]). It is a secret plan hidden in God ([3:9](#)), which cannot be unraveled or understood by human ingenuity or study. It is unveiled by God. The word “mystery” is translated in the NLT as “mysterious plan” ([1:9](#); [3:3](#), [9](#); [6:19](#)), “plan” ([3:4](#)), and “mystery” ([5:32](#)).

### [3:4](#)

**you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ.**—The word “plan” is the same as the expression “his mysterious plan” in [3:3](#), a translation of *mustērion* [<sup>TG</sup><[G3466](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>3696]).

### [3:5](#)

**God did not reveal it to previous generations.**—This is a good rendering of the literal reading, “which [mystery] in other generations was not made known to the sons of men.”

**but now... he has revealed it.**—Lit., “as now it was revealed.” Some think that there was some revelation of God’s secret plan in the OT, albeit not as great as in the NT. However, “as” is not a comparison of degree but a comparison of kind. Moreover, in place of “as,” the parallel passage in [Col 1:26](#) uses the adversative conjunction “but” (*de* [<sup>TG</sup><[G1161](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>1254]) to indicate a distinct contrast.

### [3:6](#)

**And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.**—The NLT’s rendering is an expanded paraphrase of this short verse, which literally is, “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow participants of the promise in Christ through the gospel.” The expansion contains a restatement of the secret plan mentioned in [3:3](#). In [3:6](#) the specifics of the plan are given. Nothing in the Greek text of this verse specifically mentions belief in the Good News. It is, however, because of the Good News that Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow participants of the promise in Christ. The Good News in the present context does not refer to the salvation of sinners but to the union of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

### Commentary

As noted above, Paul was going to pray for the gentile believers but then abruptly digressed. He chose, instead, to discuss further the new humanity that he had mentioned in the previous context ([2:11-22](#)). He introduced his remarks by reminding the believers that he was in prison on behalf of the Gentiles to whom he was called to minister ([Acts 9:15](#); [22:21](#); [26:17-18](#); [Rom 1:5](#); [11:13](#); [Gal 1:16](#); [2:7-9](#); [1 Tim 2:7](#)). The Jews had claimed that he was distorting God’s message; consequently, they were instrumental in obtaining his imprisonment in Jerusalem ([Acts 21:20-36](#)). Later, he was taken to Caesarea, tried, and granted an appeal to Caesar ([Acts 24:23-25:12](#)), which resulted in his imprisonment in Rome ([Acts 27-28](#)). Thus, his Roman incarceration was the result of his mission to the Gentiles.

As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul wanted to share with them three truths. First, he relates that he is responsible to administer God's grace to the Gentiles (3:2). In the succeeding verses, Paul explains that the grace to be administered is the revelation of the mystery of Jews and Gentiles being united into one body. This grace was given to Paul to dispense to the Gentiles (3:2—"to you Gentiles") because he was an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 1:5; 11:13; Gal 2:7, 9). Second, he discusses the revelation of the mystery, or God's secret plan (3:2-5). This subsection deals with the revelation of the mystery (3:3), the ability to understand it (3:4), and the time of its disclosure in the apostolic age (3:5). Third, he describes the content of God's secret plan (3:6).

Paul had discussed previously (in 2:11-22) the fact that believing Jews and Gentiles are made into one new person, the body of believers. This is now identified as a mystery (*mustērion* [<sup>TG</sup><G3466>, <sup>ZG</sup>3696]) or God's secret plan. As mentioned earlier, this is not something that is mysterious in the common sense of today's usage but rather it is a revealed secret to be understood by all believing people, not just a few elite. Paul tells us that the understanding does not come by human ingenuity but by God's revelation. It is not clear when this secret was revealed to Paul. It may have been at the time of his conversion on the Damascus road when he was told to go to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16; 26:17-18; Gal 1:16), when he was in Arabia (Gal 1:17), or perhaps when he first returned to Jerusalem (Acts 9:25-28; 22:21). Or it may have been revealed in stages, for it was not understood fully by the early church when Peter was criticized for baptizing Cornelius (Acts 11:1-3). Nor was it understood by the Jerusalem council in AD 49, which occurred 16 years after the inception of the church (Acts 15). It may have taken years for Paul to completely understand this new concept and many years thereafter for others to understand it.

Paul then declares that this mystery can be understood simply by reading what he had written. In short, they could know what he knew. In saying this, he was not claiming brilliance, for he clearly states that it was made known to him by revelation (3:3) and that it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit (3:5). The secret plan centers on Christ. This is slightly different from Colossians 1:27, where Paul states that the mystery is "Christ lives in you." In Colossians 1:27 Paul states that Christ is resident in individual gentile believers, whereas in the present context he emphasizes that both Jews and Gentiles are fellow partakers. Colossians emphasizes Christology, and Ephesians focuses more on the church.

Paul affirmed that this secret plan was not known in previous generations as it was presently revealed (3:5). As mentioned previously for this verse, there have been some interpreters who suggest that the Greek conjunction "as" is used in a restrictive way to indicate a comparison of degree—hence, the secret plan was revealed to some degree in the Old Testament but now is revealed to a greater degree (Westcott 1906:45; Hendricksen 1967:145; Caird 1976:64). Others see the conjunction used in a descriptive way to indicate a comparison in kind, thereby meaning that no revelation of this mystery was given in the Old Testament but that it was revealed for the first time in the New Testament (Barth 1974:333-334; Lincoln 1990:177; Best 1998:305-306). The second interpretation is preferred for the following five reasons. First, though use of "as" in the restrictive sense is more common, it is also used in the descriptive sense. For example, Peter said at Pentecost that the disciples were not drunk "as" the Jews thought (Acts 2:15). This does not refer to the degree of drunkenness but rather the lack of it. Second, the context supports this interpretation, for Paul wrote that the "mysterious plan" was hidden in the past (3:9). Third, the verb "reveal" in 3:5 means "to uncover, unveil" something that has been previously completely covered or hidden. Fourth, the parallel passage in Colossians 1:26 does not use the conjunction "as" but uses the adversative conjunction "but" (*de* [<sup>TG</sup><G1161>, <sup>ZG</sup>1254]), which clearly states this "message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people." Fifth, the temporal adverb "now" (*nun* [<sup>TG</sup><G3568>, <sup>ZG</sup>3814]) is used both in the present verse and the parallel passage of Colossians 1:26 to mark the contrast between the past and present ages. This is substantiated by the same temporal adverb in Ephesians 3:10 where it states that God's purpose was that the manifold wisdom (reference to the secret plan or mystery) might "now" be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church. Since the heavenly hosts learned of the secret plan through the church (which did not exist before Pentecost), certainly the people of the Old

Testament did not know of it. Granted, there were Gentiles included within Israel ([Lev 19:34](#); [Deut 10:18-19](#); [1 Kgs 8:41-42](#)), but they had become a part of Israel. This is not the same as Jews and Gentiles forming a new entity as described in this secret plan. Therefore, the secret plan was not revealed until New Testament times.

Paul declared that God revealed the secret plan “by his Spirit... to his holy apostles and prophets.” This means that it did not come by human ingenuity. Interestingly, although Paul was responsible to disseminate this plan, he said it was revealed to all the apostles and prophets and not to Paul only. Who were the apostles and prophets? They were those gifted individuals given to the church; they formed the foundation mentioned in [2:20](#) and are later mentioned in [4:11](#). As discussed earlier ([1:1](#); [2:20](#)), the apostles were sent as Christ’s representatives. They had full authority and were commissioned to proclaim authoritatively the message in oral and written form and to establish and build up churches. The prophets were endowed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy for the purpose of edification, comfort, and encouragement ([1 Cor 14:3, 31](#)); they were enabled by the Spirit to understand and communicate the mysteries and revelation of God to the church ([1 Cor 12:10](#); [13:2](#); [14:22-25](#), [30-31](#)).

These prophets are New Testament prophets, as also in [2:20](#). When prophets are listed with apostles ([2:20](#); [4:11](#); [1 Cor 12:28, 29](#)), the apostles are listed first and prophets second. If they referred to Old Testament prophets, it seems they most likely would have been listed before apostles. Also, when mentioned in [2:20](#) they are included with the apostles as part of the foundation of the new temple, the church, which is the content of this secret plan not revealed in the Old Testament. Furthermore, the present verse talks about the secret plan, which has been revealed in the New Testament era, as opposed to Old Testament times. Thus, the prophets here must be New Testament prophets. The designation “holy” given to the apostles and prophets signifies that they were set apart to receive God’s message from the Holy Spirit and consequently pass it on to all.

The content of the secret plan is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow participants of the promise in Christ through the Good News. The union of Jews and Gentiles is described by three Greek adjectives. First, Gentiles are fellow heirs. The Greek adjective *sunklērōnomos* [<sup>TG</sup><[G4789](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>5169] (“fellow heirs” or “joint heirs” with Christ) is used in [Romans 8:17](#) of all believers who have been united to Christ. In Ephesians the term is used in an ecclesiological context designating believing Gentiles as joint heirs with believing Jews. Gentiles do not become Jews and thus fellow Israelites, rather they are fellow heirs with the Jews in Christ.

Second, Gentiles are “fellow members” (*sussōma* [<sup>TG</sup><[G4954](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>5362]) of the body. This adjective could be literally translated “concorporate,” but a smoother rendering is “members of the same body” or “fellow members of the body.” Again, Gentiles are not merely fellow members with Jews but fellow members with the Jews in the body of Christ. This concept is discussed in [chapter 2](#), where it states that both believing Jews and believing Gentiles are created into one new people ([2:15](#)), both are in one body ([2:16](#)), both are growing into a holy temple ([2:21](#)), and both are being built together as a place where God’s Spirit dwells ([2:22](#)).

Third, Gentiles are fellow participants (*summetocha* [<sup>TG</sup><[G4830](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>5212]) of the promise. Although the “promise” is not specified, it probably alludes to the covenants of promise from which the Gentiles were excluded before the New Testament era ([2:12](#)). Before the Cross, Gentiles could come under the pale of the covenants of promise by becoming Jews. Now in the New Testament era, Gentiles are fully accepted and are fellow participants of the promise with believing Jews. This promise includes Messiah, salvation, and the promise of the Spirit ([Gal 3:14](#)). The sphere of the union described by these three Greek adjectives is “in Christ.” Hence, Gentiles (with Jews) are fellow heirs in Christ, fellow members of the body in Christ, and fellow participants of the promise in Christ (not “through Christ”). This concept is important; it counters the notion proposed by some that there is now a union of all Jews and

Gentiles, whereas in actual fact, it is only Jews and Gentiles “in Christ.” This makes good sense, for unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Gentiles are not united. The gospel proclaims the union of those who believe; it does not refer to the union of all humanity.

In conclusion, the secret plan is not that Gentiles would be saved, because the Old Testament already gives evidence for their salvation, but that believing Jews and believing Gentiles are together in Christ. This is a revolutionary concept for both Jews and Gentiles alike. The only way this union can be obtained is through the Good News. Those who respond, whether Jews or Gentiles, will receive not only salvation but will be united with all other believers in one body in Christ.

## 2. The ministry ([3:7-13](#))

<sup>7</sup>By God’s grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

<sup>8</sup>Though I am the least deserving of all God’s people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. <sup>9</sup>I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.

<sup>10</sup>God’s purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup>Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence. <sup>13</sup>So please don’t lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.

### Notes

#### [3:7](#)

**I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.**—The emphasis is not on spreading the Good News but the fact that Paul has been placed into God’s ministry on the basis of God’s grace and power. The Greek word for “minister” (*diakonos* [<sup>TG</sup><[G1249](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>1356]) is used for a king’s servant ([Esth 1:10](#), LXX) or waiter at a wedding feast ([John 2:5](#)). Another word for “servant,” *doulos* [<sup>TG</sup><[G1401](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>1528], emphasizes the servile relationship to a master, whereas *diakonos* stresses the activity of the servant.

#### [3:8](#)

**Though I am the least deserving of all God’s people.**—The term “God’s people,” from the word *hagios* [<sup>TG</sup><[G40](#)>/A, <sup>ZG</sup>41], means one set apart for God’s use or God’s service.

#### [3:9](#)

**mysterious plan.**—The Greek is *mustērion* [<sup>TG</sup><[G3466](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>3696] (so also [3:4](#); see note).

**kept secret from the beginning.**—The phrase “from the beginning” is a good translation of the literal “from the ages”; it signifies that the mysterious plan was hidden before time. This indicates that the mystery was hidden in God before he created “all things”; according to [3:5](#), it was not revealed until the time of the apostles and prophets.



### [3:10](#)

**God’s purpose in all this was to use the church.**—The Greek text includes the adverb “now” (hence, “to use the church now”) to indicate again that God’s multifaceted wisdom regarding the revelation of his secret plan is displayed “now” as opposed to in OT times.

### [3:11](#)

**This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.**—The verb in the second clause, *poieo* [<sup>TG</sup><G4160>, <sup>ZG</sup>4472], can mean “to conceive, form” in reference to planning (cf. [Mark 3:6](#); [15:1](#)), which would indicate that God formed his eternal plan in the person of Christ (NASB, NJB; Abbott 1897:90; Best 1998:328). The verb can also mean “to accomplish, achieve” ([3:20](#); [6:6](#); [Matt 21:31](#); [John 6:38](#)); in this context it indicates that God accomplished his eternal plan in Christ’s death (RSV, NEB, TEV, NIV, NRSV, NLT; Eadie 1883:236; Lincoln 1990:189; O’Brien 1999:248). The latter interpretation is preferred because (1) it makes better sense of the aorist tense; otherwise, a present or perfect tense would be expected. (2) Its voice is active rather than middle, conveying the idea of achievement or accomplishment, and (3) the context indicates that the union of believing Jews and believing Gentiles into one body was accomplished by Christ’s death.

**Christ Jesus our Lord.**—There are three elements in this title: (1) Christ’s lordship as our “Lord”; (2) his name, “Jesus”; (3) his title, “Christ,” which denotes that he is the promised Messiah who would bring salvation both to the Jews and Gentiles.

### [3:12](#)

**Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence.**—Lit., “in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in him.” The preposition *en* [<sup>TG</sup><G1722>, <sup>ZG</sup>1877] with the relative pronoun *hō* [<sup>TG</sup><G3739>, <sup>ZG</sup>4005] relates back to Christ as the sphere in whom we have access to the Father.

### [3:13](#)

**So please don’t lose heart because of my trials here.**—The NLT translation “so” is a rendering of the strong inferential conjunction *dio* [<sup>TG</sup><G1352>, <sup>ZG</sup>1475] (“therefore” or “for this reason”) to introduce the conclusion of a long conditional sentence that began with [3:2](#) (see notes on [3:2](#)).

## Commentary

In this section Paul discusses his ministry: dispensing God’s secret plan to the Gentiles. There are three parts to this discussion. First, he relates how God placed him in the ministry and his feeling of unworthiness ([3:7-8a](#)). Second, he explains that he carries out this ministry by preaching the unfathomable wealth of Christ ([3:8b](#)) and by enlightening all humanity concerning this mysterious plan ([3:9](#)). Third, he develops the purpose of his ministry ([3:10-12](#)), which is threefold: to make known God’s wisdom to angelic rulers through the church ([3:10](#)), to show that God accomplished his eternal plan in Christ ([3:11](#)), and to explain the free access to God that believers enjoy ([3:12](#)).

Paul had already explained his administration of the secret plan, how and when it was revealed, and its content ([3:2-6](#)). Now he relates how he was placed into the ministry of imparting the knowledge of the secret plan to the Gentiles ([3:7-8a](#)), and then he speaks about his responsibility in that ministry ([3:8b-12](#)). He told his readers that he did not earn nor work for this responsibility; rather, it was a gift of God’s grace. This gracious gift was accomplished by the working of God’s power. So by God’s grace, he was made a minister, and by God’s enabling power he was able to carry out the ministry. God does not give

responsibility without the provision of his enabling power to carry it out. In the end God is to be praised, for people can neither initiate nor accomplish God's work by their own energy or efforts. Further, Paul exclaims that he did not deserve the privilege of this ministry. He considered himself not just the least of all the apostles but the least of all the believers. This was not false modesty but true humility. Elsewhere, Paul called himself the foremost of sinners and not worthy of God's salvation ([1 Tim 1:15](#)). He was ever mindful of the past when he had blasphemed and persecuted Christ ([Acts 9:4-5](#); [26:11, 14-15](#); [1 Tim 1:13](#)) and had persecuted the church ([Acts 8:1-3](#); [9:1-2, 4-5, 7-8](#); [26:9-11, 14-15](#); [1 Cor 15:9](#); [Gal 1:13](#); [Phil 3:6](#)). Yet God, in his grace, had chosen Paul as his minister.

By God's appointment, Paul's ministry was among the Gentiles ([Acts 9:15](#); [22:21](#); [Rom 11:13](#); [Gal 2:8-9](#); [1 Tim 2:7](#)). He was called upon to preach to the Gentiles the "endless treasures available to them in Christ." The word for "endless" does not mean "inexhaustible" but refers to the "inscrutable, incomprehensible, unfathomable" wealth of Christ ([3:8b](#)). This unfathomable wealth of Christ refers to the gracious provision of redemption ([1:7](#); [2:8-10](#)). Before Christ came, the covenant nation of Israel was the recipient of God's grace, but now the endless treasures of Christ are available to the Gentiles! Furthermore, not only was Paul to make known the endless treasures of Christ to the Gentiles, but he was also to enlighten all people of the administration of God's mystery or secret plan, which had been hidden in God from the beginning ([3:9](#)). This statement indicates that the mystery had not been partially revealed in the Old Testament and then more fully revealed in the New Testament. Rather, it was not known in Old Testament times but is now finally revealed in the New Testament era. Although Gentiles had been included within Israel in Old Testament times by becoming Jewish, the hidden plan had now revealed that believing Jews and believing Gentiles formed a new entity called the church. In conclusion, then, the endless treasures of Christ include the message of redemption and the enlightenment of the mystery or secret plan to all humanity.

Paul has established his placement in the ministry, stating that it was by God's enabling grace ([3:7-8a](#)), in order to preach the unfathomable treasures of Christ and to enlighten all people regarding the hidden mystery ([3:8b-9](#)). He now states that the purpose of this ministry is, through the church, to make known God's wisdom to the angelic powers ([3:10-12](#)). As discussed in [1:8](#) and [17](#), wisdom is insight into the true nature of things. Here the adjective *polupoikilos* [<sup>TG</sup><G4182>, <sup>ZG</sup>4497] further describes wisdom as multifaceted. The root of this adjective was used to describe intricate embroidery, such as Joseph's coat of many colors ([Gen 37:3](#), LXX). In the present context, it alludes to the variegated facets of God's wisdom and hence the translation, "his wisdom in its rich variety." Although in the past God had demonstrated a multifaceted wisdom in his various dealings with humanity, in the present context Paul was referring specifically to the unification of believing Jews and believing Gentiles into one new humanity in Christ. By commissioning Paul to preach the unfathomable treasures of Christ and enlighten all humanity of the hidden mystery, God, through the church, is making known his multifaceted wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. As mentioned in [1:21](#), the "rulers and authorities" most likely have reference to angelic leaders. They may include both good and evil angels. Throughout time, good angels had desired to decipher God's plan ([1 Pet 1:12](#)) but had been unable to do so. It is probable that evil angels would want to know God's plans in advance in order to attempt to frustrate them. It is very possible that animosity between Jews and Gentiles is encouraged by evil angels. However, this animosity is also a very natural one (as seen in [2:11-12](#)). But now with the revelation of God's secret plan, whereby believing Jews and Gentiles compose one body, the church, God's multifaceted wisdom is manifested through the church so that the angelic leaders, both good and evil, can have this knowledge. Both good and evil angels would have considered this inconceivable, even impossible. It should be noted that the members of this union do not preach to the "rulers and authorities" but rather serve as a witness to them.

According to [3:11](#), the revelation of God's multifaceted wisdom to the rulers and authorities had been planned by God in eternity past but was to be accomplished in Christ. The last part of this verse presents an interpretative problem. It could be interpreted that God's eternal plan was formed or conceived in

connection with Christ in eternity past. This view emphasizes the personal element of Christ's involvement in the making of the plan. However, it could be interpreted that the revelation of God's wisdom was God's eternal plan and was carried out or accomplished in Christ's death. The latter interpretation makes better sense in the present context because, as Paul discussed the revelation of the mystery of the union of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body, he specifically stated that it was accomplished on the cross "by" or "in" Christ Jesus our Lord ([2:14](#)).

Having established that God's eternal plan was conceived in the past and achieved in the death of Christ Jesus our Lord, Paul explains the wonderful privilege of access that believers have to their Heavenly Father. This access is described by two nouns. The first is *parrēsia* [<sup>TG</sup><G3954>, <sup>ZG</sup>4244], which was used of free speech in Athens and was characterized by a frankness that could be misused when there was a lack of restraint. In the New Testament it conveys openness, speaking freely ([Mark 8:32](#); [John 7:4, 13, 26](#); [Col 2:15](#)), boldness or candor ([Acts 2:29](#); [4:13](#)), and confidence ([2 Cor 7:4](#)). Basically, it means freedom to speak without restraint. Believers in Christ can speak freely, boldly, or openly with confidence to the Father. In the Old Testament, there are many illustrations of people speaking openly with God. Moses and David are two such examples (see [Exod 32:11-13](#); [Pss 6](#); [13](#)). In the New Testament, Jesus' honest communication with his Father is clearly illustrated in Gethsemane ([Matt 26:36-44](#); [Mark 14:32-39](#); [Luke 22:40-44](#)). Whereas the first noun gives the idea of the freedom of address, the second noun *prosagōgē* [<sup>TG</sup><G4318>, <sup>ZG</sup>4643], already used in [2:18](#), means access and freedom of approach. These two nouns are followed by a prepositional phrase *en pepoithēsei* [<sup>TG</sup><G1722>/<G4006>, <sup>ZG</sup>1877/4301], which means "with confidence." Thus, believers may not only speak freely to the Father and approach him freely, but both may be done with confidence. This confidence must not stem from arrogance or presumptuousness but from faith in Christ. The present tense of the verb indicates a continuous action, showing that we may, with confidence, continually speak freely to God and enter his presence with boldness. For the Gentiles in particular, this was astounding news. Previously they had been far from God, but now they were able to come into God's presence without fear and speak openly and frankly to him, just as Moses and David of old had done.

In the final verse of this section, Paul tells his readers that if they truly had understood the administration of God's grace entrusted to him, they would not be in despair about his present sufferings for them. Rather, they would feel honored that he was in prison for them. Paul was not a masochist. He was simply stating that if he had not been disseminating the message of God's secret plan of the union of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body, then Jews would not have been hostile to him and he would not have been imprisoned. His faithfulness in disseminating the message of God's secret plan had made it possible for many Gentiles to become members of the church, Christ's body.