

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*October 7, 2012
No. 3640*

*Regenerated into Christ's Church
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear radio friends,

The apostle Paul writes this letter to the congregation or church in the city of Ephesus. Paul writes this letter not to individual believers scattered here and there, but to a local church organized under officebearers and assembling for worship. This congregation or church in Ephesus had its own elders and ordained pastor. Yet Paul addresses this church as the body of Christ. And the reason is clear. This local church was indeed the body of Christ. It was a local manifestation of the body of Christ, that is, a local representation of the body of Christ where believers dwell together in life and unity. Where the faithful church institute is found, there you will also find the body of Christ. The body of Christ is not a separate entity from the church institute. All true believers join themselves with other believers for worship. That is the very nature of the church.

However, though elect believers are found in the church institute, not everyone in the church institute is an elect believer. Not every member in a church institute is a believer belonging to the elect body of Christ. Unbelievers also join themselves with the church. This is why Paul begins the second chapter of this letter to the Ephesians with the instruction of verses 1-5:

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind: and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

A true member of the church of Christ is brought by Christ from death and into life.

It is quite the accusation Paul levels against the members of the church in Ephesus. "You were dead in trespasses and sin," he writes. "In time past you walked according to the course of this world." If anyone thought he had reason to think highly of himself in the church there, Paul dashes his vain conceits. "We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh." The sobering reminder of our text is this: There is not a member of the church that was not, in times past, dead in his sin. Whenever we are tempted to glory in ourselves, we must be reminded of what we are by nature according to our flesh: we are dead in trespasses and sin. Let us take note, friends, of the nature of sin and its horrible malady.

There are a couple of words used here in verse 1 that describe for us the nature of sin. The first of these is "trespasses." At times we can come to a property line where the owner hangs a sign saying, "No trespassing." What that means is that it is forbidden to cross over onto that property and walk on that property. The property is forbidden territory. This describes sin to a "t." God, in His commandments, forbids you and me from walking in ways that are contrary to His will. He tells us, "You may not go there. You may not do that. Those ways of evil are forbidden to you. You may not cross over onto the property of the wicked and unbelieving. We

sin when we, despite what God's Word tells us, cross over into the world and its sins and unbelief. We trespass. Notice the deliberate character of sin.

The second word translated "sin" here in verse 1 also describes the deliberate character of sin. It means "to miss the mark." In His law, God gives us the target toward which we must aim our lives. God commands us: "Aim the arrow of your life at that target and shoot to hit it right in the bull's eye. Keep My will. If you love Me, keep My commandments." When we sin, we take the arrow of our lives and deliberately aim it in the opposite direction. We aim to please ourselves, rather than pleasing God. That, too, is the character of sin.

These actions are summarized in a third term used in verse 2. That term is "disobedience." Sin is at root disobedience. Disobedience is deliberate refusal to walk in the way that God has laid out for us in His Word. Sin is rebellion. In times past, Paul writes, you were rebels against God. You were the children of rebellion because Satan was your father, holding you in his sway. The horrible reality of such sin is that you were dead in it all. Your rebellion against God, members of the church, rendered you at one time dead in your trespasses and sins. No life in you. You were not sick in that sin. You were not unhealthy in sin. You were *dead* in sin. You were not hanging on by some feeble strand of goodness and virtue of life. You were *dead*. There was nothing redeemable about you. You have no reason to lift up your eyes in pride. Look at your past and be humbled.

The passage before us here speaks of our spiritual condition. We are born dead in sin. No spiritual life in us at all. Our very nature is that of depravity and corruption. Sin is not simply found in our outward deeds, but our natures are a well-spring of sinfulness spewing out the blackness and filth of sin.

And, if that is not a bleak enough picture for us, Paul goes on to remind us: In time past, we who are believers walked in the ways of the wicked unbelieving world that is still lost in its sin. In fact, we walk according to the course of the world, he writes.

The sun runs its circuit through the skies. It rises in the east and sets in the west. It will never rise in the south and set in the north. It has a set course. The same is true of the wicked world. It runs its course of sin without changing. It is stuck in its course of rebellion and unbelief. And at one time we were stuck in that too. You and I had no ability to decide to rise in the south and to set in the north. We were stuck in the course of sin, with no desire to change from walking in the way of sin.

This is true because we were led by the prince of the power of the air. I think we all know who that is. We were held in the powerful clutches of Satan. He is a power in high places, a power out of whose grasp no one can escape except through the powerful work of Christ. He is the prince of the power of the air. His power is much higher than that of man. When man is held in Satan's sway, man walks in sin and cannot break loose from it.

Further, we walked according to the same spirit that now works in the children of rebellion. That spirit is, once again, Satan, who himself rebelled against God and leads the world in that way of rebellion. Do not think that he is a myth, dear listener. Do not think that Satan is a made-up character of a horror movie. Satan cannot be seen, because he is a spirit. But he is real, and he works within the hearts of those who are his children.

At one time we were the children of Satan. He worked in our hearts and held us in the power of sin and rebellion. And this became manifested in us. In verse 3 we read that in times past we walked in the sinful deeds of the wicked. We all had our conversation, that is, our walk

of life, in the lusts of the flesh. We fulfilled the strong cravings of our sinful flesh to do what is forbidden of us by God. We did exactly what we wanted to do. We lived for ourselves, to satisfy ourselves. We walked in selfishness and self-centeredness. We did not care about others. We especially did not care about what God wanted. Neither did this selfishness cleave only to our desires. Our minds also were darkened in sin. The thoughts of our hearts were only evil continually. Our thoughts, and our reasonings too, were given over to the power of sin and Satan. They were stuck in the course of this world. And all of this made us children of wrath—God’s wrath. Because of such horrible attraction to sin, we were the objects of God’s anger and condemnation.

Here is the point: we were all children of disobedience and wrath. There is not a person in the church who, in times past, was not dead in sins and trespasses. This was true of the Jewish believers in Ephesus as well as the Gentile believers. The Jews may have been preserved by God from the horrible vices that were found in the Greek culture. They had been members of the synagogue their whole lives. And God had spared them, probably, from the excesses of sin that were found in the godless culture that surrounded them. They were born and raised in the church. They had been sheltered from the horrors found in the wicked world. As a result, the Jewish believers in Ephesus might be inclined to think that what Paul addresses here was aimed only at the Gentile believers in the church. The Jews may have thought that they were a bit, well, a bit better than the Gentiles, who up to this point were given over to the course of the world and had consciously walked in the lusts of the flesh.

But the Word of God in these verses does not make an exception to the sin described here. Paul even includes himself in this category—everyone in the church, without exception, at one point in his life, was a child of disobedience.

But, you might say, I really do not remember that. I did not walk openly in these sins. God has preserved me from infancy from the excesses of sin. But even if that is true of some of us listening today, that does not mean that we were not lost in our sin in times past. We cannot remember the time that we were indeed given over to that sin. But sin, you understand, does not merely exist in excesses. We can fulfill the desires of our flesh and of the mind without walking in the horrible atrocities we see in the world today. Sometimes we can fulfill our desires in a very sophisticated manner, without the glaring over-indulgence or intemperance of the world. Many in the church have lived for themselves, in their own pleasure, with no thought of God, though they never went to the extremes of sin. Paul tells us here that we were all among the children of disobedience and were all children of wrath in times past. In times past. That is, before that moment of time when God, by His grace through Christ, quickened you and me. Prior to our regeneration—and every believer, every child of God must be regenerated—prior to our regeneration, we were dead in trespasses and sins. In that past time of life we were the objects of God’s wrath and condemnation. Let us never forget that. That is the sobering reminder we have before us in this Word of God. We were nothing in ourselves.

But that means that if we are to have a place in the church, if we are to be members of the body of Christ in this world, there must be a radical change in our lives. I am not talking about a sudden change necessarily. I am not talking about a change that we must have been suddenly aware of. But there has to be a change. One cannot be a member of the church and walk according to the course of this world. One cannot be a member of Christ’s body in this world and spend his entire life fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. There is an indispensable act that must be performed—not by us, but by God—in order for us to be true

members of Christ's church. God must quicken us. He must make us who were dead in trespasses and sins alive from the dead. Verse 1: and you who were quickened from the dead. Verse 5: but God, when we were dead in sins, quickened us.

That takes a miracle. It is as much a miracle as Christ's raising Lazarus from the grave after he was dead for four days. We were dead! Believers, we were dead! There was not one little spark of life in us from a spiritual point of view. God, who is rich in His mercy and in His great love, makes us alive from the dead. That is what "quicken us" means. It is the miracle God performs in the hearts of each one of His children. It is known as regeneration. It is at that very moment when we are brought from spiritual death in the clutches of Satan, into spiritual life and under the rule of Christ.

This work of our regeneration is accomplished in us by our risen Lord. Notice in verse 5: We are quickened together with Christ. When Christ went the way of the cross for us, He destroyed the power of sin and death over us. Christ won the victory over Satan. In His resurrection Christ came back to life again. He, through His death and resurrection, earned life for Himself and for all those who are in Him, that is, for those whom God had given to Him. God's people, the elect, were together with Christ in His resurrection. The life He earned in His resurrection is a life that He earned for them.

It is a life that He instills in every one of them at the moment of their new birth—regeneration. At the moment our resurrected Lord sends forth His Spirit to dwell in our hearts, we are made alive from the dead. We live, not only because of what Christ has done, but we live together *with* Christ, our living Lord, the head of His body. Because our head lives, and we are one with Him, we live with Him.

No one can be a true member of Christ's church in this world without that work of regeneration. No one can be a member of Christ's church in this world without that work of God's grace. In order to be a member of Christ's body we must be born again (John 3). We must have, flowing through our spiritual veins, the life of Jesus Christ. This spiritual act of God's grace is indispensable to belonging to the true church of Christ.

Now we get into the whole distinction, you see, between belonging to the elect body of believers, the church, and belonging to the instituted church. There is no doubt about it: true believers do not live outside the instituted church. True believers join with other believers because they are called to assemble themselves together to worship. That is the purpose of God in their salvation. But there are others who are either born into the church or join from without but are not regenerated. They are not quickened. We cannot necessarily see this on the outside, but their heart has not been changed. God has not performed the miraculous work of regeneration. These may belong to the church for all kinds of reasons. At times in history, it was the popular thing to do. At the time of Constantine, for example, anybody who was somebody belonged to the Christian church. It was a matter of prestige and acceptance by everyone. So, many unbelievers joined the church institute.

There are many who are born into the church and, because their family and friends belong there, they simply go there too. There are those who go to church because, well, it is nothing more than a social club—just like some people join a lodge or a club in order to have people to do things with. Or they join the church because it is good hunting grounds for a wife or a husband. But they are not members because the life of Christ flows through them. They are not in church because they are believers and, as believers, are drawn by the Spirit to other believers.

They do not come because their new life craves the spiritual food of the preaching. They do not come because they are a believing member of the body of Christ. They join for carnal reasons. These people may fool themselves into thinking that they belong to the church of Christ. But if they do not have the life of Jesus Christ flowing through them, they are members of an institution where the body of Christ is found, but they are not members of that body even though their names may be on the membership rolls.

Why are we here? Ask the question: why are we in church? That is the point that Paul makes in these verses. We must be those who are alive from the dead. That is what makes us members of the body of Christ in this world.

But what an amazing work is the life of Christ given through regeneration. When we see it in us, what an amazing work! We marvel at what God has done for us. God takes a dead sinner such as I and, through the power work of His grace, makes me alive. And when He does, He graciously places me into the body of this church in this world. Amazing!

Now I have this desire in me to be a part of that body of Christ as a living member! I want to gather with the saints and faithful and worship with them! Now I understand why it is in the nature of the church to worship! I want to gather in worship to praise God for the salvation He has given me freely and out of no merit of my own. All I can point to is His sovereign mercy and love as the reason for my salvation. God who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He loved us has made us alive in Christ! In the great love by which God chose us as His own already in eternity He saved us. He took pity on us in our deep distress and reached forth His mighty arm and drew us out of the floods of sin and unbelief that were drowning our souls in perdition. And He set us upon the Rock Jesus Christ.

Did we merit any of this more than anyone else in this world, more than anyone who is still living in unbelief? Not at all! It is all of God's grace, mercy, and love. He freely put us into His church. Let us attend to the worship of the church today and bow with humble thanks before God, who has made us alive in Christ!

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 14, 2012 *The Wall of Separation Broken Down*
No. 3641 *Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

The verses we consider today address the separation God ordained in the Old Testament between the nation of Israel and all other nations of the world. Paul addresses the Gentile believers with these words in Ephesians 2:11-15:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.

This passage explains how God broke down the barrier between the Old Testament church and the Gentile people in order to include the Gentile nations of the earth in His church and kingdom. This passage is the central theme of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church: in the New Testament age Christ fulfills the law in order that the Gentiles might be grafted into the church. God blends together into one new man—into one church—the saints of the Old Testament and the Gentiles of the New.

A Separating Wall

It is clear from the verses we study that the Gentile nations in times past were *not* a part of God's church. Paul explains that the Gentiles were at that time without Christ. They were "sometimes," that is, "at that time," far off. A middle wall of partition existed between them and the nation of Israel. The simple truth Paul emphasizes here is that during Old Testament times God had built a wall of separation between the nation of Israel, the church of the Old Testament, and all the other nations of the world.

This separation between the Hebrew people and the other nations did not come about suddenly. Noah foretold it in Genesis 9:26, when he prophesied that God would be the God of Shem's descendants. This meant that God would gather His church specifically out of Shem's generations. This prophecy began to come true when God chose to establish His covenant with Abraham who was born out of the line of Shem. This line of the covenant and church was narrowed even further when God told Abraham that in *Isaac* would his seed (that is, the church) be called. In other words, the other children of Abraham, those that he had with his other wives, Hagar and Keturah, would not be included in God's church of old. Slowly, through several generations, all this proved true. God narrowed the scope of His church to include Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob and his 12 sons. These twelve sons eventually became the heads of the 12 tribes of the nation, and later, the kingdom or commonwealth, of Israel.

After God had delivered the nation of Israel from the land of Egypt, He formed the nation into a kingdom under law. At Mt. Sinai God made Israel a Theocracy—a kingdom under the rule of God. Israel was given the Torah—the many laws that would govern her as a nation and kingdom. She was organized there into her 12 tribes. At that time, too, the priest and Levites were appointed for service in the temple. The tabernacle was built and Israel's official worship as a kingdom began. Israel was now transformed into a commonwealth—the instituted church of the Old Testament. Moses reminded the children of Israel of this before they entered into the land of Canaan: Deuteronomy 7:6: "Thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." At that time God limited His church and salvation to the nation of Israel.

The rest is history. Israel was given by God the land of Canaan as an inheritance. God set up David as the great king, and under him and his son Solomon the nation of Israel developed into the greatest commonwealth or kingdom on earth. With the development of this kingdom, the nation of Israel became known as the nation whose God was Jehovah. Here is the simple truth: in the Old Testament, God did not save any people or nation in the earth other than the people of Israel. Not everyone in Israel was saved, mind you. God saved only His elect people found within the nation of Israel. But this did not change the fact that those whom God had chosen to save were, with but very few exceptions, always born within the nation of Israel. This went on for well over a thousand years!

Now, that means of course that these Gentile believers in Ephesus were, *in their generations*, not a part of God's church or His covenant. Paul explains in verse 12 of Ephesians 2 that the Gentiles were aliens, not only from the commonwealth of Israel, but also from everything that that included! These Gentile nations were strangers from the covenants of promise. They were cut off from God's covenant: the friendship, love, and favor of God. And they were cut off from the various promises of that covenant. They simply were not a part of the friendship and fellowship God had established with the children of Abraham. They were strangers from the promises of God that He would be their God, who would never leave or forsake them—and from the promise of eternal glory.

Because these Gentiles were alienated from the covenants of promise, they were without Christ too. This passage conclusively proves that the saints in the Old Testament were, just as the church today, viewed by God in Christ. Believers in Old Testament Israel were saved in Christ! They were saved through the faith that pointed them ahead to the coming of the Messiah—to the coming of Christ! The other nations of the earth were cut off from the faith that was given to God's people in Israel that connected them to Christ. This means they were cut off entirely from salvation! This is why they were without hope! They had no hope! They had no spiritual desire or longing for the coming of Jesus Christ and the salvation from sin and misery found in Him alone. They did not look or wait for Christ's birth. They did not even know who Christ was, nor the redemption that He would bring. And all this added up to one thing: they were without God in the world.

What a horrible plight: their eyes were blinded and their hearts were darkened in sin and unbelief. They knew there was a God that had to be served, but they were determined not to serve the true God. They followed after the gods of their own flesh. They heaped to themselves idols. There was this huge spiritual wall or barrier that existed between Israel and the Gentile

nations of the world. It divided them into two camps. On the one side were God, Christ, and salvation. On the other was sin, despair, and no hope.

And that wall was impenetrable! Man could not break it down. That is true because God had appointed this wall of separation. It was divinely ordained. God did not choose to save the Gentiles in the Old Testament. He chose to save His people only out of the natural seed of Jacob. That's it. And what made that wall so solid was the law of commandments contained in ordinances. The middle wall of partition that divided Israel from the rest of the nations is mentioned in verse 14. Then in verse 15 Paul describes what the wall was. This was the wall that separated Israel from other nations: the law of commandments contained in ordinances. The law of commandments refers to the Mosaic law given at Mt. Sinai that organized her into a kingdom under law. God instituted His church as a kingdom under law—under all kinds of commandments. These commandments of the law included the civil, ceremonial, and moral commandments. All these commandments made up the one law of God. That is why Paul refers to the Torah as the law of commandments. God's law consisted of many types of commandments.

But the particular type of commandments Paul has in mind that separated this nation from all other peoples was the ceremonial law. We say that because these particular commandments consisted of all kinds of ordinances, that is to say, all kinds of ceremonies. Paul refers to one of these ceremonies in verse 11, that of circumcision. Circumcision was a sign of membership in God's covenant and church. The nations around Israel were uncircumcised heathen. This is just one example. *All* the ceremonies of the law: the sacrifices, the feast days, the temple worship, the priesthood, and so on, served to form a barrier between Israel and the nations of this world. That barrier was a wall of enmity we are told in verse 15. Hatred existed between Israel and the unbelieving nations of the world. God had commanded His people to dwell in safety alone and not to touch the unclean nations of this world. And likewise, these nations were out to destroy the cause of Jehovah in the earth by destroying Israel. There was a wall of hatred and strife that existed for hundreds of years between the commonwealth of Israel and the Gentiles who were without Christ.

A Breaking Down

But Paul speaks of the amazing mystery concerning the church of Christ that is revealed to the church today in verses 13, 14: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." Christ has broken down—smashed, demolished—the wall that for years had divided the Gentiles from true Israel. There is not one separating stone of that wall left upon another. The way that kept those outside of Israel from being a part of the church and covenant of God in this world—that way is now completely open to you and me who are Gentiles! We are no longer barred by God from the fellowship of God's church and from fellowship with Him. We are no longer without God in this world. We may confess that the God of Israel is our God and that He will be our guide even unto death. We have hope—blessed hope. We now wait for and long for the second coming of Jesus Christ, when He will receive us into heaven together with the saints of the Old Testament.

Believers today *are* a part of the church because Christ has removed the enmity that kept us in separation from the church of the Old Testament. The unbelief that hardened us in our sin has been taken away by Christ. We are given eyes to see and hearts to understand that we have what

believers of old had. It was true: salvation was of the Jews. But now God's people from all nations, together with the saints of old, have become recipients of salvation by God's grace. Israel's God is now our God.

It is true! God, who is rich in mercy and in His great love wherewith He loved us, has grafted us into the generations of His church. There is no more enmity or envy or strife between us and true Israel. And when we say true Israel we mean those Jews who are of the faith of Abraham—not the natural descendants of Abraham. That nation has been cut off. True Israel believed in the Christ when He came into this world. Now we, together with these believing Jews, are true Israel.

Now we, God's people out of all nations and races, belong to the commonwealth of Israel. We are fellow citizens with the saints of old! Is this an earthly nation or kingdom? Not at all! It is a spiritual kingdom—the kingdom of God and Christ. The church today, in unity with the church of the past, is true Israel.

But there is one question remaining. How did Christ accomplish this? How did He manage to break down that middle wall of separation? What was the hammer that smashed to ruins the law of commandments contained in ordinances? Christ's blood! Ephesians 2:13: "ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh *by the blood of Christ.*" Christ has abolished *in his flesh* the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, by shedding His blood to save God's people out of all the nations of this world.

You see, all the ordinances of the Old Testament laws governing Israel as a nation before the birth of Christ were ordained by God to point His people to Christ. Circumcision, for example, was a bloody ordinance that pointed to the blood of Christ that would cleanse God's people from sin and cut away the foreskin of unbelief. The sacrifices likewise shed blood in order to point God's saints in the Old Testament to the blood that needed to be shed to take away the guilt of sin. The priesthood pointed to Christ, the feasts pointed to the work of Christ in salvation, the temple with its rites and furniture pointed to Christ. Through His death and resurrection, all these commandments contained in ceremonies were fulfilled.

In fulfilling them, Christ abolished, did away with, these ceremonies. They became obsolete, unnecessary. And since they were the wall that separated Israel from the Gentiles, the wall of separation was taken away. The church in Christ no longer had to keep these ceremonies: neither the Jews nor the Gentiles. There is no longer the requirement for us to worship as did the saints in the Old Testament. So there is no more reason for division. We are as believers of the same household of faith.

But there is one more way the blood of Christ broke down that wall. That was the way of salvation! We who were dead in our sins and trespasses have been delivered from sin by the grace of God and through the blood of Christ. Such salvation has become universal—that is to say, God's people out of all peoples, nations, and races of the earth are saved. At the time of Pentecost the Spirit of Christ was poured out upon all nations. Ever since that day Christ has gathered His church out of the nations of this world. God grafts His people out of all nations into the church of Christ and then continues to gather them in the line of their generations. By Christ's blood we have been reconciled to God. We are saints and are faithful!

Now understanding the mystery of the church, we are humbled! We were nothing in our generations! Nothing at all! We were in our generations excluded from heaven and God's favor and fellowship. We have done nothing to deserve to be where we are today! Only by God's

grace have believers been grafted into the church of Jesus Christ. Only by grace have they received the gift of faith and become members of the church.

Think of what God by His grace has done for His people! We who were alienated from the church because we were alienated from God are now reconciled to God on account of Christ's death. Christ paid the price for our sins. He has made us righteous in His blood. We are no longer the children of wrath. We are now the people of God—members of His church! God has done that! He has accomplished that freely for us in the blood of Christ.

A Resulting Peace

Here is the result of this wonder work of Christ. Verse 15: He has “made in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.” Two peoples: Jews and Gentiles. A wall had divided them for a thousand years and more. These two, who were divided according to God's sovereign choice between faith and unbelief—these two God has joined together to make one new man. We have become one body, one living organism, believers from all nations interacting as one living whole. We are a new man.

No, the church of today is not different from the church of old. The church today has simply taken on a new appearance. It is renewed in Christ. And it is identified together with Christ. Who is the new man we have become? The church has become one in *the* Man: Jesus Christ. Christ is the head, and we are the members of His body, the church. We are Christ's. We are become that one man in Christ.

And because we are, there is now peace! There is peace between the races of men who, since the tower of Babel, have always been divided. In Christ there is no distinction between nations. Oh, as long as unbelief reigns in the nations of the earth there will be division and strife—no peace for them. But for believers from these nations there is peace because they are one in Jesus Christ. What a glorious gospel!

But Christ is our peace in another sense too: it is He that gives us peace in our hearts. We are brought nigh to God. We dwell in perfect fellowship with Him. That gives us inner joy and peace. We are happy and content in the safety of the church. We marvel at God's grace in our lives. And as God's church we gather together in worship on the Lord's Day to lift our voices in praise to God.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 21, 2012
No. 3642

The Church's One Foundation
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

In our last radio broadcast we began our consideration of the central theme of this letter to the Ephesian church: the *mystery* of the church. God in His great mercy has blended together into one the saints of the Old Testament with the saints of the New Testament. All peoples, languages, and races of people are now a part of what had been given only to a select body of people before the advent of Christ. Christ's church has broken outside the bounds of Old Testament Israel. It now embraces believers out of all of the world. In Christ we are all members of God's household. We are members of His family. We live together with God in the same household.

It is with that in mind that Paul now describes the church in Ephesians 2:20-22 as a building fitly framed together. We read:

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The church is compared here to the structure of the temple —God's dwelling place, or God's house. We are built into God's house founded on, or built upon, Jesus Christ. We consider today the church's one foundation.

The Building

In these few verses before us Paul compares the church to the structure of the temple in Jerusalem—not that of the temple built in Ephesus in honor of Diana, the goddess of the Ephesians. Paul directs the attention of these Ephesian believers to the temple of Jehovah. Notice, verse 21: you are fitly framed together unto a holy temple in the Lord. Or again, in verse 22: you are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. The temple to which the church is compared is the temple where Jehovah abode and shared in fellowship with His people.

Paul uses this particular comparison to call our attention to a couple of important truths concerning the church. First of all, the temple was "fitly framed together." It was made up of various materials, all put together meticulously in their place in order that it might be the temple of God. The temple in Solomon's day especially, but to a large degree also the temple of Herod that now stood in Jerusalem, was built to a particular specification. Stones, marble, wood, precious metals such as gold, silver, and brass, tapestries—all were fashioned exactly and joined together for their particular place in the temple. There were certain pillars, certain rooms, certain furniture that were set exactly in their places in that temple in order to function together. All of these various parts had their own special place in the beauty, solemnity, and worship of this building. They were all fitly framed together, or joined together in just the right order, that they together became the one structure of the temple—the place of God's habitation. Everything in

its particular place, each item serving its own particular function, yet in such a way that it lent to the beauty and harmony of the whole.

In the second place, the figure Paul uses here also points out how this building *grew* into the temple. Notice verse 21: "...in whom the building fitly framed together *groweth* unto a temple." There were indeed various stages in the building up of the temple. The foundation had to be laid with its cornerstones. That was the first stage in building the temple. The walls were then built upon that foundation. The pillars were raised, and the roof was framed. The furniture and decorations were then added, and so on. The point is, there were various stages of development that the construction of the temple had to go through in order for it to grow into its completed form: a temple. All these stages of development took time, and all took place exactly as the master architect ordered.

All of this applies so precisely, so beautifully, to God's building up of His church throughout the ages! In the first place, the church of Jesus Christ in this world, like a building, consists of different materials or parts. Paul tells these Gentile believers in Ephesus and the church today that we are built together for an habitation of God. All of God's saints, all the individual members of the church, both Old and New Testament (Jews and Gentiles), are built together to make up this temple. We have spoken of this in connection with the church as the body of Christ. All of us are members of that body, having our own particular work and function in that body, yet having our value only as part of the body. The same is true of this example used here in our text by Paul. We are all a piece of the temple of God. Some of us are boards, some stones, some precious metals. Some of us are a part of the roof, others of uppermost courses of stones in the walls, still others are pillars, and so on. Each one of us has his own particular place in the structure of the building, and that in such a way that, without each of us, that building of the church would be incomplete.

Do you see what that implies, people of God? God, the Master Architect, takes people from every walk of life, from every station in life, and from every nation and language and fits them into the building of His church. We may be a man of great wealth and affluence, or we may be a poor laborer, but God takes us and gives us our own particular place in the church. We may be an outgoing and lovable character, or we may be a hard-to-get-along-with, stubborn old saint, but God gives us a place in the church. We may be a Jew or a Gentile, yet God takes each and every one of us and places us in the building of His church. And we all have our particular purpose and function in that church. The church is incomplete without us. Sometimes it may take finding our particular place and work, but it is there!

But the blessed aspect of the church is that we are built *together with the rest of the church*. We are fitly framed together, we are closely joined by God to the rest of the members of the church to form the church. We do not function alone. In fact, we have no value at all apart from our place in the church. We are but a single stone or a piece of wood. We are useless until God by His grace joins us in perfect harmony with the other members of the church. And the function we have in the church is always in perfect harmony with the function of others.

All of this comes to manifestation in the church institute, where believers join themselves together under Christ their head. So if we were to step back and take a good look at the church, we would see that it is not the individual parts of the church in themselves that are the beauty of the church. The beauty and glory of the church is that together all these parts blend together with one another to form the whole. And that whole is the temple—the very abode of God!

That brings us to the second feature of the church of Christ that is pictured in the figure of the building of the temple. The church grows! It grows into that temple. The completion of the temple where God dwells comes about through various stages of development. In each of these stages God takes time to develop and build the church in all its beauty. This could not be clearer to the saints in Ephesus. The church had just entered into a new stage in her development. The plan of the building of Christ's church was laid out in eternity. The first stage of the development of the church was found in the church before the Flood. Then there was the church during the time of the patriarchs. The church entered into another stage of building under the law of commandments contained in ordinances—the nation of Israel. Now Christ had come and brought the Old Testament stage of development to an end. The courses of stone that made up the walls of the temple were now in place. The church was now freed from the bondage of the law of commandments, from the ceremonies of the Old Testament law. The church had come of age. She now stood in the liberty of the sons of God. The church had grown up.

Now God would add to His church all the gold, silver, precious jewels, and tapestries in order to beautify his temple. The Gentiles had now been grafted in! She was soon to reach the full glory and beauty as the temple of God.

Ah, beloved saints, today the finishing touches of the church are being made. The building of God's church has reached its last stages. We dwell in the last days. Soon that building will be completed and will shine forth in all its beauty unto eternity as the habitation of God. Together we belong to that one glorious church that has been built from the beginning of time. God has built His church throughout the ages. What a beautiful building!

The Foundation

There is another aspect of this figure that we have not yet considered—perhaps the most important aspect. A building that is built upon the sand may look nice for a long time, but it has no firm foundation. And when the winds come and blow upon that building, then that building will topple and fall. It will be ruined and destroyed. This temple of God's church must be built therefore on a firm and solid foundation, or the building is useless. For this reason we ought to consider our strength as God's people. This is why Paul writes in verse 20 that "we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." We are built together, we are fitly framed together, but none of this means anything if we are not built upon this firm foundation.

Notice the figure once again. A foundation is that upon which the entire house is built. When we go to a place where a house is just being started, then we will see the excavating crew dig a large trench. In that trench, forms will be constructed and into those forms the cement truck will pour his concrete. When this concrete dries and the forms are taken away, we will see a solid, concrete foundation in the ground. And on that foundation the entire house will now be built. In Jesus' day, however, they did not have the convenience of cement trucks. Their foundations were built out of large stones that, for the most part, rested upon the foundation stone—the cornerstone. The cornerstone was a huge boulder, a rock hewn out of the mountainside specially for the purpose of upholding the entire foundation. It was the stone upon which all the stones of the entire foundation rested. It determined the size and shape of the building, but it was the strength of the building as well. It held both the building and the foundation up.

Vital to the building of God's temple was its chief cornerstone. There may have been other cornerstones in the huge structure of the temple, but there was one and only chief cornerstone

upon which this structure was determined. The same is true of the church. Vital to the building of God's church is our cornerstone, which is Christ. Upon Him alone the entire structure of the church throughout the ages rests. From the very beginning of time to the end the church rests upon Jesus Christ. *In Christ*, we are told in verse 21, all the building grows unto a holy temple. Only as we are cemented together with Christ in the structure of the church are we able to stand as a church in this world. In fact, our beauty and our glory is found in the fact that we are built upon Christ.

How is this true? How is it that Christ must be viewed as the cornerstone of the church? This is a reality in eternity already. Peter tells us in I Peter 2 that God from eternity carefully chose this precious cornerstone, and in that counsel of our God the church was chosen in Him. He was ordained first of all, and all the members of the church were chosen only as from all eternity they were viewed by God in Him.

In time, too, the church is built upon Christ. Consider ourselves, people of God, apart from Christ—what are we? We are nothing more than pieces of scrap thrown upon a pile and ready to be cast out. Such is what our spiritual state has rendered us. We are not only useless, but undesirable in ourselves. We are so polluted with our sin. When man fell into sin, we were cast upon the pile by God to be burned. But God in His great mercy and grace sent Jesus Christ into this world. And Christ not only removed us from the pile but made us beautiful in His blood. He cleansed us and then took us and most graciously put us in the building of the church. He made us a part of the church—that grand and glorious temple of God in this world. He made us valuable in connection with Him. In that way we, not only as individual believers, but also as a church in this world are built upon Him. We find and draw our life out of Him and His work for us. He even now lives as the very head of His church and reigns over all things for the benefit of that church. We can definitely say, as Paul does in our text, that we are a holy temple *in the Lord*, that is, as united together with Christ by faith.

Upon that foundation stone which is Christ is built the foundation of the church itself. This foundation, we find, is made up of the stones of the apostles and prophets. Remember, we said that the foundation must also be strong if it is to hold up a building. The temple of God is strong only as it is built upon a solid and firm foundation. That firm foundation that God now lays upon Christ (who, remember, is both the strength and stay of the foundation as well as of the whole building), that rock solid foundation, is the apostles and prophets. Sounds pretty shaky to me! I'm sorry, but the apostles and prophets were just men as I am. They were sinners who were prone to stumble and fall just as I am. They not only sinned, but they certainly could make mistakes. That sounds like a pretty shaky foundation to me! The church rests upon mere men. Even if these men rest upon Christ, they are still but men. That makes a very weak foundation! Yet, that is what God's Word here says. And though the Romish church still insists that the church in fact rests upon mere men, this cannot be the meaning of our text.

Consider who the prophets and apostles were. They were ministers of the Word of God. To the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New, we learn in II Corinthians 15:9, was entrusted the Word of reconciliation. We learn in II Peter 1:19-21 that they were given a sure Word of prophecy to which we do well to take heed. It is not therefore the prophets or apostles themselves personally upon which the church is built. It is upon the Word that they were led by the Spirit of truth to speak and infallibly record for us in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the firm foundation referred to here in our text. The Bible is the authoritative

Word of God to His church. And the apostles and prophets were used by God to record that infallible Word.

Do you see what this implies, dear listener? First of all, if we as a church institute or as believers throw away the infallible Scriptures as wholly and completely the Word of God, then we have lost our foundation! A true church of Jesus Christ is one that is built upon the Word of God, and therefore upon the apostles and prophets. Deny the Bible, remove sections of it, say that it is not word-for-word the Word of God to His church, then your foundation is destroyed and your church will crumble and fall. The same is true if you place the authority of the church above that of the Bible. The Scriptures are our highest authority. They alone determine truth! Deny this and you are no longer a true church of Christ, because the Bible is the firm foundation of the church that rests upon Christ! Christ's church is built upon the foundation of the Word of God as spoken through the mouths of God's teachers and ambassadors.

The Temple

The end or completion of this building is that it is a holy temple. The church of all ages founded on the apostles and prophets has, dwelling in her midst, God Himself. Just as God dwelt between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the Temple, so also does God dwell in his church. She is a holy temple. In her is the presence of the holy God. And He dwells in her through His Spirit. The Spirit of truth is in the church and leads and guides her in this world. That same Spirit dwells in each of us as individual members of the church, leading and directing us. God very really therefore dwells in His church. Now already. In heaven the building of the church will be completed. There God will dwell in us perfectly. But already now we are the holy temple of Jehovah. God is in the midst of her! In that we find the glory of the church.

The church is not an institution of man. It is a divine institution established, preserved, and indwelt by God Himself. It is an institution that is founded on salvation from sin, earned for us through the cross of Jesus Christ. It is not an institution set up by God to provide social services. It is not a social club reserved for the families of the social elite. It is a highly spiritual institution that administers the Gospel to sinners—to poor, wretched, miserable sinners. In that is found the beauty and grace of the church. There is nothing in this world that can compare to her! There is no one in the world that can be happier than those who are a part of that true church of Jesus Christ! And there is no other institution that can replace the church in the affections of God's saints! We swear allegiance to the Lord of that church. We are no more strangers or foreigners. We belong to the family of God!

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 28, 2012
No. 3643

Paul: Administrator of the Mystery
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

The church of Jesus Christ is worldwide. For centuries Christ has gathered His chosen saints from among the many nations and languages of the earth. That is normal. It does not amaze us, really. It has been going on for a long time already—so long that we never really give it that much thought. What has become so common to you and me, however, was not always true. The church at one time was not universal. The church for thousands of years was limited to one little nation of the earth. The various nations and peoples of the earth were not saved—none of them. God chose to save His people, with but very few exceptions, out of the nation of Israel. All nations outside of Israel were not included in the church. That you and I are saved today and are given by God to be a part of the church of Christ is an amazing and gracious work of God—one that we ought never to take for granted.

The very existence of the Ephesian church was a new phenomenon. Not the existence of the church, mind you, but the existence of a church made up of Gentile people. They were a part of something brand new. God had chosen to save them, together with the Old Testament saints out of Israel. As Paul states in Ephesians 2:18, “through [Christ] we both [Jew and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

It is this subject that lies at the heart of the verses that we consider on today’s broadcast: Ephesians 3:7-9. We read there:

Whereof I [that is, Paul] was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.

This passage lies at the heart of this entire letter of Paul. There are so many important themes that Paul expounds for us in this letter. But the one central theme of Ephesians is the mystery spoken of in the verses we consider. We considered that mystery already, in part, in connection with chapter 2. In these verses Paul defines the mystery spoken of in this letter.

For centuries God’s saints in the church were confronted with a puzzling mystery that they could not seem to solve. Paul informs us in verse 9 that from the beginning of the world this mystery was hid with God. Or, again, we learn in the beginning of verse 5 that this mystery in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men. It was not as if this mystery had not been set forth both in the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. It was recorded repeatedly in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures. But Peter tells us in I Peter 1:10, 11: “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

In other words, the reason the saints of old could not solve this mystery was because God did not choose to open their eyes and understanding to it yet. We learn in II Corinthians 3:14, 15, that the eyes of the Old Testament saints were blinded, for there remained a veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament. The reason this was true of God's saints in the Old Testament was because the Spirit of Truth had not yet revealed to them the mystery. Just as in the case of a murder there may be all kinds of facts or evidence available, the case remains a mystery until everything adds up and the murderer is revealed. So also with this mystery of the gospel.

What truth about the church from the beginning of the world was hid in God who created all things? This, verse 6 of Ephesians 3: "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body and partakers of [God's] promise in Christ by the gospel." That is the mystery. It was prophesied by Noah when he blessed his sons. It was given to Abraham when he was sent to the land of Canaan. It was evident in the very name of Abraham: the father of many nations. It was prophesied over and over again by the prophets. The psalmist recorded it in many of his songs. All the evidence of a universal church, a church gathered out of all the nations of the earth, was there in Old Testament Scripture. But the saints could not figure it out because the Spirit had not yet chosen to reveal this blessed truth to the saints of old. What is now so commonplace to you and me that our minds cannot comprehend a church without its universal nature, was beyond the imagination of the Old Testament church.

In fact, that phrase in verse 9 of our text, that this mystery has from the beginning of the world been hid in God who created all things, is revealing in itself. This mystery, we are told, was hid in God. The gathering in of a universal church was in the plan of God from all eternity. God did not view His church in eternity piecemeal, so to speak. He did not see His church as consisting of the nation of Israel with the Gentile nations tacked onto it later on in history. In God, the church is one whole, a body. God decreed and comprehended His church as a whole in His plan. In God, the nations of this world are as much a part of God's plan as was the nation of Israel. But this truth was hid in God before the coming of Christ and the pouring out of the Spirit.

When we think on these things, fellow believers, we have so much to be thankful for, so much. What Paul writes in Romans 9:26 is true now: "And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God." We were not a people unto God. We were strangers from the covenant of promise and without God in this world. Now we, too, are called by the name of Christ. We, too, are a part of the church of Jesus Christ in this world. God is fulfilling His plan for all things in His church today.

The task of making known this great mystery was given specifically to the apostle Paul. The other apostles also were given to know and to preach this gospel concerning the church. But Paul was specifically chosen by Christ for this task. Notice what Paul writes of himself in verses 7 and 8 here: "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Paul was made the minister, that is, the person called to serve the church in the great capacity of preacher to the Gentiles. This office was the gift of God given to Paul—to make all men understand that mystery was now being carried out. God was at that very time gathering into His church the Gentile nations. Paul has become the administrator, or the dispenser, of the knowledge that Christ's church has now become universal. He was the preacher sent to the

nations, the Gentiles, with the good news that salvation is freely given by God to all peoples. What was shut up to the nations of this world in the past is now freely given by God to all men through the administrator of the mystery: Paul.

That Paul was chosen and called to this task was evident in the instruction Christ gave to Ananias after Paul's conversion. We read in Acts 9:15 these words of Christ: "Go thy way: for he [Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Christ called and ordained Paul to this special task of administrator of the mystery. And Paul was fully aware of this and verified his position everywhere. For example, in Romans 11:13 Paul writes: "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." That was Paul's particular place in the church. His gift was the special position chosen by God and given him.

Paul says in verse 7 that his position was given him by the effectual working of Christ's power. What he means by this, first of all, is that he was appointed by Christ through the powerful work of his conversion on the road to Damascus. That is where Christ's power was first revealed to him and in him.

But the effectual working of Christ's power was ultimately displayed to Paul when he was directly instructed by Christ in Arabia. Paul writes of this experience in the first few verses of II Corinthians 12. Though we do not have time to read those verses, we must notice in them that no other man ever received such a powerful work by which the mystery of the church was revealed to him. Christ revealed it directly to him in the wilderness. If anyone had reason to glory in himself, the apostle Paul did. But Paul did not boast in himself. Rather, he accepted his office as a gift of grace. Notice verse 7: "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God." Or, verse 8: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." Paul's office was a gift. It was freely given him of God on the basis of God's unmerited favor alone. That is grace. Paul received the gift of his office on the basis of God's favor, a favor that he, Paul, did not deserve. I am less than the least of all saints, Paul states.

You are God's saints, people of God, Paul writes to the Ephesian church. You are those sanctified and made holy in the blood of Christ. Well, I am less than the least of you. I am lowest on the totem pole. I do not deserve what God has freely given me in my office. I persecuted the saints and church of God. I breathed out threatenings against them. I hated them. I deserve nothing but punishment from the hand of God. But I thank Christ Jesus who has enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.

Oh that every officebearer in Christ's church might bear that humility. No man may usurp to himself an office in the church. They who try to put themselves forward in this regard do so only out of pride and self-glory. Every officebearer who serves must be lawfully called by Jesus Christ through His church and must serve in utter humility. There is no room for a proud officebearer in Christ's church. There is no room for a man who will attempt to rise in power and influence above the other officebearers. If anyone had the right to do this, Paul did. But he served with deepest humility, knowing who he was.

When we serve in the capacity of an officebearer in the church, whether that be preacher or elder or deacon, let us do so in meekness and sobriety. What was true of Paul must be true of us. We will consider this more in detail when we consider those offices in connection with Ephesians 4.

There were two great truths Paul was commissioned to preach to the Gentiles. The first truth, we are told in verse 8, was the unsearchable riches of Christ. The Greeks in Ephesus lived in a city that abounded in earthly wealth and prosperity. Society was filled with riches. God's people, along with the pagans in that city, all had plenty. These saints then could well understand when Paul spoke to them of the riches of Christ and told them that these riches were unparalleled in worth. The riches in Christ were unsearchable. They were boundless. The riches in Christ were so great that the depths could not be fathomed. They were unsearchable. Wow! Talk about riches! What earthly wealth can compare to the riches of Christ? If given the choice, what would we rather have?

What are these riches of which Paul speaks? They are the riches of salvation found in Christ, who is the storehouse of all these blessings. Think of that, dear friend. Christ does not merely walk with believers as He did with His disciples during His earthly ministry. Christ has sent forth His Spirit to dwell in them. Christ through His Spirit has taken up His dwelling place in the hearts of His saints. And that means that every blessing Christ has earned for us on the cross is ours, without exception. Believers have received the forgiveness of sins.

That by itself is a precious possession to the sin-weary saint who sees his need to be delivered from sin. But with that comes faith, that is, the knowledge that our sins have been forgiven us. We are confident that our sins are wiped away in the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ. We are righteous and holy in Christ. Ah, more riches! We are declared righteous before God, and Christ has cleansed our hearts. We have received the adoption of children. We belong to Jesus Christ and therefore to God Himself. We are His dear children. We bask in the love and the protection of a Father that has loved us from eternity. He is our God and we are His people. He will not leave us in this life when the going gets tough. He is there for us every step of our lives in leading us on to glory.

Then there is the wealth of heaven that awaits God's people. In this life we are given the hope of glory. Christ in us has worked a hope for the glory that awaits us in heaven, a land flowing with the milk and honey of God's blessings. We are given a strong desire and longing to enter into that glory, so that the riches of this present world mean nothing at all in comparison to the riches that await us at God's side—to bask in pure, unadulterated glory and perfection without the slightest smudge of sin—that will be happiness and joy unspeakable.

And that is what Paul was given to preach. In short, his task was to preach the gospel—the same good news we yet hear today in the church institute through the proper, faithful preaching of God's Word. The same riches thrill our hearts.

But Paul's calling included more than merely preaching the gospel. His calling was a ground breaker. He was doing something that was brand new. He was called to perform a task that at first, to the church, seemed radical and even wrong at some points. Paul had been placed by God on the cutting edge of the preaching of the gospel, so to speak. The rest of the apostles preached at first only to Jewish Christians. Paul was sent to carry this blessed gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ to a people who had never been a people. He had to preach the gospel of grace to those who had been utterly rejected by God in the Old Testament. Imagine being one of those Gentiles to whom Paul now imparted the gospel. Imagine the thrill, that God in His grace had now chosen them too to be a part of His church in this world.

We are talking about believers here, of course. The world of unbelief would not consider what was happening here to be exciting at all. But we who look back across the period of the

New Testament can truly be excited about what had begun with the apostle Paul. The gospel has spread throughout this world. What Paul started then has continued. The church became active in her mandate to spread the gospel to all peoples. And woe to that church today that does not see this as her calling. The gospel has been heralded since the beginning of the world. It has been prophesied and sung from the beginning of the ages. Paul was used by God to begin the spread of the gospel. What a privilege was his.

And Paul recognized that, too. Paul's task fulfilled what it was meant to do—to make all men see the fellowship of the mystery of the church. I want to make a point of that yet before finishing today. All men have come to see what the church is. The mystery in the Old Testament has been revealed. The mystery of the church is no longer a mystery. We live in the end of the ages and the mystery has been solved for centuries already. All nations of men have come to see the beautiful truth concerning Christ's church. God's saints are gathered from every nation of this world. It consists of people of every language. These saints have come to share in the riches of Christ.

But the church still today labors to make those who have not seen the beauty of the church to see it. The church institute still sends out men into this world to preach the gospel and to gather the church. In fact, the church still sends men to those who had the gospel in their generations and have lost it. The church is always giving witness to what Paul was first sent to do.

But there awaits a far better time. That time is in the future when our hope of glory is finally fulfilled. We will then be gathered together in heaven and we will see perfectly what has been hid in God from eternity—the church of the old dispensation and of the new, gathered together into one grand and glorious body in heaven, one beautiful church. Then the mystery of God will be fulfilled in all its perfection.

We thank God that the mystery is no longer a mystery to us. Now we look and strive for the final perfection of that church.

Let us pray together.

Our Father and our God in heaven, again we come into Thy presence, for Thou art the great and glorious God of heaven and earth and Thou hast sent forth Thy Son to be the head of the church, the church that Thou hast gathered from the many nations and languages of this world, and we are thankful that we can belong to that wonderful church. We pray that Thou wilt grant to us the grace to know that it is so necessary for us to join ourselves to that church in this world. Father, forgive us of our sins. We pray, go with us in this day. For Jesus' sake we ask these things, Amen.