
Studies in Ephesians – 2

Introduction

In last week's study we saw that the message of Ephesians concerns a mystery – a mystery that has been revealed. Paul refers to it seven times in the letter, beginning at Ephesians 1:9. This mystery concerns a new creation that God is bringing into being in Christ, “a plan for the fulness of time” (Ephesians 1:10). This plan involves the relationship between Christ and His church, and it is typified by the relationship between a husband and a wife (chapter 5:31, 32).

In this study we are going to examine this mystery as it is revealed in relation to Adam and Eve.

The mystery revealed

The revelation of the mystery begins in Ephesians 1:4. Here Paul says:

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Notice that this work of God began “before the foundation of the world”. This is not something that depends on any decision of mine or yours; it is an act of God before time. And its culmination is that we should be “holy and blameless before him”—that is, it reaches forward to a new age when all sin will be destroyed and all will be set right.

The phrases “in Him” or “in Christ” or “in whom” recur a total of 23 times throughout this letter. Everything that Paul writes in this letter refers exclusively to those who are “in Christ”. These phrases suggest that it is from Christ that all things emanate—and indeed Paul expressly states this elsewhere:

For by (literally, in) him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

—Colossians 1:16, 17

This statement is like a complete circle: All things are created in Christ, all things are created through Christ, and all things are created for (unto) Christ. He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the origin and the purpose of all things (Revelation 1:8, 17).

God's ultimate intention is “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). The same thing is expressed in Hebrews:

...but in these last days he has spoken to us by (literally, in) his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance (literally, the streaming forth) of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

—Hebrews 1:2, 3

Later the same writer refers to Christ as the One “for whom and by whom all things exist” (Hebrews 2:10). Paul speaks of Him in these terms: “For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Romans 11:36).

Christ is not only our Saviour; he is much more than that. He is our ultimate end, the One for whom we (and everything else) have been made. And God's plan does not only encompass our salvation; it involves bringing everything together into Christ. What Paul is talking about is nothing less than the reconstitution of all things.

Adam and Eve; Christ and the church

Referring back to chapter 1:4, in order for God to “choose us” in Christ, He must first have “seen us” in Christ. In the foreknowledge of God, He must have seen that Christ could and would bring us forth at some point in the future.

Let’s go back to the creation of Adam and Eve. First, God created matter, including “the dust of the ground”. Out of this dust He created Adam. Then He brought Eve forth out of the man’s side (Genesis 2:21, 22).

In the mind and intention of God, Eve already existed in the side of Adam, but only God saw her. She needed to be brought forth. God has an amazing way of seeing things that we do not see. For example, He looked at Abraham (who was childless) and called him “father of a multitude” (Genesis 17:5).

Abraham could easily have looked at himself and told God He was mistaken. But instead, Abraham chose to see with God’s eyes. It is this “seeing how God sees” that we ordinarily call *faith* (see Romans 4:16-21)

In the same way, God the Father foresaw that we could be brought forth out of Christ and formed into the new bride. And so He chose us. Obviously, in order to be a member of that bride, a person must be “in Christ”.

What we read next in the story of Adam and Eve is very interesting: “The rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made (literally, *built*) into a woman.” God took the raw material and built the bride for the man. It was not an instantaneous thing. In fact, with that word “build” in mind, we can almost imagine God shaping and fashioning the woman.

This is exactly the sense that we read in Ephesians 2:10. “We are his workmanship,” Paul says. The “we” indicates something that is corporate, not just individual. The word *poiēma* literally means something made, a product, or a piece of workmanship. Just as a piece of furniture is the workmanship of the carpenter, so the original Eve was God’s workmanship, built out of the raw material taken from Adam’s side. In the same way, the new bride is also fashioned by God and built.

Once Eve (her name was not Eve at that time) was fully formed, God wakened Adam and presented her to him (Genesis 2:22). Adam instantly recognized her as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v.23).

All these details are reminiscent of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Adam and Christ

Jesus is called the “last Adam” in 1 Corinthians 15:45, and “the second man” in v.47. In Hebrews 2 He is evidently the one who inherits the promises that Adam lost:

It has been testified somewhere, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honour, putting everything in subjection under his feet.” ...At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death.

—Hebrews 2:6-9

As we have seen several times in our previous studies, God’s original plan for mankind, which was so tragically subverted by satan, is brought back on track in Christ. The last Adam—the New Man—has succeeded where the first Adam failed.

Eve and the Church

In the beginning, God recognized that it was “not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). He therefore determined to make “a helper fit for (literally, answering to) him”. The helper was to be a complement, a mirror image, someone who would impart completeness.

Just as it was not good for Adam to be alone, it is not God's intention that Christ should remain alone (Romans 8:29). He is to be the "firstborn among many brothers," and we are invited as His brothers into that same family relationship. On the resurrection morning, Jesus said to Mary, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers..."

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

—Hebrews 2:11, 12

In Ephesians we are called "members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

Just as God brought forth Eve out of the side of the first man, so He has brought forth the church "out of the side" of the New Man on the Cross. It is not surprising that John records that blood and water, the elements of birth, came out of His side (John 19:34). See also 1 John 5:6.

But the church also has to be "built" (Matthew 16:18), just as Eve was built. It is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20). Elsewhere Paul says that Christ Himself is the foundation of the building (1 Corinthians 3:10, 11).

Building the church is one of the themes of Ephesians, and we shall return to it later.

The calling of the church

Eve was the *fulfilment* or *completion* of the man Adam (Genesis 2:18). In the same way, the church is the "fulness" (literally, *completion*) of the new man, Christ (Ephesians 1:23). This has everything to do with the *calling* of the church.

Paul refers to our calling several times.

- In 1:18 he prays that we might know "what is the hope of his calling"—that is, the hope to which He has called us. What is this hope? That we should be "his body, the fulness (or *fulfilment*) of him" (Ephesians 1:23).

There is evidently a sense in which Christ, *in His manhood*, is incomplete without the church. Note that we are not suggesting that God Himself is incomplete; He is the truly self-sufficient One.

- We are "his glorious inheritance" (1:18). Note that Paul does not say that *He* is *our* glorious inheritance, though that is true. *We* are *His* inheritance.
- In chapter 4:4 he says that we have been called unto "one hope that belongs to [our] call". What is this hope? In chapter 5:27 he says that Christ will "present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." *This* is our ultimate destiny.

The Bible ends with the picture of the Lamb and His bride. See how she is described:

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready...And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."...And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

—Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 3, 10, 11

It is for this reason that we are to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called" (4:1).

As always in Paul's writings, his pleas for holiness of life are *not based upon a law* but upon the work that God has already done in and for us. Notice, for example, in Romans:

Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

—Romans 6:1, 2

He does *not* say, “You mustn’t because it’s wrong.” Instead, he says, “You mustn’t because it would be a contradiction of who you are.”

Again, in Colossians:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

—Colossians 3:1, 2

The new creation

The things that we have seen so far are revolutionary when viewed through the eyes of a first-century Jew—that is, a person reading this letter in Ephesus. So often, familiarity with New Testament ideas robs us of an appreciation for their revolutionary nature.

All the hopes of a first-century Jew revolved around the liberation of Israel from foreign domination. His idea of the “kingdom of God” centred upon a renewal of God’s covenant with Israel. He expected God to break the domination of foreign powers in Israel. Some even believed that He would set up a new kingdom over the whole earth, with Israel reigning supreme in His name.

What Paul describes, however, is completely different. It is a *new* covenant, and it is made not only with Israel but also with Gentiles. And instead of national restoration, he speaks of a universal renewal that has *already begun* with the resurrection of Christ from the dead. This renewal will (and does) extend beyond the borders of Israel, and will encompass both Jews and Gentiles. Furthermore, it reaches out far beyond them to encompass the whole heaven and earth. He describes God’s plan to redeem the whole of creation, to save it from bondage to corruption (Romans 8:19-25), and to overthrow the powers of evil that have spoiled the present creation.

The purpose of God

For Paul, the church is a vital part of the overarching plan and purpose of God. Because this letter has so much to say about the church, it makes many references to God’s purpose. Read through it and notice, for example:

- God’s ultimate purpose expressed in His actions on behalf of those who are in the church – 1:4-12
- His purpose in the coming ages, to display His grace through the church – 2:4-7
- His purpose in having the gospel made known to the whole world – 3:8-12
- The church’s *calling*, and the way it should affect behaviour – 4:1
- The ultimate purpose for the church: union with Christ – 5:25-32
- The consequent warfare with, and overthrow of, evil powers in the heavenlies – 6:12-20

The church of Christ here and now is the beginning of the new thing that God has created (ch.2:15). (The word “created” is used also in 2:10 and 4:24.) In a sense Christ Himself also is new. Although He is the eternal Son of God, yet in His *manhood* He is the firstborn of a new race that will inherit the promises that Adam lost. He bears that manhood still in heaven (see 2 Timothy 2:5).