

The Church Manifests God's Manifold Wisdom

(Ephesians 3:10-11)

Introduction:

1. This wonderful Scripture expresses a thought that staggers the mind's ability to comprehend and appreciate. This Scripture states that the angels in heaven learn the manifold wisdom of God through seeing what God has accomplished in the church.
2. Many have a low view of the Lord's church, seeing it as some kind of spiritual appendage for the religious zealot, but of little value to the common man who wants to be saved by Christ without ever being a member of his church.
3. Let us consider the things stated in this text about the Lord's church.

Body:

I. A Study of the Text.

A. *Paul previously expressed his deep feeling of indebtedness to divine grace that:*

1. God had given to him and the other apostles and prophets the blessed privilege of revealing his previously concealed mystery, namely that the Gentiles could be fellow-heirs of the promises of Christ through the gospel.
2. He was blessed with the grace of preaching to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, bringing to light to all men that mystery which God had kept secret since the world began. At the end of the ages, God revealed his mystery.

B. *The "principalities and powers in heavenly places" are the various orders of angels in heaven* (Eph. 1:21). The angels see what God accomplished in the church and see through the church the manifold wisdom of God (1 Pet. 1:12).

1. The point is not that the church preaches the manifold wisdom of God when it preaches the gospel, although this is a true statement; rather, the church manifests the wisdom of God in the same manner as a beautiful painting manifests the skills of a painter, a bridge displays the skills of an architect, and a beautiful song displays the skills of its lyrist and musicians. When the angels see what God has accomplished in the church, they see the manifold wisdom of God that was concealed throughout the ages during which his divine plan was coming to fruition.
2. Henry Alford quoted Stier as saying that to the angels, the church is "the fact of the great spiritual body, constituted in Christ, which they contemplate, and which is to them the *theatron tes doxas tou Theou*" (theater of the glory of God, mw) (*The Greek Testament: Ephesians* III:106).

3. H.A.W. Meyer said, "To the angels, in accordance with their ministering interest in the work of redemption (Matt. xviii.10; Luke xv.7, 10; 1 Cor. xi.10; Heb. i.14; 1 Pet. i.12), the church of the redeemed is therefore, as it were, the mirror, by means of which the wisdom of God exhibits itself to them" (*Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians* 416).
4. That the angels witness what occurs on earth is confirmed in other Scriptures (1 Pet. 1:12; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 12:22). This passages says that their own knowledge of God's divine wisdom is enhanced by what they see in the church.

II. Things That Angels Saw About The Church.

A. *They saw how God saves men.*

1. How could God save sinful men without losing his divine justice? The angels witnessed a truly remarkable scene when they saw God the Son leave heaven and take upon himself a physical body in the incarnation. They witnessed his sinless life, despite the most assiduous assaults of Satan (Heb. 4:15).
2. At the end of his life, this sinless man was crucified on the cross of Calvary, shedding his blood in atonement for sin. The just debt of sin was paid by the blood of God the Son.
3. W.A. Criswell observed, "At the same time He pays the penalty for our sin thus upholding the righteous judgments of God and yet showing mercy, dying in love for our fallen souls. How the angels, looking upon that, must have been astonished! What we lost in Eden in the sin of the first Adam, we have gained and more besides in the second Adam, Christ. . . . Satan is stung by his own venom. Goliath is slain by his own sword. Death is destroyed by its own captive. As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. As by one man, Adam, sin came into this world, and death by sin, so by one man, the God-man Christ Jesus, is sin destroyed, and life and immortality brought to life" (*Ephesians: An Exposition* 120).

B. *They saw what God can do with sin defiled men.*

1. Every one of us was marred by sin (Rom. 3:23) and worthy of eternal damnation (Rom. 6:23). If one asked any member of the church, he would confess that his sinful conduct made him unworthy of eternal life or unfit to be used in God's service.
2. H.C.G. Moule commented on what the angels see in us: "They see in us indeed all our weakness, and all our sin. But they see a nature which, wrecked by itself, was yet made in the image of their God and ours. And they see this God at work upon that wreck to produce results not only wonderful in themselves but doubly wonderful because of the conditions" (*Ephesian Studies* 118).
3. Think of what change was wrought in sinful men.
 - a. Angels saw fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards and revilers changed into saints (1 Cor. 6:9-11).
 - b. They saw the "chiefest of sinners" turned into an apostle (1 Tim. 1:13-16).

C. *They saw Jew and Gentile reconciled to God in one body.*

1. Paul had declared that God “might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph. 2:16).
2. S.D.F. Salmond observed, “The *Church*, therefore, that is, as is evidently meant here, the whole body of believers in the unity in which Jew and Gentile are now made one, is the *means* by which the Divine wisdom is to be made known and Paul’s commission in that respect made good” (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Ephesians* 309).
3. The wall of alienation that had separated Jew and Gentile was broken down so that God could redeem all men in one church.

D. *They saw the manifold wisdom of God in other facets of the church. S.T. Bloomfield observes that God’s manifold wisdom being made known through the church includes “the founding, propagating, and governing of the Church” (The Greek Testament II:271).*

1. The *founding* of the church is an event worthy of a complete study.
 - a. The Old Testament prophets foretold:
 - (1) When the church would be established (Dan. 2:44, in the days of the fourth world kingdom [the Roman]).
 - (2) Where it would be established (Isa. 2:1-4, Jerusalem).
 - (3) By whom it would be established (the Messiah).
 - b. When the gospel of Mark opens, it announces that the “time is fulfilled and the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mark 1:16-17).
 - c. Jesus announced that the kingdom is the church (Matt. 16:18-19) and that it would be established within the lifetime of those who heard him speak (Mark 9:1).
 - (1) The kingdom would come with power, which power would come when the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8).
 - (2) All of these things occurred on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ.
 - (a) The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they spoke with new tongues (“as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance”).
 - (b) A sound like the rushing of a mighty wind drew together a massive crowd (Acts 2:1-4).
 - (c) Peter preached that these events were the fulfillment of divine prophecy (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21) and proceeded to tell the audience how they could be saved by “calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 2:21).
 - (d) Three thousand responded to the gospel that day and were added to the church (Acts 2:47).
 - (3) The angels in heaven, like mortal men on earth, must have been amazed at the manifold wisdom of God when the church was established.
2. The *propagating* of the faith was also a display of the manifold wisdom of God.
 - a. Jesus chose twelve men to take the gospel into all of the world. These men were without the formal training that rabbis generally received (Acts 4:13). Yet, Christ sent them into all the world to preach the gospel, working with them through signs and wonders (Mark

16:15-20).

- b. The number of the disciples began with 3000 on Pentecost, grew to 5000 in a short time (Acts 4:4), and was soon so large it was described as “multitudes” (Acts 5:14).
 - c. A persecution broke out against the disciples at the death of Stephen that drove out of Jerusalem all of the disciples except the apostles (Acts 8:4).
 - d. In the providence of God, this persecution contributed to the spread of the gospel throughout the world, for they “went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).
 - e. The angels in heaven, like mortal men on earth, must have been amazed at the manifold wisdom of God when they saw how the gospel was spread to all nations of the world within one short lifetime.
3. The *governing* of the church was also a display of the manifold wisdom of God.
- a. Each local church was organized independently of all others (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).
 - b. Local churches were overseen by a plurality of elders (Phil. 1:1) whose qualifications were revealed by the Holy Spirit (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9).
 - c. Special servants of the church, known as deacons, were appointed to do special works (Acts 6:1-7; Phil. 1:1) and their qualifications were also revealed by God (1 Tim. 3:8-13).
 - d. The simplicity of the divine government of the church prevented wholesale apostasy. The apostasy of one local church does not destroy other local churches by necessity, as would be the case if there were inter-congregational government.
 - e. The angels in heaven, like mortal men on earth, must have been amazed at the manifold wisdom of God in how he governed the local churches.
4. I suggest that the manifold wisdom of God is also seen in others aspects of the church including:
- a. Its worship.
 - b. Its moral purity.
 - c. Its universality.
 - d. Its consummation.
 - e. Like a diamond that is turned in the light so that each facet can glisten, the various things about the church reflect the multi-faceted wisdom of God. If the angels praise divine wisdom and glorify him when they see the church, how much more such mortal man!

Conclusion:

- A. How sad is the circumstance that some gospel preachers have reached the conclusion that preaching the church is somehow “preaching ourselves” and that emphasizing the identifying marks of the divinely revealed church is preaching “sectarianism” and somehow denigrating to Christ! Paul said that when the angels behold what God has done through the church they see the manifold wisdom of God, but some among us say that preaching what God has done in the church somehow detracts from the glory of God. How can one explain this significant difference of opinion about the church?
- B. When men outgrow preaching about the divinely revealed church, they have moved away from preaching the whole counsel of God simply because the church is a part of the divine purpose in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:11).

- C. May we ever appreciate the importance of the church which was planned in the mind of God as a part of his eternal purpose, built by the Lord Jesus Christ, established on Pentecost, and will be delivered up to the Father at the Lord Jesus' second coming (1 Cor. 15:24). It is a glorious church, having been sanctified and cleansed by the washing of water by the word so that it might be without a spot or wrinkle, but that it might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27). Who can refrain from telling others about what God has done in and for his church, which is "the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23).

- Outline by: *Mike Willis*