

Ephesians

Ephesians 1:9-10 - The Great Secret

In **verses 7 and 8** Paul tells us how the blood of Christ released us from our helpless slavery to the cruel grip of evil, so we could recover what we lost to evil in the Garden of Eden. Up to the time of Christ's death, therefore, we were stuck in a locked cage with no escape possible, but with his death the door to the cage was flung open.

Great, so we're out of the cage, but now what? What happens next? We're free, but for what purpose? Well, this is where **verses 9 and 10** come in, because they tell us why God freed us. It's like the Israelites being freed from their slavery in Egypt, and God then leading them to Mount Sinai to tell them **why he'd freed them too** - which in their case was to become his kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6).

His purpose for freeing **us**, though, is something quite different. In Paul's words in **Ephesians 1:9**, it's God "making known to us **the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ."

So God freed us **to tell us a secret**. We've been taken behind the curtain to see what he's up to. And it's not like we're peeking through a keyhole either. God chose us and adopted us as his children to "**make known** to us the mystery of his will" (verse 9). In Greek "make known" is **gnorisas** (g-nor-reezus) from the verb **gnorizo** meaning "having a thorough knowledge of" - like Jesus telling his disciples in **John 15:15**, "**everything** I have learned from my Father I have **made known** (same Greek root) to you."

So God chose us and made us his children to answer the biggest question of all, "**What is the purpose of everything we see?**" We find ourselves in a vast universe, and we're still struggling to come to grips with HOW it came to be - if, for instance, it truly was a big bang that started it all. But who knows the answer to **WHY** it came to be? **Why** would something suddenly appear from nothing? And why something with such vast explosive power that it would create trillions of stars and planets of infinite variety? Surely there's an explainable reason for this mystery happening, but what is it?

You'd think the brightest minds on the planet would want to know the answer to that, but struggle as they may they can't fathom it out.

According to one such bright mind, and I quote: "Why are we here upon this puny mud heap, spinning in infinite space? **I have not the slightest idea**, and I am quite convinced that no one else has the least idea." And a newly appointed president of Cambridge University in his opening lecture stated categorically, "There is **no secret and no plan** in history to be discovered."

But it's understandable why they would think that way, when what they see is an endless stream through history of the same purposeless repetition of suffering, and even what joys we experience being snuffed out in death. It all seems so pointless. Shakespeare thought so too, when he summarized our existence as "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

It's no surprise, then, that even in the best institutions of learning there is no exciting or fulfilling answer to why we find ourselves with these marvellous minds of ours, and what this universe is for. It's a mystery. But Paul is saying it **isn't a mystery**, not to those God chooses and adopts, because out of sheer joy and love for his children (verses 4-5) he's making it known what the purpose of this universe is, and how **everything** that happened in the past, that's happening right now, and is yet to happen, fits in with that purpose. It's like God saying to us, "Let me tell you a secret, and the best secret of all...."

And it is very much **God's secret**. He kept it under wraps on purpose so it would become obvious to those who understood it that he'd chosen them. Because what we understand could only come by God's direct revelation. That's made clear in the Greek word *musterion* (moo-se-tare-ri-on) for "mystery." Paul chose a fairly risky word here, because the Greek world was full of mystery religions containing secrets that only the initiated would know. But it got the point across that **God has mysteries too**, that can only be understood by those he reveals them to.

So what is this mystery God is revealing to his initiated ones - those he's chosen and adopted? According to Paul it's the "**mystery of his will according to his good pleasure**" (verse 9). But note how Paul attaches God's "will" to "good pleasure." That's different. Normally God's will, as we understand "your will be done" in the Lord's Prayer, means his intentions and all his plans, decrees and promises will be done. But, when relaying God's secret to his children and taking us behind the curtain, Paul adds a different meaning, that God's will is also his good pleasure. What God wills, in other words, is what he loves doing. As The Message phrases it, he loves "letting us in on the plans **he took such delight in making**." This is God's heart's desire. It's more than just his intention; this is what he dreamt up for us before the foundation of the world, and now takes huge pleasure in revealing to us.

But he kept it secret until Christ redeemed us through his blood. That had to happen first (verse 7), but once that was done, it was time for the **Great Secret** as to **what else** had been “purposed in Christ,” **verse 9**. And that takes us to **verse 10**, where Paul opens the safe, so to speak, lifts out the document marked “Top Secret,” and he opens the folder and begins to read, and this is what it says (translated for us in good old King James English): “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”

To break that down a bit, the word for “**dispensation**” in Greek is *oikonomia* (oy-co-no-mee-ah), from oikos (oy-ee-kos) meaning “household,” and nemein (ner-me-in) meaning “management.” It’s about managing a typical home with good stewardship of time and resources. Paul uses the same word in Ephesians 3:2 to describe the “dispensation” - proper stewardship and management - of God’s revelations to him. So in Paul opening up the mystery of God’s will, we’ve got this revealing picture of **God as a household manager** overseeing everything - which, of course, is what he’s been doing all through the ages, making sure that everything he planned for our planet home “before the foundation of the world” (1:4) works out just as he envisioned.

But Paul now ties this in with God’s management “**of the fullness of times.**” The Greek word for “times” here is *kairon* (ky-ron), meaning a time when conditions are right and everything’s ready to go, as in **Galatians 4:4** “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.” So in God’s plan a decisive moment arrives. All the pieces of the jigsaw have been put together - as in Christ’s birth; all the prophecies about it had been written, every detail had been worked out over thousands of years, so the time finally came when there was nothing left to do but kick the prophecies into action.

The same applies to the “fullness of times,” when the staggering number of things God put in place in this age now “will have reached their fulfillment,” **verse 10** (NIV). And that’s the time when the next part of God’s plan, that everything **before** this time was leading up to, kicks in. Another translation phrases this rather nicely, that “when the time is right, God will do all he has planned.” In other words, the great moment arrives when there’s nothing left to do but **launch into what all this has been looking forward to.**

So what exactly **has it** all been looking forward to? Well, the next phrase in **verse 10** in the King James says, “**he might gather together in one.**” In Greek it’s *anakephalaiōsasthai* (anna-keffallayo-zass-thigh), meaning going back over what this entire creation was for and what it was like in the beginning, and gathering it all back to its original state of perfect oneness and harmony.

And as the King James says next, it really is “**all things**” too. Everything will be restored back to the way it was meant to be in the beginning. Or as **Acts 3:21** phrases it, the time is coming when “everything is **restored to order again** just the way God, through the preaching of his holy prophets of old, said it would be.” So, first of all in Ephesians, Paul reveals that we ourselves are being restored (1:7), but now in **verse 10**, he pulls the curtain even further back to reveal it’s the entire universe, heaven and earth, that’s going to be restored as well. And both restorations are being done “**in Christ.**”

But why in Christ? Because, **Colossians 1:16**, “all things were created by him and for him.” So, since Christ created the heavens and the earth in the first place, he can **RE-create them** too. And that’s something he’d obviously love to do, because this entire creation was **his Father’s gift to him**. Which is why Paul wrote that “all things were created **FOR** him.” In other words, the Father designed it all with his Son in mind. The Father made the blueprint, so his Son could then have the immense pleasure of bringing it to life and making it happen, like a builder taking an architect’s paper blueprint and transforming it into a beautiful three dimensional structure.

Having redeemed us through his blood, then, Jesus can now look forward to redeeming everything else. The great day will arrive (Acts 17:31) when he can gather everything up - our entire history and all the damage done to our bodies and minds, and everything else rotten that’s happened on our planet - and, at last, he can create a clean slate and show us instead what his Father had in mind for us **had we eaten off the Tree of Life instead.**

But does the Father give us a little **taste** of the Tree of Life now? Yes, he certainly does, according to author of Hebrews, who writes of those who “have tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the coming age,” **Hebrews 6:4-5**. That last bit is quite something, that we can experience the power of the coming age **now**. Paul wrote of it too, in **Ephesians 1:3**, that “the Father has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing.” He’s **already** blessing us, therefore, with a taste of the power of heaven.

So that too is part of the Great Secret, that it’s God’s pleasure and will to have us eating off the Tree of Life now. He isn’t transforming the heavens and earth yet, but he is transforming us, as proof that the Great Secret is already being opened up and put into operation in this age now.

We could do with that proof too, because it gives us reason to carry on in a chaotic world, knowing that it won’t be like this forever, and nor will our bodies. And all thanks to what our Father has done in Christ.