

authorities” encompasses all intelligent beings in the universe.¹ The idea that the ultimate success of the *ekklesia*, as promised by Yeshua Himself (Matt 16:18), is the very means by which the wisdom and glory of God is made known to the entire universe, parallels what Peter writes in his first epistle.

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Messiah within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Messiah and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look. (1Pet 1:10–12)

We see, then, that God’s plan to hide the manner in which the promise would come to fruition and to unveil what was hidden through the apostles and prophets following the victory of Yeshua’s death, resurrection and ascension, had universal dimensions. Even the powers in the heavenly places would only discover God’s unfolding plan as they observe the building of the *ekklesia* and its life and success in this world.

11–12 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Messiah Yeshua our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Paul goes on to emphasize that the hiddenness of God’s plan to unite Jew and Gentile believers into one body, the *ekklesia*, was part of His eternal purpose and plan. It was not something “unforeseen” and so required a “change in plans” as often is the case in human endeavors. In human experience, hindsight is very often far more accurate than trying to look ahead and judge all future possibilities. Not so with the Almighty. His plan for blessing people from every nation and family on the earth was fully determined and set into place from all eternity. Indeed, as Paul writes here, the divine prerogative to keep the “mystery” of Jew and Gentile together as one in the body of Messiah was in full accordance with God’s eternal plan, where the Greek *κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων* is more literally translated as “in accordance with the purpose of the ages.” The Greek *αἰώνων* from *αἰών* (*aiōn*), “age,” especially when

¹ See F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, p. 321.

used in the plural as in our verse, can denote “eternity” and clearly does here. Paul’s clear statement is that from eternity past, God’s plan of redemption was determined and this included the fact that the “mystery,” remained hidden until it was divinely revealed to Paul and his fellow apostles.

That fact that God determined His plan of redemption from all eternity accords with Paul’s emphasis in the opening verses of this epistle.

... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:4–6)

Note also 2Tim 1:9.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Messiah Yeshua from all eternity, (2Tim 1:8–9)

...which He carried out in Messiah Yeshua our Lord – The predetermined and preordained divine plan to procure redemption for all who would be saved, is carried out by Messiah Yeshua in His incarnation, death, resurrection, and heavenly priestly intercession. As Peter proclaimed while at the Jerusalem Temple:

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

And Peter’s words are based upon what Yeshua Himself made clear:

Yeshua said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (Jn 14:6)

Note as well that here Paul uses the full title of Messiah: Yeshua Messiah our Lord. The other places in Ephesians where all three names occur, the title “Lord” is always put first, as “our Lord Yeshua Messiah” or “Lord Yeshua Messiah” (1:3, 17; 5:20; 6:24). In our verse, however, “our

Lord” is put in the final position and has the definite article. Likewise, the word “Messiah” has the definite article as well (τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν). It appears quite likely that Paul wanted his readers to know that “the Messiah is Yeshua *who is our Lord.*” The emphasis is thus that Yeshua is the one and only fulfillment of the messianic prophecies given by Israel’s prophets, and that He is “Lord,” *kurios*. The fact that *kurios* is the word most often used in the Lxx to translate יהוה and that Paul includes it here as the title for Yeshua would indicate that Paul affirmed Yeshua to be יהוה *in the flesh.*”

The point is simply this: the plan of God, from all eternity, was to procure eternal redemption for sinners through a sacrifice of infinite value, which could only have been offered by His Son, Yeshua as the promised incarnate Messiah, Who being God could alone pay the infinite price of redemption to match the infinite value of the Father’s holiness. If Yeshua is not God in the flesh, then His death could have never offered sufficient payment for sin, for the payment must match the infinite value of God’s holiness. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Rom 3:23).

in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.
– Paul’s language here, utilizing the first person “we,” as well as the Greek word προσαγωγή (*prosaōgē*), “access,” is reminiscent of his words in 2:18, “for through Him (Yeshua) we both (Jew & Gentile) have our access (*prosaōgē*) in one Spirit to the Father.” Yet in this verse, his emphasis is that through the unity made between Jewish and Gentile believers, coming together as one in the body of Messiah, there exists a witness to the whole universe, including evil powers, of the inevitable success of God’s unalterable plan of redemption.

And this success is guaranteed to all who are truly born from above and have been adopted as children into the family of God (1:5; 2:19). It is because of our being “in Messiah” through the exercise of saving faith gifted to us by God’s grace (2:8), that we have “boldness and confident access” in Him.

The Greek word translated as “boldness” is *παρρησία* (*parrēsia*) which in the Greek empire could

refer to the freedom of speech granted to citizens of Athens in the public assembly. By Paul’s time it had acquired both philosophical and moral connotations, particularly where telling others the truth about life in a philosophical discourse

or speaking frankly in friendship were the issues.¹

In our text, the “boldness” to which Paul refers may be understood several ways. It could be understood as having confidence in our prayers to the Almighty, knowing that we will always be received by the Father and never rejected since we come to Him “in Messiah Yeshua,” i.e., through the finished work of Yeshua in procuring our redemption and through Him as our heavenly High Priest.

Likewise, the “boldness” of which Paul writes could be “boldness to proclaim and share the Gospel of Yeshua to unbelievers.” That this is a possible understanding of Paul’s emphasis here rests upon his use of *parrēsia* 6:19.

and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me
in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness
(*parrēsia*) the mystery of the gospel.... (Eph 6:19)

It would seem that in this verse Paul is emphasizing the assured access we have to God in prayer, combining “boldness and confidence” as describing the access which we have to the Father through the work and person of Yeshua. We come to Him knowing for sure we will be received (thus, boldly) and with full confidence that in coming to God in prayer, we are doing what He has commanded and what He desires. Thus, our access to God is characterized as having “bold confidence” that in Yeshua we have constant access to our Father Who is the Almighty One.

And this confidence likewise incorporates the second suggestion regarding Paul’s emphasis here, for even as he petitioned his readers to pray on his behalf that he would have boldness in proclaiming the “mystery of the gospel,” so he knew that their prayers would be answered, for they would themselves have “bold and confident access” to the Father through the work of Yeshua.

The last phrase of v. 12, “*through faith in Him,*” has been variously understood. This is because the Greek *διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ* could be understood two ways: (1) “through the faith of Him,” meaning “through the faithfulness of Yeshua,” or (2) “through the faith in Yeshua,” through

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 219.

the believer exercising faith in Yeshua.¹ In recent times a good deal of discussion on this topic has been generated.² In our text, it seems that “faith in Messiah” has the greater weight of evidence, for in the immediate context (3:17) Paul writes “that Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith (διὰ τῆς πίστεως)” which clearly means the faith the believer has in Messiah. And this would seem to be the primary meaning of our text. Yet there is no reason to entirely discount the alternative, that we have access to the Father through the faithful, ongoing work of Yeshua in His intercession for us and His functioning as our heavenly high priest. Both, then, are important aspects of why and how we have boldness and confidence to enter into His presence in prayer and worship, for in doing so we are exercising faith in Him and thereby recognize and affirm that our Lord and Savior, our heavenly High Priest, is faithful in all He has promised, and that therefore it is by His faithfulness that we are saved eternally.

As Hendriksen writes:

Since, then, Christ Jesus is ours and we are his, bought with his blood, indwelt by his Spirit, we know that we have free and unrestricted access to the Father. We can and should approach him without restraint, telling him all our troubles, asking him to help us in all our needs. We know that he will welcome us most heartily. Particularly, we should ask him to enable us so to live that the fruits of his grace may be exhibited in us, and the wisdom of God reflected in us, so that the angels may see us as the mirror of God’s virtues. Such courage of confident access is possible only “through faith in him,” namely, in “Christ Jesus our Lord,” the very One “in whom” we were chosen from eternity. God’s eternal purpose which cannot fail and the redemption accomplished

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- 1 The grammatical issue is whether the genitive αὐτοῦ should be taken as an objective genitive or a subjective genitive. Is “He” (Yeshua) the “object” of faith or “subject” Who possesses faithfulness? The question results from the fact that the Greek word πίστις can carry both the sense of “faith” or “faithfulness.”
 - 2 For current writings seeking answers on Eph 3:12, see Paul Foster, “Πίστις Χριστοῦ Terminology in Philippians and Ephesians,” pp. 100–109 and Richard H. Bell, “Faith in Christ: Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections on Philippians 3:9 and Ephesians 12, pp. 120–125” both of which are in Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ; The Pistis Christou Debate* (Hendrickson Pub., 2009).

by Christ Jesus our Lord make such fearless access possible.¹

13 Therefore I ask *you* not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

The Greek of the opening line of this verse is a bit ambiguous, primarily because there is no direct object of the verb “I ask” (αἰτοῦμαι, *aitoumai*), so that a word-for-word rendering would be: “Therefore I ask not to lose heart...,” where the Greek word ἐγκακέω (*engakeō*) means “to become discouraged.” Some have understood this to mean that Paul is expressing his prayer to God that Paul himself not be afraid or discouraged because of his imprisonment and the suffering he is enduring. While such an interpretation of this phrase is possible, it seems to me to be unlikely for the simple reason that Paul, having begun in v. 1 to express his prayer and petition for his readers, does not resume describing his prayer until v. 14. Thus, to interject at this point a description of prayer on his own behalf seems out of place.

So it seems best to understand Paul’s words here as directed to those who would be reading his epistle. Why would Paul be concerned that they would “lose heart” or “become discouraged” over his tribulations on their behalf? If the imprisonment of Paul is that which is described in Acts 28, then he would have eventually been imprisoned there for five years. It seems quite possible that those who knew Paul personally, as well as those who only knew him by reading his epistles or by knowing those who had personal acquaintance with him, could have begun to wonder if God was really mindful of their situation. As those who were not adhering to the pagan religion of the Imperial cult and were therefore easy targets for persecution, they may have begun to question their faith in Yeshua and wonder if they had been led astray by His apostle who was now in prison without any sense that he would be delivered any time soon. As Thielman notes regarding Paul’s readers:

If they were being marginalized in their own cities and neighborhoods, then Paul’s fate may have seemed like a reflection of their own difficulties. During this period more than a few Christians in Ephesus must have wondered from time to time whether their commitment to the God of the gospel was a mistake. With their refusal to participate in the imperial cult or to sacrifice to the local deities, had they only succeeded

¹ Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 161.

in angering the gods who had placed Rome in power? Were Paul's troubles—and their own—a result of Christianity's demand for exclusive loyalty to the God of the Jews and his Messiah?¹

So Paul encourages his readers by expressing to them that his faith has not wavered nor been diminished, but that he counts his current tribulations (θλίψεις, *thlipsis*) on their behalf to be their glory. Here we are reminded again that Paul was imprisoned because of his association with the Gentile believers. But for this he was not discouraged nor in any way holding negative feelings toward his Gentile brothers and sisters in the Lord. On the contrary, in his imprisonment he reckoned himself as participating with the Gentile believers in their being marginalized and rejected by the traditional synagogue community, and thereby viewed his own tribulations as the very means of fully identifying with them. Rather than turning his back upon them in order to save himself from being persecuted, his troubles were the clear sign that he fully identified with them as fellow believers in Yeshua and as therefore brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Here we see Paul living out what he has been teaching in the previous context. He is not simply speaking the truth, he is living the truth of the “mystery” of the gospel. As Klein notes:

Here Paul equates his sufferings with his readers' glory, as though to say that sufferings go with the job description of apostleship. He literally rejoices in his ability to suffer for the sake of Christ's body, the church (Col 1:24). If people are to obtain glory, then apostles (and others) must get the message out, and this will invariably involve suffering. Paul adopts the same view of reality he expressed earlier: “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2Co 4:18). Suffering is temporary; glory lasts forever!²

1 Thielmann, *Ephesians*, p. 221.

2 Klein, *Ephesians*, p. 93.