

***Ephesians 1:7-10***

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Backing up a little bit to verse 7, I did not want you to miss a beautiful and extremely comforting truth. We have been redeemed (God purchased us with the blood of His Son), we have forgiveness (forgiveness defines our existence; in fact, we live in a perpetual state of forgiveness), but all of this is according to the riches of His grace. Now Grace is one of those words that get thrown around a lot but essentially it means that God gives us what we do not deserve and what we have not earned. It is literally a gift, a precious treasure given to us by God.

Therefore, our redemption and forgiveness are gifts and they comes according to the riches of His grace not from the riches of His grace. This distinction is critical. In other words, God pours out His grace on us and continues to pour out His grace and yet the magnitude of His grace is never diminished. He does not take grace from a limited pool and pass it around; rather, His grace is merely an expression of His nature; thus, it is not something that we will ever be without because His supply of grace is as eternal as His nature. This is why we can take comfort and assurance in both our redemption and forgiveness.

In addition, His grace is always sufficient for our needs; no matter how much we have messed up. He has not given us just enough grace to make it through;

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“for of His fullness we have received grace upon grace” (*John 1:16*). In the Greek the quantity of grace given to us is excessive and super-abounding—we have been lavished and doused with His grace; thus, we can be assured that we will never find ourselves outside of its covering.

Paul said that God has made known the mystery of His will according to His purpose, which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

As I stated before, the “will of God” is a big topic in this letter to the Ephesians and in this reference Paul calls it a mystery; a mystery in which Christ is the absolute center. I am going to deviate here for a second and give you an assignment that might be fun. I want you to search out all the different Biblical mysteries. A Biblical mystery is not something that cannot be discovered, but it means something that was previously hidden or not understood and which has now been unveiled or made known. I have created a list of the ones I found and I would like you to go and search out the scriptures.

The reason this is important is that according to *1 Corinthians 4:1* every one of us is a steward or overseer of the mysteries of God. And if that is the case we should know them, understand them, and be ready to communicate these mysteries to others. So here is the list of mysteries: His will; the administration of the ages; Christ and the church (illustrated in a the marriage between a husband and wife); the Gospel; Christ; the kingdom; among the Gentiles; the Jews being re-grafted into the vine; God’s wisdom; the rapture (we shall not all sleep); of lawlessness; of godliness; 7-stars and 7-lampstands; of God fulfilled by the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet; Babylon; and the woman who rides the beast. It’s your job to go find the

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scripture that is behind each of these and study the issues so you are well versed as a good steward of the mysteries of God.

Now back to our text, the specific mystery Paul is talking about is that according to God's good pleasure (in the Greek there is a specific reference, once again, to His pleasure) which He purposed in Himself (since there is none greater and He cannot purpose in any one else), that in the dispensation of the fullness of times (which just means at the proper time which He has appointed—when all things come to a close), He will sum up all things in Christ. And when He says all things He means it—everything in heaven and on earth in Christ.

It is interesting to note that the same root word which is used in **1 Corinthians 4:1**, when we are called “stewards,” is also used in **Ephesians 1:10**, which is translated “dispensation” or “plan.” It is where we get our word, “economy.” So in effect we are God's designated economists of the mysteries of His spiritual economy, which are tucked away in the Word of God and will be played out in this world and beyond.

This is one of the reasons that we should be students of the entire Bible and not just skip over things that are difficult. I am making a specific reference to prophecy regarding the end times—the time when all things are summed up in Christ. We should know and be a good economist of what is going to take place in the future of God's economy. We should be able to interpret for others all those mysteries which are spoken in various images, colors, numbers, and names and which are flavored with all manner of historical and very specific cultural context.

I know that many of us have avoided these fascinating parts of scripture because they are confusing and there are so many opinions, by well learned

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people, on what they mean. But let me tell you this one thing; the clues for understanding Biblical prophecy are not found in a specific school of thought or system of theology; but if you are a careful student, you will find that the Bible actually interprets itself. You just have to study hard in order to learn the code of colors, symbols, numbers, and names, as well as become very familiar with the historical and cultural context in which things were spoken. As pretty much all of prophecy speaks in the language of the people of that day in which it was spoken.

But it is all in there. For example, if you really want to start to understand the book of Revelation (which, as good economists, of the economy of God you should want to understand), you need to master your Old Testament, for pretty much all of the clues lie therein.

Now, being an overseer does not mean that you will become the absolute end all be all of Biblical prophecy, for there is so much that we cannot fully understand. God sometimes just gives us small pictures or details that really do not fit anything within our worldview and often our historical and cultural understanding is so limited. I have found that it takes a real stripping of much of what we have been taught from a western centric mindset before we have eyes to see—eyes which are not filtered by someone else's glasses.

In addition, God uses metaphors to describe metaphors, which can be problematic, but these pictures capture for us concepts and ideas and do not necessarily describe physical realities. For example, when we are told that there are streets of gold in heaven this is communicating to us a concept that the most valuable thing imaginable in our economy is worth nothing more than mere tar in heaven. In other words, our future is going to be so grand that nothing on this

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earth even compares. But since we are so finite and cannot fully understand spiritual realities, God speaks to us in pictures which give us just a taste of what things will be. Moreover, there are things that God chooses to keep secret and those belong to Him, but the revealed things do belong to us and our children forever (***Deuteronomy 29:29***), so we need to know them.

So let's think about this notion that all things are summed up, or gathered together, in Christ. This is a perfect example of what I was just talking about. We don't really know what that means in terms of tangible reality and we cannot describe it in detail; but it communicates to us that, as believers, we chose the right **One** with whom to align ourselves—we are on the winning side. You see there will be a time when the power and authority which God has granted to various angelic beings (including Satan), to man, and to various aspects of creation, will all be stripped away. All power, authority, and majesty will be given to the **One** and only Jesus Christ. The Old Testament clearly describes this truth.

***Isaiah 45:21-25***

And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. They will say of Me, 'Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory.

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And the New Testament describes it as follows:

***Romans 14:10-12***

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

***Philippians 2:8-11***

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus **EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So in a word, ***submission!*** The summing up of all things in Christ will involve the complete submission of everything to Jesus. No one will escape His rule, no one will thwart His purposes, no one will do anything that He has not directed; nevertheless, all will bow their knee and all will confess that He is Lord. This is so beautiful and as joint heirs of Jesus Christ we will actually share in this glory. This is part of our great inheritance. Yes, it is unfathomable.

***Ephesians 1:11-14***

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Wow that is a mouthful. We talked before about our having been predestined so we won't spend a lot of time on it except I want you to take comfort in how intentional and detailed God is in your life. As Jeremiah said: can anything happen without the Lord's permission (***Lamentations 3:37***)? His work is so precise (check out ***Hebrews 4:12-13*** to explore this a bit further) and it all follows His predetermined plan. So nothing in your life is random and nothing is arbitrary. He is in control and what He allows in your life is according to His wisdom for your life. He knows exactly what is needed in order for you to learn to live as His son and enjoy your inheritance.

Now, we have obtained an inheritance. This is in the past tense and sticking with the cultural metaphor we discussed last week it refers to the time we were publically presented and received our white toga along with the legal rights to all that our Father possesses. It is the time when we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior and He created within us a new nature that in His image is holy and righteous. It is the time when He placed the Holy Spirit of promise within this *New*

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*Creation* as a seal of all that will come when God's economy is summed up in Jesus Christ.

Now since we have obtained it; it is ours and cannot be taken away—God has given it to us as a gift and “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (**Romans 11:29**), which is why Jesus could say:

***John 10:27-29***

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Think about this concept. We are a beautiful gift or reward that is given by the Father to Jesus. And this is why our eternity is perfectly secure; no one is bigger than God. We are His gift and He secures us for His son with the Holy Spirit of promise. That is what it means when Paul says we are sealed in Him. The Spirit is a pledge of an unalterable destiny with Jesus.

This concept of a “seal” can be understood from a couple of *Old Testament* and *New Testament* passages, beginning in ***Esther 8***. In this story, the King's key advisor tricked him into passing a law that would single out the Jews for persecution. But when this treachery was discovered, the king passed another law granting the Jews the right to defend themselves and to lawfully kill anyone who tried to harm them. This law was then sealed with the king's signet ring which



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indicated that this decree cannot be revoked. It had the full backing, power, and authority of the throne.

Similarly, in **Daniel 6** the kings' advisors tricked him to pass a law which was intended for one purpose only, to persecute and kill Daniel, the prophet of God. When this law was passed, the king signed it and it could not be revoked. As a result Daniel was arrested, and according to the law was thrown in the lion's den. The king then put a stone over the entrance to the den and sealed it with His own signet ring so that no one could alter the sentence without losing their life.

When Jesus was entombed, the Jews asked Pilate to seal his tomb with a Roman seal to ensure that no one could mess with the tomb under threat of death. Complying with their request Pilate sealed the tomb and posted a guard to protect it (**Matthew 28:65**).

Still another use of a seal was to certify a transaction. If you purchased something you would mark it with your seal in order to claim it as your own in the event it got mixed in with goods belonging to another. We see a picture of this in the book of **Exodus**. On the night of Passover, the Jews were sealed with the blood of the lamb, which was placed on the mantel of each house, such that when the angel of death made his way through Egypt and saw this seal he passed by and left the inhabitants untouched; whereas the households without the seal were stricken by the plague of death which killed each first born.

In the book of Revelation we see a very similar event. Right before judgment is poured out on the earth, God sends an angel with His seal to mark certain Jews. The seal was then placed on the foreheads of 144,000 who were sealed from all the tribes of Israel. They were marked as His personal possession, redeemed from

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the earth, and set apart as holy unto the Lord. And that mark contained both the name of the Lamb of God and His Father's name (***Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1***). How cool is that; I want that written on my forehead for the angels to see.

This also reminds me of the parable of the wheat and the tares (which, by the way, each of the 7 parables, in ***Matthew 13***, speaks to the various mysteries of God—so there is a hint for your studies). In the parable of the wheat and tares we find that an enemy of the farmer sowed a type of weed amongst the wheat which as it grows looks very much like the wheat. This made it very difficult to tell one from the other. The farmer's servants asked if they should go and pull out the tares and the farmer said no; not wanting to risk damaging any of the wheat. He told them that in the day of gathering it will be easy to separate the wheat from the tares; for the wheat will have fruit clearly visible to all and the tares will be obviously worthless. So in essence the wheat, which symbolizes true believers, will bear the mark or seal of authenticity and it will be undeniably revealed when all things are summed up in Christ.

Do you know that the Father even sealed the son as belonging exclusively to Him so that Jesus would only do what the Father wanted Him to do, nothing more and nothing less (***John 6:27, 35-40***).

So a seal denotes ownership, authority, legitimacy, and power over that which has been sealed. Thus, the Holy Spirit's presence in our life, as He dwells in our *New Creation*, speaks to God's legitimate ownership of our lives (as the cost of redemption was fully paid), His authority, and the power that He has to operate in and through our lives.

Now you might be wondering why I am spending so much time on this notion of being sealed, marked, set apart as exclusively belonging to the Lord. I'm going to tell you. There have been many studies which have revealed that men and women have, for the most part, very different psychological profiles and that the primary needs of women are fundamentally different from the needs of men (I know that is a little obvious and probably did not need a study to prove it).

However, the most important aspect of love that a man needs in a relationship is to feel respected and honored by his woman. Respect is at the very core of a man being able to feel like a man; and if he does not feel respect in a relationship he often begins to shut down and close himself off to his woman, emotionally and physically, in order to protect himself.

Whereas for a woman, the aspect of love which she needs most is to be secure. She needs to know she is loved, she needs to feel secure in that love, and be absolutely convinced that her man cares for her and desires her above all others. And when she is convinced she is safe, she naturally gives herself to her man. Now unfortunately a woman is also very complex and her need to be secure spans across many areas: emotional, relational, physical, as well as the practical aspects of life; so it's a big job for a man to meet her needs in this manner. The Song of Songs gives us a good look at a woman's need to be secure in love.

Prior to their marriage, but during the time of engagement, Solomon calls out to his betrothed to assure her of his love and intentions for her.

***Song of Songs 2:10-13***

My beloved responded and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, And come along. 'For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 'The flowers have already appeared in the land; the time has arrived for pruning the vines, and the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. 'The fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along!'

He lets her know that their love is ready to be indulged. The time of engagement where love is grown and nurtured is at its end; now it is the time for the two of them to eat of the harvest of love. He invites her to arise and come with him. He is assuring her that he desires her and he is going to marry her; it will surely happen. His assurances warm her heart; but just temporarily.

***Song of Songs 2:16-17***

My beloved is mine, and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies. "Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether.

The comfort lasts only so long. She is not yet married and she has not been permanently established in the relationship. Therefore, in her heart grows a paranoia; she insists that when he is done with his work that he comes to her right away with the speed of a gazelle or young stag. She wants him to leap over

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the mountains of division which separated them during the day. So although she makes a bold statement of belonging (my beloved is mine and I am his), she is still paranoid and her insecurity plays itself out in her dreams later that night.

***Song of Songs 3:1-4***

"On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him. 'I must arise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves.' I sought him but did not find him. "The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, And I said, 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' "Scarcely had I left them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go until I had brought him to my mother's house, and into the room of her who conceived me."

"On my bed at night" is reference to a dream she had. Notice that she is totally paranoid and begins to freak out believing that she cannot find her lover. She is looking all over for him just so she can be reassured. When she finds him she grasps on to him, clings, to him, and does not want to let him go until she can find within herself that place of greatest comfort and security (which is the reference to her mother's house). For those of you who have listened to the Way of a Woman, this is a precursor of what will go wrong if her love is not secured. But sure enough, just like he promised, the wedding day arrives. He says to her:

***Song of Songs 5:1***

"I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk.

He has given her his love and has received her love. As a result, she is absolutely enthralled with her lover:

***Song of Songs 5:10-16***

"My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. "His head is like gold, pure gold; His locks are like clusters of dates and black as a raven. "His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, and reposed in their setting. "His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs; His lips are lilies dripping with liquid myrrh. "His hands are rods of gold set with beryl; His abdomen is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. "His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold; His appearance is like Lebanon choice as the cedars. "His mouth is full of sweetness. And he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

Notice that her man is not only her beloved but also her friend. She feels secure. It is obvious to me that for this woman to be this vulnerable and this lovesick that this man has not just secured her place in his arms but he has also been emotionally available to her and has been there to meet much more than

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just her sexual needs. This man is her friend; he has cared for, cherished, and adored his love. As a result, her heart has been made secure. She knows him as a friend, a lover, and a husband. That is why she just stares at him, admires him, and why he is wholly desirable to her. Understand, her attraction goes far beyond his physical attributes. I am sure he was a stud (I don't want to take anything away from the man); but because her heart is secure, to her he is the most gorgeous man she has ever seen.

Then she actually asks him to place her like a seal over his heart or like a seal on his arm. She now wants everyone to know that he belongs to her.

Obviously, as the bride of Christ, our biggest need is to know and be fully convinced that we are loved, safe, secure, and adored above all others. However, believing that we are loved is the one thing with which we all seem to battle. We are constantly seeking for God to once again validate and prove to us that He loves us. It's really kind of silly.

In addition, our need to be secure spans across many areas: emotional, relational, physical, as well as the practical aspects of life. And if we feel that any of these areas are at risk we freak out. Like this woman we scramble around wondering where God is and why He is not doing what we think He needs to do. We also tell him to drop everything and come to us; to leap over mountains of separation and get here right now. It is amazing how insecure we can be in His love.

But He has made us a commitment, a promise, and He will not break it. We belong to Him; He has redeemed us. We are set apart as His special possession. We have been sealed in order that we might know that we do not have to worry,

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we do not have to freak; therefore, we do not have to start running around the city (so to speak) like a crazy woman looking for assurance. We are His and He takes His ownership of our lives ever so serious.

That is why He has given us His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in effect our engagement ring. He is our pledge that during this time of waiting for the summation of all things in Christ, we can know His love and be fully assured in His love and take comfort in knowing that He is always with us and will never leave us. In addition, He will always provide for us and care for us. That is why He said:

***Matthew 10:29-31***

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

***Matthew 6:25-33***

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory



clothed himself like one of these. "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Jesus knows that we easily freak about so many things; therefore, He tells us over and over again that we are loved and we do not have to worry, for all our needs are met in His love (yes, even our emotional and relational needs). Besides, He will do everything that He has promised; the scriptures speak so clearly of His faithfulness to His loved ones. I don't care if it is about the pain you still feel in your heart due to wounds from the past or the worries about your future, He has everything in His loving hands. Our job is to rest in that love, to abide in His love, or as we talked about last week, to be willing to take the path to His tent and lie down, get a cool cup of water, and enjoy a good meal. It's all waiting for us.

The Holy Spirit of promise, who dwells in the midst of our *New Creation*, is our assurance and our guarantee that we are never more safe and secure than when we trust ourselves to the Father's love. Thus, being secured, we should be free to gaze at Jesus and adore Him, worship Him, love Him and most importantly give ourselves completely to Him without reservation. He is safe thus we are safe; and there is not a single part of our lives that cannot be completed in Him.

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Paul referred to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit of promise. I believe this was one of those mysteries in the *Old Testament*, disclosed by Jesus, yet not fully understood until the day of Pentecost. I thought about giving you a homework assignment to find the passages that promise the giving of the holy Spirit, but I decided to just give them to you to look up: **Joel 2:28; Proverbs 1:23; Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29;** and **John 14:15-21, 26; 16:5-15**. Now the mystery is that although God promised that He would “pour out His Spirit,” no one had any idea that He meant He would “pour Him out” to live inside of us in the *New Creation* that He would create inside of our bodies. This was a concept that we can see pictures of in the *Old Testament* (for example, in the Tabernacle), but again it was not something understood.

There is a lot more that we still need to do with this passage, and that will have to wait until next week, but I do want to point out that the Spirit was given as a pledge with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. What this means is that the Spirit was given to us to assure us, comfort us and establish us in this truth: when it is all said and done, Jesus wins; and since we belong to Him, since we are His own possession, we also win!

Being the bride of Christ is a marvelous thing and since He cares about us in every way (emotionally, physically, psychologically, and practically) and is always available for us, we are the luckiest woman that has ever lived. So take joy in this truth to the praise of His glory. Let His praises ring from your lips and worship Him, adore Him for He is the **One** and only who is able to love us in this manner. Believe me, no man or woman will ever be able to satisfy us the way Jesus can. In fact, this is such a monumental mountain of truth that we all must first and

foremost find our security, comfort, and assurance in His love so that we will be free from worry, free from insecurity, free from paranoia, and hence entirely free to love.

Let's Pray