

New Understanding

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[0 : 0 0] This morning we looked back at the passage, we read it together, but we read the last section of that passage, verses 11 to 14. We've looked at the introduction in our first week and then last week we looked at the section verses 3 to verse 10. So this morning, although we've read the whole passage because it's great to do so, we're looking particularly at verses 11 through to 14. Now I'm sure you're probably like me, I would imagine, at least in one way, and that is that you like new things. Would that be fair in saying that?

That you like new things. Nothing better than a new pair of shoes. Or even a new car. It's a bit less likely, but nonetheless we like new things. New things are good. Enjoy them. Sometimes new things give us a bit of a fear and an adrenaline rush in our lives as well. Maybe your first day at a new job is good, but a bit fearful as well, a bit afraid. Or your first date, very appropriate on Valentine's Day, is that maybe you're fearful as well as excited at this new experience, this new relationship that you're in. And that's an interesting reality about new things. Now I know that new things can become an idol to us and I know that we can be two consumerists in our lives and long for new things all the time, but let's not be too hard on ourselves at this point. I think we're hard-wired. We're genetically wired up to enjoy and to benefit from new things. I think it's part of the makeup that God has given us. Like everything else, it's broken and like everything else, it needs redeemed and we can make an idol of new things of course. But there's a real emphasis in the New Testament about the gospel being something new and that's a really appealing and positive thing within the gospel. So there's a redemptive element about newness and about wanting new things and that's good. We've begun the service with that fantastic verse from Lamentations 3, because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for His compassion never fail. They're new every morning. So there's that great element in which in the gospel in Christ we have a newness every day to consider and to think about and to look forward to. And in 2 Corinthians 4 Paul speaks about not losing heart. Though outwardly we're wasting away, though outwardly we're getting older, he says yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day. So there's a sense of spiritual renewal and newness that is absolutely right and good for us as Christians. And the terrifying thought is for our Christianity and our Christian faith to be stale and to be dull and for you to drag your feet spiritually into the house of worship or into the presence of God. For our Christian life to be uninspiring and unexciting and not challenging. The title of it or the theme or the name we've given to this series, which I haven't really mentioned so far, is new ambition. Kind of that focuses on the whole of what Ephesians is trying to do is giving us a new spiritual ambition, a new outlook. It speaks about newness, about making two new people out of the one, due and gentle. It speaks about the fact that we are a people who are renewed and new. And it has that sense and that feel about it. But I guess sometimes just like a new job or something like that where there's a bit of anxiety, sometimes we're a little bit afraid of newness spiritually. We do like routine and we do like what we know. And sometimes there's a fear of branching forward spiritually and getting closer to Christ because it takes us into a new place. And we're a little bit afraid of that because we like to be in control and we like things as we know them and as we're comfortable with them. And yet the gospel and Ephesians is absolutely encouraging us to constantly be developing a sense of new understanding of Jesus Christ, a new understanding of our Christian faith and where it leads us. So I want to look at four things briefly this morning from this passage, from these verses 11 to 14. And it can only be just a dipping of our toes into the passage and into the newness that hopefully by God's spirit we can see. The first is really a reminder of much of what we said last week is that through Ephesians we will by God's spirit get a new understanding of God. In verse five, which we looked at last week, talks about God predestining, predestined us for adoption as Son through Jesus Christ. And in verse 11 it says, in Him we have obtained an

inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. So we recognize and remember in this new understanding of God that believers, because Paul through the Spirit is writing here to the church, churches around and in and around Ephesus, that believers, and we take it for ourselves as believers, that believers are at the very center of His will and have been from before the foundation of the world. An astonishing fact that we consider when we think about God, that the very purpose of the universe revolves around His people, about His love for and His choice of and His desire to save a people to be adopted into

His family. A new understanding of God. Because very often what we do is we ask God, well where are you? Do you care a jot about my life? Have you any interest in my tiny little flea like life in this massive big world and universe? Are you interested in this sovereign, glorious, powerful God in my very small ordinary life? And in Christ, because we've seen that last week, didn't we, that everything is channeled in and through Jesus Christ here in Christ, remarkably, jaw-droppingly, we are at the center of the mind and the will of God. That all of His purpose for the universe, for the world, from before the creation of the world has been to redeem a people for Himself, to choose a people for Himself. A new understanding of God. That's the mystery that's revealed in the Gospel. And can I just encourage you, having looked at this, to go on and read Ephesians again. And I'm going to say that probably three or four times during this service. Go home and read Ephesians. Read it again, because when you've read the first bit and when we've studied the first bit as we've done for three weeks and at city groups, it's a great foundation for then reading the rest of Ephesians. It's like, oh yeah, I understand it better now. I see what God's trying to say through Paul and I see the repetitive nature of what He's saying and it's so fresh and so new. Go and read Ephesians. This new understanding of God reminds us, as Corrie was reminding us in his prayer, we all come with different experiences, highs and lows, faith, faithless, whatever it might be. But as believers we come today and we need to recognize that things are not as they seem. Whatever we may think is happening, God is revealing to us here that He, in the purpose and the sovereign purpose of His will, is in absolute and total and complete control and the way that the very centre of His purpose is and He's leading us forward to this great inheritance that we have in Him, in Christ. Things are not as they seem.

[8 : 37] The importance of recognizing that God knows what's going on. He's not surprised, He's not taken aback, He's not needing to second guess anything, that He knows and in Christ we are at the very core, the very centre of His purposes. That's highly significant.

It's highly significant in our understanding of God and think of the complaint, think of the grumble, think of the doubts that have been in your mind about God over this week as a believer, as a Christian. And then think how this revelation of His character and of His will changes that. It gives us a sense of purpose, of priority, of humility, of confidence.

So we go forward that our lives aren't just rambling around in a kind of meaningless, a random way that, well maybe God will pop in here and there and change things and find out to you now that God is a glorious, good and loving purpose for us in Christ that we live with His great future. So it's a new understanding of God. Of course, there's a million other things you could say there. Secondly, there's also a new understanding of the church. It's a great letter for explaining the significance and importance and the centrality of the church. Now in verse 14 of this section that we read, Paul speaks about, and him you would also heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who's the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it. Now I'm going to take umbrage with that particular translation.

If you look, there's a secondary translation that's given to us in very, very small writing at the bottom of your Bible, which says, until God redeems his possession. Okay. And that fits in more clearly with the emphasis and the passage and the word that we have here.

It's similar to Exodus 19, which, where the Old Testament people of God are called his treasured possession. And so we have a new understanding of the church that's beginning to be unpacked here. We're the possession of God. We are loved by him. We are protected by him. We are his people. Yeah. So often don't we? Don't we? So often don't I particularly as an officer of the church have a jaundiced negative, sometimes consumerist view of the local church and even of the universal church. I think it's a bunch of nutters. We think it's just everyone's failed. Why can't everyone see and understand the way I do about what church should be like? Why can't everyone

be great Christians like I am? And we criticize and condemn and we distance ourselves from the church and we find it easy to find fault with the church, whether local and usually the New Testament guidelines for the church are all about local churches, you know, about the outworking of the church as we are living in it. And you know, we are God's treasured precious possession. And this whole book is about the uniting of very unnatural elements together into the church. And that's what the church is made up of. And it speaks about unity and it speaks about the healing of brokenness and it speaks about coming together. That's the whole. There's so much, you know, we saw the central verse really for the whole letter as God's plan, the fullness of time to unite all things and him things in heaven and on earth. And we as the church are to reflect that unity, that purpose of God in the way that we act with and among one another. So we're the church, the treasured possession of God. And that means several things. It means we are to be united in Christ. You know, this many think that Paul was specifically writing to the Jews and the Gentiles to always, you know, come together in chapter two and verse 15. He says that, you know, for he himself as our peace, who has made both one and has broken down the flesh, the dividing wall of hostility and created one new person in place of the two, so making peace. And then later on, he speaks about being united in verse chapter four, verse three, keep the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. There's kind of, there's themes that go through the whole book. So we're united in Christ. A new understanding of the churches that were united in Jesus Christ. Here in this passage where we read, he says, we, the Jews in verse 11, you, the Gentiles in verse 13, and then share our inheritance.

[13:53] We're together sharing what God has purposed for us. So there's this uniting of different races and different cultures and different nationalities and different religions in many ways and through Jesus Christ. That was what made the New Testament church stand out so much. See how they love one another, Jews and Gentiles who would never, they wouldn't even, they wouldn't even walk in a pavement together. And here they are united worshiping God as part of the same family. It was a total miracle. So a new community, a kingdom community that the churches and they were united. So look around us today. Look around this local church and see the social and intellectual and relational barriers that there might be between us and break them down. Break them down because we're united in Christ despite our differences, despite our cultures, despite our backgrounds. That's the new understanding of the church that we are united in Christ. Peace and unity are big doctrines, big, heavy, strong, muscly doctrines. And we should think about them and recognize them as such. So united in Christ, united in purpose. He speaks here about the gospel in verse 13 and him also when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, which is previously explained as the lavish grace of God. Okay. So we're united in the gospel of sharing that lavish grace. I mean, I could say a lot more about the purpose that we have, but isn't that great? Just as a summary of what we are and what we do, that our lives as a church and as individuals within the church is to have God first and others next in the center of our hearts, to serve, to forgive, to encourage, to spoil, to provide, to help for others with lavish grace because that's what we've been shown. Isn't that good that you could go out this week and when someone really annoys you in the church or says something just in the way of church and you've really enjoyed the word that you've heard in the worship, someone says something that really niggles you, lavish grace. Don't just store it up for the next time that you're going to knock them down. Lavish grace, forgive them. How many times have we said things to God that needed His lavish grace and forgiveness? We've received these things and so in Christ as a church, we should be united in purpose, showing this lavish grace to God and to one another because we've received it from God so often, isn't it? So often we are going at different ways, different purposes, self-justifying, critical, miserly, relational beauty. May that be what we reflect in our purpose as a church. So as a church, we are a new understanding, we're united in Christ, we're united in purpose, we're also united in the Holy Spirit. It says that here in the verse we read that those who became Christians were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who's the guarantee of our inheritance. Every believer, every believer, sealed with the Holy Spirit, that mark of ownership that we belong, that we are, we believe and that we belong and that we have been given what we need. It's the divine down payment on what lies ahead. It's beginning to enjoy the kingdom privileges of relationship with Jesus Christ now through the Holy Spirit. It means there's more to come. Isn't that good? That there's more to come? Sometimes we just feel we're struggling a bit. There's more to come. It's the down

payment, it's the promise, the fact that we have the Spirit, that we want to worship, that we love Christ, that we're beginning to display His fruit and His grace in our lives. We know God's indwelling. We're God's family by adoption and by implanted divine genetic code. We have got the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity in our lives. We share a common counselor, helper, one who prays for us before the Father, one that we are responsible before, not to grieve, to quench, but rather to be filled with. We share that in Jesus Christ. So we're united and we have that great, Ephesians really speaks up the church. Not the institution as such, although it's kind of difficult to not link the institution and the body of whatever the local outworking of the church is, the family that you belong to. Saint Columbus, you know, for those of us who are here, those who are visiting, your home church. That is where you outwork grace, a lavish grace and the faith of God. And the church is not secondary. It's not unimportant. It's not just at the fag ends of our life. It's to be what is core and central in the outworking of who we are as Christians because we belong to Him and to His kingdom. So new understanding of the church, new understanding of God. Also, thirdly, a new understanding of evangelism. A new understanding of evangelism here. Verse five, it talks about being predestined. Verse 11, it talks about being predestined, but God's choice, God's election. And so you logically, sorry, I'm going to move back a bit. No, forward a bit. They reliably informed us here that the sun would not shine on this bit until after 12 o'clock. So either God's moved the sun or they got it wrong. But anyway, a new understanding of evangelism. Okay, so this passage speaks about God's choice, God's election. And so some people logically take that and say, well, if God chooses and if God is chosen before the foundation of the world, then there's nothing we can do. There's nothing for us to do. We'll just not bother evangelizing because well, God will choose and God will bring people in. So we'll just sit back in our fishing boat. We'll take our big cigar and we'll put our feet up and we'll put the boat out into the water and the fish will just jump in. In you come. All the elect fish.

In you come. We don't do anything. But we are never allowed to make that conclusion and take that logic from God's word. God doesn't allow us to do it. And we don't allow laziness to hide behind logic in order for us to do that either. We must let scripture speak because scripture always holds intention to truth. The truths of God's sovereignty and God's knowledge and God's greatness and God's power and God's glory and God not being surprised and our responsibility before him. And so what we have here is truth that reminds us of that in two ways. Firstly, God's sovereign will, God's choice, God's election is a motivation to evangelism. Isn't it? Isn't it? Because it's the only reason that evangelism that we do sharing the gospel will ever be successful because God must be involved and because it is God's will to save and because we can't change someone's heart. Good grief. Don't we know that? How hard it is to change out to try and we try and change your own hearts.

Self help doesn't work. That's why we fall on our knees and come to Christ for salvation. We can't change our own hearts. We've got no chance of changing anyone else's heart, have we? Of course not. So in our evangelism we share the gospel because we know only God can rise people from the dead. Only God can bring people to new life and can bring him to himself. So it drives us to God in passionate and heartfelt prayer for our best friends, for our wives, for our husbands who don't know Christ, for our family, for our children, begging, pleading, longing for them, that God will work in their hearts, that He will bring them to Himself. Not being the big shot, not thinking it's just, you know, formulaic.

If we say this, that and next and then the end the person says the sinner's prayer then hey presto, I've brought another person to Christ. The sovereignty of God drives us to depend on God for this great and wonderful work. But also the sovereignty of God in the teaching of Scripture helps us to understand our responsibility. See what it says here.

[23 : 28] In verse 15, in Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in Him. So there we have God's picture of it. There's this tremendous responsibility for any person who is going to become a Christian, not to sit back and say well I'll just wait and see if I'm chosen. Some people call us Presbyterians, the frozen chosen. It shouldn't be the case. It should be gospel centered, heart filled people. But notice here the responsibility is to hear the word and to believe it. That's what we're, you know, right in that passage which people want to throw out of the Bible because it talks about the choice and election and the sovereignty of God. It says this is how God works. He saves people and He brings them to Himself as they hear the word and they believe in it. And that's our responsibility.

Look at it from our point of view. We need to share that word. What is the word? It is Jesus. It's the good news. It's the gospel that there is a redeemer for every single person and people. We need to implore them to believe. That's what we do. And that's what you must do if you're not a Christian here. You must know about Jesus and what He claims and take it seriously and think about it and think about who He was. And the offer that He makes that He will forgive your sins and He will take the sting, remove the sting from your death and give you eternal life and Him and pleasant and pleasures at His right hand evermore. We could believe that. Nobody can stand back and wait for God as it were.

Our responsibility is to respond. That's God's way. That is the way God works. And we as those who are to evangelize by our lives need to share that word, don't we? How will they hear if no one speaks to them? We are to share that word. We are to share Christ with people and we are to present them with a choice. And we are to say, this is the way that there are two ways to go. Which way will you choose? That's our calling. The word revealed in Christ is so important and that's our task as Christians. I think we can, for various reasons, not deliberately, be neglected evangelism in some ways. Partly because we want to make it generic to our lives that it's part of what we do, not an extra, not an added extra, that it's part of who we are, that we are those who live and share the gospel. But you know, it's so, the challenge for us, isn't it, is to evangelize, is to not just believe and be comfortable in believing and say, well, I'm all right, Jack, but to genuinely understand the truth of who Jesus is and what He says and the needs that we have and share that and share it prayerfully and share it sensitively and share it naturally and share it as you, not as somebody else. You know, share it in your unique, ordinary way, the way that you've been redeemed and through your unique personality. We need to pray about that and we need to think about that and remind ourselves of the importance of the gospel. And lastly and very, very briefly, a new understanding of God and of the church and of evangelism through here, but also through this passage, we also have a new understanding of worship. And that's very important. We mentioned that last week. And we mentioned last week that when passages like this repeat things a lot, then that's significant. And throughout this passage, we have in Christ through Christ, in Christ, in Christ, in Christ, the importance of Christ, remember, like the hourglass that he's the centre, he's the core from which everything comes. But also there's a repeated phrase even in the section we read, verses 11 to 14. We have that truth where it says in verse 12, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. And then at the end of verse 14, it says, to the guarantee of our indents until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.

So at the very core of this section is a hopefully for us a new understanding of worship. That we are to live our lives. That everything we do is to be to the praise of His glory.

[28 : 11] That's the core of our understanding of what it is to be a Christian. We live not just for the hour here, but as we go from here for the rest of our lives to the praise of His glory. That everything we do, every decision we make, every conversation we have, every choice that we make in our lives is to the praise of His glory. Now that is, you know, it talked about the church in the New Testament that they turned the world upside down. Now why did they turn the world upside down? Because they had been turned upside down. Because that is a radical upside down way of thinking is to live for the praise of somebody else, not ourselves. See the whole of our sinful instinct is to just live for ourselves. We might not physically or outwardly worship ourselves, but that's really what we're doing.

It is self glory as I'm number one, as I'm the most important, a self focus. And so when we come to Jesus Christ, what we're doing is we're just turning that completely upside down and saying, well, God's our maker and God's our Lord and God's our sustainer. I am breathing today because God has allowed and gifted me that breath and He's sent His Son, His divine sovereign, all knowing God has sent Jesus to be nailed to a tree in Golgotha so that I can live. And it's upside down then to go and praise Him for that. The glory of God, it's really, it's, I don't know how to put it into words, because I don't really understand it fully in any sense. All I can think of is say something like, when you get to the top of a mountain and you see the glory and beauty of the creation around you, you just get the sense of awe. Or when you stand before your bride or groom at the altar of your marriage and you see what is there and there's that great sense of belonging and praise for that person or any kind of sense of achievement when you see your children or your friends that are so close and you have a great evening together. And there's all kinds of things that give us just that sense of something amazing. We'll take that and multiply it a million times. And even then it can

only begin to be a grain of sand in our knowledge of what it is to praise the glory of God because He is absolutely worthy of our glory. He is worthy because He holds everything and He gives it all up as it were on the cross in order to redeem us to Himself in all His perfection and His completeness and His beauty and His majesty and His perfect love and absolute justice, all of these things simply be on anything that can ever grasp. But we can begin to see it in Him, in Christ, through Him. That's where we see it. So if we want to understand more of the praise, more of what it means to praise the glory of God, we have to be channeling our lives and our prayers and our understanding of the gospel and of God through Jesus Christ. So we shake our fists at God and we say He's miserable and unfair. You must channel that through the cross and you must channel it through the one who, my verse for today was greater love is no man than this. He laid down his life for his friends, speaking about

God, that He could do no more. There was no other way that He could bring us into His family. He's not a magician. He didn't have a magic divine wand that could say, you're all Christians. The only way He could do it was to shed His own blood. The divine God becoming flesh, unbelievable, we can't really put it into words. The glory of God is that we see that, we recognize it and we want to begin to live for that glory. And that glory of God helps us to understand the purpose of our lives, is to worship Him. That's the purpose of our lives, to live in the light of His lavish grace, of His daily forgiveness, of His limitless patience for us, of His beautiful future inheritance that is ours in Christ that I haven't even begun to think about or talk about today. Live in that sense of God and that sense of who He is and what He's done for us and make Him known. Why don't we share God in our lives? Well, it's because we're afraid of what people will say, our own particular what people will think of us, maybe, fear of people. Maybe it's also because He's not that great. He's pretty small. He's not really that important. We've got much more important things to share than this God who we worship. But as we live and long for the glory of God, I do believe, interestingly, and in a sense, paradoxically, it's also the greatest form of evangelism. It's not less theology. And I mean that in the best understanding of theology that we put it into practice and we know it, we live it. It's more theology. The more we know, the more we imbibe the glory of God into our heart and see who He is, that we will find it difficult not to share His lavish grace with others. Because we'll say, I don't believe I've been forgiven again. I know my own heart and it's simply remarkable that He loves me still. And that lavish grace begins to change our heart and the way we are and gives us a new perspective on evangelism. It's the sharing of humble grace, lavish grace, a life of worship. Praise be to Him for who He is, to the praise of His glory. So that what we do here, what we do when we invite people to our homes, when we're ripping out pews next door in the church, doesn't seem very spiritual. We're doing it to the praise of His glory. God forbid we do it for any other reason. We want a better suit we're building for the praise of His glory. Invite people to have spaghetti, bowling knees in our house for the praise of His glory. We want to share His love. We live for the praise of His glory. We entertain for the praise of His glory. We are entertained for the praise of His glory. We do things because of who He is. And that is to be the worship of our lives beyond these walls and may it be that we have a new understanding by His Spirit of worship, evangelism of the church and of God. Let's bow our heads briefly and pray.

[35 : 50] Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to understand you better. Forgive us for having a miserly, small, shrunken idea of who you are. Forgive us for often living with you in the dot of our lives, the one who is accountable to us rather than the other way round. Forgive us for being quick, to receive your amazing forgiveness, to wallow in it, to speak amazingly about it in prayer, but to be really slow in sharing it with others.

To rejoice that God forgives us huge beams that stick out of our own eye, but that we feel the need to expose, to tell everyone else about the tiny little specs that are in other people's eyes. Forgive us just for being so sinful so often and not understanding.

And we pray by your Spirit you would give us a new understanding of God in Christ through Christ, of the church, of evangelism and of worship. And we pray it would help us into this week that we've entered to worship you together, to worship you as friends together, to worship you by our lives, by our decisions, by our thoughts. And we pray that you'd be near to those who find that really hard this week, those who are struggling with depression or grief. We remember Margaret's family today, her two sons particularly. We pray for them.

We ask that in the suddenness of their loss that they might think about life and might think about her own, Margaret's own faith and what it meant. And we pray for them and I say you'd be close to

them. And for others who are grieving, both here or throughout this broken and dark world that's so often. Lord help us to love you first and to love others next and serve because Christ served us. Help us to understand that more clearly and may it free us and redeem us. And may any who have heard that today and who are holding back from believing in you, may they take that step of faith and courage today by putting their faith in Jesus Christ and believing in his claims and his life, his death and his resurrection and all that it means for Jesus' sake. Amen.