

RUF Bible Study – Ephesians
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Ephesians 3:1-13²

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles- 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

In our text today, we have two themes that eventually come together into one. The first theme is rivalry and the second is mystery.

Think of the great rivalries throughout time: Capulets / Montagues; Israel / Arabs; Yankees / Red Sox; Apple / Microsoft; WalMart / Small towns; Napster / the music industry; OU / Texas; Hatfields / McCoys; Confederates / Union; Americans / Soviets; Jeffersons / Hemings; Jennifer Anniston / Brad Pitt.

What would it take for these to be reconciled? What would it take for the two sides to come together in peace, and seek the good for others? Usually it is only when there is a common third foe that these parties work together, and even that is tenuous at best. But here we are reading of two sides whom God is joining together. He is making a new society, exploding the dividing wall to pieces, as we read at the end of chapter two.

But how does he do this? It is surprising. If you've been here the past five weeks, you may have noticed something. Paul hasn't given us much to do yet. In fact, he's only given us one command thus far – remember. Remember. That's the only imperative given in these first chapters. Have you remembered?

In a message on these verses, Sinclair Ferguson told of the time he spoke at a conference for a notable evangelical ministry. After a few of his messages, the coordinators of the conferences pulled him aside and told him in frustrated tones, "You have been speaking to us now for two solid hours and you haven't yet told us a single thing that we have got to do."

Dr. Ferguson explained to them that he'd been preaching on passages of the Bible that didn't tell you what to do, and if the Bible didn't tell you what to do, then you have to listen to what it says about Jesus Christ.

He explained that if they persisted in this way of reading the Bible, that they would disembowel the gospel of Jesus Christ because the gospel doesn't tell us what we must do, but it tells us that there isn't anything we can do. That God has invaded the space time continuum and done something glorious for helpless sinners and the first thing we are to do is to drink deeply from the fountain of God's free grace.

We all want something we can do. We've been trained to think that way. We want to achieve, to earn our own way, to prove to others that we are worth it. We feel uncomfortable when we can't do anything to help ourselves. Many of us, especially as we get older, find it more and more difficult to receive kindness, help and charity from others.

But practical Christian living is not rooted in anything we can do. In chapters four, five and six, there are 50 things Paul tells us to do. But if we are to fulfill the imperatives, these commands that are way beyond our capacity to fulfill, we must go down and down into the riches of God's grace. To speak in grammar terms, those imperatives are built on the indicatives! We cannot reverse the grammar of the gospel.

Paul is expounding to them the riches of God's grace in the mystery of Christ

And so he begins, *For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles -* and do you notice what happens? Paul doesn't finish his sentence. There is a big dash there because he is distracted by the sheer amazement of the sentence he wrote. When he said that about himself, he just can't believe how incredible this is. He is distracted by grace.

Paul is imprisoned by Caesar, but he says it's for Jesus. He, who had persecuted the church, was saved by Christ. This man, probably the man in Jerusalem who had previously most hated Gentiles, now loves them and has been sent to them. The wall had been brought down, even the walls that had been built up in his own soul.³ He says, "Let me hold this thought for a minute and talk about how this has impacted my life and how it can impact yours as well."

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² Sources: commentaries by Tom Wright, Peter O'Brien, John Stott, J.M. Boice; sermons by Rev. Tim Keller, Rev. Rob Rayburn, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson and Dr. Bryan Chapell

³ Thoughts from Sinclair in a message found at <http://www.pepc.org/sinclairaudio/index.asp>

And then he begins telling of the riches, gift, blessing, grace, and privilege given to us by God to serve him. He begins to tell us that we are saved by grace, justified by grace, and we serve by grace. Having been saved by grace alone we are not thrown back onto our own energies. The Christian life is not a meritocracy, unless you mean *only* the merits of Christ.

Mystery – the divine revelation

Paul says that there is a mystery. One that he knows and wants to pass on.

Some of us like to read mysteries (I don't very much). What makes them work is unraveling the clues along the way. The author has to keep the reader guessing because it's no good to have the mystery easily solved, but also has to not make it too hard, so the reader stays engaged and can remember the clues along the way.

In Paul's day there was something called the "mystery religions." These were secret religions for the initiated only, for those to whom it is revealed. This kind of mystery is dark, obscure, secret, puzzling.

Really, the best example of this in our context is the secret sorority and fraternity codes, rituals and initiations. There are secret passwords – KKG's is "adelphie," (Greek for sister); TriDelt's are supposed to greet their chaplain at the door for a chapter meeting with the words "Este laethes," (Greek for "be true"); Delta Phi password, "Jusilove," is supposed to stand for "justice, sisterhood and love." Pi Phi's might greet each other on the street with the letter "w" and the other is supposed to spell "worra," which is "arrow" backwards. Chi Omega's have a secret dialogue in which the first letters of the sentences spell out the word, "watch." (What is it? A good thing. To be elected. Can all be elected? Hardly.)⁴

According to Robbins, the initiation ceremonies for sororities are fairly similar. "Many groups drape the initiation room in white, and most require sisters and pledges to wear only white. Called, "the temple," the initiation room in some house is intended to replicate the house of the Greek gods. In one chapter's Kappa Alpha Theta initiation script, the initiates are to follow the lead of the 'High Priestess,' who carries a ceremonial cup.... During initiation, Zetas receive a blue ribbon representing their ties to the sisterhood; sisters are told to hide the ribbon, to let no one see it, and to keep it forever.

"During the Delta Phi Epsilon initiation, the sisters and initiates form concentric circles around according to pledge class. When Pi Phi pledges enter the initiation room, they are handed candles, wine-colored or silver blue, if possible. Inside the room, the neophytes stand in a circle and sing songs. They must repeat an oath that includes the line, 'I pledge myself to Pi Phi.' Sororities consider these vows crucial to the bonds of sisterhood. As the National Song of Alpha Delta Pi proclaims,

We pledge once more allegiance now, With hearts as true and high, As when we took the sacred vow, For Alpha Delta Pi.

"Both Chi Omega and Kappa Delta include songs with religious overtones, which some non-Christian girls refuse to sing. Chi Omega has initiates kneel on cushions in front of an 'altar,' place their hand over a Bible, and pledge themselves to Chi Omega. In 'hard-core' Chi Omega chapters, pledges are dropped into a coffin, pronounced dead, and then reborn as sisters."⁵

Now for some this is sort of like the great, drawn-out mystery of *The Davinci Code*. Uh....that's it?!

But for others this is a huge deal. I'm shocked at how seriously people take this and take themselves. I have never heard a college student tell me about any of these things, even if I ask about them. I may get a few generalities, but really, how important is it to know that Alpha Tau Sigma stands for All Sisters Together?

Paul's mystery, that of the church is different. It is used to "describe something that was unknown before the coming of Christ but is now revealed fully."⁶ "Although a secret, it is no longer closely guarded but out in the open."⁷ It is a revealed truth. There is no secret ceremony. No secret handshake or knock. No mystery letters or rituals. No closed doors where vows are taken. It's all out in the open, available for anyone to watch, witness and understand. It is a revealed mystery.

What is the mystery? –the Gentiles alongside the Jews are to be made partakers of the blessings of the church. 3:6 *This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.* "The mystery of Christ is the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ."⁸

This was a huge deal. This is the very reason why Paul gets thrown in prison. It was because people thought he was trying to bring the Gentiles in. In Acts 22:21-24 we read, *And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'* "Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

I would have to say that that's a fairly dramatic reaction to the sentence, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles." The Jews despise the Gentiles. The Greeks thought non-Greeks were barbarians. They didn't get along too well.

Paul says 4 *When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*

God had said before that he was interested in saving the Gentiles. He had stipulations, statutes and prophecies to that effect. There are prominent Gentiles in the unfolding story of the gospel, particularly in the line of Jesus. "But what neither the Old Testament nor Jesus revealed was the radical nature of God's plan, which was that the theocracy (the Jewish nation under God's

⁴ From Alexandra Robbins, *Pledged*, 286

⁵ From *Pledged*, various pages

⁶ Boice, 95

⁷ Stott, 116

⁸ Stott, 117

rule) would be terminated, and replaced by a new international community, the church; that this church would be ‘the body of Christ,’ organically united to him; and that Jews and Gentiles would be incorporated into Christ and his church on equal terms without any distinction. It was this complete union of Jews, Gentiles and Christ which was radically new, and which God revealed to Paul, overcoming his entrenched Jewish prejudice.”⁹

Paul says they won’t be some sort of bastard offshoot, but they will be equal heirs. Equal members. Equal partners. “They get the same offer, same help, same promises in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰

We’re all *heirs together* – “These uses of the words embrace all that a person receives or will receive in salvation. It is the whole of God’s blessings, possessed jointly by all believers in and with Christ. So there is no inner circle or outer circle of the saved.”¹¹ There isn’t supposed to be a Reformed vs. Arminian divide¹². There isn’t supposed to be charismatic vs. non-spirit filled chasm. There are no second-class Christians. We are heirs together, all of us. Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, Greek and independent, Presbyterian and Baptist, college-educated and high school drop outs, black and white and Hispanic and Asian. All of us are *members together of one body* – “This image speaks of the mystical union possessed by God’s people in the church. But it also suggests that this is something into which the people of God must grow and toward which they must strive.”¹³ I’m the toe! I’m a knee! I’m an elbow! I’m the spleen! I’m the little piece of skin between your nose and your upper lip, whatever that’s called! That is crazy to think that way. We all have a place, a humble place, since Christ is the head of the body and we all serve him. We’re all *sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus* – “To have that [promise], as Paul says the people of God do, is to have a share in the greatest of all possible human blessings. To share it with others from a great variety of races, peoples and cultures is to participate in the mystery which was revealed to Paul and declared by him.”¹⁴

Paul says that he was made an ambassador of this mystery. *7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*

It’s like he wants to tell you all the secrets of the Lambda Chi’s because they’re so great and life transforming. He wants everyone to know that the mysteries have been revealed! And he gets to tell the story, that’s what he just can’t get over.

Again, he sort of interrupts himself by saying he is the least of all the saints. This could almost mean “The meanest member of God’s people.” He says he’s the “leastest.” Less than the least.

It’s very possibly a clever play on words, though Paul meant it sincerely. Paulus is Latin for “little,” or small, and tradition says that Paul was a short man. It’s like he is saying, “I am little, little by name, little in stature, and morally and spiritually littler than the littlest of all Christians.”

Yet this stature and position did not hinder him from taking responsibility as an apostle. He combined personal humility with apostolic authority. While minimizing himself he managed his office. This is the great security if being called in Christ, rooted him. Because of this, because of what we’ve learned in chapters one and two and are now seeing chapter three, we should be both the humblest and most confident people in the world. We *know* that we are not loved because of our works, but by the Father since the foundation of the world, shown by the dramatic actions of the Son on our behalf, sealed to us by the work of the Holy Spirit in a way that is un-losable. That is a powerful word indeed. These are incredible riches for us.

“They are riches freely available because of the cross. They include resurrection from the death of sin, victorious enthronement with Christ in the heavenlies, reconciliation with God, incorporation with Jewish believers in his new society, the end of hostility and the beginning of peace, access to the Father through Christ and by the Spirit, membership of his kingdom and household, being an integral part of his dwelling place among men, and all this only a foretaste of yet more riches to come, namely the riches of the glory of the inheritance which God will give to all his people on the last day.”¹⁵ John Stott writes this, “Christ never impoverishes those who put their trust in him, but always immeasurably enriches them.”¹⁶

John Newton told a story about a man, a man who had always thought of himself as a Christian. But, one day as he read this passage he was stopped dead in his tracks by Paul’s phrase ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ.’ He thought to himself, I don’t find anything so wonderful, so ‘unsearchable’ in Paul’s message. He thought it was all plain and obvious. He thought salvation was a matter of doing good and being good, what is so unsearchable about that! But this phrase made him think that Paul obviously did not think about his message the way he thought about Paul’s message. So he began to read and study until he realized that he had completely missed Paul’s great point about Jesus Christ and salvation by God’s free grace. And suddenly realizing what a glory the gospel was, he believed and was saved.

Friends, do you understand the unsearchable riches of Christ, what Eugene Peterson calls “the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ”? There is no way you can understand everything about it. Do you understand that you don’t understand it all? Does this change your heart in any way? Do you have friends who aren’t like you? Do you hang out with people, truly love them and serve them, listen to them and care for them, because the gospel has made a difference in your life?

⁹ Stott, 118

¹⁰ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*

¹¹ Boice, 98

¹² A discussion maybe, but not a divide.

¹³ Boice, 98

¹⁴ Boice, 99

¹⁵ Stott, 120

¹⁶ Stott, 121

History – the divine commission

Paul doesn't quit there. He writes, *9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*

He's got something else that will enlighten us. Paul says that this is not *euangelizo*, the good news, but it is *photizo*, to enlighten. We live in the darkness of ignorance, my friends. "We must always remember in our evangelism that the 'prince of darkness' holds men and women in darkness, and that only by a divine enlightenment will their eyes be opened to see."¹⁷ We need the Bible to help us truly see things as they are.

What does Paul want us to see? That there has been a plan hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the wisdom of God might be made know to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

What does that mean? Paul is talking about the history of the world.

Henry Ford has two famous quotes about history – "All history is bunk" and "History is the succession of one damned thing after another." Woody Allen has a rather gloomy view: "More than any other time in history, mankind faces a cross-roads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

Thomas Carlyle I think best summarizes what Paul is trying to say to us: "All history . . . is an inarticulate Bible."

You see, to live in a world without meaning is to live a life without meaning. We're all trying to do this all the time. We're synthesizing things. Systemizing them. Analyzing them. This is so natural to us we don't even think about it.

I'm taking a class right now, English History, which covers the Tudor dynasty of the 1500s. I would sorely disappointed if the professor came in and began to recite facts to me: Henry VII defeated Richard III on Bosworth field on August 22, 1485... fact after fact after fact. What we're doing is trying to ask and answer, Why did that happen? What factors went into it? Why did Lord Stanley change sides on the field of battle? Why did only 9 of the 36 lords even show up to battle? Why was England so ready to get rid of Richard III and take a king who had less than stellar credentials?

We're trying to bring meaning to a chaos of events. Paul does that for us right here. He says that the church is the focal point of world history. He says that to understand the true nature of things, you have to understand the church.

"Secular history concentrates its attention on kings, queens, and presidents, on politicians and generals, in fact, on 'VIPs.' The Bible concentrates rather on a group it calls 'the saints,' often little people, insignificant people, unimportant people, who are however at the same time God's people – and for that reason are both 'unknown (to the world) and yet well-known to God.'"

"Secular history concentrates on wars, battles and peace-treaties, followed by yet more wars, battles and peace-treaties. The Bible concentrates rather on the war between good and evil, on the decisive victory won by Jesus Christ over the powers of darkness, on the peace-treaty ratified by his blood and on the sovereign proclamation of an amnesty for all rebels who will repent and believe."

We're familiar with this story because of JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Surely you've considered that one of the major themes of this masterpiece is how the small things accomplish the undoing of destruction. How the littlest of peoples leads the way, despite all appearances and odds to the contrary. How what is needed is not what was expected. How no one even thought to consider that this spot, this people, this one little hobbit might be the bearer of the great ring, the power to create or destroy. Just like and even more so than Tolkien, God delights in the small and lowly, the unexpected and the neglected.

"Again, secular history concentrates on the changing map of the world, as one nation defeats another and annexes its territory, and on the rise and fall of empires. The Bible concentrates rather on a multi-national community called 'the church,' which has no territorial frontier, which claims nothing less than the whole world for Christ, and whose empire will never come to an end."¹⁸

This is the answer to the question, "What is God Doing?" God is bringing together otherwise divided individuals in Christ. God is a creator, and he is creating harmony between himself and people, and between people and people. "In the church God is bringing these otherwise alienated and mutually accusing entities together on a basis that excludes any real cause for alienation. The church is a community of sinners redeemed by Christ and forgiven by God. If salvation were of works, as we might like and even the watching angels might have supposed it would be, the alienation would not have been removed. One person would still feel superior to another and boasting of moral or spiritual merit would fracture the church and eventually sully heaven. But salvation is not achieved by works. God has achieved it and made it available to us by grace alone. Thus boasting is excluded and men and women of all races and nations meet as forgiven sinners within the church's fellowship."¹⁹

The church is the focal point of history only because it is the focal point of Christ's work. We reckon history this way. We don't start at the creation of the world and number our years from there. In the west, our history has a center from which we look back and forward. That center is the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. "The modern historian may when pressed find a historically confirmed meaning in the fact that the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth is regarded as a decisive point of history. But the

¹⁷ Stott, 121

¹⁸ Stott, 127-128

¹⁹ Boice, 104

theological affirmation which lies at the basis of the Christian chronology goes far beyond the confirmation that Christianity brought with it weighty historical changes. It asserts rather that from this mid-point all history is to be understood and judged.”²⁰

The glory of this is the displaying of Christ by Christian people in the world throughout time.

One of the stories of Hurricane Katrina you don’t know about. Beale Heights Presbyterian Church in Lawton, Oklahoma, had its classroom space turned into a Red Cross shelter. For months, 51 people crammed into this tiny area with no showers and only two bathrooms. Rev. John Butler told me that the session of this small church decided to treat the people there like family. They would not be managed, nor inconvenienced, but would be made to feel like this was their home.

What is amazing is that new spaces in the city would come open time and again. Better beds were available. Better housing with showers and nicer facilities. But no one wanted to move. They liked it there. They felt at home. They were loved. They went to church. The session had been given some money through an inheritance, and they had been praying what to do with it. They felt that God called them, as a church, to give each person \$2000 from the church.

These people are buying homes in the area. They have instantly diversified the church. They have found a true home. That is what God is doing in Lawton.

“When we are talking about Christ we are not talking about some vague historical idea or some abstract principle for measuring the meaning of life. We are talking about a person who lives in us and can be known to others as we model him before a watching world. It is not a dead Jesus whom Christians serve, but a living one. Where can people see him except in the church, which gives, as it were, hands and feet, nerves and sinews to his life?”²¹

There is proof that there are riches in Christ, though there is physical, financial, emotional and locational suffering. There is proof, given by Paul himself of the principle that suffering for truth and righteousness is the way to glory and the secret of true happiness, that the way of Jesus is the way of suffering, that John 15:19-20 might be true.

What Paul is saying is that the history of the Christian church becomes a graduate school for angels. What Paul is saying is that the church really, really, really, really matters.

“Some people construct a Christianity which consists entirely of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and has virtually nothing to do with the church. Others make a grudging concession to the need for church membership, but add that they have given up on the ecclesiastical institution as hopeless. Now it is understandable, even inevitable, that we are critical of many of the church’s inherited structures and traditions. Every church at every time is in need of reform and renewal. But we need to beware lest we despise the church of God, and are blind to his work in history. We may safely say that God has not abandoned his church, however displeased with it he may be. He is still building and refining it. And if God has not abandoned it, how can we? It has a central place in his plan.”²²

Our own intern, Jonathan Ramsay felt this last week. He cold-called a guy, actually he sat down with him in his booth at the Union. Now, anyone may be startled by such a move, and this freshman was no exception. Jonathan writes on his blog, “Right before he ended my misery and went to his next class, he asked me why I had sat down. I told him what I did and his face changed for the first time since I had gotten there, but instead of a welcoming smile, I got a self-satisfied smirk. He had figured it out. This guy had sat down to talk to him because he wanted to win his soul. “A Christian ministry? Yeah, that is what I thought. I went to a Baptist church growing up, and I didn’t ever get much out of it. I also went to Kanakuk for six years, and I have a relationship with God. I don’t plan on going to church here in Norman, but I talk to God and that is all I need. So good luck with whatever it is your doing, but I am not interested.”

What Jonathan experienced is far too typical in our day, in our town, on our campus. Just me and Jesus. But “the good news of the unsearchable riches of Christ which Paul preached is that he died and rose again not only to save sinners like me (although he did) but also to create a single new humanity; not only to redeem us from sin but also to adopt us into God’s family; not only to reconcile us to God but also to reconcile us to one another. Thus the church is an integral part of the gospel. The gospel is good news of a new society as well as of a new life.”²³

There are mysteries in the church. There are things too grand to be knowable. But they aren’t hidden from you. I’ll tell what the vows, the oath, the initiation rites are for my church.

Church Membership Vows

(from the Presbyterian Church in America’s *Book of Church Order*, 57-5)

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

²⁰ Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time*, 19, found in Boice, 105

²¹ Boice, 105

²² Stott, 126

²³ Stott, 129

The initiation rite is baptism, to be administered upon profession or on an infant upon profession of his or her parents. There you go. If you want to, you can come to our chapter meetings. We meet every Sunday morning at 10:30 am. All you have to do is to come. You don't even have to be a member to come. There are songs, but they aren't secret. There are rituals, but they are open for all who are sinners. You don't have to go through a lengthy process of joining our society; you have to call on the name of Christ. There are no academic requirements, no dress codes, no beautiful-people quotients, no big bros and little sisters, no mandatory philanthropy meetings.

But there is a true society, one that will last absolutely forever. There is a brotherhood, a sisterhood, an accountability, a membership, that will shake you to the core. It is all there for you, a mystery that has been revealed. The church is where God is at work the most. You should be investing there.

One last story. A few years ago, we coined the mantra of Galatians, "I just barely understand the gospel." This is one of those moments.

Anna came with me to Tulsa for our Fall Conference last weekend. She was talking and singing and performing for Jennifer and Carilyn Guliano on our car ride. She began singing one of her songs²⁴, "R-E-D, red, R-E-D red, I can spell red. I can spell red. Fire trucks are red. Stop signs are red too. R-E-D. R-E-D."

"Good job, Anna," I said. "Can you sing another color songs?"

"I can sing the blue song," she said, and she sang it: "R-E-D, blue, R-E-D blue, I can spell blue. I can spell blue. The sky is blue. Water is blue too. R-E-D. R-E-D."

Learning and repeating "R-E-D red. I can spell red" isn't the same as understanding what you are saying. Many of you, and me too, are singing. R-E-D blue. I can spell blue." You know all this stuff. You can repeat it. You have seen it at some level. But you don't *know* it. You haven't *experienced* R-E-D red. You haven't given over to Jesus and his church. You haven't loved it, really. You haven't submitted to Christ and his church. You haven't seen the glory of it. You haven't meditated on the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus and the mystery of the church.

The church is like the hobbits. There's a ton of other stuff going on all around, but this is where the action is. You would never guess it, but it's true. We just barely understand the gospel and all its implications.

There is no more rivalry. Not in the church, the greatest institution in the world. That's a part of the mystery. Are you a part of this mystery?

²⁴ To the tune of Frere Jacques / Are you sleeping?