

A Catholic Gospel

Long Beach Alliance Church
September 7, 2014 • Pastor Chris Lankford

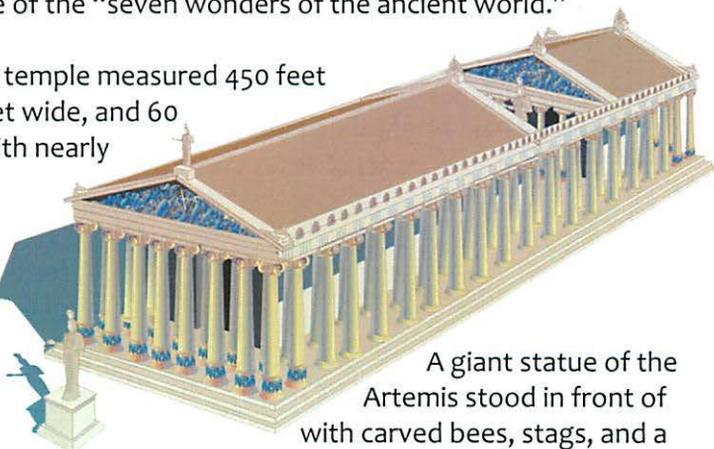
When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

~Ephesians 3:4-5 (ESV)

1) Hey Look, It's A Squirrel!

A) The ancient city of Ephesus distinguished itself with many religious, civic, and entertainment options for the local populace. The ultimate example of Ephesian culture was the extraordinary Greek temple of Artemis, one of the “seven wonders of the ancient world.”

B) The Artemis temple measured 450 feet long, 225 feet wide, and 60 feet high, with nearly 130 columns supporting the grand ceiling and overall temple.



A giant statue of the Artemis stood in front of with carved bees, stags, and a sprawling tree attached to symbolize the life-giving fertility of Artemis.

C) During the time of Christ (around 5 B.C. to 25 A.D.) the Temple of Artemis employed thousands of priests, artisans, and temple prostitutes. It was the center of religious culture in both Ephesus and Asia Minor (see map on next page -- Ephesus is located in what is the modern-day country of Turkey).

D) When a person arrived in Ephesus, almost always traveling 525-feet up the Arcadian Way from the large shipping harbor, they would pass next to the local marketplace where imported goods, local produce, and touristy trinkets were sold and a thriving idol industry existed. The “agora” (marketplace) was equal in size to some sixteen city blocks and surrounded by (at times) one hundred different shops.

E) Towering over the Ephesian Agora was the Great Theater of Ephesus, the location for civic and judicial meetings, and the center of a thriving local arts & entertainment culture. Located at the end of the Arcadian Way, the Great Theater (the modern-day ruins are pictured here) had a seating capacity of over 24,000 people (66 rows of seating, 3 tiers, 22 staircases, with a 164-foot diameter).



The public conflict in Acts 19:23-41 involving Demetrius and the local silversmiths “trade union” against Paul and “The Way” occurred in the Great Theater of Ephesus.

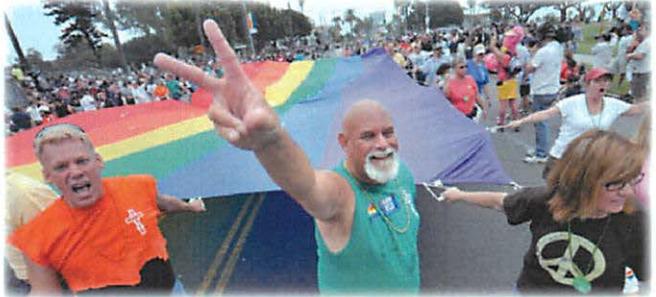
F) During his 3rd Missionary Journey (around 54 A.D., detailed on map), the Apostle Paul established himself as an influential preacher and proponent of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:1-10). Paul remained in



Ephesus three years (20:31), fighting hard for the “whole counsel of God” against false teaching/teachers in Ephesus (20:17-32). Timothy is eventually appointed by Paul as the leader of the Ephesian church (1 Timothy 1:3-11), further establishing the church as the most influential in the Macedonian & Asia Minor region.

- G) The similarities between Ephesus and our very own Long Beach culture are notable. Both cultures represent an aggressively anti-religious environment, with a progressive lean toward a more anti-Christian perspective.

Christianity is seldom embraced or appreciated, challenging followers of Christ with the difficulty of serving a world which (in part) hates Jesus and His faithful.

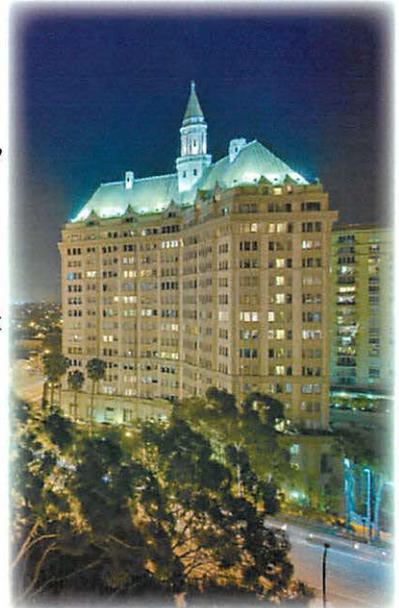


- H) In Ephesus, arts and entertainment were important aspects of the culture. Like Long Beach, this led the local populace to incredible

financial investment in both locations and options to fill venues. Unlike many parts of the ancient world, the metropolitan Ephesian culture attracted a very diverse populace, much like Long Beach, a culture of 'exclusive inclusivity' was created.



- I) Like Long Beach, Ephesus prized their icons and practices of intellectual and spiritual insight, setting the pace for art, culture, and religion in the region. As we return to the world of Ephesus, it is important to remain solidly connected to our modern cultural situation, remembering how isolating and difficult it can be (and maybe should be!) for followers of Jesus Christ in the world! The answers to which the Apostle Paul called the Ephesians are many of the same answers we need for life in Christ right here in our slice of Long Beach!



2) *The Gospel Unifies God's People*

- A) The Apostle Paul, seeking to establish Ephesian believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:1-2), especially emphasizes the importance of salvation through faith in Christ, but not as a result of works (2:8-10), in contrast to the religious effort required in Ephesus.
- B) Rather than belonging to a group of people on the basis of what you do or have to offer, Paul emphasizes inclusion in 'God's family' (2:19) on the basis of Christ Jesus (2:20). With Christ as the "cornerstone" of faith, the direction and basis for relationship with God is established for everyone in God's family (2:21-22).
- C) With this in mind (3:1, "for this reason") Paul begins to worship God in prayer and thanksgiving (note 3:14 for the continuation of the thought). But quite abruptly, Paul inserts a note (3:2-13) regarding his commission from God to reach the "Gentiles" (non-Jewish people).
- D) Note that Paul describes himself as a "prisoner for Christ..." (3:1). He is not concerned with the injustice of his imprisonment, but rather the purposes of his life. This sets the following details into context. In other words, 'I am serving Christ and you (here in prison) for the Gospel.'
- E) It is easy to get dismayed at circumstances, but Paul instructs us even as he is writing, to take our eyes off of our circumstances for the sake of the "stewardship" (serving in an appointed role) of God's grace (3:2).
- F) Paul assumes the story of his radical conversion to Christ was known by the Christians in Ephesus (cf. Acts 9:3-19), and how the "mystery of Christ" (cf. Ephesians 1:9-10) had been revealed to Paul by Jesus (3:3).
- G) For the world, there are many natural mysteries; for other religions, there are many mystical mysteries; for human beings, the future holds many unknowable mysteries. But for Christians, the mystery has been revealed (3:4). The Messiah is Jesus the Christ; Jesus IS the mystery!
- H) Even more radical, to the apostles and prophets (cf. 2:20, "the family") Christ has revealed that salvation is not ONLY for the Jews (3:5, natural heirs), but also for the Gentiles, who are now "fellow heirs," "members," and "partakers of the promise" (3:6).
- I) The Good News of the Gospel is Jesus Christ, who has united all people together into one grand family (cf. 2:21-22). The Gospel is for everyone, an open invitation to enjoy God's grace and goodness in Jesus Christ!

Growth Group Guide

“a catholic gospel” (ephesians 3:1-6) september 7-12, 2014

Take a Closer Look!

● How did Paul “steward” (manage) God’s grace? What does administering grace mean?

● What is the “mystery of Christ?” Why did Paul call it a mystery?

● What’s generally significant about being an heir? How are Christians “heirs” together?

● What is the “promise in Christ Jesus” of which believers partake?

Tackle any question here from this week’s Bible verses!



Take It Home!

How can we live out these ideas from the Bible?



Like Paul, God entrusts Christians today with His grace. What does it look like for you to manage/administer grace?



As “members of the same body,” Christians are called to unity. What differences matter? Which differences can we overlook?

Take It Further!

Want to study more? Read here outside group time



Read and identify any similar themes between 1 Corinthians 12:4-26 and Ephesians 3:1-6. How does Christian unity build up Christ's church?