

## THE CHURCH, GOD'S DIVINE INSTITUTION

God had the church as Exhibit A in His eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ. **Ephesians 3:10** declares the important place which the church has in His great plan.

The passage in general (**Eph. 3:1-13**) refers to God's plan of salvation as a mystery. Paul was given the privilege of receiving the revelation of that mystery in order to make it known to the whole world. Verse **11** shows that God purposely kept His plan a secret until the right time to fulfill it in Christ and then reveal it through the gospel to all men.

Verse **10** especially says that the church manifests the manifold wisdom of God. It is like a beautiful diamond with many cuts and points. Whatever direction you turn the diamond, another fascinating view displays its beauty. Likewise, we see the wisdom of God in His design of the church.

The church is a reflection of God's wisdom. In several ways, it has His divine stamp upon it. The church was in God's heart from eternity, and He gave clues about it throughout the Old Testament. He made the promise to Abraham in **Genesis 22:18**, "*In your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" He gave prophecies about the universal kingdom and His Christ conquering the nations which are fulfilled spiritually in God's plan of salvation (**Daniel 2:44, Isaiah 2:1-4, Psalm 2**).

The Lord designed the church (**Eph. 3:8-11**), bought the church (**Acts 20:28**), and built the church (**Matthew 16:18**). All these facts demonstrate the divine nature of the church.

The Lord adds to the church those who are saved (**Acts 2:47**). Here we see the relationship between the divine and the human components of the church. We receive God's grace and the opportunity to be a part of the church. We are forgiven sinners who have determined to stop sinning (repentance). However, we still sin, and we must admit it when we do (**1 John 1:8-10**). God will forgive as often as we repent, confess, and seek His forgiveness (**Acts 8:18-24**).

We must be realistic in our view of God's divine institution which is composed of imperfect human beings. We are told to get along (and **how to** get along) with each other in **Ephesians 4:25-32** and **Colossians 3:12-15**. These passages necessarily imply that we will sin, and so we are told to forgive each other. The fact that we may do wrong from time to time or that others may wrong us is not proof that the church is not divine. **Ephesians 5:26-28** shows that the church is a work in progress with the goal of achieving perfection. Until then, we need to press on with diligence, adding to our faith and spiritually growing.