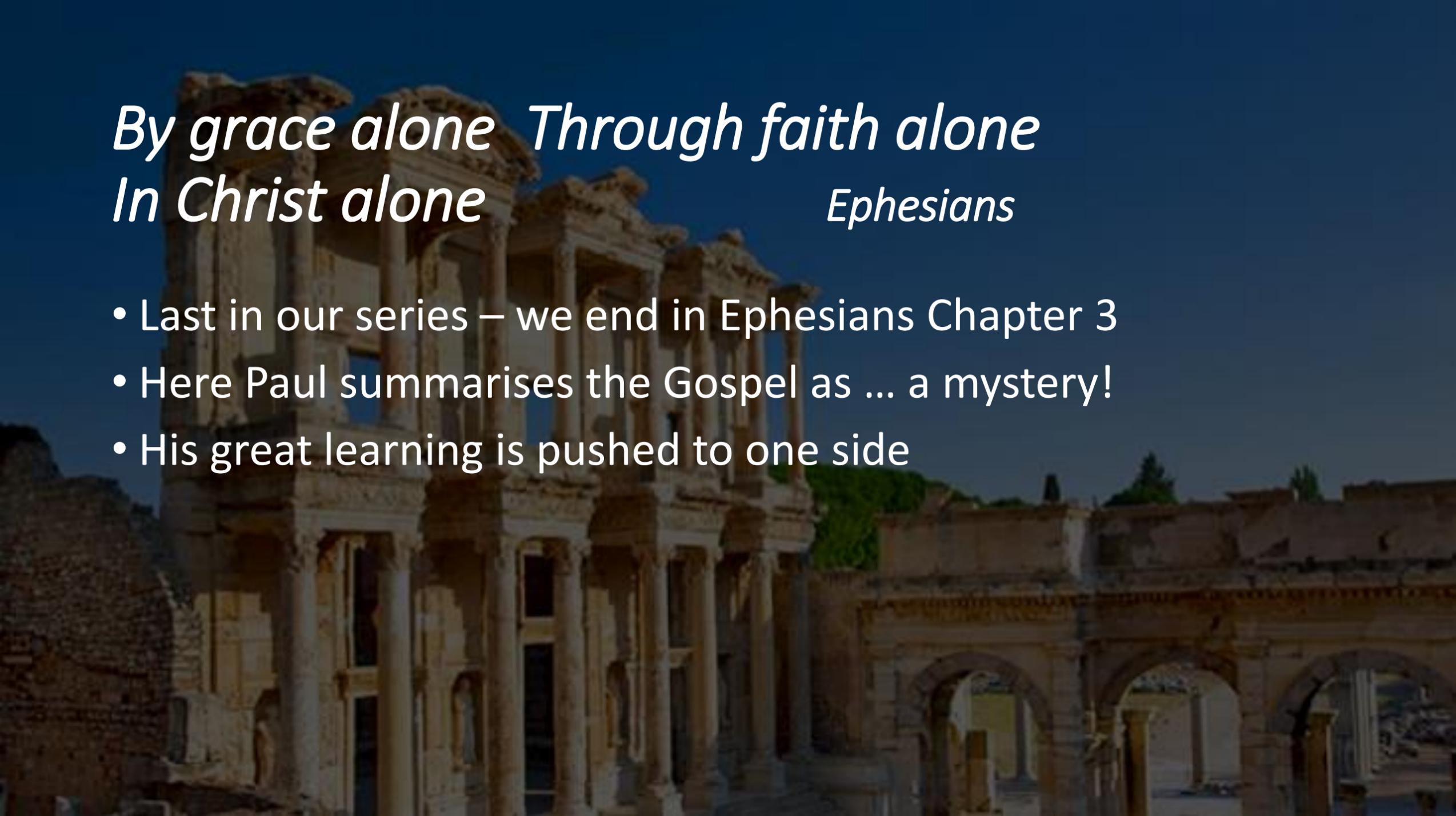




'tis mystery all

Ephesians 3



By grace alone Through faith alone
In Christ alone Ephesians

- Last in our series – we end in Ephesians Chapter 3
- Here Paul summarises the Gospel as ... a mystery!
- His great learning is pushed to one side

Ephesians 6 1-9

For this reason ...

I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you ...

*that is, **the mystery made known to me by revelation**, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ**, which was not made known to people in other generations ...*

*as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. **This mystery** is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus ...*

*I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of **this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden** in God, who created all things.*

We get the point!

- There is no fathomable explanation for the extent of God's love
- Or as Wesley will later comment: *'tis mystery all – the immortal dies!*
- Specifically, the mystery is
 - ALL people are brought back to God through Christ ...

This is the Gospel – simple yet confounding - it's the pearl of great price

Today's big idea

- *God is mystery*
- And even *faith* is a mystery ... let's have a look ...

How has your faith changed over the years?

- Sometimes it's good to step back and assess our faith
- As you might step back and critically but positively assess other aspects of your life

*Where has my faith been? ... Where might it go next? ...
... Has it got stuck? ... Do I have doubts?*

3 Stages of Faith

- Infant / Institutional faith
- Adolescent / Critical faith
- Adult / Faith as mystery

Hold off from thinking about age



Infant or institutional faith

- Faith here is about pure trust
- We want the faith of our parents / teachers
- Swimming pools and new shoes
- We learn by heart
- We accept the answers given to us
- We have a sense of “what’s fair”



Adolescent or critical faith

- Just as teens or young adults do - we look for meaning
- Faith has to become owned, relevant to me
- We ask critical questions - & the church needs to answer
- As a church we must not shy away from critical questions
- It's risky but otherwise
 - God is excluded from "real life"
 - At best he is a harmless hobby
 - *"Religion without reality breeds rebellion"*



Adolescent or critical faith

- Not everyone encounters this stage
- Otherwise faith can fade
- If this is YOUR son / daughter / relative
 - It's hard!
 - Encourage them to look for truth
 - Pray they meet other Christians and hear their story
- And remember some hard questions DO have answers ...

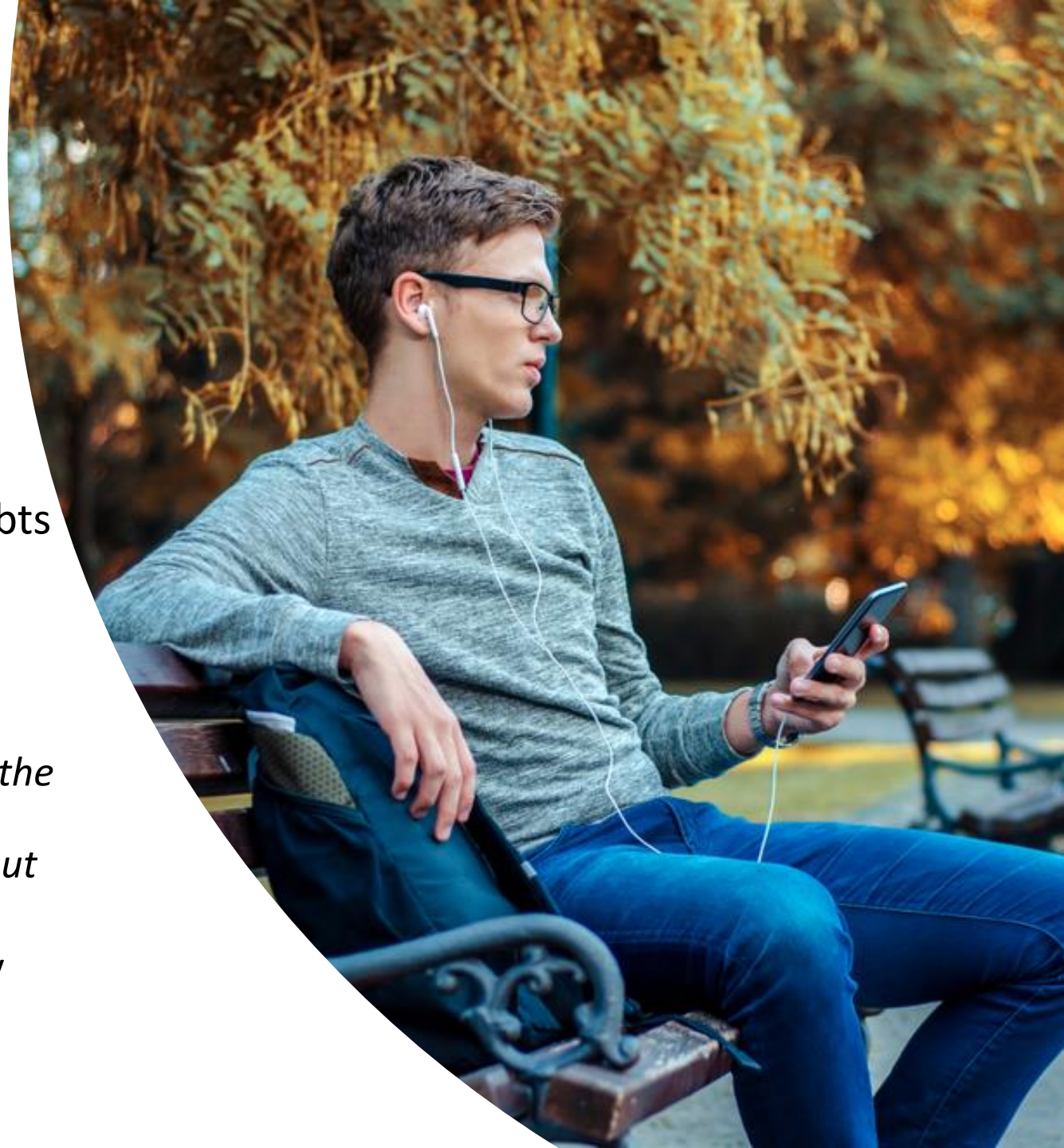


Adolescent or critical faith

- And some don't ...
- It's not a sin to have hard questions – or doubts
It's always OK to ask questions – “Why?”
- Think for example about “courage”

Hard questions and doubts are in scripture eg:

- *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted*
Matthew 28.16
- Even Jesus suffered turmoil with some really hard questions



Winning through doubts to a place of greater confidence

- Don't go it alone
- Safe places to ask those questions
- Good books to read and resources to help you think through

Faith as mystery

- We become increasingly aware of the sheer complexity of God
- ... and the layers of consciousness within ourselves
- More simply ... it's about realising how much we don't know



*“There has been an
alarming increase in the
number of things about
which I know nothing”* Alice



Faith as mystery

- We become increasingly aware of the sheer complexity of God
- ... and the layers of consciousness within ourselves
- More simply ... it's about realising how much we don't know
- *But our faith not only survives, it grows more richly and more deeply ...*
- As we increasingly realise that knowing God is different to knowing stuff



Faith as mystery

- Appreciating **the otherness** of God
- A God:
 - Of compassion and tenderness
 - Of righteous anger and fury
 - Of mystery
- Often the most important stage on our journey of faith
- We need encouragement and guidance towards this God who's ways are not our ways
- “Deconstructing” and “reconstructing”



God is mystery whatever else He is

- Can coincide with increasing age
... children growing up ...
increasing awareness of one's
own identity
- He will not be subject to a neat
and clear definition!



What's the opposite of "God as mystery"?

- The mistake of a neat and clear definition
- A domesticated God
 - Made in our own image
 - "God in a box"
 - We want to remain in control But God is not controllable
 - And we realise "the deal" with God" isn't what we thought

The deal is

God is mystery - and yet knowable

Coming back to Paul's "confusion"

- The one who says *before all things were, I AM*
 - Is also the one who welcomed sinners and had dinner with them
 - And would make his home in your heart today as your "Abba"

It is easy to forget

"We find He can prove to be an awkward guest who tends to take over everything, invading our privacy, disrupting our plans. He can introduce us to unwanted people and disturbing ideas, puts our property, our jobs, and even our lives at risk..."

Recap

- 3 stages of faith
- But this is largely NOT age related
- A mature faith will embrace all three



Behold I tell you a mystery!



- Empty hands – open hearts
- Simple trust
- And thanking God for those “simple things”



Behold I tell you a mystery!



- Empty hands – open hearts
- Simple trust
- And thanking God for those “simple things”



- Not suppressing the hard questions
- Bringing them to God and to others
- Or faith is just a pastime



- The otherness of God
- There are more questions than we ever realised
- Not understanding “why”, but knowing “who”

Do you recognise all 3 in your own faith ... do you feel “stuck” in one place?

Wesley's mystery

*'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more!*

It'll soon be Christmas!

Paul wants his readers to grasp the mystery

- Unfathomable – and yet easily knowable
- The Gospel cannot be reduced to a ticket to Heaven
- Its as much about living well now as it is about eternity ... about discipleship as much as conversion

And Christmas provides a wonderful reminder of the mystery ... that begins in a back street shed

