

Ephesians

Lesson One (1:1-14)

Salutation (1:1-2)

*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus;
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ.*

V. 1 Paul, an apostle—Until the First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:9) Paul was known by the Hebrew name Saul. It was by this name that we first met him (Acts 7:58) as one who helped in the stoning of Stephen. It was this same Saul who was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9, 22, and 26) and was appointed apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18).

The word “apostle” comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “one set forth.” In its special use here in the New Testament it refers to the men personally chosen and sent out by Jesus. Jesus promised these men inspiration (John 14:26) and gave them unique authority in the founding of the church (John 20:21-23; Eph. 2:20). Paul’s special role as an apostle was to bring in the Gentiles, to share with the Jews God’s gift of salvation in Christ (Eph. 3:4-6).

of Christ Jesus—“Christ” is from the Greek word for “anointed,” and is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” In the Old Testament, reference is made to the anointing of prophets (Isa. 61:1), priests (Exod. 29:7), and kings (1 Sam. 15:1). The long-awaited Messiah or Christ was anointed by the Father as our great Prophet, Priest, and King.

“Jesus” was the historical name given by the angel to both Mary (Luke 1:31) and Joseph (Matt. 1:21). It is the same as the Old Testament name Joshua, and means “Jehovah is salvation.”

by the will of God—When the Lord Jesus chose Saul of Tarsus to be His apostle, it was by the will of His Father. Notice how many things in Ephesians are done by the Father through the Son.

to the saints—The saints are “the holy ones.” To be holy means to be “set apart” to serve God. Every true Christian is a saint.

who are (at Ephesus and) also faithful in Christ Jesus—Although the earliest manuscripts do not include the words “at Ephesus,” it is still probable that Paul sent the epistle there first. From Ephesus, the major seaport and capital of Asia Minor, copies could have been sent

to all the Asian churches. If Paul had intended his letter for Ephesus alone, he surely would have included personal greetings to those with whom he had labored so long.

V.2 Grace to you—Every one of the thirteen epistles signed by Paul begins and ends with a note of grace. Could it be that a man who had so violently persecuted the church simply felt a greater appreciation for God’s grace? The word “grace” is often defined as “unmerited favor.” What this means is that although we are unworthy and undeserving, God likes us anyway! Grace is goodwill, favor, and lovingkindness—to people who do not deserve it.

and peace—Peace is best defined as “well-being of the soul.” The Christian has inner peace because he has been saved by grace through faith (2:8)—not by his own worthiness.

It has often been noted that “grace” (*charis*) is very similar in Greek to the usual Greek greeting (*chairein*). Also, “peace” was the usual Hebrew greeting (*shalom*). Since so much of Paul’s ministry involved bringing together Jews and Greeks into one body (3:4-6), it seems somehow appropriate that this Greek-Jew greeting should begin each of his epistles.

from God our Father—There is strong emphasis in Ephesians on the fatherhood of God. At least once in every chapter we are reminded of this important fact. The unity of the church is built upon it. Since there is one Father—only one (Eph. 4:6)—all who are His children are automatically brothers and sisters in one family. God is pictured as Father in the following verses in Ephesians: 1:2, 3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23.

and the Lord Jesus Christ—God our Father has appointed His Son to be head over all things (Eph. 1:22). So then, just as we have one God, we have one Lord (Eph. 4:5).

The title “Lord” has an interesting background in Greek. Originally it was used for the owner of a piece of property. Next it was applied to the man who owned slaves and had the authority to demand their obedience. Then it became a common title in referring to the Greek gods. (You can see the word growing in significance, until finally it becomes a fitting title for God’s Son!) Last of all, shortly before the coming of Christ, the word “Lord” became the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Jehovah” or “Yahweh” in the Septuagint version of the scriptures.

Add up all the implications of the title “Lord”—owner, master, deity, the true God. Consider the glorious fact that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

Every Spiritual Blessing (1:3-8)

3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 which he lavished upon us.*

V. 3 Blessed be the God and Father—When we bless God we acknowledge his grace, praise his glory, and worship him. Our hearts cry out “Blessed be the Lord!” as the rightful response to his greatness and goodness.

who has blessed us—When God blesses us, he gives us grace and power.

in Christ—If you look carefully at each of the seven blessings in verses four through fourteen, you will notice that each one of them is available “in Christ,” “in him,” or “in the Beloved.” It is only in the Son that the blessings of the Father are given.

with every spiritual blessing—God’s most important blessings are the spiritual ones. While it is true that he sometimes blesses us with health, wealth, family, or friends, his seven greatest blessings are listed in the verses ahead:

1. He chose us. (V. 4)
2. He destined us. (V. 5)
3. He bestowed grace. (V. 6)
4. He redeemed us. (V. 7)
5. He made known the mystery. (V. 9)
6. He made us a heritage (ASV) (V. 11)
7. He sealed us with the Holy Spirit. (V. 13)

I think it is striking that these greatest blessings are freely available to all men. There are no “special favors” held back for a few “super-saints.”

in heavenly places—This unique phrase occurs five times in Ephesians, but not once in the rest of the Bible. The heavenly places are:

1. Where our blessings are (1:3).
2. Where Christ sits at God’s right hand (1:20).
3. Where we sit (now) with Christ (2:6).
4. Where the principalities and powers are located, to

whom God is showing his wisdom (3:10).

5. Where the spiritual hosts of wickedness are (6:12). We are talking about a realm of real existence that is above and beyond our mortal earth, which shall endure even when this earth has passed away. Through the church we are already (2:6) participants in the grander

drama, since we are by faith pilgrims here...and citizens there. It is in the heavenly places that we are right now wrestling against Satan and his hosts (6:12).

V. 4 even as he chose us in him—What a wonder! How amazing! God wants us to live with him in heaven! God is not grudgingly sharing his heaven with us—he is joyously *choosing* to have us join him there.

Sometimes this verse is wrongly understood to mean that God chooses in advance who shall go to heaven and who shall go to hell. Regardless of how a person lives, his destiny has already been pre-determined. This is a wrong concept. Throughout the scriptures men are told to repent and are offered salvation—and their destiny depends upon their response. (See Luke 13:5; John 3:16-18; Acts 2:38, 17:30; Rev. 22:17).

What did God choose? He chose to receive all those who were *in Christ*. In other words, God chose a class of people—the people who had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Each individual is given the freedom to decide which group he will be in—the group in Christ, or the group apart from Christ.

before the foundation of the world—Before God had even created man, God knew man would sin. He therefore chose a way of salvation for man, and that way was in Christ Jesus. He chose to accept all who would accept his Son (John 1:12).

that we should be holy and blameless before him—Even though we were totally unworthy, God received us when we accepted Christ. God’s plan for us, now, is that we should become holy (set apart to him) and blameless (without blemish). God did not accept us because we were good, he accepted us in Christ in order that we might become good.

V. 5 He destined us in love to be his sons—The divine plan of salvation called for all those who accepted Christ as Lord to be received as sons. God did not destine which people would accept Christ. He destined that whoever did accept him would be adopted into the family.

The word “destine” means literally “to establish boundaries in advance.” God staked out the boundaries for the group he would adopt. By his sovereign decree, all those *in Christ* were considered to be in the group. Whether a man is in God’s group, then, depends on what he has done with Jesus.

through Jesus Christ—As with all the spiritual blessings, adoption into God’s family is possible only through Jesus. It is interesting to note what “adoption” meant in Paul’s time. When a person was adopted, the action cancelled his former name, his former debts, and his former life. Adoption gave him a new name, a new home, and a new inheritance. This is also what God did

for all those in Christ, when he destined them “to be his sons.”

according to the purpose of his will—Salvation is the will of God. He does not will that any should perish, but that all should repent and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). He wills that men should repent, and gives them every opportunity to do so. It is not his will to save men who do not repent.

God calls all men to repentance (Acts 17:30), but only those who accept the call are “chosen” (Matt. 22:1-14). If a man accepts God’s plan of salvation, the credit belongs to God who made it all possible. If a man rejects the plan and is lost, the blame is totally his own.

V. 6 to the praise of his glorious grace—God freely gave his favor without regard to man’s merit or worth. Man had nothing to deserve God’s grace, but it was given anyway (Rom. 5:8). This is why we should praise his glorious grace (verses 6, 12, and 14).

which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved—God is lavish (v. 8) in the grace he pours out upon his children. However, he restricts his grace to those who are found in his Beloved Son, and to those alone.

V. 7 In him we have redemption—To “redeem” is to deliver and set free by paying a price; to ransom. Our self-incurred debt was slavery to sin (Rom. 6:16). The rightful consequences were the wrath of God (Eph. 5:6) and the death of the sinner (Rom. 6:23). The price to rescue us was the blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

through his blood—Throughout the Old Testament God had been teaching a principle of blood atonement (Lev. 17:11). The climax and fulfillment of all this was Calvary, when God’s only Son gave his life and satisfied our debt.

riches of his grace—Paul keeps coming back to the unbelievable fact that God gives grace to those who deserved wrath. God is so rich in grace that he can never exhaust the supply.

V. 8 which he lavished upon us—God spares no expense for his children.

More Spiritual Blessings (1:9-14)

9 For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

11 In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the

gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

V. 9 For he has made known to us...the mystery of his will—One of the ways God has lavished his grace upon us (see preceding verse) is by revealing his plan of salvation. For all earlier ages this plan had been kept secret (Eph. 3:9), but now it has been revealed. The word “mystery” in the Bible does not mean something that is complicated, obscure, and difficult to understand. It means something that has been kept secret until God chose to reveal it. No man could have guessed in advance that God would save the world by the death of his Son, but once God announced it, it was plain and it was simple.

according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ—This phrase, as translated here from the RSV, loses one important element of the original in Greek. A more accurate translation is “according to his **good will** which he set forth.” It was not just God’s **plan** to save the world—it was his **pleasure** to do so!

V. 10 as a plan for the fullness of time—The plan was to send Jesus to be the Savior and Lord of all creation. The fullness of time began when Jesus was sent forth to be born of woman (Gal. 4:4). The fullness of time will reach its completion when Jesus reigns over all things in the Consummation.

to unite all things in him—The final act in this grand drama will be when all things are brought under the headship of Jesus Christ. The Greek word for “unite” used here means more than just to bring together. It means to put together **under a single head**. Unity among men is of no value unless there is first a right relationship with God. The tower of Babel proved this. God’s plan was first to bring men into a right relationship with him through Christ, and second, to bring men into a right relationship with one another under Christ’s lordship.

NOTE: Verses eleven and twelve will be quoted from the American Standard Version of 1901. The Greek is difficult to translate, and English translations vary widely. I prefer the wording here of the ASV, instead of the Revised Standard Version which we are otherwise following.

V. 11 in whom also we were made a heritage—a heritage is something which is specially designated to become the property of a given individual. God’s heritage is his people.

“The Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.” (Deut. 32:9)

In Christ we have been admitted to the ranks of the chosen people—the special possession of God. We get heaven—and God gets us!

having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will—There is a chosen people whom God is using to accomplish his eternal purpose in Christ. This chosen people is made up of all who have yielded to Christ as Lord. God did not predetermine who would be in this group, but he did predetermine what he was going to do with that group.

V. 12 to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory—God’s chosen people are appointed to live unto his glory. This was true of the Jews in the Old Testament and is true of Christians in the New Testament. All that we ever say or do should be to the glory of God!

we who had before hoped in Christ—“We who had before hoped” are the Jewish Christians who had been faithfully awaiting the promised Messiah. They are mentioned in contrast to the Gentile Christians (“you also”) in the next verse. First Jew, then Gentile (see Rom. 1:16), all men are offered the opportunity to become and live as God’s chosen people.

V. 13 In him you also, who have heard the word of truth—These are the Gentiles. They had not become acquainted with God through birth into a Jewish family, but by hearing the Gospel. Notice that in this verse Paul unreservedly calls the Gospel message “truth.”

and have believed in him—“Faith comes by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). Faith is not an irresistible working of the Holy Spirit on a man’s heart. Faith is the rational response of the man who hears, believes, and acts upon the Gospel.

were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit—The “seal” of the first century was a mark of genuineness. If a person saw the king’s seal on a document, he could be sure it was the king’s document. In a similar way God has placed an identifying seal on every true child. This seal is the indwelling Spirit, and “if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9). At the beginning of the church, when the Gospel of Christ was first proclaimed, the promise was made to those believers that if they would repent and be baptized they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we today know we have the “seal” of the Holy Spirit in us if we have obeyed God’s commands (Acts 2:38). Subjective or emotional feelings are not a dependable guide.

V. 4 which is the guarantee of our inheritance—The guarantee (also translated “earnest”) is a down payment which makes a transaction binding. When a person is ready to commit himself to a real estate

transaction, for instance, he puts up “earnest money.” This is proof that he will carry out what he says he will do. When God puts his Spirit into our hearts, it is proof that he will carry out all he has promised. In our covenant relationship with God, we do not need to worry that God will fail to do his part.

Interestingly, the same Greek word (*arrabon*) is today the modern Greek name for an engagement ring! (See *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, “Earnest”.) When a young man is serious about his intentions, he gives this ring in promise of a future relationship. It is a lovely parallel that the church will one day be gathered up as the Bride of Christ, to share in the great Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Eph. 5:25-27 and Rev. 19:7-9).

until we acquire possession of it—Some translations understand this in a different way: Until God takes possession of what he has purchased (his people). However, in the context of the “earnest” payment made by God to us in the preceding clause, it is best to accept this RSV rendering. Until we come into God’s very Presence in heaven, we have the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives.

to the praise of his glory—How we should praise God in his glory for our spiritual blessings! Three times Paul has now repeated this refrain (v. 6, 12, and 14).

Study Questions

1. What words are always found in the opening of Paul’s epistles? What is their significance?
2. What are the heavenly places?
3. Did God choose some and reject others even before the foundation of the world?
4. When God adopts sinners to be his sons, what are the results of this adoption?
5. What is redemption? What does blood have to do with it?

6. What is the biblical meaning of “mystery”?
7. How would you summarize God’s master plan for the salvation of a lost world?
8. God has made us his heritage. What does this mean?
9. Does the seal of the Holy Spirit preserve us from falling away? What does it do?
10. Does the guarantee or “earnest” of the Spirit guarantee our faithfulness? What does it do?
11. Have you praised the glory of God for his spiritual blessings as often as for his material blessings?

Lesson Two (1:15-23)

Paul’s Prayer (1:15-23)

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; 22 and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the

church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Some Christians are like the farmer who bought a tractor but did not know it ran under its own power. Each day he hooked his big team of horses to it and pulled it around the field. Finally he got tired of all the bother and quit using the tractor altogether. “Tractors are no good,” he concluded. He didn’t know what one was good for, and he didn’t know how to use its power.

Lest any Christian not know what Christianity is good for, or how to use its power, Paul writes the prayer which is the text of our lesson.

V. 15 For this reason—The reason that Paul makes this prayer for his readers is the thought of the preceding verses: God has blessed them spiritually and has sealed them with his own Spirit.

because I have heard of your faith—Why did Paul say he had “heard of” their faith if he had spent nearly three years with them in Ephesus? There are two probable answers. First, since some years had passed since his stay in Ephesus, Paul was rejoicing that he heard of their continuing faith (as in Philemon 4, 5 and 1 Thess. 3:6). Second, this epistle was apparently intended for *all* of Asia Minor and many of these believers were people Paul had never met. (See comments on Eph. 1:1).

and your love toward all the saints—Faith in the Lord Jesus must necessarily be accompanied by love for the saints. It is impossible to be in a right relationship with the head, while being cut off from all the rest of the body. Jesus said that love for one another was the identifying characteristic of his disciples (John 13:35).

V. 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you—Paul had left Ephesus for the last time around 57 A.D. As he writes this epistle from Roman imprisonment, some six years have gone by. Still, he is faithfully lifting up the Ephesian saints in his daily prayers. The fact that he did the same for so many other churches shows something of the prayer life this great apostle must have had (see Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; and Philemon 4).

remembering you in my prayers—“out of sight, out of mind,” was not the way Paul operated. He gave thanks for those with whom he had served; he prayed for their well-being.

V. 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ revealed the true God to man (John 1:18). While many gods had been depicted in wood or stone, the true God was manifested in human flesh, in his only Son. To have seen Jesus was to have seen the Father (John 14:9), for Jesus was the visible image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) and carried the very stamp of his nature (Heb.

1:3). Jesus is not only the full and final revelation of the Father, he is also the only access to him (John 14:6).

the Father of glory—God stands unchallenged in the magnitude of his glory. His glory is shining radiance and majestic splendor, and his dwelling is in unapproachable light. (See 1 Tim. 6:16.)

may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him—A Christian must have more than just raw enthusiasm. Unless he is grounded in truth and wisdom, his faith may be as short-lived as the froth whipped up by ocean waves. On the other hand, true Christianity is not an elaborate system of doctrines and theology. Paul chooses the perfect words here to avoid either extreme—ignorant enthusiasm or lifeless dogma.

The spirit of wisdom is an attitude of wise insight into reality. It is not an accumulation of facts, but an ability to understand the meaning of facts, and the meaning of life itself. “Revelation” is knowledge that goes beyond human observation and learning, coming from God himself. Perhaps most important of all, we should note that the real focus of both wisdom and revelation is **knowledge of God**. Even wisdom and revelation are worthless to a person if he does not know the Lord. (Consider Paul’s own situation in Phil. 3:4-11, especially verse 8.)

V. 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened—The eyes are the primary means by which we learn things. This beautiful figure of speech used by Paul is a prayer that our inner man (“your hearts”) may be enlightened and informed as to the real significance of certain spiritual realities. If the eyes of the heart are enlightened, the windows of the soul are thrown open to receive important truth.

that you may know—The word for “know” used here (*oida*) was used by the Greek to refer to knowledge that is perceived in the mind, even when it cannot be experienced with the senses of sight, hearing, or touch. The specific items which Paul will mention cannot be tested or measured by the skeptic. They must be perceived by those who walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

what is the hope to which he has called you—There is one hope of the Christian’s calling (Eph. 4:4). God has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). The ultimate hope of every Christian is to dwell with God in his eternal glory and light (1 Tim. 6:16). We are exhorted to give diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10) and to follow the example of Paul, who pressed on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14).

what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints—While we have a wonderful hope of future bliss, we must not forget that God also has an inheritance (see comments on verses 11 and 12). The “riches of his inheritance in the saints” points to the fact that the Lord sees the church as a beautiful bride (Eph. 5:27). If our eyes more readily spot blemishes than beauty, we may have a difficult time understanding how the church could be so lovely in God’s eyes. God has a glorious possession in his people!

V. 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power—The third thing our hearts’ eyes need to see is God’s power. Like the hope of our calling and the riches of his inheritance, God’s power is unseen and unfelt by people who lack spiritual vision.

Before taking up the phrase-by-phrase discussion of what is said about God’s power, let us make three important observations about the statements which follow:

1. Paul piles up the greatest collection of “power” and “greatness” words to found in any single spot in all the Bible. He practically exhausts the vocabulary of the Greek language to emphasize his point.
2. The supreme example of God’s great power was not the creation of the world or the working of various great miracles of old. The supreme demonstration of God’s power was the raising of Jesus from death.
3. This same resurrection power is at work—**now—in us who believe!**

in us who believe—If God can make his power work in a dead man (as in Christ in the next verse), then he can make his power work in you!

What would you say of someone who did not believe in God’s power to raise Jesus from the dead? The Bible says such a person cannot be saved (Rom. 10:9). To deny God’s ability to do this would be a terrible and wicked thing.

What would you say of someone who did not believe in God’s power to work in *his* or *her* life to accomplish unbelievable things? Is it really any worse to deny that power in Jesus than to deny that power in yourself? The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in all believers, conquering spiritual death and giving spiritual life and strength. (See also Eph. 3:20-21).

According to the working of his great might—Literally, “according to the working of the strength of his might.” To show the impact of all these “power” words,

let us list them individually, starting with the words from verse nineteen.

“immeasurable”—Exceeding; going far beyond (from the Greek *hyperballon*).

“greatness”—Truly and very great (Gk. *megethos*).

“power”—Power; might; force; miracle and wonder (Gk. *Dynamis*, from which we get “dynamite”).

“working”—Inworking force or power, always used of supernatural rather than human power (Gk. *energeia*, from which we get “energy”).

“strength”—Power, strength, control (Gk. *cratos*, from which we get democracy, or “people-rule”).

“might”—Personal strength and ability.

V. 20 which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead—Of all the forces which man must struggle against, death seems to have won the most complete and final victory. Even if a man succeeds in war, in love, in financial affairs, and much more, he will sooner or later die. The rich and the wise die just like the fools (Eccl. 2:16). Since all men were helpless to defeat death, God stepped in to win an eternal victory. Death, the undefeated champion, fell to defeat with just one blow of God’s great power. That single blow was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. After twenty centuries the resurrection still stands as the basis of our faith, the historical proof that Christianity is uniquely true among all other religions (1 Cor. 15:1-20).

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Cor. 15:54-55)

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in God’s people. We are not managing the kingdom on earth by our own power and resources, thus “doing God a favor.” God is managing the kingdom himself, working through us with the power that he himself provides!

One final word should be said about the practical application of this “resurrection power.” This power is mentioned in the context (see verse 18) of things which cannot be physically felt or measured, but must be accepted on faith. Therefore, the presence of this power in our lives must be accepted as true, whether we “feel” it or not. If we sit down and do nothing until we “feel” divinely empowered, we will probably never do anything. Instead, we must take God at his word and launch out. Experience repeatedly teaches us that it is when we make ourselves available to God and have the faith to TRY, that God gives us unseen power to succeed. It is when we

TRY, and not before, that “resurrection power” works in us.

and made him sit at his right hand—God not only raised Jesus from the tomb, but raised him still higher to the throne. To sit at the “right hand” meant to share in the authority which controls all things in heaven and earth. When Christ assumed this royal seat, the prophecy was fulfilled which God had made long ago through David:

“The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.’” (Psalm 110:1)

in the heavenly places—See comments on verse three.

V. 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion—These words were currently being used in reverence to various ranks of angels. It is likely that Paul had these angel ranks in mind here (see also Col. 1:16 and Rom. 8:37). Jesus sits at the right hand of God, superior to every angel in heaven or hell (Heb. 1:3-14).

It was especially pertinent to show Christ’s superiority over angels because of problems then arising in Asia Minor. Certain Christian groups were giving angels undue prominence, even to the point of worshipping them! (See Col. 2:18).

and above every name that is named—Jesus is superior to angels in the name by which he is called (Heb. 1:4). God has “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, very knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil. 2:9-10).

not only in this age but also in that which is to come—Christ’s exaltation to the throne, seated beside the Father, is not temporary. Throughout the remainder of man’s time on earth and throughout all eternity in the heavenly kingdom, Christ will sit on his throne as Co-Regent of all existence.

V. 22 and he has put all things under his feet—God has subjected all the universe, visible and invisible, under the authority of his Son. This is also in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 110:1 (see comments on verse 20). The New Testament makes reference to this verse more than any other verse in the Old Testament.

and has made him the head over all things—The Father has designated the Son to be the supreme head and ruler of all things. Since all authority has been given to Jesus (Matt. 28:18) he has the right to issue commands to his subjects. His subjects must not merely pay lip-service to his authority and lordship (Matt. 7:21), but must do whatever he demands.

for the church—Christ is not just the head of the church; he is head of all creation **for the church**. It is for

the sake of, and to the advantage of, the church that Christ reigns over the universe.

This is the first time Paul uses the word “church” in the epistle. It is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “a called-out assembly.” Most of the uses of *ekklesia* in the New Testament refer to local congregations. In this verse, however, it is the universal church—the worldwide body of all God’s children—that is meant. This was also the sense of the word when Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18).

We must be careful, however, that we do not fall into the modern trap of claiming to love the “invisible, universal church” while despising all the local manifestations of it!

V. 23 which is his body—The church is the body of Christ (Col. 1:18), just as surely as human flesh was once his body. While his body of flesh never got more than 200 miles from Jerusalem, his body of believers reaches around the world. While his body of flesh was subject to death, his body of believers cannot be stopped. The more the early martyrs were killed, the stronger the body became!

Most of Ephesians has to do with the Christian’s role as a member of Christ’s body. So much of our individual duties and our shared relationships with one another will become clear, if we can just remember that we are one body, and Jesus is the head.

the fullness of him who fills all in all—The church is the fullness of Christ in the sense that a head without a body is incomplete. Christ, who is all-sufficient, has deliberately chosen to depend upon his body of believers to accomplish his work on earth. He did not really need us to fill anything, but has chosen to work through us as his body.

Study Questions

1. Why did Paul say he had “heard of” their faith when he had spent three years in Ephesus personally?
2. How is God going to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation? In what form will it come?
3. What three specific things did Paul pray that his readers might come to know?
4. What is the greatest demonstration of God’s power in history?
5. Is the resurrection of Jesus something we accept on faith or on fact?
6. What does God’s ability to raise Jesus from the dead mean to you?
7. Have you ever been guilty of doubting God’s ability to work through you to accomplish anything for his kingdom?
8. What are several specific things a head does for a body?
9. In what way is Jesus dependent upon the church? If he is all-powerful and all-sufficient, why does he need us to labor in his kingdom on earth?

Lesson Three (2:1-10)

From Death to Life (2:1-10)

1 And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— 9 not because of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God to the rescue! Mankind was helplessly, hopelessly lost. We all walked in sin; we were all by nature children of wrath. But God chose to save us anyway! This passage, which contrasts our guilt with God's grace, is surely one of the most beautiful sections of all scripture.

V. 1 And you he made alive—In the Greek text this phrase does not actually occur until the fifth verse. Read the first three verses without this phrase and you will feel the impact of guilt and hopelessness. In an age which no longer believes God to be capable of righteous wrath against sinners, we would do well to remind ourselves of the fact that we were all children of wrath—saved only by God's grace.

when you were dead through the trespasses and sins—Death is separation. Physical death is separation from family and friends on earth; spiritual death is separation from God. When a man willfully sins, defying the commands of God, his sin cuts him off from his Creator. Our most holy God cannot tolerate sin or sinners in his presence. So long as men are still stained by sin's guiltiness, they are cut off from God—spiritually dead. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

"Trespasses" are literally "missteps which fall off to the side." It is a failure to stay within the prescribed path. In the scriptures trespasses usually refer to individual acts of wrongdoing.

"Sin" is literally "missing the mark." The picture is that of a marksman who takes aim, but misses his target. In the scriptures sin is usually more than just a single incident of wrongdoing. It is a state into which man falls; it is a way of life. "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

V. 2 in which you once walked—It was not just an isolated failure here or there in their lives; it was their whole way of life. In the scriptures the word "walk" is used to describe the continuous action of a life-style. In this case their way of life was the way of death.

Following the course of this world—To follow the course of this world means to live according to the present, temporary scheme of things. It means to ignore the prospect of eternity and heaven, and to live entirely for "the here and now."

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he

who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

following the prince of the power of the air—The prince of this world is Satan (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). It is against him and all his hosts that Christians must do battle (Eph. 6:10-12). When men sin and disobey God, they transfer their allegiance to Satan.

The power of "the air" has been understood in many ways. The early church fathers thought of storms and atmospheric disturbances. Others have taken "the air" as astrological powers, or as a synonym for "heavenly places" (see 6:12), or as the air we breathe, which is then said to be the dwelling place of demons.

Actually, the best way to understand this sentence grammatically is to take "the air" as the same as "the spirit" which is in apposition to it. This would be the resultant meaning: "Satan is the prince of the power of the air—and that air is the rebellious spirit or attitude working in men."

the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience—The spirit, as used here, is an attitude or way of thinking. This evil seems to pervade humanity. "Sons of disobedience" is simply another way of saying "men who disobey."

V. 3 Among these we all once lived—No man has the right to look down his nose at a sinner. Despite what the Pharisees thought of themselves, "there is none righteous, no, not one," (Rom. 3:10). Before we can properly appreciate how God so graciously saved us, we have to admit how lost we were!

in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind—The purest essence of sin is not some horrible, unthinkable atrocity. It is living for self. It is obeying my own desires and caring only what I want for myself. Satan does not have to convince us to commit murder to have us in his clutches; he has only to convince us to live for self. This is why the very first thing a man must do to follow Jesus is to deny self (Matt. 16:24).

Furthermore, it is not only the body which has sinful passions. The desires of mind can be just as bad—and perhaps worse, since they are less conspicuous. The mind that demands its own way in matters of anger, pride, resentment, revenge, etc. is working for the devil (see 4:26-27).

and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind—when Paul said we were "by nature" children who deserved God's wrath, he by no means meant we were born that way. Man is not born totally depraved, as some would teach. He is born a free moral agent, capable of both good and evil. Men have all chosen evil at one time or another, thus becoming

guilty of sin. Notice all the indictments against men which led to this verdict:

1. You were dead through trespasses and sins (v. 1).
2. You walked in them (v. 2)
3. You followed the course of this world.
4. You followed the prince of the power of the air.
5. You shared the attitude (spirit) of the sons of disobedience.
6. We all lived according to the passions of our flesh (v. 3).
7. We followed the desires of body and mind.

It was not God's doing, but our own, that made us "by nature children of wrath." Where does the Bible make God responsible for the sinful choices that we made for ourselves?

V. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy—Two of the most beautiful words in all the Bible are these: "But God." (See Acts 13:30; Phil. 2:27; and 1 Cor. 10:13). "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8)

There is a dramatic contrast in verses three and four between God's wrath and God's mercy. It is hard to avoid going to an extreme with one or the other. In earlier days people were gripped with terror as they heard Jonathan Edwards preach "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In modern times people are often so presumptuous of God's mercy that they say, "It doesn't matter if you sin. God is so nice that he won't send anybody to hell, anyway." God has wrath for his enemies and love for his children, and one cannot be properly understood without the other. Furthermore, he offers us a choice. We may choose to be either his enemies or his children.

out of the great love with which he loved us—The unique quality of God's love (*agape* in Gk.) is that he loves even when love is not deserved and the object of his love is very unlovely. His love does not count the cost or calculate its own profit. (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10). The "children of wrath" have become children of mercy and love.

V. 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses—Paul here picks up on the line of thought from the first three verses so that he can bring it to its grand conclusion: Even though we were helplessly, hopelessly dead, God made us alive with Christ!

made us alive together with Christ—Just as God raised his Son from physical death in the preceding verses (1:19-23), so now he raises his human children from spiritual death. Just as the Son now lives forever and reigns triumphantly, so should the children continue

in spiritual life and triumph over the old life of human failure. What we were, we are no longer—by God's grace.

(by grace you have been saved)—Like a composer of a beautiful symphony, Paul has been building to a beautiful crescendo. He started with the low, dark tones of death and then introduced the bright note of God's mercy. The climax he reaches in verse eight is the theme of his symphony, and he cannot help but insert a preview of it here: By grace you have been saved!

V. 6 and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him—What a beautiful parallel there is between Christ's resurrection and our own! Just as God did for Jesus physically, he does for us spiritually:

1. He made us alive with Christ.
2. He raised us up with him.
3. He made us sit with him.

in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus—In Christ and his church we are participants in the eternal sphere of being. We should live our lives in constant awareness of the cosmic struggle going on around us (6:12).

V. 7 that in the coming ages—As the years roll into eternity, throughout countless ages God will continue to work blessings for his beloved children.

he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace—Not only is the greatness of God's power "immeasurable"; so also is his grace. God shows himself to have an earnest desire to bless the people he loves. True *agape* love is always seeking a way to express itself, to the benefit of the one loved.

Note also that God's resources for forgiveness and grace are inexhaustible.

in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus—Most world religions have men trying to appease the wrath of their angry gods. Christianity, the true religion, shows how eager God is to show his lovingkindness!

"Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee. So I will bless Thee as long as I live." (Psalm 63:3-4)

God's kindness for all eternity, however, is available only "in Christ Jesus."

V. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith—This is the Hallelujah Chorus of salvation! This puts the "good" in "good news." We are not saved by works of our own righteousness (which is woefully inadequate), but by the self-sacrifice of the righteous Jesus Christ.

It was God's grace that made possible this way of salvation. Grace is "unmerited favor," which means that God gave his goodwill and lovingkindness to people who did not deserve it. It means that even though we are

unworthy and undeserving, God likes us and wants us anyway! We are saved “by grace.”

The Greek uses the perfect tense for “you have been saved.” This tense shows the present result of past action. It means that the Christian should not be ashamed or afraid to say, “I am saved.” While salvation is sometimes viewed as in progress (1 Cor. 1:18) or a future event (Rom. 5:9-10), it is viewed here as a present reality. We are in the present state of having been saved.

We are saved by grace “through faith.” Faith is the response of the sinner to the Savior which appropriates God’s gift to him. Faith by no means “earns” salvation or makes the sinner “worthy” of grace. Faith is more than mere belief that God exists (James 2:19). Faith is “the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.” (Quoted from the official statement of faith of the Southern Baptist Convention, adopted and printed in 1963, p. 11.) Anything less than total commitment to Him as Lord is not saving faith!

and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—What is it that is not of our own doing? Is it faith? (Some have said that a person cannot believe until the Holy Spirit makes him believe.) Is it grace? Actually, it is neither. Both grace and faith are feminine gender in the Greek, while “this is not your own doing” is neuter gender. The neuter gender makes it refer to the entire concept of salvation, not to one of its particular parts. Salvation is what we cannot do for ourselves, and is therefore God’s gift.

V. 9 not because of works, lest any man should boast—No amount of good works could ever make up for our evil works. (Just as observing the speed limit most of the time does not make up for that one time you got caught! Neither would the fact that you are a good employee most of the time make up for embezzling from the company—even just once!)

When men try to gain heaven by “works,” one of two results always follows:

1. If a man is arrogant and blind, he may think he has actually earned heaven and he will boast. God’s way of salvation prevents boasting (1 Cor. 1:29, 31).
2. If a man is honest and conscientious, he will realize his own inadequacy. He will see that he is in constant peril of breaking just one law and coming under the curse of God (Gal. 3:10).

V. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them—Good works do have a place in our lives. They must follow

our salvation. Good works are not the source of our salvation, but the result of it. Works do not produce salvation, but salvation—if it is real—will produce works. To put it another way, good works are not the root of salvation, but the fruit of it. (See the essay following the study questions.)

Study Questions

1. How do trespasses and sins cause death?
2. When you sinned, did the devil make you do it? (See verse two.)
3. When you sinned, was it because God had made you with a sinful nature? (See verse three)
4. What is the real essence of sin?
5. What did God accomplish in the resurrection of Jesus that he also accomplishes in us?
6. In what sense do we already sit with Jesus in the heavenly places?
7. Try an experiment. Memorize Eph. 2:8 and quote it to your Bible School class. See if anyone recognizes it and can tell you where it is found. (I hope you are not as disappointed as I have been! Are we avoiding this verse?)
8. What is faith? Is it possible to be “full of faith” without being “faithful”?
9. How has God eliminated our ground of boasting?
10. Where do good works fit into God’s plan of salvation?

Work Without Faith is Dread

Or

“Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Grace, But Were Afraid to Ask”

“Brother, are you saved?” The question annoyed me. If my new friend had been going to the right church,

he would know not to ask questions like that. You can sing it (“Glory, I’m saved...”), you can pray it (“Thank Thee for saving us...”), but in orthodox circles you just don’t think or say it.

Ever since Luther turned his church door into a Protestant bulletin board, good Christian folks have been yearning for a feel of this forbidden confidence of salvation. Common sense and most of our preachers have warned us to stay clear. Salvation by grace through faith is just too good to be true!

Besides that, how can you keep the masses in line without a healthy fear of coming up short on Judgment Day?

Your solution of course, is to preach grace only as a prelude to a good stiff sermon on works. With all the jokes, illustrations, and theological double-talk removed, it comes out like this in layman’s language: “Salvation is God’s gift! You can’t earn it, but if you don’t earn it, you can’t keep it. Get busy!”

Now it’s true that trying to do all this work without an assurance of being saved produces dread, but that’s just the price you have to pay. Folks may feel frustrated and lost, but after all, that’s what keeps them coming back week after week!

In customary practice, the clergyman selects each week the virtue necessary for the aspiring saint to keep himself saved. The beautiful part of the program is that if the pew-people get close to attaining it, you can switch them next week to a different virtue.

Occasionally someone asks why it wouldn’t be better if we all simply responded to God with works of love. This is a dangerous question. For one, this could cause people to lose their fear. For another, if news of this ever got out, you might have to leave the brotherhood of the true church and start working with the Baptists!

In conclusion, and in order to prevent any more bulletins on the church doors, let us clarify this matter with a few definitions:

GRACE—Divine generosity in offering you a chance to earn the right to keep your salvation.

FAITH—Taking God up on his offer.

WORKS—The rental fee on the promise of salvation. Anytime you can’t quite work up the agreed price, you are evicted from the promises.

(I trust you caught the irony of this!)

Lesson Four (2:11-22)

One Body in Place of Two (2:11-16)

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

God has not only conquered death through Jesus Christ; he has also conquered division. “Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11). Christ not only reconciles man to God; he also reconciles man to his fellow man.

V. 11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh—Paul has reminded us in the preceding ten verses how we were all dead and doomed, until God saved us. Now he points out that the Gentiles (all non-Jews) have even more reason to be thankful, for they were more alienated from God.

As the chosen people of God, the Jews felt contempt and hostility for the Gentiles. This is well illustrated by two quotations from the Talmud, the official body of Jewish civil and religious law. “Kill the best of the Gentiles! Crush the head of the best of snakes!” “The daughter of an Israelite may not assist a Gentile woman in childbirth, since she would be assisting to bring to birth a child for idolatry.”

called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision—It was highly derogatory to call someone “uncircumcision,” for the Greek word means literally “foreskin of the male penis.” Circumcision represented a division which was at once religious, social, racial, national, and physical. No dividing line of creed or color today could be more complete.

which is made in the flesh by hands—Paul no longer recognized circumcision as a mark of the covenant, identifying God’s people. In Christ there is a circumcision made **without** hands (Col. 2:11). The seal of the new covenant is not an external marking, but one that is internal and spiritual.

V. 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ—Paul continues to list for the Gentiles (and us, their descendants) the ways in which they were cut off from God. They were not a part of the people awaiting the Messiah or Christ. They were separated not merely as those who do not yet believe, but as not even having a right to hear!

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel—The Gentiles were aliens, and had never been anything else. They were cut off from God’s community. Even after the church was established many Jewish Christian thought the Gentiles must first become Jewish proselytes before they were eligible to accept Christ. This shows how complete the alienation had been.

and strangers to the covenants of promise—God had made his promises to Abraham and his seed. This clearly left the Gentiles out—at least, in the mind of the Jews! It is interesting that in several ancient languages, the word “stranger” was synonymous with “enemy.” This reflects the thought pattern of the times.

having no hope—Apart from the hope of a Messiah, there was no hope. Hopelessness was the state of most of the Graeco-Roman world in the first century. Gilbert Murray’s classic description of the times was a “failure of nerve.” Their government was corrupt and their gods were dead.

and without God in the world—The climax of failure and separation was to be without God. Furthermore, to be without God in this world is also to be without God in the world to come! This tragic circumstance was true for the Gentiles of the first century, and it is also true for a majority of the world’s population today.

V. 13 But now in Christ Jesus—What a wonderful change God can make! Spiritual death was reversed by “But God...” (Eph. 2:4), and spiritual alienation is ended by “But now in Christ Jesus...”

you who once were far off have been brought near—Those who were “far off” were the Gentiles, and they were specifically included in the very first Gospel invitation. “This promise is to you and to your children **and to all that are far off**” (Acts 2:39)

in the blood of Christ—The same blood that removes the stain of sin also removes the stigma of separation. In Christ there can be no barriers of class or color, because we have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27-28).

V. 14 For he is our peace—Peace is not just the absence of conflict, it is the positive presence of true harmony. Jesus is our peace. He himself is the only means of reconciliation between man and God. When a man is then right with God, he must also get right with

his fellow men—regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile!

who has made us both one—The unity between Jew and Gentile was not just organizational or mechanical union. It was a genuine “oneness” which Paul will later call “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3).

and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility—The “wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles sometimes took on physical reality. At the Temple in Jerusalem there was an outer perimeter called the Court of the Gentiles. This area was separated from the inner courtyards and the Temple itself by a fence or screen. Archaeologists have found at least two of the warning signs that were posted all along that fence. Chiseled into stone, with red paint to make the inscription more bold, was this warning: “No Gentile may enter inside the enclosing screen around the Temple. Whoever is caught is alone responsible for the death which follows.” (*Archaeology and the New Testament*, by J.A. Thompson, p. 36)

That the Jews took this seriously is shown by the mob’s outrage against Paul in Acts 21:28, since he had allegedly “brought Greeks into the temple, and he has defiled this holy place.”

V. 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances—It was the O.T. law that actually separated Jews from Gentiles, so it was the law that Jesus had to abolish. Jesus set the law aside by fulfilling all its demands of righteousness, and then paying off the debt we owed because of unrighteousness. Just like a mortgage finally paid off, the law was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). In fact, when Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” he used the very same Greek expression often found at the bottom of a certificate of debt meaning “Paid in Full”!

that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two—It was through Jesus that man was originally created (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). Because of the effects of sin, man came to be divided—religiously, socially, and otherwise. Now the same Jesus has created one new man to be all that the original Adam was intended to be.

V. 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body—The purpose of unity is the reconciliation of man to God. Unity apart from God has no particular value. At the tower of Babel men were united in location, language, and purpose—but apart from God. So God broke them up! Not long afterward, in order to deal with sin and salvation, God separated Abraham and began the Jewish nation. God’s ultimate goal was completed in Jesus Christ. In Christ he could bring mankind back together, but this time in unity with himself.

through the cross—The cross marked the end of sin’s reign and the end of legal separation of Jew and Gentile.

thereby bringing the hostility to an end—Literally, “having killed the enmity by it.” This enmity, now slain, has existed between man and God, as well as between man and other men.

The Family of God (2:17-22)

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

V. 17 And he came and preached peace—Jesus came in fulfillment of all that Isaiah, the “Gospel Prophet” had said the Messiah would be. (See Isa. 52:7; 57:19). Jesus was called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) who came to guide people into the way of peace) Luke 1:79). If at times Jesus seemed to cause discord instead of peace (Matt. 10:34), it was because real peace must begin with reconciliation to God—and anything standing in the way of that must be removed!

to you who were far off and peace to those who were near—“You who were far off” were Paul’s Gentile readers in Ephesus and Asia Minor. Although there were Jews living throughout that area, they nearly always rejected Paul’s preaching. The Gospel remains available, however, to both Jew and Gentile, and to all of us today, regardless of ancestry.

V. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father—The key word here is “access.” It was used in Greek society for the “right to approach,” as when a person has received an introduction to the king. Christ Jesus gives us access to God. No longer is there a fence to keep out Gentiles; no longer is there a great veil of the Temple to keep out every Jew except the High Priest.

“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

V. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners—In the Old Testament “sojourners” were also called “strangers within the gates.” They were non-Jews who lived among the Jews and were tolerated with some distaste. They were bound by Jewish laws (Exodus 20:10), but were not allowed to share in their sacred activities, such as a Passover supper (Exodus 12:45).

In Christ Jesus there are no “half-way” citizens. No one is merely tolerated in God’s kingdom!

but you are fellow citizens with the saints—Have you ever seen the joy and pride of an immigrant who has become a naturalized citizen of the United States? He is happy because he has become a rightful participant in what he considers the best country in the world. He has the right to vote, to hold office, to own property, and to live without fear of deportation. Even if certain other citizens do not like him, he has a right to stay! (He may, of course, elect to renounce his citizenship at some later date, but his fellow citizens cannot throw him out.) See also Phil. 3:20-21.

and members of the household of God—Now the figure changes from a kingdom to a family. The proper understanding of the member of God’s household is not a servant, but a son! The church is the family of God. Christians are God’s children (1 John 3:1) and are supposed to exhibit the traits and characteristics of their Father (Eph. 5:1).

V. 20 built upon the foundation—Now the figure changes again. The church is pictured as a building with a firm foundation. This imagery is also found in 1 Peter 2:4-8. In that passage the living stones of this temple building are the Christians themselves.

of the apostles and prophets—By God’s grace ordinary men were given the privilege of having important positions in the founding of the church (Matt. 16:18-19; John 20:22-23). The apostles are also seen as the foundation of the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).

The prophets mentioned here are probably persons in the first century church having the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:28), rather than Old Testament prophets. The use of “apostles and prophets” in Eph. 3:5 and 4:11 seems to confirm this.

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone—While the figure used in 1 Cor. 3:11 has Jesus as the whole foundation, another figure is used here to bring out an additional truth. Jesus is the cornerstone of the holy temple building.

The Common understanding of “cornerstone” is the first stone of a foundation, from which all measurements are made for the rest of the building. Jesus is certainly

worthy of this application. However, there is good evidence that the word “cornerstone” (Gk. *acrogoniaios*) should be translated as “head of the corner” or “capstone.” This figure sets Christ up as the topmost stone of the building, having prominence and priority. This parallels the image of Christ as “head” of his body the church.

There is an interesting parallel in the use of this word in the *Testament of Solomon*, a Jewish work from the first century which describes the building of Solomon’s Temple. “The Temple was being completed. And there was a great *acrogoniaios* stone which I was wanting to set as the head of the corner.” Therefore a workman “went up the ladder bearing the stone and set it at the top of the arch of the entrance of the Temple.”

V. 21 in whom the whole structure is joined together—Christ gives the building unity and purpose, just as he unites the “body” in Eph. 4:16. The building or body grows up into its head.

The word for “joined together” was used by the Greeks when all the parts made a complete whole, when different music blended in harmony, or when a man and his bride were joined in wedlock. The emphasis is the harmonious blending of diverse parts into a united whole.

and grows into a holy temple in the Lord—This building is alive and growing! Each living stone is built upon the living foundation of apostles and prophets and together they grow up into the head stone Jesus Christ.

While in the Old Testament the glory of God dwelt in a tent tabernacle pitched in the wilderness, or in a stone temple in Jerusalem, now God dwells in a living temple. Formerly, the people could not fully approach God’s dwelling; now, God has brought his dwelling into his people! The word “temple” here (Gk. *naos*) had special reference to the Holy of Holies, the sacred sanctuary within the temple where the glory of God hovered above the mercy seat and the ark of the covenant.

V. 22 in whom you also are built into it—Paul’s Gentile readers were also a part of the church. They had a rightful place in the walls of the living structure. They could not be knocked out of the wall without leaving an ugly gap. (See 1 Peter 2:4-8.)

for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit—If a person loves Jesus and keeps his word, the Father and Son will take up residence in that person, in the form of the Holy Spirit (John 14:23). The Gospel invitation promises the indwelling gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38), and the presence of the Spirit identifies the Christian as a child of God (Eph. 1:13-14). If anyone does not have

God dwelling in him, as the Spirit of Christ, he simply does not belong to God (Rom. 8:9).

In these last four verses, three different figures have been employed to depict the church. In all, Ephesians uses five such pictures:

1. A kingdom (2:19)
2. A family (2:19)
3. A building, which is both a temple and home (2:20-22)
4. A body (1:23)
5. A bride (5:23-32)

Each of these figures brings out an important and beautiful lesson about the nature of the church and her relationship to her Lord.

Study Questions

1. In what ways did Paul say the Gentiles were cut off from God in verses eleven to thirteen?
2. How is each of these forms of alienation answered elsewhere in Ephesians? (See especially 2:13-19)
3. Does world history agree with Paul’s assessment of the predicament of the Gentiles?
4. What was found in Jerusalem which graphically illustrates the “dividing wall of hostility?”
5. How did the law separate men from God and from one another?
6. How did the cross solve the problem?
7. What were sojourners?
8. What does it mean to be “members of God’s household”?
9. In what way is Jesus Christ the cornerstone of the church?

10. If we are the temple and dwelling place of God in the Spirit, how will that affect our lives? (See 1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 6:19-20.)

Lesson Five (3:1-13)

Paul's Part in the Plan (3:1-6)

1 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 man in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

God has a plan for the salvation of mankind, and Paul had a key role in that plan. In order to make the blood of Christ available to all men, Paul was commissioned to bring the Gentiles into the new covenant. This lesson will focus on Paul's mission to the Gentiles and the blessings which resulted from it.

V. 1 For this reason—Paul now resumes the prayer which he had stated in 1:15. The “reason” he mentions is the gracious goodness of God in giving salvation and all the spiritual blessings.

Just as in chapter one, however, Paul no sooner starts this prayer than he digresses again. It seems that his heart must have been overwhelmed with God's provision for salvation, so he just had to tell about it. The prayer is resumed again in verse 14 of this chapter and is concluded in verses 20 and 21.

I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus—Paul wrote this epistle during his imprisonment in Rome. Other epistles written from this same imprisonment are Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of the Roman emperor Nero, nor a prisoner of the Jews. He was a prisoner for Christ Jesus. If his Lord had not wanted him there, not all the power of Rome could have held him. His confinement could not shake his confidence (Phil. 1:12-14).

on behalf of you Gentiles—It was for the sake of Gentiles, such as his readers, that Paul was in prison. God had called him to open the gates of salvation to the

Gentiles, and this was what got him into so much trouble with the Jews. With the mention of his mission to the Gentiles, Paul must now again digress from his prayer and tell about God's plan.

V. 2 assuming that you have heard—His readers had indeed heard about the work of the Apostle Paul. The word “assuming” implies no doubt here, just as there is no doubt in 4:21, where the same Greek expression is used. Paul is simply reminding of what they already know, before he begins to build upon it.

the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you—The word “stewardship” (Gk. *oikonomia*) is also translated “dispensation” or “assignment.” It refers to the responsibility that is laid upon a servant or steward to accomplish a given task. The assignment of this task was given to Paul when he was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:16-18).

It is most interesting that Paul should look upon his job assignment as a matter “of God's grace.” As a matter of fact, the giving of God's grace always carries with it responsibility. The privilege always demands purpose. While the grace of God is free and unmerited, God expects unworthy men to attempt a worthy response (Eph. 2:8-10). Thus, for Paul, the handing out of God's grace to him also meant the handing out of a job.

V. 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation—The word “mystery” means a “secret” which people do not know until they are told (Eph. 1:9). God's secret strategy for saving the world was to have Jesus die on the cross, and then to offer free salvation to all men—including Gentiles! (See the parallel text in Col. 1:24-29.)

Paul had not guessed the secret plan, nor was he taught it by other men (Gal. 1:1, 11-12). God revealed the secret to Paul directly, and then commissioned him to tell all men.

as I have written briefly—Paul is referring to the previous two chapters of this same epistle. In them he has begun briefly to outline God's secret strategy to reconcile fallen man to himself. The primary purpose of the plan was to restore the man-to-God relationship. A secondary purpose, which is really a necessary corollary to the first, was to restore the man-to-man relationships. True unity with God must bring about unity with other men, whether they are Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians. No man can make his faith a purely private matter, ignoring the rest of the body of believers.

V. 4 When you read this—As Paul's readers read the first two chapters and continued on with this present chapter, they would understand the secret plan.

you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ—From this verse through verse 8, Paul will be

focusing on his own particular role in God's plan. Paul's specific task was to bring in the Gentiles. Paul does not mean to imply here that bringing in the Gentiles was the whole plan; rather, that this was his own part in the plan.

When Paul spoke of "the mystery of Christ" his readers may well have remembered the many mystery religions of Asia Minor. They, too, promised to reveal hidden secrets. (Satan often misleads people by offering a counterfeit imitation of the real thing.) The mystery religions of Asia Minor were foolish collections of myth and fable, long since forgotten. The true revelation of heaven's secret is found in the person of Jesus Christ. He is God's mystery, "in whom are hid all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2:2-3)

V. 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations—Neither the Greek philosophers nor the Oriental sages were able to uncover God's plan. The wisest of men could not think God's thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). By concealing these things from the wise and revealing them to babes (Matt. 11:25), God made salvation possible to all men, not just the intellectually elite (Col. 1:26 and 28).

as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit—Just as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit led the apostles into all truth (John 14:26). They did not immediately grasp all the implications of Calvary, but were led step by step to complete understanding. This gradual process can be best observed in Simon Peter and his understanding of the Gentiles. Although he opened the door to Gentiles on Pentecost (Acts 2:38-39), several years later he still needed some prodding to preach to Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48). Still later, he became a hypocrite in Antioch when he refused to be seen eating with his Gentile brothers (Gal. 2:11-16).

As Paul writes this epistle from Roman imprisonment, some thirty years have passed since Pentecost. God has fully revealed his plan regarding Gentiles, not only to the apostles, but also to the first century prophets. (See also 2:20 and 4:11.)

V. 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs—For at least seventeen centuries the Jews had taken special pride in being God's chosen people, heirs of the promises made to Abraham. They jealously guarded their national identity and excluded non-Jews from any covenant consideration. But now, in Christ, the Gentiles are fellow heirs! As Paul wrote to the Galatian Gentiles, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29).

members of the same body—This entire phrase is taken from a single Greek word, apparently coined by

Paul himself. Christ's body on earth is his church, and Gentiles have equal access with Jews to become members of this body. The body of Christ must not recognize dividing lines among men. People are freely accepted by God for salvation regardless of color, nationality, sex, or political persuasion. The church must not draw lines where God has not.

and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus—Those who had been "strangers to the covenants of promise" were now partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:12). The seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:7) in whom the promise was to find fulfillment was Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16), and Christ extended the blessings to the Gentiles.

Paul used three individual words in Greek to express these three statements regarding the Gentiles. To catch the impact of this in English we would say:

The Gentiles are: Co-heirs

Co-body-members

Co-partakers of the promise.

through the gospel—Jesus extended the promised blessings to all men. However, the only way to receive them is through the gospel. All men are potentially blessed in Christ, but only those who respond to the gospel are actually blessed.

To Make Men See the Mystery (3:7-13)

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 make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confidence of access 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.

V. 7 Of this gospel I was made a minister—The term "minister of the gospel" has become synonymous with "clergyman" or "a reverend" in the minds of many people. In Greek, however, the word translated "minister" means simply a "servant." The same word (*diakonos*) is used for the banquet servants in John 2 and for the church workers (deacons) in 1 Timothy 3. Paul was not trying to set himself up in a special class of the clergy, but was rather stating his work as a humble servant of the gospel.

according to the gift of God's grace—As in verse 2 of this chapter, the giving of God's grace turns out to be a job assignment. Grace demands response and responsibility. When we get the proper perspective on things, we realize that if God assigns us a task to be done, we have received a very great blessing and privilege. If we look at serving God as a chore and a burden, there is something wrong with our way of thinking!

which was given me by the working of his power—Paul claimed credit for neither his office of apostleship nor his labors in that office. What he had accomplished was possible only through the "resurrection power" of God working within him (Eph. 1:19 and 3:20). While we all must "work out our own salvation" (Phil. 2:12), the credit is still ultimately due to God who works in us "both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

V. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints—In view of all Paul's accomplishments as an apostle, it is remarkable that he could view himself in such a lowly fashion. He added both the comparative and superlative endings to the Greek adjective, so that the resulting meaning was "less than the least." He also called himself the "least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9) and the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Incidentally, this is strong proof that the epistle was written by Paul himself, and not by one of his admiring disciples, as the critics sometimes claim.

this grace was given—This JOB ASSIGNMENT was given!

to preach the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ—On the road to Damascus God commissioned Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17). Throughout the Gentile world Paul's message was simply "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

The word "unsearchable" means literally "not to be tracked out." It comes from the vocabulary of the hunter, who is tracking his prey. The skillful hunter is rarely outsmarted, being able to follow tracks through almost any kind of terrain. The movements and motives of God, however, are simply beyond our ability to follow completely. The riches of his grace available to us in Christ are beyond our understanding.

V. 9 and to make all men see—Literally, "to enlighten" all men. Paul's commission was "to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18). Paul preached to the pagan Gentiles, but he also tried to show his fellow Jews what God's plan for mankind was.

what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages—The word for "plan" is the same word translated

"stewardship" in verse 2. Now, however, Paul is beginning to enlarge the scope of his vision to encompass not just his own role in the plan, but the whole plan in its entirety. This larger frame of reference is evidenced by the double use of "all" in this verse. (Refer to comments on verses 3 and 4 for additional notes about God's hidden plan.)

in God who created all things—God who is the ultimate source of all things is also the source of the plan for saving mankind. You can notice throughout Ephesians how much Paul stresses the fact that God is the all-sufficient source and Father of all existence. Salvation is given freely through his sovereignty; it is not devised or earned by man.

V. 10 that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known—God has often been mocked and his plans have been called foolish (1 Cor. 1:21-23). However, God has chosen a means of demonstrating his wisdom and showing that he is no fool. This chosen means is the church! Through *the church* God is proving his wisdom! How can this be? Isn't the church weak and full of hypocrites? Do not great numbers of his own children look with contempt upon the church? Surely God had a reason for choosing this surprising way of displaying his wisdom.

It may help to begin by comparing the church with the institutions made by men. No human institution has ever:

1. Cared so much for the poor, hungry, and enslaved.
2. Crossed racial barriers so completely.
3. Lifted morality and decency so much.
4. Inspired hope, beauty, and love so much.
5. Reconciled sinners to God—at all!

When you realize how much the church has accomplished in spite of hypocrites and lukewarmness, God's power becomes much more impressive. In fact, God deliberately chose the weak, lowly, and foolish to overcome the strong, mighty, and wise. When he can win the victory in spite of these handicaps, his power and wisdom are more clearly seen, and no human can boast before his presence (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places—It is not just to men, though, that God is proving his wisdom. The specific audience named here is made up of angels. The "principalities and powers" are angel ranks, especially those who are opposed to God. (See Eph. 6:12 and Rom. 8:38.) What a responsibility is laid upon us to allow God to work through us to prove his wisdom!

V. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose—Paul again refers to God's plan for saving

mankind. This plan for salvation is an eternal plan, fixed in the mind of God from the very beginning.

which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord—All the promises of God find their Yes in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20). He is not a preliminary or intermediate phase; he is the final word and the climax of the whole plan (Heb. 1:1-4).

V. 12 in whom we have boldness and confidence of access—The word for “boldness” was the word for the “freedom of speech” of the Greek citizen. God has granted Christians the right to speak and be heard before his throne of grace.

The “confidence of access” reminds us of Eph. 2:18 and the removal of all barriers standing between various kinds of men and their Father. It is only in Jesus, our great high priest, that we can have such confidence before God (Heb. 4:14-16 and 10:19-22).

V. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you—Paul also had to encourage the Philippians (1:12-14 and 2:17-18) and the Colossians (1:24) in regard to his imprisonment. Paul wanted them to see that imprisonment was not defeat. Suffering and affliction should not be allowed to overwhelm oneself, but should be accepted gladly. It is often in our weakness and distress that God’s power is most clearly seen at work (2 Cor. 12:9).

which is your glory—It was an honor to all the early Christians that Paul suffered for them as he did. Therefore, they should not lose heart (Gal. 6:9) but take great courage in the power of God to sustain Paul even in imprisonment.

Study Questions

1. How had Paul’s association with the Gentiles caused him to be imprisoned?
2. What was the “stewardship of God’s grace” which was given to Paul in verse two?
3. What does “mystery mean in these verses?
4. Why did God hide his plan from the sons of men in other generations?
5. What three descriptions of the Gentiles in verse six point out their full citizenship in God’s kingdom?
6. What is a “minister of the gospel?”
7. What is God teaching the angels?
8. What object lesson is he using to teach them?
9. What does it mean that God has “realized” his “eternal purpose” in Christ Jesus?
10. What is the boldness and confidence of access we have?
11. Can you appreciate how the people of Asia Minor would be tempted to lose heart over Paul’s imprisonment? Would you have wanted to volunteer to preach in his place?

Lesson Six (3:14-19)

A Glorious Prayer (3:14-19)

14 For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, 17 and that Christ may dwell in you hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul now concludes the prayer from which he has twice digressed. The power and beauty of this prayer transcend the frailties of human language, speaking directly to our hearts. All the glory of the body of Christ, filled with resurrection power, is graphically stated. If this prayer can be fulfilled in our lives today, the glorious bride of Christ will be seen by a doubting world.

V. 14 For this reason—This is the third time Paul has said these words (1:15 and 3:1), and now he will finally conclude his prayer.

I bow my knees before the Father—The usual posture for praying throughout the Old Testament was to stand with one's hands lifted toward heaven. Exceptions to this usual practice may be found in the case of Solomon (1 Kg. 8:54) and in the case of Daniel (Dan. 6:10). Perhaps inspired by what Jesus did at Gethsemane, early Christians adopted kneeling as a favorite posture. (See Acts 7:60; 20:36; and 21:5.) Whatever the posture of the body, it is the posture of the heart which is most important to God.

V. 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named—Paul's emphasis on the total Fatherhood of God is closely connected to the preceding verses, especially verse nine. God is seen as the ultimate source of all things and the original source of all families. Knowing that God is the ultimate giver of "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (James 1:17), Paul makes his request known.

This phrase may also be translated "from whom all fatherhood takes its name" (Phillips, NIV margin). If this is the right translation, the point is that God is the original model for fatherhood.

V. 16 that according to the riches of his glory—Paul is not asking God to do something beyond his resources. God's treasure house of riches is inexhaustible (Eph. 1:7 and 18; 2:4). God's blessings are limited only by the measure of our willingness to get into a position to receive them.

he may grant you—Paul states his requests in a striking way, linking his three-fold petition to the three Persons of the Trinity. To summarize in advance the content of Paul's prayer, let us use this outline:

Paul Prays that God Will Give:

- I. The Spirit Within—for Strength
- II. Christ Within—for Love
- III. God Within—for Fullness

to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man—In language reminiscent of 1:19, Paul prays for strength from God in his readers. The Holy Spirit is to be the channel of this strength.

God's Spirit has always been associated with power. In the time of the Judges, the Holy Spirit took possession of weak, fearful Gideon and destroyed a host of 120,000 Midianites (Judges 6:34 and 8:10). Some years later the Spirit "came mightily upon" Samson, enabling him to tear apart a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:6). On another occasion the Spirit "came mightily upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty men" (Judges 14:19). On yet another occasion the Spirit "came mightily upon him" and he killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:14). At the end of Samson's life we find him

praying for strength just one more time to destroy his enemies (Judges 17:28).

These incidents seem to illustrate a pattern of the Spirit's activity during the Old Covenant. The Spirit came with his might and strength upon only isolated individuals, and then for only a brief time period. The days had not yet come when God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28) to be a permanent resident within all believers. The coming of the indwelling Spirit at Pentecost was accompanied with many signs and wonders, but the real work of the Spirit throughout the Christian era was to be spiritual, not physical. His strength was to be for the inner man. He makes us strong to withstand not lions and Philistines, but to withstand the devil (Eph. 6:11-13) who walks about as a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8).

V. 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—Paul's second petition is that Christ may dwell in our hearts. Actually, this is very similar to the request for the Spirit in the inner man. The Spirit living within the Christian is Christ! (See John 14:23 and Rom. 8:9).

The indwelling Presence is promised as a result of repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38), but all this must be "through faith." To go through the motions without the underlying faith produces only mechanical emptiness. At the same time, to profess faith while disdainful obedience and commitment is to have no real faith at all.

One further lesson seems obvious. If a person ceases to have faith, he ceases to have a place within him where God in the Spirit may dwell.

that you, being rooted and grounded in love—The main thing associated with Christ living in us is love. (See also verse 19). To be "rooted" in love is to be firmly planted, with deep roots drawing both stability and nourishment from love. To be "grounded" in love is to have a "foundation" built upon the love of Christ.

It is remarkable how much of Christ's ministry was associated with love. His greatest commandments (in fact, all commandments) were summed up by love (Matt. 22:36-40). The identifying mark of his followers was love (John 13:35). The very first fruit of the Spirit (which is Christ within) is love (Gal. 5:22).

V. 18 may have power to comprehend with all the saints—Paul is still speaking of power, but now it is the power to comprehend the incomprehensible. The word for "comprehend" meant "to seize for oneself, to grasp with the mind." Just as Christ's riches are unsearchable (3:8), so is his love too great for us to grasp completely. Without God's help, for which Paul is now praying, we would be able to understand very little at all.

The phrase “with all the saints” is a subtle reminder that our mystic communion with Christ is not a private matter. Our faith is personal, but not private. We are not alone in the family.

what is the breadth and length and height and depth—Paul does not specify the object of which these are the measurements. While some have taken that object as the “mystery” named in earlier verses, it seems best to take these measurements in the present context of the love of Christ. Like a child who has just seen his first ocean or mountain, we should never cease to marvel at the magnitude of the love of Christ. He owed us nothing, he gave us all.

V. 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge—the word Paul uses here for “know” was used by the Greeks for the kind of knowledge that is gained by personal involvement and experience. The extent of this involvement is well illustrated by a use of the word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In Genesis 4:1 Adam “knew” his wife and she conceived a son. In this context “to know” meant to enter into an intimate, productive relationship with one’s marriage partner.

What Paul is praying for is not just knowledge concerning the details and dimensions of Christ’s great love. He wants all Christians to really know that love through intimate, personal involvement. This, after all, is what eternal life is really all about (John 17:3).

The Greek word for “surpasses” is the same word which was translated “immeasurable” in 1:19 and 2:7. In all these places it refers to some facet of God’s nature that is too great to be completely understood or defined by mortal man. While we cannot totally grasp so great a concept as the love of Christ, we can come to know it and participate in it. It is this experiential knowledge for which Paul is praying. Christianity is not just feeling and emotion, but if there is no feeling and emotion, then it is not the Christianity of the scriptures.

that you may be filled with all the fullness of God—Paul’s third petition is that his readers be filled with the fullness of God, the third member of the Godhead. To think that the Creator, in all his vastness, could come and dwell within our insignificant frames is a mind-boggling thought! To be filled with God’s fullness is much the same as to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). In promising the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). Thus, it becomes very difficult to draw strict lines of separation between the Father, Son, and Spirit, and their respective

activities. The unity and diversity within the Trinity cannot be reduced to simplistic, easy terms.

It is “in Christ” that we are able to come to this “fullness of life” (Col. 2:10). As we become part of the body of Christ, God enters our lives and begins to fill us with his fullness. It is a process that is only just beginning at baptism, for even the mature Christians to whom Paul was writing were still in need of more filling. This is why Paul made this third petition and also charged them to be “filled with the Spirit” in 5:18.

Please consider this one additional thought. Is it possible for God to fill us more and more when our lives are stuffed full of the things of this world? Can you pour very much clean water into a cup full of garbage? Think about this the next time you sing “Fill My Cup, Lord”!

A Glorious Benediction (3:20-21)

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

V. 20 Now to him who by the power at work within us—Paul’s prayer for God’s participation in God’s kingdom. The glorious power that is mentioned here is a power “at work within us.” God could have done all the Kingdom’s work by himself, but he has chosen to work through us. God rarely will do for us what he can do through us!

Most translations put the phrase “who by the power at work within us” at the end of this verse, where it is overlooked or ignored by many people. Perhaps we get so excited by the thought that God can do anything we could ask for or even think of, that we forget that he plans to do it through his power in us! If we sit back and wait for God to do it for us, it simply won’t be done. God will still be waiting for us to get up and get ready to be the appliance through which his power works.

This benediction is the close of the same prayer Paul began in chapter one. The power mentioned here is the same resurrection power of that chapter. Please review the comments made regarding verses 19 and 20 in that chapter.

is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think—Literally, “is powerful to do superabundantly beyond all things that we request or think of.” God has the power to grant anything we ask. However, he may refuse to grant it if it is contrary to his will (1 John 5:14-15) or contrary to his very nature. For instance, under no circumstances would God honor a request to lie (Heb. 6:18).

The energy resources of God’s kingdom are infinite. We need never fear that God will be unable to

provide the power to achieve great victories. We need only confirm that a given project is indeed according to his will.

God's plan is to work through his children. God has all the power needed to carry out this plan. It appears that the only thing lacking is the confidence and cooperation of his children. This verse opens up vistas of opportunity almost too great to grasp. The more one meditates on it, the more he is staggered by the possibilities. God is willing...and able!

V. 21 to him be glory—We do not actually “give” God glory. Rather, we recognize and acknowledge that he is already in full possession of it. God's glory is his majesty and shining splendor. It is his magnificence and radiance which are natural outgrowths of his very being. The word “glory” has an unavoidable association with brightness and light.

in the church—God is glorified in and by the church of Jesus Christ. One cannot bring glory to God while disdaining the church. Even choirs of angels cannot glorify God in such a way as to replace the glory God seeks from the church.

and in Christ Jesus—Just as the body glorifies God, so also does the head of the body, Jesus Christ. Throughout his earthly ministry it was always Jesus' purpose to glorify his Father, rather than himself. (See John 7:18; 12:28; 13:31; 14:13; 17:1).

to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen—If God is to be praised on the basis of his power working through us, and if that praise is to be sounded forth in all generations, then that includes us! Even in this generation it must be possible for the church to bring honor and glory to God. Even now God's power must be available to work through his people.

The word “Amen” comes from the Hebrew language, meaning “it is firm, heavy, solid, and trustworthy.” Paul believed in his heart and proved in his life that God's inworking power was a present reality. We add our “Amen” to this benediction today by proving that same power to be at work in us.

SPECIAL NOTE

Much has been said recently about how God works through us by giving each of us a special gift. Before we can serve him effectively we must “discover” our gift. Ray Stedman has even said, “The supreme task of every Christian's life is to discover his gift and put it to work” (*Body Life*, p. 131). It is often implied that a Christian who tries to serve God outside his own “gift” area will be ineffective and disappointed.

I believe it is possible to go to an unhealthy extreme concerning these gifts. To counter such excesses, let us consider these questions:

1. Where in all the Bible are we encouraged to “discover” our gift(s)?
2. Where does the Bible ever give any instructions on *how* to accomplish this “supreme task of every Christian's life”?
3. Has God ever warned us that his power at work within us is available only in our special “gift” areas? Will not God support and bless any work we attempt in His name and in His will?

I choose to temper the “gift theology” with an appreciation for resurrection power. I believe that God will work in and through whoever makes himself available to God. I believe we should attempt to work in the Kingdom not only on the basis of what we suppose our gift(s) to be, but also on the basis of the urgency and the need. I believe some people have been led to an unhealthy introspection, always asking “What is my gift?” instead of “What is my brother's need?” Finally, I believe it is possible to use the “gift theology” as a cop-out on God: “Lord, I'd love to serve you and meet this urgent need, but it just isn't my gift!”

Study Questions

1. Where did Paul begin the prayer which is concluded in this chapter?
2. How does the Trinity fit into this prayer?
3. How was the working of the Holy Spirit different in the Old Testament from that in the New Testament?
4. What is the “inner man” of verse 16?
5. How does Christ dwell in our hearts?
6. Can one be a true Christian, believing all the right doctrine and obeying all the right commands, if he does not have the love of Christ?
7. What does it mean “to know” the love of Christ?

8. What was Paul's request connected with God in his three-fold prayer?
9. Does God usually choose to work *for us* or *through us*?
10. Explain "to him be the glory."
11. Do you believe all this business is *really* possible in all generations—including this one?

Lesson Seven (4:1-10)

The Unity of the Body 4:1-6)

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

We have reached a major turning point in this epistle. Paul now leaves the grand theology of how God gives salvation, to take up the practical application of how man lives it. If a person chooses to be "in Christ" and a part of the covenant people, there are certain obligations which are laid upon him. All these duties are for his own good, and they in no way earn him the favor which God has given him. They are simply the lifestyle the Christian should expect to live.

V. 1 I therefore—In nearly all of Paul's epistles, he sooner or later comes to the "therefore" or "so what." He has spent three chapters describing God's work in salvation and is now ready to make some specific applications. It will deepen your understanding of each of the many obligations which follow to consider them in light of what God has done to make salvation possible and in light of the body of believers to which we belong.

a prisoner for the Lord—As in the beginning of chapter three, Paul's reference to his imprisonment adds strength to his appeal. He is not an idle bystander just offering advice. He is the soldier of the Lord, serving and suffering to carry out his mission.

beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called—Perhaps the word "beg" sounds too pathetic or helpless. The Greek word Paul used meant originally "to call to one's side" and is usually translated "exhort" or "change." (Note the parallel usage in Rom. 12:1.)

In an absolute sense, there is no way we can "walk worthily of the calling," as Paul puts it. No Christian ever lived a perfect life—even after being cleansed and reborn. However, this does not mean we should ever be content to set our sights on anything less. Total perfection may never be attained, but we will certainly come closer to it if we aim for it. Human nature will always cause us to fall a little short of our goal, whether that goal is high or low.

The "calling" of this verse and verse four refers to God's invitation to become a part of the chosen people "in Christ." God never forces a man to join his covenant people, but "calls" or "invites" him. Many are "called," but only those who accept the invitation are "chosen" (Matt. 22:1-4).

V. 2 with all lowliness and meekness—The very first step we must take to "walk worthily" is to humble ourselves. Likewise, the very first pre-requisite for the unity sought in verse 3 is humility. (See Phil. 2:1-3.) People can never live together in unity so long as each person thinks to highly of himself.

The Greek word for "lowliness" means literally "humble-mindedness." The word was always used in a bad light in the secular literature of Paul's time, because lowliness was not considered to be much of a virtue.

"Meekness" means "having strength under control." It must not be confused with weakness. The weak person yields because he is helpless and can do nothing else. The meek person yields, in spite of his own superior strength, because he seeks the well-being of the other man.

with patience—"Patience" is literally "having a long mind or temper." When people blow up over every petty annoyance, unity becomes impossible. The best way to lengthen the fuse on your temper is to remember how much God has to overlook and forgive in your own life! (See Eph. 4:32.)

forbearing one another in love—"Forbearing" means "putting up with." If the Father has made you a part of the same family I'm in, then I have to "put up with" you. Moreover, I must do more than merely tolerate you—I must forbear you "in love."

Notice the logical progression of these four steps toward "walking worthy" of the calling:

1. Be humble-minded.

2. Care more about the other fellow's well-being than your own.
3. Have a long fuse on your temper.
4. Love the other fellow so much that you can put up with his foolishness and stupidity, just as God puts up with yours.

V. 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit—The four steps just taken lead up to this final goal. God wants his people united. Notice that we do not create unity—we recognize and maintain a unity which God has already provided. Notice also that this unity is not a product of men, based on human endeavors, but the unity of the Spirit.

Most efforts toward church unity fail because the two above points are not recognized. Men try to establish their own basis for unity by negotiation and compromise, and they falsely assume that a merger of denominational headquarters will produce real unity. The unity of the Spirit is more than the union of the churches.

in the bond of peace—The mechanical union produced by human efforts brings friction instead of peace. That kind of “unity” is like that produced by a little boy who ties two cats’ tails together. The unity of the Spirit, on the other hand, is characterized by peace. “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14).

V. 4 There is one body—This is the first of seven things listed by Paul as the basis of our unity. Since there is only one of each of them, we who participate in each one must participate together. These seven “one’s” are the common denominator for Christians. They are the irreducible minimum upon which we must stand.

The one body is the body of Christ, the church. It is made up of all those whom God has accepted into his family. We cannot make anything a test of fellowship or requirement for admission which God has not himself established. Neither dare we ignore anything which God has required. No single denomination or movement is the entire body.

and one Spirit—The Holy Spirit spreads throughout and activates the entire body of believers. All God’s children have the same Holy Spirit within them (Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:9). Ever since the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, he has been available to all men on the same basis (Acts 2:38-39). The Holy Spirit does not divide us, but makes us all members of one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—The third basis of unity is the one hope we all share in Christ. The essence of hope is that although we cannot see our final salvation and entrance

into eternal life, we still have a steadfast expectation of receiving it. Christians who share this one hope are drawn together because their lives are all oriented in the same direction. (See Rom. 8:24-25; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:13).

V. 5 one Lord—Christians have only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6). The Father has made Jesus our Lord (Acts 2:36) and one day every tongue will admit this fact (Phil. 2:11). No man can become a Christian without surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus (Rom. 12:3).

We would do well to remind ourselves of all the things the title “Lord” implies (see notes on 1:2), and of the folly of paying mere lip-service to our Lord (Luke 6:46; Matt. 7:21). The early Christians often were killed for taking Jesus as their only Lord, since they refused to call the Roman emperor their Lord.

one faith—Sometimes the word “faith” refers to the body of truth and doctrine revealed by God, as in Jude 3. However in all the uses of “faith” in Ephesians Paul has reference to “saving faith,” the personal trust and commitment to Jesus which is the basis of our salvation (see 2:8 and 3:17). While Christians may differ in their understanding of many things, they all share a common commitment to Christ.

God will forgive his children for many foolish notions if they just have one thing right—their relationship with the Son. And God will condemn men who have their systems of theology correct, but are not right with the Son.

one baptism—The early church had only one baptism and every member of the body had shared in it. There was not question about its form, immersion, because that was the clear meaning of the Greek word (*baptizo*). There was no question about its purpose, which included forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), bestowal of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13), and union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-5; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:11-12).

It is sometimes alleged that this “one baptism” is a baptism in the Spirit rather than in water. It must be noted, however, that nowhere in the scriptures is anyone ever told to be baptized in the Spirit. (How could such a command be obeyed, anyway?) Furthermore, even after Cornelius and his household had received the miraculous giving of the Holy Spirit, Peter *commanded* them to be baptized in water! (Acts 10:44-48).

In the early church Christian baptism was a primary source of unity. All Christians had participated in a common initiatory rite as they entered the body. They had in common the baptismal experience, in which the water and the Spirit are both involved. There was one

baptism—only one—and it drew together the family of God.

V. 6 one God and Father of us all—The ultimate unity of the entire universe is based upon the Fatherhood of God. He, through the Son, is the source of all things and the origin of all existence.

When men recognize and honor the true God they are brought into unity with him and with all creation. For Christians, God is not only the Father from which they came, but also the Father to whom they were returning for eternity.

who is above all and through all and in all—God reigns supreme over all creation. He permeates every particle of existence. He does not, however, live in all created things as though that were his body. God existed, unchanged, before the worlds were made and shall remain unchanged after the elements have melted with a fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

By his grace he did choose to reveal himself in human flesh through his son Jesus, and he does now choose to dwell in Christians as his temple (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Diversity Within Unity (4:7-10)

7 But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said:

"When he ascended on high and he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

V. 7 But grace was given to each of us—Within our unity in Christ there is diversity. While we all stand united on the seven basics just listed, we each take our own individual positions of service. These individual roles which each member of the body carries out do not destroy the body's unity, but indeed enhance it.

The "grace" that is given to each of us is a job responsibility, just as it was for Paul (Eph. 3:2,7). God has been gracious and kind to allow us to serve in his kingdom.

This passage does not say that each man has one gift—only one—carefully hidden by God. It does not suggest that we should undertake a search and discovery operation. The emphasis is on the simple fact that we do not all serve God in the same way—we serve him in whatever ways we can.

according to the measure of Christ's gift—Whatever abilities and opportunities we may have should be considered the gift of Christ. Since they are gifts, we have no right to feel proud for the specific ones

we may possess. Likewise, we must not scorn a brother to whom Christ has given a task we would not esteem very highly.

This same lesson is taught by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:4-31 with reference to the dispensing of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in the early church. The gifts were different, but the principle is the same. We should give thanks for every member of the body and the function it is able to do. All the functions of every member are necessary to the completeness of the body.

V. 8 Therefore it is said—As is often the case, Paul appeals to scripture to prove his point. This time he quotes Psalm 68:18. Following the scripture quotation, he uses verses nine and ten to demonstrate why this verses should be taken in reference to Christ. He uses an approach which would have been quite clear to the first century mind, but may seem strange to us today. Even so, if you follow the line of argument carefully you can appreciate the point he makes. Notice that the first line of the quotation is necessary to prove the connection with Jesus Christ, while the second line carries the message Paul wanted: "He gave gifts to men."

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives—In the context of Psalm 68 the conquering God is seen going up to Mount Zion in victory. From Sinai to the promised land God had made his people victorious over their enemies.

These words have an even greater fulfillment, however, in Jesus Christ. When he ascended into the heavenly Zion, the new Jerusalem, he had conquered the forces of Satan. The principalities and powers were disarmed and defeated by Jesus, who led them as his captives in his triumphal victory parade (Col. 2:15).

and he gave gifts to men"—When these words are compared with Psalm 68:18, you will notice a difference. There it says he *received* gifts among men. Two factors help us in solving this apparent problem. First, certain ancient versions (the Peshitta and one of the Targums) do state this verse as Paul quotes it. Second, Psalm 68 in any version is also a Psalm of God giving to man in many ways. (See verses 5, 6, 10, 11, 19, and 35.) As the last verse of Psalm 68 makes clear, the reason God received gifts from men was to "give power and strength to his people." Understood in this light, the verse Paul quotes is certainly not being taken out of its proper context.

When Christ ascended to his throne and "gave gifts to men" those gifts were the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, with their spiritual endowments for leading the church (verse 12).

V. 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended—Paul uses a

typical first century line of argument here. He who ascends must first have descended. What goes up must first have come down. And obviously, he who came down and then ascended is Jesus Christ. This proves that it is justifiable to apply the Psalm to Christ and his church.

(If an inspired apostle says there was a hidden meaning in a Psalm, I will accept it on his authority. If an uninspired interpreter tries to make a clever parallel, I will not be impressed.)

into the lower parts of the earth?—The “lower parts of the earth” is probably another way of saying that Jesus went down into death or Hades. (See Phil. 2:8; Rom. 10:6; Acts 2:27.) It is possible, however, that the “lower parts” simply refers to earth itself, which is “lower” than the heavenly home from which Jesus came.

V. 10 He who descended is he who also ascended—Jesus Christ, who became obedient even unto death, was highly exalted by the Father (Phil. 2:9). God raised Jesus from the dead and lifted him up to his right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20).

far above all the heavens—The imagery of these words is much the same as Eph. 1:21 “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named.” Jesus, with the Father, is at the top.

that he might fill all things—As in Eph. 1:23, Jesus is the one who “fills all in all.” From his position of superiority over all the universe, Jesus sustains (Heb. 1:3) and holds together all things (Col. 1:17).

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of “therefore” in verse one?
2. Is it possible to lead a life that is really “worthy” of our calling?
3. How would you contrast the view of the world toward “lowliness” or humble-mindedness with the view of Christians?
4. How is it possible to be patient and forbearing with people who are stupid and foolish?
5. What are the seven basic “one’s” named in verses four through six? Can you recite them from memory?

6. If there is only one body, why are there so many denominations?
7. What is the one baptism which all Christians shared in the first century?
8. God wants unity. We all want unity. We could have unity if everybody would come and join me. (What is wrong with this approach?)
9. What is shown about the character of Christ, when in his victory over the hosts of Satan he “gave gifts to men”?
10. How was Paul justified in applying Psalm 68:18 to Christ? Can you express the line of argument from verses nine and ten in your own words?

Lesson Eight (4:11-16)

So We May All Grow Up 4:11-16

11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

The master plan for the church is given in these verses. Not only are the job descriptions laid out for us, but the reason behind the jobs is also given. The ultimate purpose of the body is to grow up into the head. The ultimate purpose of a man’s salvation is to come to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

V. 11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles—The first of Christ’s gifts to the church were the apostles. These men were hand-picked by Jesus to be his representatives on earth after he ascended into heaven. They were promised inspiration (John 14:26) and their preaching was to carry authority (John 20:23). These were “men sent forth” who turned the world upside down for Christ.

With the exception of Judas Iscariot, who hanged himself before the church began, no provision was ever made for the successive replacement of apostles. They served as the *foundation* of the church, and do not need continual successors (Eph. 2:20). They and their close associates gave us the New Testament scriptures, which perpetuate that foundation. We have no need for new apostles and new scriptures.

some prophets—In the early church some people had the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10, 28). These prophets possessed the gift of speaking forth a message directly from God, usually with prediction concerning the future. Especially in the early years, before the New Testament was written and copied and circulated to all the churches, this gift was vital to the strength of a congregation.

Just as with apostles, the prophets did not provide for their successors. They were foundational, not a permanent office in every generation. (See Eph. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 13:8-10). The sufficiency of the scriptures makes prophets unnecessary.

some evangelists—Evangelists are those who proclaim the “good news” of the Gospel. (The Greek word for gospel is *euangelion*.) The evangelists carried the Gospel to people who had not heard it, planting new churches wherever they went.

Unlike apostles and prophets, evangelists are found in every generation of the church. The work of evangelism has been given to the church “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). As long as there are still people who need to be won to the Lord, the evangelist and his work will continue.

some pastors and teachers—It is not enough to win a man to Christ. That man must also be shepherded and taught as he grows to maturity in Christ. For this reason the church has also been supplied with pastors and teachers.

The word “pastor” is the common Greek word for a shepherd. It is used interchangeably in the New Testament with the terms “elder” and “overseer” (“bishop”). (1 Pet. 5:1-5; Acts 20:28.) The structure of the Greek grammar links pastors and teachers together as a single office. (See that overseers must be “apt teachers” in 1 Tim. 3:2.)

As long as there are still people who need to be taught the way of the Lord, the work of the pastor and teacher will continue.

V. 12 for the equipment of the saints—God did not give the offices of leadership so that certain men could feel important or arrogant in their authority. Neither did God put the leaders to work so that they could do all the work of the church single-handedly. God gave the church leaders to equip the saints.

The Greek word for “equipment” is used thirteen times as a verb in the New Testament. A summary of these uses will show quite clearly what is to be done for “the saints.” The word means:

1. To teach (Luke 6:40)
2. To equip with everything good (Heb. 13:21)
3. To supply what is lacking (1 Thess. 3:10)
4. To prepare for use (Heb. 10:5)
5. To form, mold, and shape (Heb. 11:3)
6. To mend and repair (Matt. 4:21)
7. To correct faults (2 Cor. 13:11)
8. To restore a fallen brother (Gal. 6:1)
9. To bring into functioning harmony (1 Cor. 1:10)

Jesus said “When a disciple is fully taught (equipped) he will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

The “saints” who are to be equipped are all God’s “holy” children who have been “set apart” to him. In the scriptural use of the word, a saint is simply a Christian, and every Christian is a saint.

Unfortunately, in recent years some church leaders have used the concept of the “equipping ministry” to excuse themselves from doing any of the work themselves. They ignore the work of soul-winning, hospital visitation, Bible School, youth programs, etc., saying, “That’s not my job. My job is to find people in the church and put them to work.” Such a person has overlooked the fact that people learn best by example. The way to equip saints for service is to work with them and become a model for them. The concept of the “job-finder” who spends his time fitting workers to the right jobs is totally foreign to the New Testament.

for the work of ministry—The saints are to be equipped to do the work of ministry. Ministry means simply “service,” (see 3:7) and anyone who serves people and meets their needs is a minister. In the scriptural use of the word, to minister or serve includes:

1. Providing food (Luke 8:3)
2. Waiting tables (Acts 6:2)
3. Meeting physical needs (Matt. 25:44)
4. Delivering famine relief money (Rom. 15:25)
5. Serve as a deacon (1 Tim. 3:10)
6. Proclaiming the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:12)

Two-thirds of the sixty-six uses of “ministry” or “to minister” in the New Testament have to do with meeting physical needs.

To involve the saints in “ministry” is much more than using a few of them on Sunday morning on the platform. If we continue to limit our concept of “ministry” to the Sunday services of the church, there is no way all the saints can serve. If we will realize that even giving a cup of water in Jesus’ name qualifies as “ministry,” great opportunities for service will open. People will find fulfillment using their God-given abilities to help other people.

The key to gaining the right focus on ministry is to stop thinking of serving the “church program” and start thinking of serving people. Then all the abilities and functions of the members of the body will be usable. Consider the following chart:

<i>What Can I Do?</i>	<i>For Church Program</i>	<i>For People</i>
Bake Cookies	V.B.S. (once a year)	Rest homes Newcomers Service men College students
Drive a car	Bring people to church	Taxi for elderly Meals on wheels
Mow grass	Mow church lawn	Mow widow’s lawn
Give money	Tithe	Help family deserted by father Help widows
Go fishing	None	Be a “father” to a boy who has none
Fix motors	None, unless church owns a bus	Keep widow’s car running

The abilities and applications could be expanded infinitely. Is any act of service named above not qualified to count as “ministry”? Is any more worthy, or less, than another? Is the body really functioning until all the applications—for *both* the church program and the people—are working? Please remember that the church is the *people*, so what is done for the people is done for the church.

for building up the body of Christ—People grow to maturity through service. So long as the saints are merely consumers of the church program product, they will remain immature and selfish. Just as Christ came not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28), so must his

body learn the satisfaction that comes from being concerned about the needs of other people rather than one’s own needs.

The Lord’s plan for building up the body has beautiful balance. He has first provided leadership for the church and its activities, then a pattern of service for all the saints.

V. 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith—The pattern for the New Testament church calls for the maturing of each member through service. This is a people-centered, not a program-centered, pattern.

The “unity of the faith” we seek is not doctrinal conformity. We will never agree in all our opinions. Instead, Paul is thinking of faith as total trust and commitment to Jesus Christ. It is the commitment in which we must be united.

and of the knowledge of the Son of God—This is not an intellectual knowledge of all the facts about Jesus. It is personal involvement with him (Eph. 3:19). At the same time, this personal experience is also a corporate experience. We all attain this spiritual maturity together as a body, not as isolated spokes on a wheel.

to mature manhood—Spiritual manhood means full-grown completeness in becoming mature Christians. It does not mean total perfection. It stands in sharp contrast to the “children” of the next verse.

to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—If any man thinks he may already have arrived at completeness, let him stand up to the measuring rod of Christ. Jesus is our perfect standard, and although we will never match his perfection, we must never aim for anything less.

V. 14 so that we may no longer be children—God wants us childlike, but not childish. So long as we are immature and unstable we are at the mercy of many perils. Just as a parent is relieved when his child learns to avoid fire or poisons, God is eager for his children to grow up.

tossed to and fro—Literally, tossed around by waves or rough water.

carried about with every wind of doctrine—The storms of life bring many adverse waves and winds. Among the greatest dangers is the peril of being swept away by a wind of false teaching. The immature Christian is defenseless and unable to cope with each new radio preacher or door-to-door cult salesman. The church leaders may try to protect them, like a hen scurrying after her chicks, but unless the church is very tiny it is impossible to keep a close eye on everyone. The only solution is maturity.

by the cunning of men—False teachers are clever. Since they are not limited to working with the truth, they

can shape their teaching to make it attractive and appealing. They have plenty of tricks, as is shown by the word “cunning,” which is taken from the Greek word for dice used in gambling.

by their craftiness in deceitful wiles—“Craftiness” comes from the Greek word for sly villainy, especially the practice of adulterating a product before it is sold. “Deceitful wiles” is literally “the clever strategies of error.” Christians must arm themselves against these wiles (Eph. 6:11), remembering that their foe is the father of lies (John 8:44).

V. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love—We do not combat Satan’s lies with clever tricks of our own. We fight with the armor of God, which begins with truth (Eph. 6:14). However, this allegiance to truth does not allow us to be blunt and cruel in the pretext of being frank and honest. We must always speak the truth “in love.”

Furthermore, more than our speech is involved here. Our actions, insinuations, and entire lifestyle must be consistent with “truth in love.” The word “speaking” is not actually found in the Greek, which says simply “being truthful in love.”

we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head—We must never be content until we have become like Jesus in every respect. To be like him in one or two virtues is not enough.

Individually we look to Christ as the perfect model for mature manhood. Collectively, we grow up together into him as the head of the body. The relationship of the church to Christ as a body to a head has several implications:

1. He is the source of our life. Life and energy flow down from the head throughout the body. (At least, this was the concept of “head” when Paul chose to use it to describe Christ’s relation to the church.)
2. He is the purpose and direction of all our actions. Every activity of the body flows up to the head.
3. He is our chief, with authority to direct our actions. The use of “head” as a ruling authority is well-documented in the Greek of this period.

V. 16 from whom the whole body—Paul uses beautiful imagery here. Not only does the body grow up into the head, it also functions from the head. This interplay of spiritual energy is also seen in the figure of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-11).

joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied—The Lord has “joined” each part of the body together as a wise builder “fits together”

each stone in a building (see Eph. 2:21). The word is related to our word “harmony” and emphasizes how the Lord has brought together diverse elements and joined them into harmonious unity. The fact that each member of the body is different from every other member in his abilities and functions is a strength, not a weakness.

In the words “knit together” the emphasis is on the reconciliation of differences. Originally it meant “to cause to walk together.” The word is used in the same context in Col. 2:19.

Each member of the body is united with other members of the body by joints supplied by God. We do not hold the church together—God does. Most of all, God is the source of love, which “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14).

when each part is working properly—Before the bodily growth and edification of this verse is possible, each part of the body must be working properly. This means the leaders must be leading and equipping, and all the saints must be learning and serving. God’s idea of a great church is a church where each member is becoming great through service.

If the mouth must also attempt the function of the hands, the whole body is impaired. If the hands must be used for talking, they must leave off what they would otherwise have done. I suppose that if my mouth were the only part of my body still functioning, I would try to use it in as many ways as possible. But God’s desire is for a body that is fully functional. (In other words, there are many body functions which could be better done by a member other than the mouth—the preacher!)

makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love—When each part is working properly the body will grow. It will grow in size, in coordination, in usefulness. It will grow with a growth that is from God (Col. 2:19).

In many ways the growth of the church is similar to the growth of the human body. Similarly, many of the undesirable conditions of human growth are also possible in the church. Apply the following to the church:

1. Dwarfism—Although mental growth continues, the body does not grow in size. Sometimes this condition is accompanied by mental retardation as well.
2. Cretinism—Although physical growth continues, the mental power of the body does not grow. This is a form of idiocy.
3. Deformity—Certain parts of the body do not grow in the pattern or shape intended for them.
4. Obesity—Although the mind and much of the body are normal, there is an

encumbrance of fat tissue. This tissue serves no real function, except to drag down the rest of the body.

5. Paralysis—Although the mind is alert, certain parts of the body refuse to respond to directions and do nothing.
6. Spasticism—Although the mind and muscles are fine, there is a communication and coordination gap. Each member of the body is “doing its own thing,” without regard for anyone else.

Study Questions

1. What was the role of apostles and prophets in the foundation of the church?
2. What is the work of the evangelist and the pastor and teacher?
3. What all is involved in “equipping the saints”?
4. What is the biblical concept of “ministry”? Have you decided to go into the ministry?
5. Does “unity of the faith” mean we will all have the same ideas about the Bible?
6. Jesus commended childlikeness (Matt. 18:1-4). What is it about children that Paul opposes?
7. Why can’t we combat Satan’s lies and tricks with a few clever schemes of our own?
8. What does the head do for the body?
9. What is the secret of making growth, according to verse sixteen?
10. Are all kinds of growth good?

11. QUESTION FOR ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Where do preachers fit in this picture of church leadership? Do they function in more than one category? Is it wrong to serve in more than one area? Did Paul himself do so?

Lesson Nine (4:17-24)

No Longer in Futility (4:17-24)

17 Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; 18 they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; 19 they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. 20 You did not so learn Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. 22 Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

God has not only freed us from sin; he has also freed us from the futility of sinful living. In Christ Jesus it is possible to change human nature. The leopard can change his spots and the sinner can leave his foolish ways. The old life can be shed like an outgrown garment, replaced by the new nature of Christ.

V. 17 Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord—The importance of what follows is underscored by the solemn tone of this statement.

that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do—Most of Paul’s readers were in fact Gentiles by birth. In Christ, however, they were no longer Gentiles by nature. By nature they were new creatures, no longer participating in the old practices of the pagan life. That old life is described by Paul in these eight ways:

1. In futility of mind
2. Darkened in understanding
3. Alienated from the life of God
4. Ignorance
5. Hardness of heart
6. Callous
7. Given up to licentiousness
8. Greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness

in the futility of their minds—Apart from the wisdom of God, mankind does not know its origin, its destiny, or its present reason for existence. Neither is mankind able to cope effectively with life’s problems. Consider the following illustrations of futility in modern America:

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Futile Solution</i>
Crime	Nicer prisons
Avalanche of arrests for marijuana and prostitution	Legalize them
Venereal disease	Health clinics, Sex education
International tension	Buy friends; appease enemies

V. 18 they are darkened in their understanding—Sometimes it seems that the more men learn, the farther they get from a real understanding of life. The ultimate conclusion of futile thinking and darkened minds is graphically depicted in Romans 1:18-32.

alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them—The Gentiles were willfully ignorant of God (Rom. 1:28), cutting themselves off from the very Source of all life.

due to their hardness of heart—The Gentiles were guilty of stubborn rebellion in their hearts. As F.F. Bruce points out, in both classical and biblical literature, the heart “is viewed as the seat of the will and understanding, not of the emotions.”

V. 19 they have become callous—Literally, “insensitive to the pains of mind and body.” A similar idea is found in 1 Tim. 4:2.

and have given themselves up to licentiousness—Licentiousness is one of the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19. It is the strongest Greek word for depravity, indicating a total disregard for decency, whether public or private. When men insist on this course of action, God gives them up to their base mind and improper conduct (Rom. 1:28).

greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness—Such men actually “covet” every kind of uncleanness. Uncleanness is also a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:19), indicating the kind of moral pollution that makes a man unfit to come before the presence of God.

V. 20 You did not so learn Christ—In parts of Asia Minor men were already beginning to develop a way of thinking called Gnosticism. They taught that the body is inherently evil and the mind is inherently good. Therefore, whatever vile actions the body performed had no effect on the mind and the inner man.

No such folly is taught in Christ. The mind and body are inseparably connected in acts of immorality. “Let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7).

V. 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him—Anyone who knows Christ knows that the pagan lifestyle is wrong. Both his life and his teachings set the perfect standard of purity.

as the truth is in Jesus—Truth was an important ideal in the life of Jesus, being used twenty-five times in the gospel of John alone. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). He also said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

V. 22 Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life—The “old nature” is literally the “old man” who is dead because of our crucifixion with Christ (Rom. 6:6). This old nature must be “put off” just as the removing of a garment, so that the nature of Christ can be “put on” (verse 24). Only in Christ is it possible to be rid of the soiled and stained nature of our past.

and is corrupt through deceitful lusts—The natural state of man, once he has sinned, is thoroughly defiled and corrupt. He has followed his instinctive passions, only to discover too late they were actually “passions of error.”

V. 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your minds—The Christian life is not created by external rules (Col. 2:20-23), but by internal transformation. This metamorphosis happens through the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2). The process begins when the Spirit of Christ replaces the old self at one’s conversion (Gal. 2:20), and continues throughout the Christian life. The present tense of the verb in this verse might best be translated, “renew and keep on being continuously renewed.”

The remodeling and renovating of one’s life is not an instantaneous action, but a project still in progress. Remember that it was to Christians that Paul wrote, “Put off your old nature, be continuously renewed, and put on the new.”

V. 24 and put on the new nature—Once the “old man” has been taken off the “new man” can be put on. The filthy rags of one’s own righteousness (Isa. 64:6) are replaced by the white robes of the Lamb (Rev. 3:5; 7:9). This righteousness, however, must not be merely imputed to us in the heavenly ledgers, it must also be lived out here on earth (1 John 3:7).

created after the likeness of God—In the beginning man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), but man sinned and fell short of the glory of

God (Rom. 3:23). Now in Christ there is a new beginning! The fallen sinner can be re-created in the image of his Creator.

in true righteousness and holiness—True righteousness is far more than man's feeble attempts at self-righteousness. It involves an inner transformation which is then expressed in a whole new life. In Christ the sinner is pronounced innocent and righteous, and is empowered by God's Spirit to live out the righteous life.

"Holiness" is the state of being "set apart." God's child is distinctive—not just one of the crowd. Holiness is not just a separation *from* something bad; it is a commitment *to* Someone good.

Living the New Life (4:25-32)

25 Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on you anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

V. 25 Therefore, putting away falsehood—"Therefore" always points back to an earlier statement as the basis for what will be said. In this case that basis is the re-creation of the Christian in the likeness of God. If we are to be like God, who cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), we must put away all falsehood.

let every one speak the truth with his neighbor—The Christian must do more than avoid the outright lie; he must speak the truth. All half-truths are also half-lies! This emphasis on truth echoes verse 15 of this same chapter.

For those who would ask, "And who is my neighbor, with whom I must be truthful?" perhaps the moral of Luke 10:29-37 will be helpful.

for we are members of one another—We must not lie to one another in the Christian family because that pits one part of the body against the other. We must not lie to anyone outside the body, for when that lie is finally found out it will bring reproach not just on the liar but on the entire body.

V. 26 Be angry but do not sin—Anger is an automatic emotional response to insult or abuse. It is a

dangerous emotion because it so easily leads to sin. The scriptures never recommend anger or wrath as healthy emotions (see Matt. 5:22 and James 1:20).

Anger is a temptation, just like many other urges we feel. God does not blame us for feeling a sudden urge, but he does hold us responsible for how we handle that urge. The two specific ways anger can become sin are as follows:

1. We can unleash our anger and let it determine how we will act. When anger overrules one's spirit, sin will follow.
2. We can harbor our anger, storing it up and letting it boil inside us.

do not let the sun go down on your anger—Paul forbids both ways of dealing with anger. We must not unleash or nor harbor it.

Because pent-up anger eats inside a man like acid, most psychologists urge a person to spew that anger out at whoever made him angry. Having vomited out that rage, he will feel better. (But how will the one feel on whom he has vomited?) The only answer is to give our bitterness to Jesus and let him drink the bitter cup for us. He alone can turn bitter anger into better love.

V. 27 and give no opportunity to the devil—Both uncontrolled anger and pent-up resentment provide a place for Satan to operate. This is just the foothold he needs.

V. 28 Let the thief no longer steal—Then, as now, slaves and other workmen often thought they had a "right" to pilfer as much as they could get away with. The pagan society just shrugged off this failure of morality. Whether society demands it or not, however, the Christian shall not steal. God's morality is unchanged (Exodus 20:15).

but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need—Paul has a two-step cure for the thief. It is surprisingly simple, but so far removed from modern penal practices that it seems absurd. To cure a thief, he must first be put to work. He must learn the dignity and rewards of honest labor. Second, he must learn that the rewards of his labor are to be shared with the needy. By learning the joy of giving he will lose the joy of taking. (If our modern methods were not already working so wonderfully well, it might be interesting to try this approach!)

V. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths—Not even a fit of anger can justify evil talk. What comes out of a man's mouth defiles him, because it betrays what is in his heart (Matt. 15:11).

but only such as is good for edifying—To edify means to "build up." This does not call for constant

false flattery. Criticism can be edifying, when offered in the proper spirit to the proper person. It does mean that a Christian's words should be gracious and appealing (Col. 4:6).

V. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God—The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force. He speaks (1 Tim. 4:1), teaches (John 14:26), and intercedes (Rom. 8:27). He has feelings and can be grieved.

Perhaps there are many ways in which we can grieve this divine Indweller, but notice the immediate context of the verse preceding and the verse following. In context, we grieve the Holy Spirit by what we say!

in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption—The Spirit is a seal placed upon every Christian, in the sense of an identifying mark (see Eph. 1:13-14). The “day of redemption” is the time of the Lord's return, when the sons of God will be revealed (Rom. 8:19) and rescued from this present age (see Phil. 3:20-21).

V. 31 Let all bitterness—If we are to avoid causing grief to the Holy Spirit, there are certain things we must put out of our lives. “Bitterness” is sharp animosity or spite, nearly always in connections with speech. James reminds us that sweet water and bitter water cannot flow from the same spring (3:11), thus denouncing the bitter tongue.

and wrath—“Wrath” is the sudden outburst of temper (Gk. *thumos*). The Christian cannot justify his explosive temper by showing how quickly he gets over it. He must learn to stop exploding!

and anger—“Anger” is sustained, pent-up animosity. This is the Greek word (*orge*) normally used of the “wrath of God” (as in Rom. 1:18 and Eph. 5:6). God can handle this sustained anger against unrighteousness, but man cannot. It is for this reason God has said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19). The Christian cannot applaud himself for his ability to store up wrath instead of exploding.

and clamor—“Clamor” is shouting out in anger.

and slander—“Slander” is from the Greek word *blasphemia*, which is usually translated “blasphemy.” The literal meaning of the word is “speaking against.” The usual context of the word is to slander that which one has no right to speak out against.

with all malice—“Malice” is a very broad and inclusive term for a totally evil disposition. It sums up the attitude that has no place in the new nature of the man newly created after God's own likeness.

V. 32 and be kind to one another—What a striking contrast to the ugliness of the preceding verse! The removal of all those vices does not leave an inner

vacuum, because God fills the Christian with kindness in their place.

Kindness is more than gentle politeness. The word also means “useful” and “serviceable,” having a flavor of action and productivity. For instance, God's kindness toward us (Eph. 2:7) was more than just pleasantness of attitude—it was the action God took to save us! We are “kind” to one another when we are taking positive steps to do something for the other person's well-being.

tenderhearted—If we are going to put on the new nature of Christ (v. 24) we must learn compassion (Matt. 9:36; 20:34). The Greek word used here originally had reference to the inner organs of the body, especially the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys. This area of the body was noticed to produce strong feelings, even pain, when a person saw or heard of a tragedy. For this reason these organs were considered the seat of emotion.

To lack compassion was to “shut off” these organs against someone, as in 1 John 3:17.

forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you—The word used for “forgiving” here is directly related to the Greek word for “grace.” This word family includes the ideas of happiness, pleasure, favor, and goodwill. If we would forgive as God forgave, we must do it with a smile on our face!

If we find it hard to forgive, we should remember the parable Jesus taught Peter about forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-35). When a servant has been forgiven a debt of millions of dollars he should be glad to forgive a fellow servant a debt of a few dollars.

Study Questions

1. Is it true that people without God live “in the futility of their minds”?
2. Why are such people alienated from God and lacking understanding? (See verses 18 and 19.)
3. Is it possible to put on the righteousness of Christ without making any effort to take off the old nature first?
4. What is the model for our re-creation? What will we look like when it is finished?
5. How does it injure the body of Christ when we lie?

6. Does God want us to be angry? What guidelines are given on how to deal with anger?
7. What is the remedy for a thief's sickness?
8. In what context does Paul say we should not "grieve the Holy Spirit of God"?
9. What is the difference between wrath and anger?
10. What are some specific ways in which Christians can "be kind to one another"? Name some instances in which you have received such acts of kindness.
11. How can we learn to be more forgiving?

Lesson Ten (5:1-20)

Walk in Love (5:1-5)

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor lewdness, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

As we put on the new nature of Christ we become imitators of God, children who resemble their father. Our way of life is in harmony with the nature of God. We walk in love, in light, and in wisdom—three of God's greatest characteristics.

V. 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children—The word "therefore" points back to the preceding verses, especially verses 22 through 24. Being "imitators of God" is a natural consequence of

putting on the nature of Christ and being re-created in God's likeness. Although we are only "adopted" children (Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:5), God's Spirit makes it possible to resemble our new Father!

V. 2 And walk in love—God is love (1 John 4:8), so we who would be like him must walk in love. Love means we give more than we take; we help more than we hurt. It means we care more about others' needs than our own wants. (See Eph. 2:4.)

God never asks us to do anything he was unwilling to do himself. He pioneered the way of forgiveness in the preceding verses, and Christ pioneered the way of love in this verse. Our duty is to "walk and keep on walking" (Greek present tense) in the way which God has pioneered.

as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us—These words are strongly suggestive of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The word "sacrifice" and the verb form of "offering" each appear over 70 times in the book of Leviticus alone. (See especially Lev. 1:13.) Christ is the fulfillment of these sacrifices, making complete and final atonement by his single offering at Calvary (Heb. 9:28; 10:12). This was the ultimate and only sacrifice God truly desired (Heb. 10:5).

V. 3 But immorality and all impurity or covetousness—If we walk in love, certain vices must necessarily be put out of our lives. "Immorality," or fornication, refers to general sexual promiscuity. It includes any sexual intercourse outside of marriage. "Impurity," or uncleanness, is any defilement that makes one unfit to come before the presence of God. "Covetousness" means literally "have-more-ness." It is the desire to have more and more and more. Perhaps the clearest English equivalent is simply "greed."

must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints—In what way are these sins not even to be "named"? Perhaps it means that the saints should live in such a way that no one could charge them with these sins. More likely, in my judgement, it means that these sins are so unholy that they should not even be mentioned at all. They are unfit for the minds of the saints to dwell on, or the tongues of the saints to name.

Remember that "saints" are simply those who are "set apart" to God (Eph. 1:1) as Christians.

V. 4 Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor lewdness—"Filthiness" is the common Greek word meaning "shameful," and is applied here to our speech. Dirty, disgusting, obscene language is not appropriate to our new nature. "Silly talk" is literally "fool's talk." Remember that in the Bible the "fool" not only lacks wisdom, but also lacks knowledge of God (Psalm 14:1). "Lewdness" is closely related to silly talk. It refers to

coarse jesting and sacrilegious speech. Aristotle called it “cultured insolence.”

God is not opposed to all fun and joking. His approval of merriment, laughter and happiness is seen in Proverbs 17:22, “A merry heart is good medicine.” The disapproval of this verse applies to ribaldry, flippancy, and ridiculing talk. Light and irreverent talk about sacred things should especially be avoided.

but instead let there be thanksgiving—God always has a positive virtue to replace a negative vice. The lips engaged in frequent thanksgiving will be less likely to say disgraceful things. (See Col. 2:7; 3:16, 17; 4:2.)

v. 5 Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man—The same vices named in verse three are repeated here. Paul is emphatic about their consequences: “Be sure of this!”

or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater)—What has covetousness to do with idolatry? This is the answer. The people of ancient times sensed the reality of supernatural power controlling the forces of nature. They created idols to visualize and localize this power so they could worship it and get it to work for them. The most important of the idols were fertility gods. To get on the good side of a fertility god would insure good crops, fat flocks, and many sons. The people worshipped idols for what they could get from their power. Thus, idolatry and greed are very closely linked. (See Col. 3:5.)

has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God—One cannot reject the lifestyle of the new nature and still have a share in the Lord’s kingdom. This kingdom has already come in one sense, as the church. The ultimate reality of this kingdom will be heaven. The immoral, impure, and greedy have no share in either.

Walk in Light (5:6-14)

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not associate with them, 8 for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true); 10 and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; 13 but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it is said,

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.”

V. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words—Certain false teachers in Asia Minor were trying to pervert what God had said, using philosophy and empty deceit (Col. 2:8). They used clever arguments and half-truths to justify what God had condemned. Every generation must be on guard against “new” moralities and situation ethics.

the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience—God’s wrath is mentioned over thirty times in the New Testament. Despite this fact, many people have difficulty believing that the same God who wants to save men is also willing to punish them. Wrath is not sin in God, because he alone can exercise it righteously. The “sons of disobedience,” that is, all people who disobey God, deserve his wrath. God’s severity and God’s salvation are opposite sides of the same coin.

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him” (John 3:36).

V. 7 Therefore do not associate with them—The Greek word used here for “associate” means to “partake together” with someone as a partner. The only other use of the word in the New Testament is Eph. 3:6, where the Gentile Christians are fellow partakers of any nationality, but we must refuse to recognize partnership with those who claim to be Christians, but totally reject the Christian life. Paul makes this very clear in 1 Cor. 5:9-11.

V. 8 for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord—Jesus came to give light to those who sit in darkness (Luke 1:78-79; Matt. 4:16). Because he is the light of the world (John 8:12), his presence in the lives of his disciples makes them become lights (Matt. 5:14-16). Where once their lives were full of sin’s darkness and gloom, now they radiate spiritual vitality, purity, and light.

walk as children of light—The simplest way to put it is this: “Be what you are!” The Lord has cleansed us and made us lights, so we should start living up to that role. We must shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15).

V. 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)—The farmer expects his fields to grow what he has planted in them. Likewise, the Lord has put his light in us and expects us to see an appropriate harvest. Light produces fruit that is good and right and true.

V. 10 and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord—“Try to learn” comes from a Greek word meaning to test or examine in order to approve what is

genuine. It was often used of the tests to prove the gold content of ore.

In the New Testament this word means more than just finding out the value of something. It also involves active participation in what is found to be good. Paul used the same word in Rom. 12:2 where we are transformed **in order to prove out in our own lives** the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The Christian should try to find out and practice those things which please the Lord. As a child growing from infancy to maturity, he should be motivated less and less by the necessity of doing what is demanded, while wanting more and more to do what is pleasing to his Father. The mature son chooses what he will do on the basis of love, not on the basis of fear (1 John 4:18).

V. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness—The Christian should avoid the works of darkness because they are unpleasing to God and because they are profitless. This part of the verse says what is obvious; the next part of the verse carries a surprise.

but instead expose them—Human nature says, “Don’t get involved”; Paul says, “Expose those works of darkness.” Our society, influenced by the criminal element, considers it a dishonorable thing to “squeal,” to “rat,” or to “fink” on a wrong-doer, because that would make you a “stool pigeon.” When students see cheating or when employees see pilfering, usually nothing is said.

The word “expose” also means to reprove, to correct, to point something out to someone. The place to begin, especially if the offender is a Christian brother, is with the offender himself. If this does not bring satisfaction, it will be necessary to take it to higher authorities (see Matt. 18:15-17).

Correcting an erring brother can be tricky business, but the Lord says it is business that needs to be taken care of. (See Gal. 6:1-2). Two pitfalls need to be avoided:

1. One must guard against self-righteousness, which may cause one to become a self-appointed committee of one to point out everyone else’s faults.
2. One must guard against the desire to see someone else get in trouble. It is against this smirking satisfaction we are guarding when we try to teach our children not to be “tattle-tales.”

Correction must be done with the best interest of the offender in mind. It is to his advantage to root out the works of darkness.

V. 12 For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret—It is not healthy for the

mind to dwell on all the wickedness of the world. It is interesting that even the sinners try not to think about what they do, and try to do it secretly. Those whose deeds are evil love the darkness (John 3:19).

V. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible—Roaches, rats, and rotten people seem to love the darkness. If you turn on the light suddenly in dark places, they become visible and scurry for a hiding place.

for anything that becomes visible is light—The Lord wants to do more than just make the rodents of the world uncomfortable. Jesus wants his light to shine upon sinners in such a way that they are exposed, shamed, cleansed, and renewed. The light of Christ is unique in this sense, for it can turn the object upon which it shines into light.

Thus, the ultimate goal of using the light to “expose” the darkness is to save men from their wickedness.

Therefore it is said—What Paul is quoting here is not known. He may have been paraphrasing certain Old Testament passages, such as Isa. 9:2; 26:19; 51:17; and 60:1. He may have been quoting a baptismal formula recited by the early church. Apparently it was a saying familiar to his first century readers, and thus a suitable illustration of his point.

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead—Sinners sleep in the land of spiritual death. This is a call to salvation—to act before it is too late.

and Christ shall give you light—Christ is the only source of true light for those who sleep in darkness. He alone can call them forth into his glorious light. Since they come to him for that light, they should plan to walk in it.

Walk in Wisdom (5:15-20)

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

V. 15 Look carefully then how you walk—The Christian must “watch accurately” how he walks. His service for the King is far too important to be taken casually. His lifestyle must be consistent with the way of life and light.

The present tense of both verbs indicates the continuing aspect of this command. “Watch and keep on watching how you are continually walking.”

not as unwise men but as wise—Wisdom is the practical insight into what life is all about. It is the ability to see things as God sees them. We get wisdom through Christian teaching (Col. 1:28) and through the revelation of God (Eph. 1:9; James 1:5) in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30).

V. 16 making the most of time—Also translated “redeeming the time,” this phrase means “buying up a precious commodity.” Time is one of our most valuable assets, because we never know how much of it we have left, and because once it has passed by it can never be regained.

The word used here for “time” refers not to the length of time, but the special appropriateness of the occasion.

because the days are evil—The distress of the times made the days “evil.” The emphasis is not so much on moral degeneracy, as on the coming perils of persecution. He who walks in wisdom will work while he still can, for “night comes, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

V. 17 Therefore do not be foolish—The foolish person lets opportunities slip past, not knowing their importance, or not caring about their consequences. The wise Christian will understand God’s will (as also in verse 10) and make full use of every opportunity to serve.

V. 18 And do not get drunk with wine—One of the most foolish ways to waste opportunities is drunkenness. Even the Greek and Roman pagans knew drunkenness to be wrong, although they sometimes practiced it. The usual practice throughout the Mediterranean world was to dilute their natural wine with three or four parts water. This made the water more free of impurities and the wine more free from intoxication. The Bible is consistent in its warnings against intoxication (See Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Gal. 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:3, 8).

for that is debauchery—Debauchery is living one’s life in dissipation and profligacy. It is the total wasting of one’s life and the rejecting of one’s responsibilities and potential.

but be filled with the Spirit—Life in the Spirit is the opposite of the selfish, worthless life of debauchery. While wine brings out the worst in man, the Spirit brings out the best. The present tense of “be filled” shows that it does not happen all at once, but is a progressive action.

If the Christian is to let his fullness come from the Holy Spirit, he must stop filling his life with other

things. The Spirit cannot fill the man whose satisfaction in life is coming from other sources.

The context has nothing to do with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, as in 1 Cor. 12. The meaning of “be filled with the Spirit” is determined by the following verses, which are part of the same sentence.

V. 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs—One way in which the Spirit-filled Christian shares his joy in Christ is through singing. “Psalms” are the songs of the Old Testament we know as the book of Psalms. “Hymns” are songs of praise to God, perhaps composed by the Christians themselves. “Spiritual songs” are much the same, although possibly given spontaneously as a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15).

singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart—This very lovely verse of scriptures has been the battleground for a fierce sectarian warfare. The point of the contention has been whether “making melody” (Gk. *psallo*) authorizes the use of musical instruments or not. The word *psallo* originally meant “to pluck,” then later “to play a stringed instrument,” then “to sing with stringed accompaniment,” and finally just “to sing.” Some Greek dictionaries say accompaniment was included in the word in the first century; others do not. Until such a time as the battle can be waged in a spirit of Christian brotherhood, I respectfully withdraw from the contest.

V. 20 always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father—The Spirit-filled life is a life filled with thanksgiving. Because our joy does not depend upon outside circumstances, we can always be rejoicing in the Lord and giving thanks (Phil. 4:4-6; 1 Thess. 5:16-18). Our prayers are offered in the name of Jesus, who has made it possible for us to be thankful.

Study Questions

1. How do we become God’s children? Are we born or adopted into the family?
2. Where should we draw the line on joking and levity?
3. What are the connections between covetousness and idolatry?

4. Have you ever heard someone using deceitful and empty words to justify wickedness, and play down the wrath of God?
5. What does it mean to walk in the light? (See also 1 John 1:7.)
6. How should we expose the unfruitful works of darkness?
7. How do we “redeem” the time?
8. Can you draw an analogy between wine and the Spirit in the way they affect a person—the way he talks, the way he thinks, etc.?
9. How do you obey the command to be “filled with the Spirit”?
10. Compared with other world religions Christianity has much more joyful singing. Why is this?
11. Is it possible to give thanks for everything? Even for heartaches and tragedies?

Lesson Eleven (5:21-33)

Husbands, Wives, and Jesus (5:21-27)

21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with

the word, 27 that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

God cares about your family. It was God who instituted the human family in the first place, and it is God who best knows how it should operate. In an age when pressures against marriage and the family are mounting, it is both refreshing and strengthening to turn to the instructions from the family’s Designer. If the wisdom of the Designer seems to be out of step with the current wisdom of our time, you will have to judge for yourself whom to follow.

V. 21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ—This command is another part of being filled with the Spirit. The construction of the Greek sentence, beginning in verse 18, can be summarized this way:

Be filled with the Spirit—

Addressing one another in psalms, hymns, songs,

Singing and making melody,

Giving thanks always,

Being subject to one another.

“Be subject” was a military term meaning “to be arranged under the authority of someone.” In the context of this verse, it means that every Christian should be ready to surrender his own rights to his brother. He should have such lowliness and meekness (Eph. 4:2) that he prefers his brother’s well-being and wishes (Rom. 12:10).

The motivation for submission is reverence (literally “fear”) of Christ. He is our master; we are all slaves. We have no right to set up our own “pecking order” among slaves. All authority belongs to Christ (Matt. 28:18) and he alone has the right to designate any position of leadership or command.

V. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord—Every family needs someone with the final say. It is God’s plan that this person should be the husband and father. The ultimate reason a wife should submit to her husband is not his proven qualifications for the role of leader, but because God said to submit. (We should always obey God because he is God, not because his request seems reasonable enough!)

A few points need to be made here about the Bible’s teaching on the submission of the wife to the husband. First, notice that the wives are told to be subject; the husbands are not told to put them in subjection. The husband’s responsibility is not to get the upper hand over his wife; his duty is to love her (verse 25). Voluntary submission is the wife’s responsibility. If she is unwilling to assume this role voluntarily, it is

doubtful that forcing the role upon her will achieve God's purposes.

Second, the wife's submission and the husband's love are something they owe the Lord, even more than they owe each other. Even if the husband is a clod, the wife should be subject to him, because the Lord is no clod and he deserves to be obeyed. Even if the wife is unlovely, the husband should love her, because the Lord deserves it. The application of this principle adds permanency to marriage. The relationship is not based on fickle responses to a fickle spouse, but on steadfast obedience to an unchanging Lord.

Third, God's recipe for happiness in the Christian family cannot be guaranteed if part of the ingredients are left out. If a Christian wife submits, but an un-Christian husband does not love, the results may not be satisfactory. Even so, the best chance a Christian wife has in this unfortunate circumstance is to submit and try to make it work. (See 1 Pet. 3:1-2.)

Fourth, the husband has not been appointed to be God. His authority is only a delegated authority and has limitations. Consider the parallel between the family and the government. The basis of government's authority is that God has ordained it. The Christian obeys his government, because to disobey is to resist God's command (Rom. 13:1-2). However, if government tries to oppose the clear and specific command of God, the Christian's highest allegiance is to God (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Likewise, the wife is subject to the husband because God has made the husband head (verse 23). Just as Christians are to "be subject" to governing authorities, the same word is used three different times to tell the wives to "be subject" to their husbands (Eph. 5:22 & 24; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1). If, however, the husband comes into irreconcilable conflict with the authority of God, the wife's highest allegiance is to God (see Luke 14:26; 1 Cor. 7:15).

V. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife—

A few critics have asserted that "head" has nothing to do with rule or authority, but means only "source" or "origin." This may have been true hundreds of years before the first century, but the use of "head" to mean "ruler" is well documented in the Greek of Paul's time. (The use of "ruler" is found in the Septuagint, in Philo, in the Testament of Zebulon, in the Mishnah, and in the writings of Qumran.) It is not really necessary, however, to carry our investigation any further than chapter one of this same epistle. There all things have been "subjected" under Christ's feet, and he has been made "head" over all things. Paul chose this very circumstance to illustrate the relationship of the wife to the husband, using the same Greek words for "be subject" and "head."

as Christ is the head of the church, his body—

Just as Christ was given headship in 1:22, the husband is given headship in the family. Be careful to notice, however, what kind of headship this was. For Jesus Christ, headship meant that he gave up heavenly glory and comfort for the sake of the church. He became servant of all, humbling himself even to the point of death. His headship was clothed in love.

Likewise, the husband is appointed head for the benefit of the family, not for his own indulgence.

and is himself its Savior—When Jesus accepted the responsibility of being head and taking care of the church, it ultimately cost him his life, but it saved the church. Every husband and father should look to Christ for the model of how to be protector and head of his family.

V. 24 As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands—Every wife should look to the church for the model of how to submit to authority. The addition of the phrase "in everything" seems to make submission cover every area of family life.

V. 25 Husbands, love your wives—The duty of the husband is not to dominate the wife. His duty, repeated three times (verses 25, 28, 33), is to love her.

The kind of love God commands from the husband for his wife is *agape* love. This is the divine kind of love, motivated not by a self-interest or even the attractiveness of the one loved, but by a sincere interest in the well-being of the other. Love based on selfish interest will fail whenever the object of love fails to gratify selfish lusts. Love based on attractiveness will fail whenever the object of love grows older, fatter, sicker, or balder. True *agape* love includes sexual desire and appreciation for attractiveness, but it is based on a permanent concern for the one loved. It is the only love that goes on loving whether circumstances are better or worse, whether richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, until death parts the lovers.

as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her—It is only Christ's kind of love that makes the headship of the husband tolerable. When the husband's greatest desire is for the happiness of his wife, and when the wife's greatest desire is to support and be subject to her husband, a happy and harmonious union will exist.

The husband who never helps his wife with the house or the kids, caring only for his own relaxation and entertainment, can scarcely be said to "have given himself up for her!"

V. 26 that he might sanctify her—To "sanctify" means to "set apart in purity and holiness." Christ's

church has been “called out” from the world to be his holy bride.

having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word—Every member of Christ’s church has been washed from the stain and defilement of the world. As F.F. Bruce has said, “This washing with water, accompanied by a spoken word, can scarcely be anything other than baptism; this is what the language would most naturally have conveyed to the original readers.” Paul does not make a strong apologetic for baptism here, taking for granted that his readers knew its place in conversion.

The “word” associated with the washing has been taken variously to mean: the prayer of the convert (Acts 22:16), the confession of the convert (Rom. 10:9), the pronouncement of the divine name at the time of baptism (Matt. 28:19), or the whole Bible itself. The Greek term used by Paul usually has special application to the spoken word.

V. 27 that he might present the church to himself in splendor—The church is a bride getting ready for the wedding ceremony. Right now, while she is still in the process of preparing, her true beauty may not be clearly seen. But on the day the Groom receives her at the consummation of the ages, she will be beautiful. She will be splendid and glorious in a white gown of Christ’s righteousness. Every blemish, every flaw, every wrinkle will have disappeared.

without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish—Some people think Jesus chose an ugly bride. They fail to perceive two things: some of the ugliness they see is not really a part of the true church; and Jesus has the power to purify and beautify those people who are the church. (Compare the scene depicted by John in Rev. 21:1-10).

The Mystery of Love (5:28-33)

28 Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.” 32 This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church; 33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

V. 28 Even so—Again the comparison of relationships comes back to the family. Just as Christ gave everything to bring about the full beauty and potential of his bride, so should the husband attend to the development of his wife.

husbands should loved their wives as their own bodies—Under normal circumstances, a man will give just about anything to save his own skin (Job 2:4). In Christ, the husband learns that he has no possession on earth more valuable than his wife—not even his own body.

At the time Paul wrote these words, wives were not always highly esteemed. Multiple wives, concubines, and mistresses could very well have made a man think his wife was expendable. In many different times and places, a wife has been considered mere chattel property. Christianity changes this, giving the wife full dignity, fully deserving her husband’s loyalty and love.

He who loves his wife loves himself—This is true in at least two different ways. First, it is true because the wife and the husband have become one flesh. They have become so united in the sharing of their lives as to be a single soul, with one flesh (verse 31). Second, it is true because it is to the husband’s own advantage to love his wife. Even if a man were motivated by nothing but pure selfishness, he ought to love his wife. Speaking in a practical way, the more a husband loves his wife, the more she will respond and be the kind of wife he wants. Perhaps you have seen the advice: “Do yourself a favor—love your wife!”

V. 29 For no man ever hates his own flesh—The instinct for self-preservation is strong. A man will do just about whatever he has to do to secure food for his stomach and to avoid pain and suffering for his flesh. It takes a lot of weird teaching to convince a man to inflict pain on himself or starve himself. God wants this protective instinct to include the man’s wife.

but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church—Just as a man instinctively cares for his own flesh, just as Christ lovingly cares for his body—the church, so should a husband care for his wife. To “nourish” means to protect and provide for. The word is even used for the sustaining protection and nourishment which the unborn receive while still in the womb. To “cherish” originally meant “to keep warm and comfortable.” The husband should be concerned for every aspect of his wife’s well-being: physical, mental, social, and spiritual.

V. 30 because we are members of his body—Every child of God is a member of the body of Christ. Christ is no more eager to see harm come to any member of his body than you are eager to suffer injury to your own. Christ’s concern is for all of us, that we are spiritually well and prosperous.

V. 31 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one—Paul reaches back to Genesis

2:24 for this statement of the marriage relationship in the very beginning. Although the bond between a son and his parents is strong (Ex. 20:12), the institution of marriage is stronger. A young man breaks away (the word sometimes is even translated “abandon”) from his parents and establishes a new home and a new loyalty. He is joined (literally “glued to”) to his wife in a permanent new relationship. The two become “one flesh” as they blend together every facet of their lives in mutual partnership. Much more than sexual intercourse is included in becoming “one flesh.”

The marriage relationship was ordained by God. It has a holy and noble purpose. A man and woman should not enter this relationship carelessly, for God intends it to be permanent (Matt. 19:6).

V. 32 This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church—Through revelation Paul has been enabled to see a hidden purpose in the institution of the marriage relationship. God ordained the relationship as a preview of the fellowship to be shared by Christ and the church. Jesus Christ left his Father in heaven to seek his bride, and gave his life to ransom and redeem her. One day he is returning to claim her for all eternity. This is the greatest love story the world has ever known.

Paul has pointed out a remarkable parallelism between the family and the church. We learn more about the proper role of one by studying the other.

V. 33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself—Paul returns to the family to end on the same note as he began. Whatever the theological teaching about Christ and Genesis 2:24, the immediate task at hand is for husbands—each one of them—to learn to love.

Immature husbands often ignore the wife’s wishes and do everything according to their own whims to prove they are not hen-pecked. The mature husband does not have to prove anything to anybody. He will consider the preferences and needs of all the family members and make choices which will result in the common good of everyone.

and let the wife see that she respects her husband—The wife’s command is to “respect” her husband. The Greek word used here is usually translated “fear” or “reverence.” It is a strong concept. The wise young woman will accept the offer of marriage only from a man she can respect and reverence.

Study Questions

1. What is the motivation for being subject to one another?

2. What is the wife’s duty? To whom does she owe it?
3. What does it mean to be “head?”
4. Are there any limitations to the authority of the husband and the subjection of the wife?
5. Was Paul’s view of the husband-wife roles more suited to life in the culture of the first century than now?
6. Would Paul’s view of marriage have been different if he had been married?
7. What are Christ’s intentions for his bride—the church?
8. What three steps are necessary for a good marriage (verse 31)?
9. What right did Paul have to find Christ and his church hidden in a verse from Genesis?
10. There is certainly room for discussion in working out the roles of husbands and wives. Perhaps each family must fit the roles to their own circumstances. How would you respond to these questions?
 - a. Should the wife work outside the home?
 - b. Should a husband help with dishes or laundry?
 - c. Should a husband help change diapers, bathe and feed the baby, or do anything else to meet a baby’s needs?
 - d. May a wife keep track of the family finances?
 - e. Who should discipline the kids?
 - f. Since homosexuality is sometimes encouraged in children by a reversal in the proper role of their parents, how should a father demonstrate his manhood? What

specific actions would be appropriate and what would be inappropriate?

Lesson Twelve (6:1-9)

Children and Parents (6:1-4)

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Being a Father himself, God is interested in children. He knows they can bring wonderful gladness to their parents (Prov. 10:1) or bitterness and grief (Prov. 17:25). For this reason, the owner's manual for the marvelous invention called mankind has instructions about raising children.

Children ultimately must make their own choices about how they will live. Not even God himself will force anyone to be what he does not choose to be. The job for parents, then, is not to make all the choices for their children, but to be teaching them to make the right choices for themselves.

V. 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord—

This is one of the few places in the Bible addressed specifically to children. Whatever else the church teaches children about morality and decency, it must not neglect this primary commandment. Church and youth group activities should be designed to strengthen, not weaken, a child's loyalty to his parents.

The word "obey" means literally "to hear under." It means to get under the authority of someone and pay attention to their commands. Children should learn to obey their parents for at least two reasons. First, they should obey because their parents know more about life and can protect them from danger and hurt. A wise, loving parent helps a child get off to a good start in life. Second, they should learn to obey the Father in heaven. Refusal to obey authority in one area of life usually spills over into other areas.

The phrase "in the Lord" has been given some strange applications. Some have understood it to mean that children should obey their parents only if their parents are "in the Lord"—that is, Christians. Others have taken it to mean that children should obey only if the instructions are "in the Lord"—that is, what the Lord

would have recommended. (If the Lord wouldn't have wanted you to mow the yard, don't do it!) There is a grain of truth in this, but the child must be extremely cautious about disobeying his parents because of what he thinks the Lord would have wanted. I prefer to take "in the Lord" simply as the sphere in which children offer their obedience. Obedience is something the Lord wants from them, so when they obey, it is "in the Lord."

Is it ever right for a child to disobey his parents? Perhaps, but rarely. If a child is told to kill or steal or violate any explicit command of God, he should refuse to do it and suffer the consequences. If a young person comes to a point where he must choose between Jesus or his parents, he may have to reject parents and move out. If he is too young to move out on his own, he is too young to make the choice. (Consider Matt. 10:37-38 and Luke 14:25-30.)

for this is right—Children obey their parents because that is simply the way it ought to be. Parents are not perfect, but then, neither are kids! Even though the boy Jesus was wiser than his parents, he returned with them from Jerusalem to Nazareth and "was obedient to them." (See Luke 2:41-51.) He obeyed simply because it was right.

It was wrong for the Pharisees to neglect their elderly parents, saying all their wealth was "corban" (Mark 7:11). It is wrong for children to be disobedient to parents, for this is a sign of a depraved man without God (Rom. 1:30) and a sign of the "last times" (2 Tim. 3:2). Jesus came to make things right. (See Malachi 4:6.)

V. 2 "Honor your father and mother"—To "honor" means to "revere, esteem, or set a high value on." Sometimes it is even translated elsewhere as "worship." An adjective made from the same Greek word means "precious, costly, valuable."

When God first gave this commandment in Exodus 20:12, he showed that he wanted children to have the kind of respect and honor for their parents that results in obedience. Severe penalties were established for the rebellious son who refused this command. (See Exodus 21:15, 17; Deut. 21:18-21.)

(this is the first commandment with a promise)—The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21. When you read these passages you will find that not only is this the first commandment with a promise—it is the only commandment with a promise!

It is also interesting to notice that there are six commandments dealing with a person's relationship with other people, and the commandment to honor parents comes first among these six.

V. 3 “that it may be well with you—This part of the promise is found only in the commandment as found in Deuteronomy 5:16. God promised general prosperity and well-being to those who honored their parents. Since Paul quoted this promise with approval, it must also apply today. (See next comment.)

and that you may live long on the earth—Long life is promised in the commandment in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. (According to the warning in Deut. 21:18-21, the extremely disobedient would look forward to a very short life!)

In the old covenant, God’s blessings were directed more to a physical Promised Land with good crops, many sons, and long life. God’s blessings to Christians are oriented more in the spiritual plane. Whether we are prosperous and long-lived or not, we have an eternal treasure laid up in heaven. The promise was to be fulfilled “in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” For the Christians, this has primary application to heaven.

V. 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger—In this kind of context the word “fathers” sometimes should be translated “parents.” (See the Living Bible and *The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People* by Charles B. Williams.) Mothers can learn from this verse, too!

God wants parents to exercise good judgment in the way they rear their children. It is possible to be so heavy-handed and unreasonable with children that they are driven to rebellion. They despair of ever pleasing their parents, so they stop trying (Col. 3:21).

Modern parents, however, often go to the opposite extreme. They discipline timidly and reluctantly, fearful of incurring the wrath of their spoiled children. They are constantly seeking the approval of their children and avoid any discipline that might displease them. The remainder of this verse shows the perfect balance God has intended.

but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord—Parents should “bring up” their children with loving care. This word translated “bring up” is the same word Paul used for “nourish” in 5:29. The two main ideas of the word are to protect from harmful influences and to provide the necessary nourishment.

The word “discipline” is derived in Greek from a simple word (*paio*) meaning “I strike.” Parents who love their children will discipline them (Heb. 12:6), and spanking is an integral part of discipline. (See Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 20:30; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17.)

It is important that both you and your children know the difference between spanking and child abuse.

The following guidelines will help you establish proper discipline:

1. Do not discipline in anger. If necessary, send them to their room to think about their wrong action while you get a hold on yourself.
2. Do not discipline for revenge. Spanking is not a way of getting even with children for having made you look like a poor parent.
3. Do not discipline to the extent of physical injury. The child’s posterior is nicely padded and is a safe place for spanking. Use a stick or other object small enough so that it will break if you accidentally apply too much force. (Contrary to child psychologists and dog trainers, I prefer to use my hand. It is always available, and I know if I am spanking too hard.)
4. Do not strike the face. A spanking should be entirely different from getting beat up by the school bully.
5. Aim for correction more than punishment. Be sure the child knows what was wrong and why he is being punished.
6. Follow every disciplinary action with love.

Here is one last practical hint: Have some way to let your children know when you are suggesting and when you are requiring. If a child must comply with every casual suggestion of the parent, under threat of punishment, it will be a heavy burden. At our house, the kids learned when they were faced with a punishable offense by the count: “One...two...three!” We never counted unless we were prepared to spank them—right then and there—for disobedience. We never prolonged the count. Both we and the kids knew there had to be a spanking if they had not yielded by “Three!”

The word “instruction” used by Paul carries the idea of admonishing, warning, and teaching. (See 1 Cor. 10:11 and Titus 3:10 for uses of this same word.) The words of warning given to children should be instructive. They must never be mere threats of punishment that are never carried out. A parent must never warn of a punishment unless he is fully prepared to follow through.

Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)

5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; 6 not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good

any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

V. 5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters—The practice of slavery was widespread in the first century. As much as one third of the population of Rome and other great cities was made up of slaves. Slaves were considered inferior by birth, naturally fitted for slavery. Slaves were mere chattel property, in no way equal to a free citizen.

Since Jesus came to “set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18), one might have expected Christianity to urge slaves to revolt and run away. Surprisingly, God had another plan to end slavery. If the slaves would become the kind of men they ought to be (verses 5-8), and the masters would become the kind of men they ought to be (verse 9), the problem would solve itself.

“Be obedient” is the same instruction Paul gave to children in verse one. Slaves could practice their Christianity through obedience. They could honor Christ by being the best slave any master ever had. If this principle was valid for slaves who served their masters involuntarily, how much more is it valid for modern employees who obtained their jobs freely and by choice?

with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ—A man should work for his employer with devotion, as if his employer were the Lord (Col. 3:23). His “fear and trembling” are not so much for his earthly master, as for the disappointment and displeasure of his Master in heaven. “Singleness of heart” means total commitment and a whole-hearted desire to fulfill one’s purpose.

V. 6 not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers—Paul apparently coined the Greek word for “eyeservice,” since it is found nowhere except here and Col. 3:22. The picture of the slave who works only when being watched is so clear that it needs little explanation. Once while working on a construction crew, I was told to slow down to make the work last longer. “Just look busy when the foreman comes around.”

but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart—Whether the foreman is watching or not, the Master is. Just as in the previous verse, the Christian worker should give full-hearted devotion to his job, for this is the will of God.

V. 7 rendering service with a good will—It would have been hard for the Christian slave to obey a

pagan master and see him support a temple of idolatry with the profits. It would also have been hard to serve a Christian master, wondering why he did not quickly set you free. Either way, the Christian slave was working for someone else’s benefit. How could he feel good about that?

The very essence of Christianity is serving, not being served (Matt. 20:26-28). Even God’s own Son came in the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7) and learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb. 5:8). His example as a suffering servant made the abuse endured by Christian slaves both tolerable and purposeful (1 Pet. 2:18-25).

as to the Lord and not to men—It did not matter if a slave’s master was unworthy of his service. The slave had a Master in heaven who was worthy, and he could dedicate his service to him. Verses 5, 6, and 7 all say this same thing.

V. 8 knowing that whatever good any one does, hi will receive the same again from the Lord—Whether slave or free, a man ought to look beyond his paycheck in considering whether he is adequately paid. The Lord is keeping books, too.

When all this children get to heaven, God is going to make a lot of things right. The faithful slave who served well in spite of abuse will be rewarded. When a man stands before God, it is better to be deserving more than he deserved. If you are overworked and underpaid, praise the Lord! Think about it.

whether he is slave or free—Now a new note slips into the song. God is going to settle up with people some day, regardless of whether they were slaves or free men—even master! This thought, fully developed in the next verse, sounds the death knell of slavery. How can masters go on treating other human beings like chattel, when he and they will someday stand before God to answer for the way they lived?

V. 9 Masters, do the same to them—“Masters, your slaves are doing their best for you—now you do your best for them!” God is not one-sided in his social concerns. He is neither pro-labor or pro-management. He wants each side to take care of its own responsibilities. The same God who wants soldiers to “be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14) is also outraged when the wages of the laborers are kept back by fraud (James 5:4). If anything, God’s wrath seems to be hottest against those who become wealthy by withholding from their workers. (See James 5:1-6.) The Christian employer is obligated before God to do his best to provide for whomever he hires.

and forbear threatening—Masters must “leave off” the threatening and harassment of their servants.

They are not dealing with mules or dogs; they are dealing with fellow human beings.

knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven—Masters (Gk. *kurioi*) must remember the Lord (*kurios*) in heaven. Although the Roman law gave them the right to beat a slave so severely he would die, there was another Court with jurisdiction in the case. Before that Court the earthly masters will stand with their slaves as equals and fellow servants of the Master in heaven.

and that there is no partiality with him—The Greek word for “partiality” is literally “face-taking.” A judge in court of that time would look up to see who the defendant was. If he was a slave, he was given altogether different treatment than a free man, or especially, a master. With the divine Judge, however, a man’s social or economic standing does not matter. His race or nationality do not count. Masters who have been cruel and abusive will no longer have protection from the law. This sobering thought made Christian masters take a whole new outlook toward their slaves.

Study Questions

1. Why should children learn to obey their parents?
2. Is it ever right for a child to disobey? What do you think?
3. Are prosperity and long life guaranteed to every obedient child?
4. Should parents always try to avoid making their children angry? What does verse four mean?
5. It is often asserted that spanking a child will stifle his creativity and self-expression. Will it?
6. What is the difference between physical discipline and child abuse?
7. How does the teaching for slaves apply to any of us today?
8. How will the Lord “make it right” to a slave who was abused and mistreated?
9. What was the masters’ responsibility, and how does that apply to any of us today?
10. Prior to 1860 many Christian people, including Alexander Campbell, owned slaves in America. Is slavery compatible with Christianity? Did these people have a “blind spot” in their perception of Christ’s will?
11. Why didn’t Paul just condemn slavery as contrary to God’s will, and call for an end to it?

Lesson Thirteen (6:10-24)

The Whole Armor of God (6:10-20)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; 16 above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Soldiers of Christ, arise! The eternal Lord is leading forth to victory against the infernal foe! Despite Satan’s schemes and strategies, we can be strong in the

Lord and stand victorious in the day of battle. The secret to success lies in our armor—the whole armor of God.

V. 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might—The Christian’s source of power is the Lord. This is why Paul prayed for his readers to experience God’s resurrection power in 1:19-20 and 3:1-21. With this power we can face the Satanic hosts and win!

The Greek word for “be strong” means to be “empowered” or “strengthened.” Paul used the same word in the beautiful parallel to this verse found in Phil. 4:13, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” He used the same word to encourage Timothy to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1). Now, the word applies to us!

The verses which follow picture the Christian not as a gladiator, but as a soldier in an army. The Christian is not intended to defeat the enemy single-handedly, but as part of a united, marching army. This army is the church.

V. 11 Put on the whole armor of God—God supplies everything we will need to fight victoriously. This armor will be itemized in verses 14-17.

There is a very real battle going on between the forces of heaven and hell. He who is not armed and ready may be a casualty of that conflict. Satan is trying to win control of the minds and hearts of men, and we must go forth to oppose him (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Like Timothy, we must be empowered by Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1), be ready to take our share of suffering as good soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3), and fight the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7).

that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil—Satan opposes us with clever, crafty strategies. He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) and is the father of lies (John 8:44). His “wiles” are the same as the “deceitful wiles” mentioned in 4:14 of this epistle. If Satan told the whole truth about his merchandise and its consequences, he would never get a taker. This is why he always gift wraps with glitter and deceit.

Some people seem to think Satan’s most dangerous power is some kind of “possession,” such as was portrayed in the movie “The Exorcist.” They figure that if they can avoid that kind of calamity, all is well. The story is told of a man who went to see “The Exorcist.” He was a man who was cheating on his taxes, cheating on his wife, and embezzling from his firm. He came out trembling and frightened, saying, “Whew! I sure hope the devil never gets a hold of me!”

Many a fruitless argument has been waged, speculating on the reality of witchcraft, voodoo, and the

occult. Whatever the extent of Satan’s power in these areas, I am convinced they are not the most dangerous weapons in his arsenal. They are diversionary tactics to distract our attention from the real battleground—simple, subtle temptation.

V. 12 For we are not contending against flesh and blood—We are engaged in a spiritual conflict. Our opponents are not merely human, so human strength will not be sufficient. If we were preparing to wrestle a man, we would try to make our bodies strong. For this battle we must make our spirits strong.

but against the principalities, against the powers—The principalities and powers are ranks of angel beings. (See Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15.) Christ defeated these forces at the cross (Col. 2:15), but the battle must be waged for every individual person to see whether he will accept the victory of the cross for himself.

The angel beings which serve Satan are apparently those angels who joined a rebellion against God in heaven (2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6), and were cast out.

against the world rulers of this present darkness—Satan is called the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), and the “ruler of this world” (John 14:30). He and his hosts do not have greater power than God over the affairs of men, but what power he does have is concentrated here. That portion of the world under his influence is called “the present evil age,” from which Christ has set us free (Gal. 1:4).

against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places—The battle of the ages takes place in the “heavenly places” (see 1:3). We cannot see or hear the battle, but we can certainly feel it going on within us, and around us. The demons of hell throw themselves into this battle with total abandon, knowing they have nothing more to lose. We must face our foe with total conviction, knowing we have everything to gain.

V. 13 Therefore take the whole armor of God—This is the second time our armor has been called the “whole” armor of God. Every piece of equipment must be put on, or it will not be effective.

that you may be able to withstand in the evil day—While there may be reference to a final, conclusive day of battle, the “evil day” probably refers to this present age, when “the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16). This “evil day” is any day and every day we are challenged by our Satanic foe.

and having done all, to stand—When a battle is over, only one army is left standing on the field. The other army lies dead or has fled in retreat. After Satan has fled in defeat from our Christian army (James 4:7), we will stand with the Captain of our host in victory.

V. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth—As Paul writes these words he is probably chained to a Roman soldier (see verse 20). He uses the armament of that soldier to illustrate his point, listing each piece in the order a soldier would put it on.

The Christian soldier must begin with truth. It is just as vital to him as the heavy leather belt and skirt were vital to the legionnaire. Since Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), we can hardly expect lies to serve us well for the Lord.

and having put on the breastplate of righteousness—The next piece donned by the Roman soldier was his breastplate. Molded of shining metal, it protected his heart, lungs, and other vital organs.

God's soldier has a breastplate of righteousness (see Isaiah 11:5 and 59:17). This protection is not only the innocence imputed to us in the heavenly ledgers, but also the righteous state of our lives. Imputed righteousness cannot be separated from righteous living (1 John 3:7).

V. 15 and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace—The Roman soldier wore hobnailed sandals, giving him secure footing on any terrain. The sandals were also designed for mobility, for the Roman army was renowned for its ability to march great distances in a short time.

The "good news" of peace is the "equipment" (or "preparation" or "readiness") of the Christian soldier. It is his firm foundation and his impetus for travel.

V. 16 above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one—The word for "shield" is closely related to the Greek word for "door." While some armies used a small, round shield, the Roman armies used a large, rectangular one. This shield was as wide as a man's body and as much as four feet long. A row of Roman soldiers with these shields formed a solid wall. The shield was constructed of alternating layers of bronze and oxhide, so as to be impervious to flaming arrows.

The Christian's shield is his faith. Whenever Satan hurls his projectiles of doubt, despair, or temptation at us, our faith gives us victory (1 John 5:4).

V. 17 And take the helmet of salvation—The Roman soldier wore a metal helmet to protect him from fatal blows to the head. The Christian's protection against fatal blows is the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8). The worst an enemy could do is kill us, but eternal salvation turns that into a wonderful victory.

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God—The Roman sword, unlike the large Thracian weapon, was short enough to be effective in close-quarter, hand-to-hand combat. For the Christian, the

Holy Spirit has supplied the word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). The sword of the Spirit is the only offensive weapon of our armor. God's Word is not viewed as a repository of knowledge laid away on a shelf, but an active weapon. It is especially the preached and proclaimed "word" (Gk. *rhema*) that Paul has in mind.

Many improper uses have been made of the sword of the Spirit. Some of these perversions are listed below:

CHRISTIAN CUTLERY

(or What You Can Beat Your Sword Into)

Pocket Knife—Used chiefly for idle whittling.

Hunting Knife—Used chiefly for skinning whatever has been trapped.

Fencing Foil—Used energetically, but only for the exercise and entertainment of both parties.

Bowie Knife—To be thrown at whatever gets too close for comfort.

Switch-blade—Very sharp, used to take money from people.

Kitchen Knife—For chopping things up to make them palatable.

Dagger—Used on friends and acquaintances, in the back.

Jackknife—Not a true knife at all, but a gymnastic feat performed before an appreciative audience.

Sword—Close-quarters weapon of the warrior, used to slay the enemy, whether the old man of sin or the Man of Sin.

V. 18 Pray at all times in the Spirit—The soldier must maintain contact with his commanding officer. Prayer keeps us in tune with the Lord and his purposes. Perhaps prayer should even be considered a part of our armor, for a consistent prayer life shields us from the onslaught of doubt and despair, and strengthens us against temptation.

Paul told the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). God wants his children to pray regularly, consistently, and frequently.

with all prayer and supplication—"Prayer" is the general word for communication with God. It includes all aspects of asking, praising, and giving thanks. "Supplication" is a more specific word, indicating a special request or entreaty made to God.

To that end keep alert with all perseverance—The original meaning of "keep alert" was to "pass a sleepless night," as in 2 Cor. 1:27. Our captain Jesus Christ often prayed far into the night (see Matt. 14:23-25; 26:36-45). He said men "ought always to pray and

not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). Paul urged us to “persevere,” or continue steadfastly, in prayer in Rom. 12:12 and Col. 4:2.

making supplication for the saints—Here is still another reminder that Christians are never isolated from the rest of God’s family. Even when separated by time and space, we can be united in our prayers for one another. A Christian who wants to operate only on the “Just You and Me, Lord” level has failed to understand God’s will. We are integrally involved with the other members of the body. If one member hurts, we all hurt. If one member rejoices, we all rejoice. If one member has a need, we all make supplication.

V. 19 and also for me—Paul is not hesitant to request prayers for himself. And well he might need prayer in his own behalf, we would think, since he was imprisoned and facing the prospect of death. However, as you continue this verse, see what it was Paul wanted them to pray for.

that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel—Paul did not crave relief or release; he craved boldness and an opportunity to proclaim the gospel (Col. 4:3). Though we rarely remember it, the most fearless preacher of the early church often felt “weakness” and “much fear and trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). God answered his prayer for boldness, and he will answer yours, too!

The “mystery of the gospel” Paul wanted to proclaim was no longer a secret. It was God’s plan for salvation, now openly revealed (Eph. 3:3-5, 9).

V. 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains—The very thought of an ambassador being put in chains is contrary to all sense of fairness and all the conventions of warfare. Even the most hostile nations respect the freedom and safety of an ambassador, giving him “safe conduct.” However, the forces of Satan recognize no standards of decency.

Even so, Paul did not lament his fate nor complain about his invidious treatment.

that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak—Paul spent at least two years in this confinement, according to Acts 28:30-31. He spent this time “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ **with all boldness.**” Paul was chained, but the gospel was not! His imprisonment in Rome had only served to advance the gospel, which now spread throughout even Caesar’s elite praetorian guard (Phil. 1:12-13).

Final Greetings (6:21-24)

21 Now that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful

minister in the Lord will tell you everything. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying.

V. 21 Now that you also may know how I am—Paul apparently did not want to clutter up this epistle with too many items of purely personal interest. Questions regarding how Paul was getting along would be answered by his personal courier.

Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister—Tychicus was a disciple from Asia Minor (where Ephesus is located) who traveled with Paul on part of the Third Missionary Journey (Acts 20:4). 2 Tim. 4:12 mentions that Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus while Paul stayed in Rome. (This may have been on another occasion.)

Tychicus not only carried this epistle, but also carried the epistle to the Colossians (Col. 4:7-9) at the same time. He also accompanied Onesimus, the runaway slave, back to his master (Col. 4:9), carrying the epistle to Philemon.

V. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose—Paul knew how distressed the Christians of Asia Minor were because of his imprisonment. It was especially for their encouragement that he sent Tychicus to tell them first hand how things were going.

V. 23 Peace be to the brethren—Paul’s epistles always begin with a word about “peace” and usually end with “peace” as well. Peace is well-being of the soul. It is the state in which we live when our alienation from God has ended (Eph. 2:1-8). Peace is a dominant theme of Ephesians and the word appears eight times (1:21; 2:14, 15, 17; 4:3; 6:15, 23).

and love with faith—Faith and love seem inseparable in the Christian life (See 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:6; Eph. 1:15; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; etc.) Faith is also dominant in this specific epistle and appears eight times (1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13; 6:16, 23).

from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ—The fatherhood of God is stated in every chapter of Ephesians (see notes on 1:2). Reference is made to the Lord Jesus Christ, or simply the Lord, twenty-four times. You can see that Paul is using his final greeting to reinforce the key ideas of what he has written.

V. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying—“Grace” begins and ends all of Paul’s epistles. Paul uses the word twelve times in this epistle. It is both the basis of our salvation (2:8) and

the privilege of our service (3:8 and 4:7). Poor and wretched sinners who love the Lord Jesus can come to God for forgiveness—and find him smiling! This is the meaning of grace.

Study Questions

1. What is the Christian's source of strength? Where in Ephesians does Paul tell us about it?
2. Why must we put on the "whole" armor? Examine each piece to see how we would be defenseless without it.
3. How does the devil operate? What are his "wiles"?
4. How is it possible to wrestle with renegade angels and spiritual hosts of wickedness?
5. What are the parts of armor and the significance of each? Can you recite them from memory?
6. How is it possible to pray all night? What on earth is there to talk about?
7. What was Paul's prayer request from prison? Why did he request that?
8. Who was Tychichus?
9. What dominant themes are stated again in the last two verses?
10. What have you learned from the study of Ephesians? How do you view God and his plan for salvation? How will your life be changed as a result of this study?