

Faith Foundations Study Guides

Chosen in Christ

*A Journey of Discovery in the Book of
Ephesians*

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How to Use This Book

Welcome to the Faith Foundations study guide on Ephesians! Whether you are just beginning your new life with Christ, or have been a Christian for many years, this study guide is for you. It is designed to help you discover, through personal study and group discussion, the incredible riches of God's Word, and to help you grow in your walk with God by applying what you learn. This book is divided into 12 lessons, each of which contains the full NIV text of the Scripture passage, several study and discussion questions, and a verse-by-verse commentary. So, together with a Bible to look up cross-references, you have everything you need for your "journey of discovery" in Ephesians.

Why Small Groups?

These materials can be used profitably in personal study or in an adult Sunday School class. But their value will be best realized when they are used in small groups, meeting either at church during the Sunday School hour or in homes during the week. There are several reasons for this.

First, no one has perfect insight into every passage of Scripture; we can all benefit from hearing the perspectives of other believers as we seek to understand and apply the Bible. A small group gathering, using the discussion questions included in this book, is an ideal way to stimulate a sharing of observations and ideas.

Second, a small group provides a community of fellow travelers who, along with us, are seeking to follow Christ in the midst of family responsibilities, job pressures, and personal struggles. In today's fragmented and mobile society, the natural networks of neighborhoods and family no longer provide the support they once did. We need some way of making connections with others for mutual support, people with whom we can share our joys and sorrows—people who will listen, who will pray with us, who will offer a helping hand and a word of encouragement, and who will confront us in love when we've gotten off track.

Finally, a small group combines the benefits of Biblical insight and community support by keeping us accountable. If we only study the Scriptures alone, or listen to them taught in a large group, it's easy to let them go "in one ear and out the other". But when a small group of people are learning the same things at the same time, they can help one another to apply the things they are learning.

How Are the Groups Organized?

The groups should be composed of 6-14 people: if they are smaller, any absences can make it difficult to maintain the discussion; if they are larger, not everyone can participate. You can meet from two to four times a month; if the group meets less than twice a month, the members aren't spending enough time together to build relationships. Some groups find that meeting three times a month during the school year, with a break during the summer, provides a good rhythm of involvement and time off.

You may choose to include a mix of married and single, older and younger members, or you may organize your groups by age or marital status. There are benefits to homogeneous groups in which the members are going through similar life experiences, but there are also benefits of a diverse group in which the younger members can benefit from the experience of the older.

Each group needs to have a recognized leader, preferably one selected and trained by the pastor or church leadership. This person's role during the meeting is not primarily to teach (although preparation of the lesson is a must), but to guide the discussion and keep the group from getting bogged down on side issues. He or she does not need to be the host; in fact, it is preferable that group responsibilities, such as providing a home in which to meet and organizing refreshments, be shared among the members.

Finally, membership in the group should be based on three commitments: To prepare for each meeting by completing the lesson in advance, which takes from 1/2 to 2 hours (but come to the meeting even if you haven't done the lesson); to place a high priority on regular attendance and come to the meetings except in case of emergency; and to keep confidential anything of a personal nature which is shared during the meetings (except when it is necessary to communicate concerns to the pastor).

What Is the Group Meeting Like?

Each group meeting should last from 1 1/2 to 2 hours, and provide time for discussion of the lesson, prayer, and fellowship. A problem in many groups is for the lesson to take up most of the time, with only a few minutes left over for prayer and fellowship. This must be avoided for the goal of building relationships to be achieved.

Here is a suggested schedule:

15 minutes:	Gathering
30-45 minutes:	Discussion of the lesson
20-30 minutes:	Prayer
15-30 minutes:	Refreshments

As for child care, experience has shown that in order to receive the maximum benefit from time spent in the meeting, all members of the group need to be free to focus on the discussion, rather than caring for children. Therefore, with the possible exception of infants under one year, parents should make arrangements for child care during the meetings. Some options include "trading" child care with parents whose group meets on a different night, having a baby sitter care for children in another room during the meeting, or providing child care for all the groups at the church.

Introduction to Ephesians

Author

The author of this epistle identifies himself as, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (1:1; see 3:1-3). The testimony of the early church was unanimous in support of the view that this letter had come from the hand of Paul. It was quoted and referred to often in the writings of the church fathers, including Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, who quotes Ephesians 4:26 as “scripture”. Irenaeus explicitly identifies Paul as the author of Ephesians, as does Marcion. In fact, Pauline authorship was not questioned until the late 18th century.

The arguments which have been made against it since that time, as identified in O’Brien’s commentary, are as follows: First, that the letter lacks evidence of a personal relationship between Paul and the church at Ephesus. He includes no references to individual members of the church, as he does in other letters (Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3). He also writes of having “heard about” their faith and love (1:15), and assumes that they have likewise “heard about” his own conversion experience (3:2). This appears to be inconsistent with what we know of Paul’s previous ministry in this church: (1) he visited Ephesus briefly during his first missionary journey (Acts 18:18-21), (2) during his third missionary journey, he returned and stayed for over two years (Acts 19:1-20:1), (3) Later, while in Miletus on his way to Rome, he sent for the elders from the Ephesian church, and met with them (Acts 20:17-37).

The responses to this objection depend on whether one concludes that the phrase “in Ephesus” (1:1), which is not found in some early manuscripts, was a part of the original text. If not, the letter would be intended for a group of churches rather than one specific fellowship, and this would explain the lack of specific references to the church at Ephesus. However, even if the letter was specifically addressed to those in Ephesus, the passage of several years since Paul had been among them would mean that many in the church would have no personal knowledge of him. In addition, even a letter addressed to one church would be expected to be read in other churches (see Col. 4:16), and so a mixed audience would have to be assumed. And finally, the lack of references to specific persons is not unusual; Paul’s letters to the Corinthian church, and to the churches at Galatia and Philippi, also lack such references.

The second argument against Pauline authorship has to do with its vocabulary and literary style. For example, Ephesians contains 125 words not found elsewhere in Paul’s writings, and 41 of these occur nowhere else in the New Testament. In addition, many individual phrases and expressions are unique to Ephesians. As for style, it is argued that the sentence structure of Ephesians is distinct from Paul’s other writings, with a greater frequency of long sentences with many subordinate clauses. The answer to both of these objections is simply that an author may choose to use a different

vocabulary, and to write in a somewhat different style, depending on his topic, purpose, and audience; such matters could also be influenced by his use of an *amanuensis*, or secretary, who may have had some freedom in word choice and sentence structure (see Rom. 16:22; Col. 4:18). Such variation is not sufficient in this case to overturn the witness of the church fathers.

Third, it is argued that the obvious similarities between Ephesians and Colossians mean that Ephesians must have been copied from Colossians by an author trying to emulate Paul. However, these similarities can also be explained by Paul being the author of both letters. And so the objections tend to contradict one another: if Ephesians is too different from other Pauline writings, then it couldn’t have been written by Paul; on the other hand, if it is too similar to other Pauline writings, this is taken as evidence that it was written by someone attempting to impersonate Paul!

The fourth objection is that there are difference in theological emphases between Ephesians and Paul’s other letters. For example, Ephesians focuses on Christ’s resurrection and exaltation rather than his atoning death, and the central Pauline doctrine of justification by grace through faith is not addressed. This objection can be answered in much the same way as the previous one. Paul is addressing distinct audiences and circumstances in his letters, and chooses his topics accordingly.

Date and Place of Writing

Paul indicates that he is writing from prison (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). His reference to himself as an “ambassador in chains” (6:20) gives us a clue that he is writing during his imprisonment in Rome, during which he was able to receive visitors, and witness to the imperial guards and the household of Caesar (Acts 28:16-31; see Phil. 1:12-14; 4:22). This would put the date between A.D. 60-62.

Destination and Recipients

This hinges on the difficult question of whether the phrase “in Ephesus”, which is missing in the earliest known manuscripts of Ephesians, was original, or added later. Unfortunately, the textual evidence is inconclusive. The position taken in this study guide is that the general nature of the epistle makes it somewhat more likely that this was intended to be a circular letter.

Occasion and Purpose

Based on the content of the letter itself, Paul wrote it to encourage a predominantly Gentile audience to persevere together in the face of persecution and suffering, knowing that they were fully equal members of the people of God, that God had supplied the resources they needed, and that their ultimate victory was assured.

Unit 1 – Chosen in Christ

Ephesians 1:1-12

Text

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God's holy people in Ephesus,^a the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he^b predestined us for adoption to sonship^c through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and

understanding, ⁹ he^d made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen,^e having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

^a1 Some early manuscripts do not have *in Ephesus*.
^b5 Or *sight in love*. He ^c5 The Greek word for adoption to sonship is a legal term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.
^d9 Or *us with all wisdom and understanding*. And he
^e11 Or *were made heirs*

Open

Have you ever spent time in another culture, or among people very different than yourself? What was that like?

If you could live anywhere in the world (other than where you live now), where would it be? Why?

Discover

1. What are some of the “spiritual blessings” (v.3) we have received?

v. 4

v. 7

v. 5

v. 11

v. 6

v. 13

2. What does it mean to say that we have received these “in Christ”? (see also Eph. 2:4-7; Jn. 15:4-7)

In the text above, circle all the examples of this phrase and its equivalents, such as “in him”.

3. In what sense are these blessings a part of “the heavenly realms”? (v. 3; see Jn. 18:36; Col. 1:13)

4. When was our eternal destiny determined? (vv. 4-5, 11; see Psalm 139:16; 2 Tim. 1:8-9; Rom. 9:10-12)

5. At that time, what happened that determined we would be saved? (vv. 4-5, 11; see 2 Thess. 2:13-14)

6. On what basis did God choose us? (vv. 4-6; see Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 9:10-16; Titus 3:5)

7. What was God's ultimate purpose in choosing us? (vv. 4, 12; see Col. 1:22; Rom. 8:29-30)

8. What does it mean to be redeemed? How was this redemption accomplished? (v. 7; see Mk. 10:45; Rom. 3:23-26; Gal. 3:13)

9. What is God's plan for his creation? (v. 10; see Col. 1:16-20; Rom. 8:19-21; 2 Cor. 5:18-20)

10. Over what things is God sovereign?

Ephesians 1:11	Proverbs 16:9; 19:21; Jeremiah 10:23
Isaiah 45:7	Proverbs 16:33
Daniel 4:17, 35	Proverbs 21:1
Psalm 135:6	Acts 4:27-28

Apply

Do you find the doctrines of election and predestination taught in this passage to be comforting and encouraging, or offensive? Why?

How do the truths in this passage compare to the views of most people in society? In the church? To your own (current or former) views?

Commentary

vv. 1-2 **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** These introductory phrases follow the standard form of an ancient letter, as Paul identifies himself and his readers, and expresses a wish for their well being. Note that at the very outset, he is placing the focus on Christ by linking each of these elements to Him. Thus, it is Christ whom Paul serves as an apostle, Christ whom his readers are united with and faithful to, and Christ from whom the blessings of grace and peace will come.

The phrase *“by the will of God”* indicates that Paul did not take upon himself the mantle of an apostle; rather, he was chosen and appointed to this work by God (Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-18; Rom. 1:5; Gal. 1:1; see Eph. 3:1-13). He does not speak for himself, or on his own initiative, but his authority and his message come from God.

Who was this letter intended for? As the NIV note indicates, some of the copies which have come down to us lack the phrase *in Ephesus*. Although the manuscripts which omit these words are few in number, they are among the earliest, and thus considered to be more reliable. As to the internal evidence, we might expect to find in the letter references to individuals or circumstances in the Ephesian church, since Paul spent three years living and ministering among them (Acts 19:1-20; 20:17-38). However, such reference are entirely absent. For these reasons, it is more likely that this was originally a circular letter or general epistle, rather than one addressed specifically to believers in the city of Ephesus.

v. 3 **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”** Vss. 3-14 form a single long sentence in Greek, an extended paean of praise and thanksgiving to God for his gracious gifts in Christ.

The reference to “every spiritual blessing” indicates that everything which pertains to life in the Spirit; i.e. life as transformed, empowered and guided by the Spirit, has been freely granted to us by God (see Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 3:21-23; 2 Cor. 6:10). Examples of these blessings follow in the remainder of the passage, including election, holiness, adoption, redemption, and forgiveness.

Such things belong to the kingdom of God (also called the “kingdom of heaven” in Matthew), which is not of this world (Dan. 7:14; Mk. 10:29-30; Jn. 8:23; 18:36). They are of another country, a heavenly one (Heb. 11:16). Yet even now, the age to come is breaking into the present era; the kingdom of God is already among us

(Mt. 12:28; Lk. 11:20; 17:21; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13). Now we have the Spirit living and working in us, a deposit of our future inheritance, and through the Spirit we experience “the powers of the coming age” (Heb. 6:4-6; see Eph. 1:13-14, 18; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5).

These blessings are given to us “in Christ”; we receive them because of the work of Christ and as a result of our personal union with Him (see Eph. 2:4-7; also Jn. 6:56; 14:20; 15:4-7; 17:20-23).

v. 4 **“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”** The word “for” indicates that these blessings are the result, not of anything we have done, but of a decision made by God in eternity past, before he spoke the cosmos into existence. We were known by God, and chosen by him to be his, before we had taken our first breath, before we were conceived, and before our first ancestors walked upon the earth (see Rom. 9:10-16; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:8-9). As the Psalmist writes (Ps. 139:16),

*“All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.”*

This choosing, or *election*, had a purpose: that we should be *sanctified*, i.e., set apart to God and purified of sin’s guilt and power, through the sacrificial death of Christ (Col. 1:22). Thus, when God chose us to be his, he also ordained the means necessary to draw us to himself and to make us fit for fellowship with him (Rom. 8:29-30). Note that his choice of us is not merely corporate, but personal and individual; the good shepherd knows each of his sheep and calls them “by name” (Jn. 10:3; see also Ps. 139:1-16; Gal. 1:15-16).

vv. 4b-6 **“In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”** What motivated God to choose us for eternal blessing, to adopt us as his sons? Love alone (Eph. 2:4-5; 1 Jn. 3:1; 4:9-10). His choice of us was due entirely to “*his pleasure and will*”; i.e., he chose us solely because it was his loving purpose to do so. He acted in complete freedom, not moved by any obligation or compulsion, and not in response to anything we had done or would do (Eph. 2:8-10). As Paul writes in Rom. 9:11 concerning Jacob and Esau, God’s choice was made before either of them “*were born or had done anything good or bad*”. He loved us and chose us simply because he decided to. And then, in due time, we chose him, in response to his prior choice of us (see Jn. 6:44; 15:16).

vv. 7-8 ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding.”*** Redemption is the process of setting free someone who is in bondage or captivity, i.e., a slave or a prisoner. The greatest illustration of this in the Old Testament is the release from slavery of the people of Israel, who had been held in bondage in Egypt for four centuries (Ex. 6:6; Deut. 7:8). God is also described as redeeming his people by forgiving their sins (Ps. 130:8; Isa. 44:22).

According to the Mosaic Law, the life of an animal dedicated to sacrifice could be redeemed by paying an appropriate sum of money (Lev. 27:9-13). In fact, not only the first-born of ceremonially clean animals, but the first-born son of every human family, had to be redeemed in this way (Num. 18:15-16). It was even possible to escape the death penalty; i.e., to redeem one’s own life, by doing this (Ex. 21:29-30). One could also redeem, i.e., regain ownership of, personal property which had come into another’s possession. For example, if someone was forced to sell their home due to financial need, they could buy it back from the purchaser any time within the first year following the sale (Lev. 25:29-30).

These are all *types*, or pictures, of the redemption to come in Christ, who gave “his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6), something which only he could do (Ps. 49:7; Mk. 8:36-37). He accomplished our redemption from the power and penalty of sin through his death on the cross; the price paid was his own life, his “blood” (Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:23-26; 6:6, 18; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:20; Gal. 3:13; 4:8; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2 Pet. 2:19). As the terms “riches” and “lavished” underscore, this redemption was wholly of grace; that is, the entire price was paid by Christ, we contribute nothing to our own redemption (Rom. 3:23-24; 5:20; Tit. 3:5).

vv. 9-10 ***“he made known to us the mystery of his will . . . which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”*** The core of these verses is the theme of cosmic reconciliation: God’s plan to unite all things under the undisputed headship of Christ, with Christ as the center and unifying principle, the one in whom and through whom all things are reconciled to God and to one another (Mt. 11:27; 19:28; Jn. 13:3; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:16-20; Heb. 1:2). This involves the reconciliation of God to his creation and to mankind through the cross, and the destruction of the enemies of God (Rom. 5:10-11; 8:19-21; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 1:21-22).

When this occurs, every aspect of the created order will be in right relation to the others, because all will be in right relation to Christ — just as the various instruments in an orchestra are in tune with one another once they have all tuned to the concertmaster, the principal first violinist.

The result will be comprehensive and final; there will be no pockets of resistance, no ongoing guerrilla war. And thus Satan’s defiant proclamation in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, that it is “*better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven*,” will be proven false. When Christ decisively defeats his enemies, they will be placed completely under his dominion, a “footstool” for his feet (Heb. 1:13; 10:12-14; see 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Col. 2:15); they will not rule anywhere, ever again.

This purpose of God is a “mystery” in the sense that it was not previously disclosed, or was revealed only in types and symbolism, such that it was not discoverable by unaided human reason. It was “hidden” to everyone except those to whom God chose to reveal it (see Mt. 11:25; 13:35; Luke 9:45; 10:21; 18:34; 19:42; Rom. 16:26; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 2:7).

vv. 11-12 ***“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will . . .”*** The verb rendered “chosen” (Gr. *klēróō*) likely carries here the nuance of “claimed as one’s portion”. In other words, out of all the people in the world, God chose us to be his own. This echoes an Old Testament concept, in which God apportioned the nations of the earth to the “sons of God” (i.e. angelic beings), but identified the people of Israel as his own:

*“But the LORD’s portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.”
(Dt. 32:8-9 ESV; see Ps. 33:12)*

In order for God to ensure that all those whom he had chosen and predestined would come to faith according to his plan, he would need to be in control of anything which could affect the course of their lives. And Paul makes clear that this is in fact the case. Not only is our salvation in his hands, but he is sovereign over all things; he “*works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will*,” from the seemingly trivial to the rise and fall of kingdoms. This includes the decisions and actions of men, and encompasses both “prosperity and disaster” (Isa. 45:7; see Dan. 4:17, 35; Acts 17:24-28; Job 42:2; Psalm 33:10-11; 115:3; 135:6; Prov. 16:9, 33; 19:21; 21:1; Isa. 46:10; Jer. 10:23; Lam. 3:37-38; Rom. 8:28). In fact, God’s sovereignty extends to even the most wicked act in history, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:27-28)

Unit 2 – Knowing God

Ephesians 1:13-23

Text

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^a of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know

the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

^a 17 Or a spirit

Open

What people in your life would you say that you know well? How did that happen?

If you could instantly acquire one skill or area of knowledge, what would it be?

Discover

1. In this passage, Paul writes of his prayers for these believers (vv. 15-19). What is the ultimate goal of the things Paul is praying for? (v. 17)

2. In your own words, what does he pray for, and what are the three things he wants them to “know”?

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3. Why is it necessary that he pray for these things? In other words, why wouldn't other means of obtaining them (for example, personal study and reflection) be sufficient? (see 1 Cor. 2:11-14; 2 Cor. 4:4-6)

4. What was the resurrection of Jesus Christ a demonstration of? (vv. 19-20; see 1 Cor. 6:14)

What is the connection between the resurrection of Christ and the “hope” of the Christian (v. 18)?

5. What action did God the Father take after raising Christ from the dead? Describe the position he now holds (vv. 20-22).

6. Who or what are the “powers” and “dominions” referred to in v. 21? (see Eph. 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; also Col. 1:16; 2:15)

7. In the context of this passage, what does it mean to say that Christ is the “head” of the church? (v. 22)

8. The Holy Spirit is referred to as a “seal” and as a “deposit”. In your own words, what do these terms tell us about Him? (vv. 13-14)

Seal	Deposit
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Apply

To what extent do you feel that you “know” the things Paul describes in verses 18-19? As an exercise, have the group pray for these things.

Why does it matter that Christ is the head of the church? In other words, what are the practical implications of this truth?

Commentary

vv. 13-14 **“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.”** These verses conclude the prayer of thanksgiving which began in verse 3, with the gift of the Holy Spirit completing the list of blessings that we have received “in Christ”.

It has been suggested that the transition from “we, who were the first to hope in Christ” (v. 12), to “you also” here, reflects a historical shift in the preaching of the gospel, which was first to the Jews and then to the gentiles (see Mt. 10:5-6; 15:21-28; Acts. 11:18; 13:46; 14:27; 18:6; 26:20, 23; 28:28; Rom. 11:11). The main support for this hypothesis is that Paul addresses the theme of Gentile inclusion a bit later on (2:11-22). However, there are difficulties with this view. Since there is no apparent change in Paul’s point of reference between verses 3-11 and verse 12, such an interpretation would imply that the subjects of the “we” and “us” statements throughout vv. 3-12 are believing Jews, rather than all believers. Likewise, it would imply that Paul is referring to the “word of truth” here as the “gospel of your [i.e. Gentile] salvation”. Neither of these is acceptable. Therefore, it is better to regard the phrase “you also” as a rhetorical device by which Paul is bringing home to his readers in a personal way the reality of those blessings which he has been describing: “and this means you!” (see 2:1). The phrase “we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ” in v. 12 does not, then, refer to Jewish believers, but to all who came to faith in the age of the apostles, in contrast to those who would follow after (see Jn. 17:20-21).

“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” The likely meaning of the phrase “promised Holy Spirit” is that the Holy Spirit is himself the gift, that he is the fulfillment of ancient promises given to the patriarchs and reaffirmed by Christ (see Lk. 24:49; Jn. 14:15-17; Acts 1:4; 2:14-18, 32-33, Gal. 3:14).

The imagery of the Spirit as a “seal” brings with it concepts of ownership and protection. In Biblical times, the seal of a sovereign applied to any item would declare the king’s ownership of it, and by extension, his intention to defend it against any who might intend to steal or harm it. The penalty of attempting to do so would be death. For example, the tomb of Christ was sealed, on Pilate’s authority, to prevent tampering (Mt. 27:62-66). In the same way, believers are sealed by God to indicate that we belong to him. He will protect us against all the

attacks of the enemy, and he will shelter us in the midst of every trial (including his own judgment upon this world), until he brings us safely to our ultimate destination (see Jn. 17:11, 15; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Jn. 5:18; Jude 1:24; Rev. 3:10; 9:4).

Additionally, the Spirit is a “deposit,” a pledge or down payment of that which is to come: our resurrection and final redemption (see Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:1-5). Although our full inheritance is future, we are even now enjoying a foretaste of what awaits us, which is something far greater than we can “ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20; see 2 Cor. 4:16-18).

vv. 15-16 **“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”** The phrase “For this reason” likely refers primarily to vv. 13-14: Paul is giving thanks for them because they have been included in Christ through faith and sealed with the Holy Spirit, with the result that their love for one another has been reported to him. The fact that Paul knew of their faith only by hearing could indicate that he was not personally acquainted with the recipients of the letter; or it could mean that several years had passed since he last saw them. Thus, it is not determinative regarding the question of whether the letter was addressed to those in Ephesus (see notes on 1:1).

v. 17 **“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”** Not only does Paul give thanks for them, he petitions God on their behalf. Note that Paul does not request of God that he grant them new, or additional, blessings; they have already received “every spiritual blessing in Christ” (1:3). Instead, he prays that God would enable them to understand what they already possess, comprehending fully all which that implies. This is echoed later in the book (3:18-19) by Paul’s prayer that they would,

“. . . grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Note also that all three persons of the Trinity are in view here; the prayer is addressed to God the Father, who is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it will be fulfilled through the Spirit, who brings wisdom and revelation (see Isa. 11:2; Acts 6:3, 10; 1 Cor. 2:12-13; 12:8; Col. 1:9). His desire for them, simply put, is that they would know God.

vv. 18-19a **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know . . .”** Paul’s desire for his readers is enlightenment; i.e., that the darkness of confusion and error would be dispelled by knowledge of the truth (see Jn. 8:12; 12:46; Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:8, 11). Prayer is necessary, because only God can grant a true understanding of spiritual matters; to fully grasp such things requires spiritual transformation (1 Cor. 2:11-14; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

Truth must penetrate into the inner being, the “heart”. This encompasses every aspect of our non-material existence: mind, emotions, and will. It affects beliefs and judgments, attitudes, desires, motives, intentions, hopes and fears. Words and actions can be inconsistent with our true selves, but the heart represents what we genuinely think, feel, and seek. We may conceal these from others, and perhaps even from ourselves, but not from God (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Ki. 8:39; 1 Ch. 28:9; Prov. 21:2; Jer. 17:9; Isa. 29:13; Ezek. 33:31; Lk. 16:15; 1 Cor. 4:5; Heb. 4:12).

The things which Paul wants them (and us) to understand are: (a) **“the hope to which he has called you”** — not the subjective emotion of hope, but the objective content of our hope, as contained in the gospel (Col. 1:23). It is the sum total of the promised blessings which we as believers in Christ hope for, including resurrection (Acts 23:6), sharing in God’s glory (Rom. 5:2), righteousness (Gal. 5:5), salvation (1 Thess. 5:8), eternal life (Tit. 1:2), the return of Christ (Tit. 2:13), and grace (1 Pet. 1:13). (b) **“the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people”** These “riches” could be the wealth we possess, as those who will inherit what God has promised (v. 14; see Mt. 25:34; Col. 1:12; Heb. 6:12; 9:15; Jam. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:4). Or this could refer to believers themselves, as God’s own inheritance and treasured possession (v. 14; 1 Pet. 2:9). (c) **“his incomparably great power for us who believe”**, i.e., the power of God to accomplish all that he has purposed to do for his people, a power which far exceeds any opposing force, human or supernatural (1 Chron. 29:10-13; 2 Chron. 20:6; Ps. 66:3; 115:3; Jer. 32:17; Dan. 4:35; Isa. 14:27; Lk. 10:19; Jn. 17:11; Rom. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 3:20; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:5).

vv. 19b-20 **“That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead,”** The power by which God will fulfill every promise of the gospel is the same as that by which he raised Christ from the dead. That was a *tour de force*, a devastating display of strength which broke the power of death and of Satan forever (Heb. 2:14; see Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 13:4; Phil. 3:10; Heb. 7:16).

“and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” God further demonstrated his power by enthroning Christ at *his right hand*, a position of supreme honor, authority, and might (Ps. 110:1; Lk. 22:69; Acts 3:32-33; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3-4, 13; 8:2; 10:12-13).

v. 21 **“far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”** The phrase “far above” emphasizes Christ’s absolute and utter superiority. He is not *somewhat* more powerful, or *marginally* greater in authority; on the contrary, no other power or authority even remotely approaches his (see Phil. 2:9). Not only is this true in the present era, it will continue to be true in eternity future.

The “*authority, power and dominion*” referred to here are not merely human rulers, but the malevolent spiritual entities which stand behind them and exert influence over world affairs; demonic beings who oppose God and serve Satan (see Eph. 6:12; also Jn. 12:31; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Eph. 2:2; 3:10; 1 Cor. 15:24; Rom. 8:38; 1 Pet. 3:22).

vv. 22-23 **“And God placed all things under his feet . . .”** This is a reference to Ps. 8:6. Not only is Christ superior to all other powers, but they are subject to him and he will rule over them. The enthronement of Christ at the right hand of God has made this a certainty, but it will not be fully realized until he returns to earth in victory and judgment (1 Cor. 15:23-28; Heb. 2:8-9).

“and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body.” In the context, the identification of Christ as “head” of the church indicates his authority over it, just as one’s physical head governs and directs the rest of the body. This is “for”, i.e. for the benefit of, the church. The “church” referred to here is not a specific gathering of Christians, but the church universal; i.e., the community of all believers, past and present, living and deceased, who comprise one spiritual entity in Christ. This is sometimes known as the “communion of saints,” all of whom, through their union with Christ, are already united with one another in heaven (Eph. 2:5-6; Heb. 12:22-24).

“the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” “Fullness” here likely refers to the full presence of God in all his divine glory and power. Thus, Christ is viewed as filling the church with the presence of God, whose fullness also dwells in him (Col. 1:19; 2:9-10; see Eph. 3:19; 4:13; Ezek. 44:4). The phrase “*him who fills everything*” carries a similar idea: through Christ, the presence of God extends to every part of the cosmos; there is no aspect of the created order which is outside the realm of his rule, authority, and power (see Eph. 4:10).

Unit 3 – Saved by Grace through Faith

Ephesians 2:1-10

Text

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh^a and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in

Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

^a3 In contexts like this, the Greek word for flesh (sarx) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit.

Open

What are some of the accomplishments that you are most proud of in your life?

What are some important things in your life that you received as a gift; i.e., due to no effort or merit on your part?

Discover

1. This passage contains several contrasts, both explicitly stated and implied. Identify them below.

2. How was the transition from their prior condition to their present state brought about?

3. Paul describes their prior state as being “dead” (v. 1). What does it mean to be dead physically? What does it mean to be dead spiritually?

Physically:	Spiritually:
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4. What do these passages tell us about the ability which the unbeliever has to desire or to seek God?

Matthew 13:10-11	Romans 5:6
Luke 8:10	Romans 8:7-8
John 6:44, 65	1 Corinthians 2:14
Acts 11:18	2 Corinthians 4:4

5. What do you think Paul means when he states that we were deserving of wrath “by nature”? (v. 3; see Matthew 15:10-20; Luke 6:43-45)

6. According to this passage, what moved God to save us? Give verse references.

7. What was not the reason that God saved us?

How then do you explain the many Biblical exhortations concerning right conduct?

8. What were God’s purposes in saving us? (vv. 7, 10)

Apply

In what ways does this passage challenge your previous views concerning salvation?

If God created you for good works, are you fulfilling your purpose?

Commentary

In this passage, we are presented with a series of contrasts between the former spiritual condition of Paul's readers and their present state. They were dead but are now alive. They were subject to God's wrath, but have now received mercy. They were disobedient and in thrall to the powers of darkness, but have now been transformed. And the explanation for this radical change lies not with themselves, but with God – in his power, love, and mercy.

- v. 1 ***“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins”*** Not only were we separated from God, we had no ability to move toward him and no desire to do so. We were “dead”. We had no spiritual life, no power to do, or to say, or even to will, anything that would draw us nearer to God (see Rom. 5:6). And so Paul's statement that our salvation was of “grace” (v. 5) is even more striking. We didn't merely need aid or assistance; we weren't simply lacking information or impetus; we were dead. We were just as unable to accomplish, or even to seek, our own spiritual renewal as Lazarus was to seek or obtain physical life after four days in the grave. Without the work of the Spirit in our hearts, we would have no ability or desire to turn away from our sin, no ability to place our faith in Christ, and no ability to do anything pleasing to God (Rom. 8:7-8).

As Christ taught, *“no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them”* (Jn. 6:65; see Jn. 3:27; 6:44). Thus, even the power to repent is not a natural ability, but a gift of God's grace (Acts 11:18). In our natural state, we can't comprehend spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4); unless God grants us the ability to do so, we cannot hear and receive his word (Mt. 19:11; Lk. 8:10).

And so the unregenerate person is not, in the words of Miracle Max from *The Princess Bride*, only “mostly dead”. He is completely and absolutely dead; unable to help himself in any way.

- v. 2 ***“in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air . . .”*** Although human beings apart from Christ imagine themselves to be free, they are in fact in terrible bondage. Willingly or unwillingly, they are in slavery, not only to the power of sin (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:6, 16), but to the false values and ideologies of this world. Their lives are constrained by its corrupt social, political, religious, and economic systems, which influence art, science, commerce and government. Ultimately, even as they go about their daily lives, they are serving the rebellious spiritual forces who stand behind these systems and direct them (see Eph. 3:10; 4:27; 6:11-12, 16; Lk. 11:15; Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4). They are caught in a web that by their own power they can never escape, one whose presence they sense only dimly. And such were we all.

- v. 3 ***“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”*** The recipients of this letter were not unusually sinful; Paul's bleak assessment of their previous lost condition is not a response to exceptional wickedness. On the contrary, their prior state of alienation from God was universal: “all of us” at one time lived in this way, and were under God's wrath. As Paul writes elsewhere, *“There is no one righteous, not even one”* (Rom. 3:10). We were all at one time *“alienated from God . . . enemies in [our] minds because of [our] evil behavior”* (Col. 1:21). And so every person's spiritual journey begins in a place of estrangement from his or her Creator. We stand condemned, not only because of what we have done, but because our sinful actions reveal what we truly are *“by nature”* (see Mt. 15:10-20; Lk. 6:43-45). As a result of our union with Adam, not only our actions, but the thoughts and desires which motivate them, are opposed to God from the very beginning (see Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22).

- vv. 4-5 ***“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”*** This little word, “but”, is perhaps the most significant conjunction ever written. Our situation was extremely dire. We were spiritually dead, in slavery to sin and to Satan, sinners by nature and by choice, justly condemned by God, and without hope. But — he saved us! Why? Because of his love and mercy (v. 4), his kindness (v. 7), and his grace (vv. 5, 7, 8), conveyed to us in Christ. It was due entirely to the character of God. We did nothing to earn or merit it, nor could we. As Paul writes in Romans 3:22-24 (see Rom. 4:4-5, 16; 5:15-17; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9):

“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe . . . all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Paul emphasizes here, not only the fact of God's love and mercy, but also their richness and greatness, their absolute inexhaustibility (see Ex. 34:6; Ps. 103:8; Neh. 9:17). As Frederick M. Lehman wrote in the hymn, “The Love of God,”

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

v. 6 **“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus”** Our resurrection and ascension into heaven are here referred to in the past tense, as events which have already taken place. This is true in two senses. First, it is true in an anticipatory, or *proleptic* sense, in which a future event is spoken of as an accomplished fact because it will certainly come to pass. In this case, Christ’s own victory over death ensures that those who are united with him by faith will also share in that victory (Rom. 6:3-8; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12-56; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:14; 2 Tim. 2:11-12).

It is also true in a present sense, in that through our spiritual union with Christ we already experience many of the benefits of his resurrection and ascension. Among these is the fact that we share in Christ’s victory over the power of sin; thus, we are no longer compelled to obey its commands (Rom. 6:1-11; 8:11; Col. 2:11-12; 3:1-14).

v. 7 **“in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”** We tend to think of the return of Christ as the culmination of human history, and of our resurrection to eternal life as the climax of our own personal history. But these end points are only the beginning of something far greater and longer lasting. All of human history, and the entirety of our brief lives on this earth, are as nothing compared with what is yet to be, the “coming ages” in which God will manifest his grace to us, in ways far greater than we can possibly imagine (Eph. 3:20; Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 2:9). And in fact this has always been God’s purpose, the reason for which he devised and carried out the plan of salvation: that he might bless us — in ways innumerable, in extent immeasurable, and for time everlasting, thus revealing himself as supremely good and gracious.

When that day dawns, we will be embarking upon a glorious and never-ending adventure. In the final paragraph of his book, *The Last Battle*, which concludes the Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis writes,

“[T]he things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”

vv. 8-9 **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”** These verses contain in capsule form the gospel as expressed by Paul. Our salvation — that is, all the benefits which flow to us as a result of Christ’s incarnation, holy life, death and resurrection; including forgiveness of sins, escape from God’s punitive wrath, victory over death, and eternal fellowship with God as our loving Father — comes to us by “grace,” God’s undeserved, unearned, and unmerited favor. It is a “gift,” something which is offered without cost to the recipient (Isa. 55:1; Rev. 21:6), although it cost the giver his very life (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23).

Stated negatively, it is not from ourselves and “not by works”; i.e., it is not the result of human effort or achievement (Rom. 3:24; 9:15-16; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9). If it were, then the one who had attained salvation would have grounds for boasting, for claiming some kind of spiritual superiority, either in ability, desire, labor, or insight, over those who had not attained it. But such boasting is explicitly excluded (Rom. 3:27-28; 4:2; 1 Cor. 1:28-29; 4:7). All persons stand before God as equally helpless, and equally without claim on His goodness and mercy. Even the means by which we receive and appropriate this gift of salvation, faith, comes to us from God (Lk. 17:15; Acts 11:18; Rom. 1:23; Phil. 1:29; 1 Tim. 1:14; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:1); the ability to repent and believe is not inherent in our sinful natures.

This makes Christianity unique among the religions of the world (and even among some false varieties of pseudo-Christianity), since all other religions are at their core means of achieving salvation or enlightenment through self effort and personal merit. The essence of man’s rebellion against God is self-reliance and self-righteousness; thus, all religions created by man have this as their central element, and are attractive to unregenerate men and women for that very reason.

v. 10 **“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** If we are saved entirely by grace and not works, then how do we explain the many New Testament exhortations to right behavior? (see Col. 1:10; 2 Cor. 9:8). The answer lies in the sequence of events. We are not saved because we do good works, we do good works because we are saved. In fact, this was a part of God’s purpose in drawing us to himself: that as a result of our union with Christ and our increasing likeness to him in our character, we would also increasingly resemble him in our conduct. When we come to faith in Christ, we are transformed, a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and our lives will reflect that new reality (see Tit. 3:5-8).

Unit 4 – Reconciled by the Blood of Christ

Ephesians 2:11-22

Text

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making

peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Open

Name a group that you are a member of. What are some of the privileges of being a member of that group?

Have you built anything recently (or ever) with your own hands?

Discover

1. This passage contains several contrasts between the prior state of Paul’s readers and their current state. Identify them below.

prior state	current state

2. What is the key physical difference between Jews and Gentiles? Does that distinction still matter? Why or why not? (v. 11; see Genesis 17:9-14; Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 5:6; 6:15)

3. What “barrier” did Christ remove? How did he do this? (vv. 14-15; see Romans 8:1-4; Hebrews 10:8-14)

4. In what sense has the Law of Moses been “set aside”? Why was that necessary? (v. 15; see Col. 2:13-14; 1 Cor. 9:21)

5. What kind(s) of peace do we now have as a result?

6. Describe the “one new humanity” that Christ created (vv. 15-16).

7. Describe the building that we are now a part of (vv. 20-22).

Apply

Is there anyone whom you tend to regard as too far from God to ever come to Christ, too distant spiritually, or culturally? Are there any groups of people whom you regard in this way? What does this passage say about that?

What would you say to someone who feels like an “outsider” in matters concerning God or religion?

Commentary

v. 11 ***“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (which is done in the body by human hands) —”***

In this passage (vv. 11-22), Paul extends the “past vs. present” dichotomy, focusing on his readers’ transition from alienation to reconciliation; first with respect to the Old Covenant people of God, the Jews, and then with respect to God Himself. He begins by calling on them to “remember” what they were previously, not that they had actually forgotten, but because, like all of us, they had come to take for granted the marvelous transformation which God had brought about in their lives.

The phrase translated “*Gentiles by birth*” is literally “*Gentiles according to the flesh*,” which emphasizes the physical difference between Jews and Gentiles: male circumcision. Circumcision was the defining bodily sign of the unique relationship between God and the people of Israel, and was regarded with pride by pious Jews, as evidence of their status as God’s chosen people (Gen. 17:9-14; see Phil. 3:5).

Paul’s note that this rite was done “*in the body by human hands*” alludes to a key truth, which is that physical circumcision had never had any value unless it was accompanied by heart-circumcision; that is, a heart of faith, repentance and devotion toward God (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 30:6; 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:28-29). And in the current dispensation, it has no value whatsoever, since the Mosaic covenant to which it points has been superseded by the New Covenant. What matters now is heart-circumcision alone, an inner reality of which the outer, physical circumcision was formerly a sign (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Phil. 3:2-3; Col. 2:11).

v. 12 ***“remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*** Here Paul

lists some of the great blessings which belonged to the people of Israel (or, more precisely, to those individuals within the nation of Israel who had faith, for many did not; see Acts 5:31; Rom. 3:3; 9:6-8, 30-32).

Prior to the coming of Christ, there was no salvation other than through inclusion in this community, either by conversion or birth. Everyone else was “without hope” and “without God”. Only through “citizenship in Israel” could anyone share in the covenants, which contained God’s promises of salvation and blessing. Non-Israelites were thus “separate from Christ”; i.e., they had no hope in the Messiah, the promised deliverer of Israel, who is Jesus Christ (see Mt. 1:1; 1:16; Jn. 1:41; 4:25; Rom. 9:4-5).

Although many in the ancient world trusted in some other god or gods, theirs was a false hope; they had no relationship with the true God. Therefore, the only way for a pious foreigner to be saved was to become a Jewish proselyte, which required becoming circumcised (Ex. 12:48), keeping the Law of Moses, and observing the rituals of the Jewish religion, including the sacrifices (Lev. 17:8-12; 22:17-19; Num. 15:14-16) and the feasts (Num. 9:14; Deut. 16:11-15; 26:11; 2 Chron. 30:25).

v. 13 ***“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*** In contrast to their former state of separation, they have now been brought into fellowship, both with the people of God, and with God Himself (see Ps. 65:4). This was not accomplished through circumcision or through a process of conversion to Judaism, but through the sacrifice of Christ’s death, which created an entirely new body, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:15; 3:6).

vv. 14-15a ***“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.”*** In order to “bring near” those who had not previously been a part of the people of God, i.e. Gentiles, the central distinction between Jews and non-Jews had to be addressed. Prior to Christ, all of mankind was divided into two groups: those who observed the Mosaic Law and those who did not. This resulted in a fundamental separation between Jews and all other people (whom they regarded as sinful and unclean “dogs”; see Mt. 7:6; 15:26; Gal. 2:15). For example, according to Jewish tradition (although not explicitly forbidden in the Law), observant Jews could not enter a Gentile’s house or even eat a meal with Gentiles, lest they be defiled by association (see Mt. 9:11; Lk. 5:30; 15:2; Jn. 4:9; Acts 10:28; 11:3; Gal. 2:12).

How did Christ deal with this impediment to unity? By rendering it null and void through his own death and resurrection, thus “abolishing” it (v. 15, ESV). In doing so, Christ not only made possible peace between Jew and Gentile, he himself became the essence of that peace; it was not merely *through* him (i.e., through his actions) that the source of division was removed, but *in* him (i.e., in his person). Note that this does not mean that Christians are no longer subject to any moral law; Paul states that he is “*not free from God’s law but . . . under Christ’s law*” (1 Cor. 9:21; see 1 Cor. 7:19; Heb. 7:12). But it does mean that the requirements and penalties of the Law of Moses are no longer in effect, they have been “set aside” (Heb. 7:18-19; see Col. 2:13-14).

vv. 15b-16 **“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”** Christ did not accomplish reconciliation by making Gentiles into Jews; rather, he created an entirely new body, the church, made up believing Jews and believing Gentiles (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:6; 5:23; Col. 3:11). By his death on the cross, not only did he eliminate the source of their ancient animosity, but he also eliminated the grounds for their condemnation before God (Rom. 8:1-2). Thus he brought about reconciliation between God and man as well.

Note that it was not only the Gentile who needed to be reconciled to God, but the Jew as well, since *“Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin”* (Rom. 3:9; see Rom. 3:10-20). The Law given to Israel never had the power to bring about true righteousness (Acts 13:39; Rom. 8:3-4; Gal. 4:9; Heb. 7:18-19). Note also that the members of this new body, the church, both Jew and Gentile, are the true spiritual heirs of Abraham (Rom. 4:11-12, 16-17; 9:6-8; Gal. 3:6-7, 16, 29; Heb. 2:16).

v. 17 **“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”** Here Paul is using the language of Isa. 57:19,

*“Peace, peace, to those far and near,”
says the LORD”*

and also of Isa. 52:7:

*“How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good
news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”*

The purpose of these scriptural allusions is to identify Christ as the one through whom Isaiah’s prophecies are being fulfilled. He is the one who brings peace with God, not only to the physical descendants of Abraham, but to all who come to him in faith. No matter how far removed they may be, or whether they are distant geographically, culturally, ethnically, or spiritually, he offers peace.

v. 18 **“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”** Not only are both Jews and Gentiles brought near to God in the same way, through Christ, they continue to come to Him by the same means: through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9, 13; Eph. 4:4-6). Both our initial reception by God and our continuing relationship with Him are on the same basis, regardless of our background or nationality.

v. 19 **“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,”** The contrast here between “foreigners” and “citizens” is an allusion to the fact that the citizens of a country have a much different status, and different rights, than those who are merely resident aliens or transients. Previously, Paul’s readers, as Gentiles, were outsiders. Their privileges before God were limited to the blessings of common grace (Mt. 5:45). But now their standing has been fundamentally altered. Not only are they full and equal citizens with Jewish believers (see Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:16), but they have been welcomed into God’s own household as members of his family. Not only are they citizens of a heavenly commonwealth, but they are children of God.

v. 20 **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”** The metaphor now shifts, from “household” to “house”; a building where God resides. We are that house, for it is in us that God now lives through his Spirit, both individually and corporately (Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14; 1 Jn. 3:24).

The house is constructed on the apostles and prophets, the authoritative bearers and transmitters of God’s revelation. “Apostles” indicates those directly commissioned by Christ; it includes the Twelve (Mt. 10:2-5; Mk.3:14; Lk. 6:13), Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:14; Rom. 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor. 9:1), and a few others (Rom. 16:7). The term is also used in a more general sense to refer to gospel workers or “messengers” (2 Cor. 8:22-23; Phil. 2:25).

The term “prophets” here likely indicates New Testament prophets, not those of the Old Testament, since they were given to the church after Christ’s ascension (Eph. 4:11). In addition, these were the prophets to whom the mystery of the gospel had only recently been revealed (Eph. 3:4-6).

The most important part of the foundation, the cornerstone, is Christ. This stone establishes the beginning point for all three dimensions of the building, the point from which every other part of the building is measured. The house of God can only be strong and true when every part is in right relation to the cornerstone.

vv. 21-22 **“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”** The “whole building” is the church universal, i.e., all believers, past, present and future, who together constitute the body of Christ. This building continues to grow, and will do so until Christ’s return.

Unit 5 – The Mystery of Christ

Ephesians 3:1-13

Text

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the

working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Open

How are the personalities of your family members similar to one another, or dissimilar?

When you introduce yourself to someone for the first time, how do you describe yourself?

Discover

1. How does Paul describe himself in this passage? (vv. 1, 7, 8) What do these titles signify?

2. By whose authority and will is Paul being kept a prisoner at the time of this epistle's writing? (v. 1) What was the immediate cause of his imprisonment?

3. Paul uses the term "grace" several times. What does the term refer to here? (vv. 2, 7, 8)

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4. Central to this passage is something which Paul refers to as a “mystery”. Circle all the uses of this word in the text, and in the space below, describe this mystery in your own words.

5. In what sense was this mystery previously unknown? (vv. 5, 9). How did Paul come to understand it?

6. Note the uses of the word “together” in verse 6. What does each of these indicate about the relationship between believing Jews and believing Gentiles in Christ?

Heirs together with Israel (see Genesis 12:2-3; Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:16)

Members together of one body (see Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18, 24)

Sharers together in the promise

7. What was God's “eternal purpose” (v. 11)? In what sense was it “eternal”?

Apply

Have we been given the “grace” Paul refers to in this passage? Explain.

Are you approaching God with “freedom and confidence” (v. 12)?

Commentary

v. 1 **“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—”**

The prayer which Paul begins here is interrupted by an extended digression (vv. 2-13); he resumes it in vs. 14, where he repeats the phrase, “For this reason”. In the meantime, the mention of his own calling as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:13-17; 26:15-18; Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8) prompts him to pause and expound further on the inclusion of Gentile believers into the people of God.

Note that he refers to himself as a “prisoner”, not of the civil authorities, but of Christ. Not only was Paul’s imprisonment due to his preaching of Christ, but it was also by the express permission and sovereign will of Christ. If it were not, no jail could hold him (see Jn. 7:30; 19:10-11; Acts 5:17-20; 9:16; 12:1-11; 16:25-26).

v. 2 **“Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you,”**

The term “administration” (Gr. *oikonomos*), could also be rendered “stewardship” (as in ESV, NASB), emphasizing the fact that Paul had been entrusted with a responsibility to preach the gospel. It was a calling, rather than merely a matter of personal choice (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:16-17; Gal. 2:7). As translated here, “administration” emphasizes the overarching plan of God to bring the gospel to all the peoples of the earth, a plan of which Paul’s specific assignment formed a part.

The term “grace” is likewise subject to a dual interpretation; on the one hand, it describes the message itself (see Eph. 1:6-7; 2:5-8), but it can also refer to the fact that the privilege of preaching the gospel was a gift of God to Paul, one that he in no way merited (Eph. 3:7-8; see Rom. 1:5; 12:3; 15:15-16; 1 Cor. 3:10; 15:10; Gal. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:12-14).

The phrase, “Surely you have heard,” implies that due to a separation of distance or time, Paul was not personally known by many of those to whom he was writing.

v. 3 **“that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.”**

The nature of the mystery which Paul refers to here is developed in vv. 4-6. It is not merely that the Gentiles would come to know God; that was foreseen by the Old Testament prophets. Rather, it is that Gentiles would be included in the people of God on an equal basis with Jews, and by incorporation into a new body, the church, rather than by conversion to Judaism. This mystery was first revealed to Paul in his conversion experience on the road to Damascus (Gal. 1:11-17; Acts 22:1-21).

The parallels with Gal. 1:11-12 indicate that the “gospel” in that passage is the same as the “mystery” which he refers to here.

The previous writing which Paul mentions could be another document, but it is more likely that he is referring to what he had written earlier in this same letter; e.g., Eph. 1:9-10; 2:11-22.

v. 4 **“In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,”**

Paul is not boasting; he makes clear that this insight was not due to his own wisdom or knowledge (nor could it have been), but that it was revealed to him by God. His desire for his readers is that they should possess the same insight.

vv. 5-6 **“which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.”**

The fact that the Gentiles would in the last days come to know God was previously disclosed in the Old Testament (see Ps. 22:27; 86:9; Isa. 2:2-4; 52:10; 66:18-23; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 8:20-23). Paul himself acknowledges this (see Rom. 1:2; 3:21; Gal. 3:8; Rom. 15:8-12). How, then, can he claim that this mystery was unknown to those who came before?

“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

The answer to the question raised by verse 5 is that it is not the *fact* of Gentile inclusion in the people of God, but the *means* and the *manner* of it, that were completely unforeseen. In the ages before Christ, it was expected that the Gentiles would come to know God through Judaism; i.e., through circumcision and observance of the law. Even so, in this scheme they could never become true descendants of Abraham; they would always possess an inferior status: that of proselytes, or God-fearing Gentiles. The mystery, then, is that both Jewish and Gentile believers would come to God on the same basis, through faith in Christ, and that they would be united together as equals in one body, the church. Moreover, the fact that this unity would be accomplished by “abolishing” the Mosaic Law (Eph. 2:15, ESV) was certainly never anticipated by the Jewish people.

Note the repeated “together” phrases, emphasizing the radical unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ. They are now “heirs together” of the blessings promised to Abraham (see Gen. 12:2-3; Rom. 4:16; 8:17; Gal. 3:16). They are “members together” of one body, which is the body of Christ, the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24). And they are “sharers together” in the “promise”, which in the context of Eph. 1:13 and 2:12 may refer in general to the promises made to Israel, or specifically to the promised Holy Spirit. All of these blessings are experienced “in Christ,” that is, through union with Him.

v. 7 ***"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power."*** The first point to note here is Paul's personal stance toward the gospel, that of its servant (or "minister", as ESV, NASB; see 2 Cor. 3:6; Col. 1:7, 23). The good news, of salvation for all peoples through faith in Christ, is not like any other message: we do not own it; rather, it owns us. Therefore, we do not have the freedom to shape it through addition or subtraction so as to gain the approval of our hearers; to emphasize that which is most attractive while obscuring those aspects which might prove off-putting; to declare a part as if it were the whole; to imply, by word or deed, that one can pick and choose from among its claims, promises, and demands. The gospel must be presented clearly, fully, and without apology, or else it is not the gospel at all. Sadly, there are many "gospels" today, many purported Christian messages, which are partial, corrupt, or distorted, because those who proclaim them have forgotten that they are the servants of the message, and not its masters (see 2 Tim. 4:2-4; Tit. 2:1; 2:6-8; Jam. 3:1).

Note also that Paul attributes his own calling as a preacher and apostle to the "power" of God (see 2 Tim. 1:11). And yet, in the account of his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19), there is no compulsion, no sense of Paul being driven against his will into a new set of beliefs and a new mode of life. He experienced the power of God for salvation, not as a violation, not as an external force dragging him unwillingly into the kingdom, but as a revelation, an experience of having the scales fall from his eyes (Acts 9:18). And so it is with all those whom God calls to himself. For example, John Wesley described his conversion experience as feeling his *"heart strangely warmed"* in response to a sermon on Romans, and Charles Spurgeon reported that when he heard the call to *"look to Jesus Christ,"* then *"the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun"*.

v. 8 ***"Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,"*** In order to emphasize the magnitude of the grace that God had extended to Paul in calling him to the gospel ministry, he describes himself as the *"least of all the Lord's people"*. While we might view this as hyperbole, Paul meant it literally, because he had been a persecutor of the church (1 Cor. 15:9; see 1 Tim. 1:13-16). God called him to Christ and to apostleship, not because of his deeds, but in spite of them.

The content of his message was *"the boundless riches of Christ,"* that is, the wealth of Christ's glory and blessings, which he possesses in himself and conveys to his people, and which are so magnificent and

abundant as to be beyond our present ability to comprehend (see Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 3:20; Phil. 3:8; Col. 2:2-3).

v. 9 ***"and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things."*** Paul's commission was to bring to light the eternal plan and purpose of God, which was to draw to himself people from *"every tribe, people, language and nation"* (Rev. 13:7). The description of God as he who *"created all things"* is not incidental, but emphasizes that the creation itself was a part of God's plan of redemption (see Eph. 1:4-5). God knew that mankind would need a redeemer before Adam and Eve ever walked upon the earth, and he brought the universe into existence with our salvation in mind.

vv. 10-11 ***"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

The Greek term behind the phrase *"manifold wisdom"* connotes that which is complex and multi-faceted, such as the design in an embroidered cloth, or the interplay of colors in an arrangement of flowers. Here, the sense is that the plan of God, which comprises an innumerable quantity of individual threads, consisting of the decisions and actions of billions of people (and angels) over millennia, is coming together in a pattern that can now be seen to be not only perfectly cohesive but transcendently beautiful.

And as God's design for the church emerges from the apparent chaos of history, the fallen angels who rule over this world and its people (see Eph. 2:2) can also perceive the terrible truth—that throughout the ages, when they thought they were victorious in their rebellion against God, they were instead playing right into God's hands. Only now can they view the whole picture, in which it is evident that they are not triumphant, but doomed.

v. 12 ***"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."*** Because God has reconciled both Jew and Gentile to himself in Christ, we have the freedom to draw near to him without fear of condemnation (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:1; Heb. 4:15-16; 7:19).

v. 13 ***"I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory."*** Paul's sufferings are not evidence that God's plan has failed; in fact, they were announced to him in advance (Acts 9:16). They are a part of God's plan, and will ultimately result in glory for those to whom Paul is bringing the gospel.

Unit 6 – Glorious Riches

Ephesians 3:14-21

Text

¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family^a in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love

that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

^a15 The Greek for family (patria) is derived from the Greek for father (pater).

Open

Would the world consider you to be a powerful person? Why or why not?

What kinds of power in this world are temporary? Which are longer lasting?

Discover

1. Paul's prayer for the recipients of this letter is that they would receive power (vv. 16, 18). Describe the kind of power that he is referring to; i.e., what does it consist of? What are its results?

2. How strong must we be in order to exercise this power? Why? (see 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Eph. 6:10)

3. In what ways does this power differ from what most people in the world would consider to be real power?

4. Why is the power that comes from God preferable? In other words, what is it that people who are seeking other kinds of power do not understand?

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5. When Paul prays, he both kneels and refers to God as the "Father" (v. 14). What do these two aspects of his prayer indicate about our relationship with God?

Kneeling (see Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10-11)

Referring to God as "Father" (see Romans 8:15; 1 John 3:1)

6. What words or phrases does Paul use to emphasize the limitless nature of God's blessings and love?

v. 16	v. 18
v. 19	v. 20

7. What are some of the things that God wishes to "fill" us with (v. 19)?

Ephesians 4:13	Acts 6:3-6
Romans 15:13-14	Philippians 1:11
Colossians 1:9	Colossians 2:2
1 Peter 1:8	John 10:10

8. What do you think it means for Christ to dwell in your heart through faith (v. 17)?

9. Can the love described in this passage be withdrawn? Why or why not? (see Rom. 8:35-39)

Apply

Is there anything you have been reluctant to ask God for, because it seems to be out of the realm of possibility? What does this passage say to that attitude?

How would your life be different if you truly grasped "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ"? How can you obtain that knowledge?

Commentary

vv. 14-15 **“For this reason . . .”** With this phrase, repeated from 3:1, Paul resumes the thought which the intervening verses interrupted. The glorious truths which have been revealed up to this point in the letter; i.e., that the Gentiles are now equal sharers in the grace of God through Christ, and that Paul has been called as an apostle to them, form the basis for his prayer in vv. 14-19. Those truths are the grounds, both theological and pastoral, for the prayer which he offers on their (and our) behalf.

“I kneel before the Father . . .” Paul’s approach to God is both reverent and familiar, a balance which we should seek to emulate in our own prayers. In kneeling, he demonstrates his submission to God as an absolute sovereign; one who is worthy of, and who requires, our praise, adoration and obedience. Such a position emphasizes the distinction between God and his Creation, and our great need for his grace and mercy (see 1 Ki. 19:18; Ezra 9:5; Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10). At the same time, Paul addresses God as “Father,” a term of intimacy and close relationship, and one which emphasizes our freedom to approach him without fear (see Eph. 2:18; Jn. 14:21, 23; 16:27; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; 2 Thess. 2:16; 1 Jn. 3:1; Jude 1:1).

“from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” Every kind of family grouping, including clans, tribes, and nations, is ultimately dependent on God as its source and sovereign. Not only did he create them, but his right to rule over them is demonstrated by the fact that he establishes their “name”; i.e. their character and identity (see Gen. 16:11; 17:19; 35:9-10; 2 Sam. 12:25; Isa. 7:14; 8:3-4; Hos. 1:4, 9; Mt. 1:23; Lk. 1:13, 31).

v. 16-17a **“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being”** The strength and power we most need, and for which Paul prays here, is not physical, or financial, or military, or political, but spiritual. This power comes to us through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It builds up, nourishes, and protects those aspects of our being which are internal and immaterial—our mind, our emotions, and our will. It is an inner fortitude which gives us the ability to think, to feel, to choose, and to act in ways that are honoring and pleasing to God, and to resist the forces which are constantly seeking to conform us to the pattern of the world (Rom. 12:1-2; see 2 Cor. 4:16).

Since this strength flows from God’s “glorious riches” it is inexhaustible; we will never cease to have available to us all the power we need to walk with God in

obedience and love, and to resist Satan (see 2 Cor. 12:9; Eph. 1:18-19; 2:7; 3:8; 6:10; Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:11; 2:2).

“so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” The translation “so that” implies that Christ abiding in our hearts is the purpose or the result of the inner strengthening referred to in v. 16. However, the Greek syntax allows for another option. Considering that the Spirit who strengthens us is the same Spirit of Christ who lives in us (Rom. 8:9), and that it is in the Person of the Holy Spirit that Christ abides in our hearts (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13), it seems more likely that Paul is referring, not to two sequential events, but to two perspectives on a single ongoing experience: *“that he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being; i.e., that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”* (see Jn. 17:23; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 4:13).

vv. 17b-18 **“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,”**

Note that the words “And I pray” are not in the Greek text, but have been inserted here in the NIV, probably for the sake of readability (compare to ESV). And so this is not a new prayer or a new thought, but a continuation of the previous verse; our being “rooted and established in love” flows from the fact that the Spirit of Christ is abiding in us, and both of these things allow us to know the full measure of Christ’s love for us. This knowledge is both intellectual and experiential; we understand his love, not only because the Spirit has opened our minds to comprehend it (1 Cor. 2:12, 14), but because we can see and feel its effects in our lives.

The phrase “rooted and established” expresses the foundational nature of Christ’s love; it is not incidental, but fundamental to God’s purpose. It is the core of the reason for which God created us and called us to himself; everything else follows from the simple but profound truth that “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Not only is this love foundational to the work of God in our lives, it is also irrevocable. A love even of vast dimensions would not generate “freedom and confidence” (v. 12) if it might be withdrawn at any time. But as Paul writes in Rom. 8:38-39,

“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

v. 19 ***“and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*** This seems like a contradiction—if Christ’s love for us “surpasses knowledge,” how can Paul pray that we would “grasp” it (v. 18) and “know” it (v. 19)? The answer is that while the love of God is genuinely knowable, it is also endless and limitless. No matter where our journey of faith may take us, there will always remain country yet to be discovered, territory yet to be mapped. We can never come to the end of God’s love, we can never reach its boundaries or borders. This is expressed in the words of the hymn, “*O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*,” by S. Trevor Francis,

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast,
unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness
over me!
Underneath me, all around me, is the
current of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward to
Thy glorious rest above!*

The goal of coming to know the love of Christ is that we should be “*filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*,” that is, that we should grow to maturity in Christ and receive all the blessings that God has for us as his children, including wisdom, understanding, faith, power, joy, peace, and righteousness (see Eph. 4:13; also Jn. 1:16; 10:10; Acts 6:3-8; Rom. 15:13-14; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:9; 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:8).

These truths are incredibly powerful. As an example, the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905, in which over 100,000 converts were brought into the churches of Wales, was sparked by the hymn, *Here is Love, Vast as the Ocean*, by William Rees, which extols the boundless nature of God’s love for us:

*Here is love, vast as the ocean, loving
kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life my ransom
shed for me His precious blood,
Who His love will not remember, who
can cease to sing His praise?
He shall never be forgotten through
Heaven’s everlasting days.*

*On the mount of crucifixion fountains
opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God’s mercy
flowed the vast and gracious tide,
Grace and love like mighty rivers poured
incessant from above
Heaven’s peace and perfect justice
kissed a guilty world in love.*

v. 20 ***“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”*** As bold as Paul’s requests in the preceding verses have been, they merely scratch the surface of what God can do. Our prayers are necessarily limited—by our knowledge, by our faith, by our wisdom, by our insight into people and situations, and by the extent of our imaginations. We lack the capacity even to conceive of all the blessings that God might wish to pour out. And so, no matter how large our vision of God’s work in our lives and in the world may grow to be, it will always be much smaller than what he is actually able to accomplish. We can never “out-ask” God, our requests can never exceed his capacity to supply. As William Carey, the pioneering missionary to India, preached, we should therefore, “*expect great things from God; attempt great things for God*”, confident in his power to answer our prayers. If we do so, God will not be offended; on the contrary, he welcomes a persistent and audacious faith (see Mt. 7:7-8; 14:22-29; 15:21-18; 20:29-34; Mk. 2:1-5; Jn. 21:7).

v. 21 ***“to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*** Here Paul expresses a desire that God should receive glory, both in his people and in his Son. There are many ways in which the church could bring honor and glory to God. However, in this epistle Paul is focused on the church as a new entity, the body of Christ. The fact that he identifies the church and Christ here as two complementary contexts for the display of God’s glory points to the linkage of these ideas. After all, there are many possible arenas for the display of God’s glory that he could have chosen, for example, heaven and earth (see Mt. 6:10). But he chose “in the church” and “in Christ Jesus”. Thus, the glory referred to here is specifically that which the church reveals simply by being what it is—a new community, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, consisting of those who have been incorporated into Christ by grace through faith. By living out all the implications of that identity, the church will reveal God’s wisdom, power, love, and grace, both in the present age and in all the ages to come. Amen!

Unit 7 – One Body

Ephesians 4:1-16

Text

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it ^a says:

*"When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people."^b*

⁹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions^c? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in

order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

^a8 Or God ^b8 Psalm 68:18 ^c9 Or the depths of the earth

Open

Do you tend to be more social, or more reserved? Do you recharge your batteries by being with other people, or by being alone?

What group activities do you enjoy?

Discover

1. Paul urges his readers to live worthy of their calling (v. 1). Why is it important that we not only believe these teachings, but also put them into practice?

John 14:15, 21

Luke 8:21

Luke 6:46-49

James 1:22-24

2. What does it mean to bear with one another? (v. 2) What are some examples?

3. What does this have to do with unity and peace? (v. 3)

4. What will be the result of humbling ourselves as Paul exhorts us to do? (v. 2; see Mt. 23:12; James 4:10)

5. The “ones” listed in vv. 4-6 are things that all believers share. What are they?

Why does it matter that we have these things in common?

6. Who decides how spiritual gifts are distributed? (v. 11) Why is that significant?

7. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? (vv. 12-13)

8. From this passage, what are some characteristics of spiritual maturity? How do we attain it?

9. If you had to choose one thing that is essential to spiritual growth and health in the church, what would it be? Why?

Apply

Would others describe you as humble, gentle, and patient?

Do you “make every effort” to maintain unity and peace in your church?

Commentary

v. 1 ***“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”*** Paul now transitions from doctrine to application. As followers of Christ, we cannot be content with understanding, or even believing, these doctrines; we must translate them into the substance of our days. Otherwise, they will do us no good. In fact, failing to put into practice the word of God will ultimately bring disaster (see Ezek. 33:31-32; Lk. 6:46-49; 8:21; Jam. 1:22-24).

The exhortation that they live in a manner “worthy” of their calling indicates that God has chosen them, and brought them into fellowship with himself through Christ, for a purpose which is high, holy, and honorable, and not one which is base or ignoble (Eph. 1:4-5, 11-12, 18; 2:10; 4:17-18; 5:8-9, 15).

v. 2 ***“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”*** What does it mean to live such a life? It begins with how we relate to other believers: demonstrating humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance (see Col. 3:12-15). When we see attitudes, words or behaviors in the church (and in ourselves) that are arrogant, harsh, irritable or intolerant, then we are not living worthy of our calling.

The humility which Paul commends here was not any more highly regarded in the ancient world than it is today. The Greeks considered it to be something shameful, equating it with weakness and servility. However, the Scriptures reveal that God has a different perspective (as is frequently the case; Lk. 16:15). True humility does not represent an inability to assert one’s will, or a reluctance to demand one’s rights. It is not the fruit of fear or timidity. Rather, it represents a choice voluntarily to submit our will to God and to waive our rights. The greatest demonstration of such humility was that of Christ, who *“humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross”* (Phil. 2:8; see Mt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Those who follow his example will be exalted, as he was (Phil. 2:9-11; Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14; Jam. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6).

We are also exhorted by Paul to put up with one another, to patiently endure the failings, foibles, weaknesses, annoyances, insults, foolishness, character defects, idiosyncrasies, peculiarities, biases, and miscellaneous offenses that we will certainly experience if we persist in fellowship and community with other sinful human beings. What this means is that instead of seeking revenge when wronged, or severing our relational connections, we follow Paul’s example, who wrote that *“when we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly.”* (1 Cor. 4:12-13). We do this in imitation of God, who has been, and continues to be, extremely patient with us (Ex. 34:6; Mt. 18:21-35; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15).

v. 3 ***“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*** The characteristics and practices identified in the previous verse are those which tend to peace; their opposites tend to discord and contention. The difficulty of consistently displaying these virtues, and therefore of keeping the peace in a congregation, is highlighted by the phrase “make every effort;” it is not something which comes naturally or easily. Thus, when unity is achieved and maintained, it is always a unity “of the Spirit,” i.e. unity which can only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us. In this, we see the necessity both of man’s intentional effort and of God’s sovereign power, both working together to produce the desired result (see Phil. 2:12-13). Note also that the experiential unity which Paul is urging them to seek is built on the ontological unity of their identity as one community in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22). What they (and we) must do is to live in a manner that accurately reflects who and what we are. To do otherwise is, in effect, to testify falsely that the reconciliation accomplished by Christ never happened.

vv. 4-6 ***“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*** The unity which we seek is not merely a matter of interpersonal relationships or organizational dynamics, but is based on something more fundamental: an underlying unity in the created order and in God Himself. In contrast to the pantheon of Greek gods, or the multiplicity of spirits in pantheistic and animistic religions, God is One, existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and he reigns as the sole sovereign over all things.

This unity in the Trinity is expressed in God’s relationships with his people. And so the body of believers which was brought into existence by the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, although diverse in culture, language, and race, is one community of faith, not many (1 Cor. 12:20). Unlike religions such as Hinduism, we do not have many different lords to choose from, but we all serve one Lord, who is Jesus Christ. Likewise, the faith which we share, the hope which we have of the future, and the spiritual process by which we are brought into relationship with Christ, are common to all (Eph. 2:16, 18; see 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:13; Phil. 1:27; 1 Tim. 2:5). We do not have one set of beliefs for North Americans, a different collection of doctrines for Africans, and a distinct regional theology for Asians. Nor is there a separate future for believing Jews and believing Gentiles. We who are in Christ are one, because God himself is one.

- v. 7 ***“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it”***. The focus now shifts from the unity of the body to its diversity, specifically with regard to the spiritual gifts which Christ bestows on his people for the common good (compare to 1 Cor. 12:4-11). In this verse we can see three things. First, that everyone who is in Christ receives at least one gift; no one is excluded. Second, that these gifts are manifestations of grace. This means that they are not earned or merited, and also that they are good things, to be desired and welcomed. And third, that they are distributed according to the sovereign will of Christ, and not according to the worthiness, or even the preference, of the recipient. This implies a fourth point, which is that the gifts differ from one another (see v. 11). Thus our unity in Christ does not imply a dull monochromatic uniformity.
- v. 8 ***“This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.’*** This is a reference to Psalm 68:18. In the original context, this Psalm is an appeal for God to arise and deliver his people as he had done in the past, when he led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness into the Promised Land, defeating and scattering the other nations before them. The “ascent” which the Psalmist refers to is the victorious entry of Yahweh into Zion, perhaps when King David brought the ark up to Jerusalem (2 Sam. chs. 5-6). By applying this passage to Christ, Paul is indicating that his ascent into heaven, and his defeat of his enemies, was a fulfillment of this Psalm (see v. 10; also Lk. 24:50-51; Jn. 6:61-62; Col. 2:15; Heb. 9:24).
There is a difficulty with this reference, because Psalm 68:18 speaks of God *receiving* gifts, not giving them. One way of resolving this discrepancy is to suggest that Paul is quoting from a text other than the one behind the translation of our Old Testament, the Masoretic Text, and that the version he is using reflects the original words of Psalm 68 more accurately than the MT. For example, in the Syriac and Aramaic versions of Psalm 68:18, God is referred to as giving, rather than receiving, gifts.
- vv. 9-10 ***“(What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)”*** What “descent” is being referred to here? The early church fathers combined this passage with 1 Pet. 3:19 and interpreted it to mean a descent into Hades. However, the phrase “*lower, earthly regions*” refers not to hell, but to earth in contrast to heaven. It is more likely that the incarnation is in view, i.e., that Christ “descended” when he came to earth as a man (see Jn. 3:13; 6:33, 38, 50-51, 62; 20:17).
- v. 11 ***“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,”*** Here the gifts are not just the abilities; the persons who receive those abilities are themselves also gifts to the church (see 1 Cor. 12:10, 28). The gifts named here are examples rather than an exhaustive list (compare to Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Nowhere is it stated that any of these lists, nor even all of them together, constitute a comprehensive catalogue of gifts. The point is not to limit God in the special abilities he can bestow for the edification of his people, but to acknowledge him as the source of all such abilities.

An evangelist is someone who preaches the gospel, whether from place to place or in one congregation (see Rom. 1:14-15; 2 Tim. 4:5). A pastor is one who functions as a shepherd over the people of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). His ministry involves leadership, teaching, and other activities necessary to the spiritual welfare of his people, such as counseling and encouragement (1 Tim. 4:13; 5:17). A teacher is one who expounds and applies the Scriptures, but who does not have the oversight responsibilities of a pastor. For notes on “apostle” and “prophet”, see the commentary on 2:20.
- vv. 12-13 Consistent with verses 7 and 16, the body of Christ is not built up solely by those who are named in verse 11; rather, these roles exist to equip all the people of God for service, so that they may in turn do the work necessary to extend and strengthen the church. The ultimate goal, that we should know and experience all that Christ has for us as his children, is one to which we will ever draw nearer, but not fully attain until the return of Christ (1 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 3:10-14).
- v. 14 A characteristic of immature believers is doctrinal instability. They are subject to theological fads, and lack the discernment needed to separate the wheat of pure doctrine from the chaff of falsehood. In this, Paul anticipated the present age, in which the ancient truths of the Scriptures are being called into question by seminary professors, well-known “evangelical” pastors, and church leaders. Those who base their beliefs on popularity, academic credentials, or rhetorical skill, rather than consistency with the Scriptures, will easily be led astray.
- vv. 15-16 Unlike those who are cunning and deceitful in teaching what is false, we are to testify to the truth, and to do so with a view to the well-being of others instead of our own influence, reputation, position, or convenience. As we do so, the church as a whole will continue to develop and mature under the guidance and authority of Christ.

Unit 8 – Put Off and Put On

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Text

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down

while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

^a26 Psalm 4:4(see Septuagint)

Open

If you were shipwrecked on a tropical island, and knew that it would be a year before you were rescued, what items would you take to shore in your lifeboat?

What kinds of work are you able to do with your own hands?

Discover

1. How would you explain this dual "put off / put on" approach to someone who is a new believer and wants to know how they should live? In general, what are they putting off, and what are they putting on? How do they do that?

2. Is it enough just to avoid doing what is forbidden? Why or why not?

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3. In your own words, identify the behaviors that we are to “put off”, and the corresponding behaviors that we are to “put on”. Note that in some cases, the positive or negative action may be implied rather than explicitly stated.

Put Off	Put On
vv. 22-24	
v. 25	
vv. 26-27	
v. 28	
v. 29	
vv. 31-32	

4. Why should we do this? What reasons does Paul give?

5. In your own words, what is the moral condition of the world which does not know Christ? (vv. 17-19)

Apply

- What are some examples of the kind of speech that we should “put on” toward one another? (For help, see the notes on verse 29). Choose one of these to practice in the coming week.
- If your willingness to forgive others is based on the fact that you yourself have been forgiven, what does that say about those who harbor a grudge?

Commentary

v. 17 Paul now resumes the exhortations which he began in vv. 1-3, supported by the truth developed in vv. 4-16: that the goal of God's gracious gifts to his people is their unity and maturity in the faith. The critical importance of putting their faith into practice in the way he describes is underscored by the phrase, "I tell you . . . and insist on it in the Lord". Not only are these things a requirement for followers of Christ, but the authority behind them is Christ himself. Paul is no freelance moralist; what he is passing on to them is what he received from Christ (unlike the Jewish religious leaders, whom Jesus criticized for elevating man-made traditions over the word of God [Mt. 15:1-9; Mk. 7:9-13; see also 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3; Gal. 1:12]). In the same way, we need to make sure that the way of life we are following is actually based on the teachings of Christ and his apostles, rather than the traditions of men.

This godly lifestyle is contrasted with that of the Gentiles, who lack the moral and ethical heritage of Judaism. Those to whom Paul is writing come from a Gentile context, and his description of the Gentile mind and way of life is thus a description of their former condition (see 2:1-3, 11; 5:8). It is not only an indictment of the dominant culture, but a warning lest they relapse into the behavior patterns they developed as former participants in that culture.

The mental processes behind that way of life are characterized by "futility" (see Rom. 1:21; also 2 Pet. 2:18, "empty"; Tit. 3:9, "useless"). This does not mean that those who follow it lack intelligence. They may be clever; even brilliant; their reasoning may be subtle and complex; they may produce impressive works of art and philosophy; but ultimately, all that they do is pointless, because whatever is not done for the glory of God is empty, vain, and useless (Eccl. 1:2, 14). Thus, even a life of disciplined and active striving, if that activity is in pursuit of the wrong goals and founded on a false world view, is a life wasted. Everything it produces is fundamentally defective and will ultimately collapse, because it rests on a foundation of sand (Mt. 7:24-27).

v. 18 The inability of the Gentiles to perceive and understand the truth about God does not excuse their sin or diminish their guilt. In fact the opposite is true: their blindness is intentional and willful; it results from their decision to turn their backs on God and harden their hearts against him (Rom. 1:18-32).

v. 19 All human beings are made in the image of God, although that image has been badly marred by sin (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6). One aspect of that image is a *conscience*, an innate sense of right and wrong (Rom. 2:14-15). Those who continually disregard this inner voice eventually become so insensible

to it that they lose the capacity for shame, embarrassment, or self-restraint. They disregard society's norms, flaunting their libertine and debauched lifestyle before the world and before God. Every taboo is broken, every boundary disregarded; in fact, they regard being "transgressive" as something to be sought after and applauded.

The curse of this wholesale rejection of God's moral law is that one's appetites also become unbounded, and thus insatiable. Life becomes a continual treadmill of seeking more and more experiences, only to find them unsatisfying and unfulfilling. Ironically, it is the glutton who is always hungry.

vv. 20-21 The moral and ethical standard that Christians are to live by is not an abstract legal code; rather, it consists of the example and teaching of a living person, Jesus Christ, with whom they have a relationship (see 1 Cor. 9:21).

vv. 22-24 Our new life in Christ has both an "already" and "not yet" aspect. In the past, a decisive change took place, such that the believer is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). As a result, we are no longer in bondage to sin; we have been freed from its power (Rom. 6:6-7) and brought into spiritual union with Christ. However, until Christ returns and makes our transformation complete, we must choose to live in light of this new reality. Prior to our salvation, we were able only to sin (Rom. 8:7-8; 14:23); when we are glorified, we will be able only to act righteously; but in the present, we are capable of either. Therefore, we must continually choose to abandon our previous identity, our "old self," as those who served and obeyed sin, and embrace our new identity, our "new self," as those who are made to serve and obey Christ (Rom. 6:12-13). This is an ongoing process of inner renewal, or *sanctification*, in which we choose to cooperate with God's transforming work in our lives (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 3:10).

4:25-5:2 The exhortations in 4:25-5:2 generally follow the format introduced in vv. 22-24, with each one containing a negative prohibition, that which is to be "put off", followed by a positive command, that which is to be "put on". By conducting themselves in this way, the people of God will "*keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*" (4:3). This dual "put off / put on" formula highlights the fact that pleasing God is not merely negative: it is not sufficient to avoid doing evil; we also have a positive obligation to do good. Thus the maxim, "*Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful*" comes not from Christ, but from Buddha [*Udana-Varga 5.18*]. Other religions contain a similar negative rule (e.g., Confucianism [*Analects 15.23*]; Hinduism, [*Mahabharata 5:1517*]).

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- The “golden rule” of Christ, however, is positive: “*do to others what you would have them do to you*” (Mt. 7:12; see Ps. 34:14; Jam. 4:17; 1 Pet. 3:11). And so we must avoid both sins of *commission* (doing what we should not do) and sins of *omission* (failing to do the good that we ought to do).
- v. 25 It is not enough to abstain from lying. We have a responsibility to speak what is true, which implies a responsibility to speak. Note, however, that this does not grant us license to heedlessly and indiscriminately share every piece of information with every person. Nor can it justify the caustic venting of one’s spleen. We still have a responsibility to exercise discretion and to act in wisdom and love (v. 15). Moreover, each of us must keep in mind that there is a difference between truth and our own perceptions, feelings and opinions.
- The language of this verse echoes Zech. 8:16, perhaps intentionally. In both cases, the reason given is our connection with others (Zech. 8:17, “your neighbor”), rather than an abstract ethical principle.
- vv. 26-27 **“*In your anger do not sin*”** This is an imperative in the Greek (“be angry”; see ESV), which is translated here as a conditional clause (i.e., “when/if you are angry”), rather than an actual command to become angry. Given the Biblical cautions against anger (Ps. 37:8; Jam. 1:19-20) this interpretation is likely correct. Anger itself is not always sin, but the path from one to the other is short; thus Paul’s caution here. Regardless of the cause, we must strictly limit the time during which we allow our anger to smolder. If we fail to speedily seek reconciliation, we open the door to Satan to work mischief in our heart and in our relationships (see 6:10-20).
- These verses quote Ps. 4:4, in which David relates his anger at being slandered, and the joy and peace he experienced in entrusting his reputation to God.
- v. 28 It might seem that a reminder to Christians not to steal would hardly be needed, but Paul was writing to those who had come out of a pagan Gentile background (see 2:1-3; 5:8). And so previously, with no government social programs to provide an economic safety net, they may have viewed stealing as an acceptable practice for those who lacked the necessities of life (see Prov. 6:30; 30:8-9).
- But now, rather than being concerned only with themselves and their own needs, they are to consider others in two ways: first, by doing work that in itself benefits others, and second, by using the fruits of their labors to provide for those who are in need. Of course, if the entire Christian community did this, the need for any one of them to steal in order to eat would be eliminated.
- v. 29 Here again, the focus is on how our conduct affects others. Thus, we must avoid any speech which tends to have a destructive or corrosive effect. Included in this would be “*obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking*” (Eph. 5:4), “*anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language*” (Col. 3:8) and grumbling against one another (James 5:9). Such speech grieves the Holy Spirit (v. 30). Instead, we are to use our speech to benefit others and build them up. Such speech would include encouragement (1 Thess. 5:11), comfort (2 Cor. 13:11), singing and worshipping God (Eph. 5:19), teaching and admonishing (Col. 3:16), exhortation (Heb. 3:13), stirring up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24), and prayer (Jam. 5:16).
- v. 30 This echoes Isa. 63:10, which recalls the Israelites grieving the Holy Spirit by their disobedience after being released from bondage in Egypt, and being judged by God as a result (see Isa. 63:7-19). Thus, Paul’s words are not only an exhortation but an implied warning not to follow their example (see 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Heb. 3:7-19). Certainly corrupt speech (v. 29) and conduct (vv. 31-32) are offensive to all three persons of the Trinity. But it is the Spirit who is especially in view here, because he lives in us (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Jn. 3:24). Until the day comes when we are fully redeemed, i.e., when Christ returns and the work which he began in us is complete (Phil. 1:6; Eph. 1:14), we must avoid acting or speaking in ways which contradict our identity as those who are “sealed,” or marked as belonging to God.
- vv. 31-32 As Christians, we are instructed not merely to moderate our anger against other believers, but to excise it completely. Such passions begin internally, with bitterness and malice, but if left unaddressed, they progress to rage, and eventually break forth in “brawling” (shouting and angry verbal outbursts), and “slander”, i.e., cursing, defamation, and abusive speech of all kinds. Instead, we are to forgive one another, in the same way that we have been forgiven. Yes, offenses will come. But when they do, we must remember that we are in need of forgiveness just as much as those who have offended us. And our willingness to forgive them is the standard by which we will be judged. In the Lord’s prayer, we are taught to pray that God forgive us “*as we also have forgiven our debtors*” (Mt. 6:12-15; see Mt. 5:7; 18:32-35; Jam. 2:13).
- vv. 1-2 We are not merely following an ethical code, but conforming our speech, conduct and attitudes to the example of our Father and of His Son, our Savior, who loved us and sacrificed himself for us (Gal. 2:20).

Unit 9 – Children of Light

Ephesians 5:3-14

Text

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.^a ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light⁹ (for

the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

"Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."

^a5 Or kingdom of the Messiah and God

Open

What kind(s) of music do you like to listen to?

If you were given the power to make a major Hollywood film of your choice (any story, actors, etc.), what would it be?

Discover

1. What sins does Paul highlight as characteristic of darkness? State them in your own words.

2. What virtues does he highlight as characteristic of light?

3. The world does not necessarily agree with this list of vices and virtues. What are some alternate "virtues" which are highly valued by the world? Why might the world prefer these virtues? (see 2 Cor. 11:14-15)

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4. What phrases in this passage highlight Paul's "zero-tolerance" attitude toward the sins he mentions? Do you share this attitude? Or is your goal one of merely limiting and managing them?

5. What reasons does Paul give for avoiding these sins at all costs?

v. 3

vv. 5-6 (see also 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8)

vv. 8-9

6. What are some actions you could take that would demonstrate a genuine desire for purity in these areas? Choose at least one to begin doing this week.

7. What are some ways in which we can "find out" what pleases the Lord? (v. 10)

8. What does it mean to say that you are "light"? (v. 8) How has that been true of you recently?

9. How are we to "expose" the deeds of darkness? (v. 11) Give some examples.

Apply

- How much do you desire to increase the brightness of your "light"?

Commentary

v. 3 ***“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”*** For many people today, the only legitimate basis for restricting sexual practices is to prevent the victimization of the weak by the strong; that is, to eliminate sex which is non-consensual. Thus, even secularists condemn such violations as rape, or sex between an adult and a minor, or sexual harassment; i.e., coercion by means of power or authority. However, the complete prohibition of sexual activity between persons who are not married to one another seems to them archaic and unnecessary. What harm does it do, they ask, since we now have reliable birth control and protection from disease? Shouldn’t each person have the freedom to decide if, and when, and how they will be “sexually active”? The popular media reinforces this view, portraying non-marital sex as an enjoyable, liberating practice which brings couples closer together and has few if any negative consequences.

One response to this view is that non-marital sexual activity is in fact destructive, even if it does not result in disease or an unwanted pregnancy. Many who engage in it come to regret their choice, and realize that they have been sold a bill of goods by the culture. Rather than fostering long-term intimacy, it hinders the formation of an emotional bond between a husband and wife. Statistically, premarital sex is linked to marriages which are less satisfying, more likely to end in divorce, and more likely to be marred by affairs. As the Scriptures tell us, regarding the consequences of sexual sin:

“a man who commits adultery has no sense; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away.”
(Prov. 6:32-33; see 1 Cor. 6:18)

But the Christian argument against sexual immorality is not based primarily on its consequences in this life. That would imply that the foremost consideration in choosing how to live is our own temporal welfare. No, the fundamental reason for a follower of Christ to keep themselves sexually pure is that it glorifies God to do so. God designed men and women, and also the relationships between them, to serve as earthly pictures of heavenly realities (Gen. 1:27; Eph. 5:32; Rom. 1:20). But when we defy his design, we deface his image in us, and we obscure the truths that his creation is intended to depict. This helps us to understand why sexual sin is so significant, why the consequences which flow from it are so dire (vv. 5-6; see Lev. 20:10; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 10:8; Jude 1:7), and why there can be no acceptance of it among the people of God (1 Cor. 5:9-11).

In fact, even making it a topic of casual conversation is inappropriate (v. 12). It seems wise, then, for Christians to avoid not only pornographic materials but also “romance novels,” and to abstain from consuming as entertainment any movies, television shows, plays, novels, or musical performances in which themes of sexual immorality are prominent.

v. 4 ***“Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”*** Not only is actual sexual misconduct to be avoided, but also crude speech and lewd remarks. Instead, we are to use our God-given faculty of speech to give thanks. This is an apt contrast, because sexual immorality reflects a sense of entitlement which claims the right to seek fulfillment of my desires by whatever means I choose. Offering thanks, on the other hand, acknowledges that everything we have, including sex, is a gift from God (Jam. 1:17), and that he has the right to determine how his gifts will be used.

Note that the prohibition is not against wit or humor in general, but against a foul mouth and vulgar jesting. This is no loss; when a television show or comedian begins to rely on sexually-oriented material to attract an audience, it is usually a sign that they are no longer funny.

v. 5 ***“No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”*** A person who can be described as “immoral, impure or greedy” is someone whose life consistently displays those characteristics. Such a person is demonstrating by their conduct that they have not come to know Christ, whatever they may profess (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). They have not entered into God’s kingdom, and can thus have no expectation of receiving its present or future blessings. Coveting, or greed, is equated with idolatry because it places the pursuit of some created thing at the center of one’s life rather than God (see Rom. 1:25; Col. 3:5; Mt. 6:31-33).

vv. 6-7 ***“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.”*** Paul is not prohibiting all cooperation or association with unbelievers, only that which would involve a participation in their sin (see 1 Cor. 5:9-10). This requires discernment, because the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable conduct are not always clearly marked, and often there will be someone nearby who is encouraging us to put aside our principles, whispering that no one will care if we loosen up a bit. But God cares, and his judgment is coming (Rom. 1:18; 2:8; Col. 3:6).

- v. 8 **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light”** The key idea here is that not only have we been removed from the domain, or realm, of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:12-13), but that we ourselves have become light (“*you are light in the Lord*”). Jesus Christ is the light of the world (Jn. 8:12; see Lk. 2:32; Jn. 1:4, 9; 9:5; 12:36, 46). He is revelation, and truth, and holiness. And through our spiritual union with him, we also manifest those qualities to the world (v.9; see Acts 13:47; Eph. 4:15-24; 1 Thess. 5:5). We have been, not merely relocated, but transformed; the darkness within us has been changed into light (Lk. 11:35-36). And so now, we are to live in such a way that the light within us will be evident, rather than behaving as if our identities were still defined by the darkness of ignorance and impurity. This is also what Jesus taught his disciples:
- “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”* (Mt. 5:14-16)
- v. 9 **“(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)”** These virtues are the “fruit” of the light; they are produced by the power of the light within us as it finds expression in our speech, conduct and attitudes (see Gal. 5:22). At the same time, we are exhorted to “Live as children of light” (v. 8). Thus we see here the cooperative nature of the Christian life, as the power of God is joined with the obedient will of the believer, resulting in spiritual growth and fruitfulness (see Phil. 2:12-13).
- v. 10 **“and find out what pleases the Lord.”** The word translated as “find out” could also be rendered “discern,” “examine,” or “test”. The Scriptures do not provide an exhaustive catalogue of the right action to take in every conceivable situation; Paul is not Emily Post. Instead, they provide principles and guidelines that must be thought through and applied, as we seek in every circumstance to do what pleases Christ (2 Cor. 5:9). This requires the full use of our sanctified critical faculties, as we seek to determine what it means to “*act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God*” (Mic. 6:8) in a given time and place (see Rom. 12:2; 14:5, 22; 15:14; Gal. 6:4; 1 Thess. 5:21). The ability to make sound ethical and practical judgments is one that grows with maturity and practice (Phil. 1:9-10).
- v. 11 **“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.”** As our lives bring us into contact with wicked behavior, we have three choices: we can join in ourselves, we can try to ignore it, or we can actively oppose it. The first is prohibited; there must not be even a “hint” of such things in our lives (v. 1). Pretending it doesn’t exist is the preferred approach for those who are conflict-averse. But Paul calls us to a more active response, to “expose them”. What does this mean? Does he have in mind the muckraking journalist or the crusading district attorney? Is he urging us to confront the ethical lapses of our neighbors or coworkers? This seems unlikely; Paul’s focus is typically not on addressing the evils of society, but rather on purging sin from the people of God (1 Cor. 5:9-13). This leaves several possibilities, any or all of which could be in view. Paul may be speaking generally of the need to expose sin for what it is; i.e., by making clear to one another that sin is in fact destructive and not acceptable to God. This would fall under the heading of teaching and instructing one another (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11). It is also possible that Paul has in mind the direct application of these truths to those in the church who are erring, with the goal of bringing them to repentance (1 Tim. 5:20; see Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:16; 4:2; Tit. 1:9, 13; 2:15; Jam. 5:19-20). Or finally, he may be referring to the proclamation of the gospel, which involves a warning of judgment for sin and a call to repentance.
- v. 12 **“It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”** This does not forbid any discussion that would be necessary to carry out the command in the preceding verse. However, it does make clear that salacious gossip and scandalous rumors are not fit topics for Christian conversation.
- v. 13 **“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.”** Light has a twofold effect: it not only reveals, it also transforms. When a strong light shines on something, it glows with reflected brilliance. Those who respond to the exposure of their sin by repenting will themselves be changed, and their light will shine as a result (v. 8). Thus the exposure of evil has a redemptive purpose.
- v. 14 **“This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”** This saying could be a loose paraphrase of Isa. 26:19 and/or 60:1-2, reworked as an early Christian hymn or baptismal formula. It reinforces the thought of the previous verse—that the light of the gospel has power to transform.

Unit 10 – Wise Living

Ephesians 5:15-24

Text

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Open

- What is one thing you were thankful for in the last week?

Discover

1. Why do we need to be “careful” how we live? (v. 15)

Ephesians 5:16

1 Peter 5:8

Ephesians 6:12

1 John 5:19

Romans 12:2

2. How can the truth of the statement that “the days are evil” (v. 16) be seen in our society?

In Education

In the Arts and Entertainment

In Business

In Families

In Law and Government

In the Sciences

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3. The Scriptures help us to understand the difference between a foolish person and one who is wise, i.e., who understands what pleases God (v. 17). How do these verses in Proverbs contrast the two?

A foolish person	A wise person
11:2	
12:15	
12:18	
20:3	

4. What contrast is Paul making in vv. 18-20? Describe how these two influences would affect our lives.

5. What three examples are given of submission to “one another” (v. 21; see 5:22, 6:1, 6:5)

6. Does submission imply inferiority? Why or why not? (see John 14:31; Philippians 2:8)

7. What reason(s) are given for wives to submit to their husbands? (vv. 22-24)

8. Are there limits on the submission of wives to their husbands? (v. 24)

Apply

How would you describe the wisdom Paul writes about in this passage? What would it look like?

How would you describe the submission Paul writes about in this passage? What would it look like?

Commentary

vv. 15-16 **“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”** Living the kind of life that pleases the Lord (5:10) is not a simple matter. It cannot be done casually or carelessly; it is not intuitive, but requires thought and consideration. We cannot simply follow the path that seems most expedient, nor bob along in the currents of our culture, because the “ways of this world” (Eph. 2:2) are directed and controlled by the Evil One (1 Jn. 5:19; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 6:12). Christianity has always been counter-cultural. And so all the “received wisdom” which our unbelieving neighbors take for granted — our society’s customs, values, norms, assumptions, and expectations; its judgments about what is right or wrong, honorable or contemptible; its “heroes” and “villains” — all of this must be examined in light of the Scriptures, as we are guided by the Spirit of God. Not only is this demanding mental and spiritual work, it is also likely to put us at odds with the world around us: this world is constantly applying pressure to conform (Rom. 12:2), in ways that range from subtle and inviting to overt and threatening.

v. 17 **“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”** To link wisdom with godliness, and foolishness with ungodliness, as Paul does here, is at variance with contemporary attitudes. We tend to equate godliness primarily with moral purity, theological knowledge, and piety. On the other hand, while we may regard foolishness as a character flaw or a sign of immaturity, we don’t view it as having any spiritual implications. However, foolishness is more than mere naïveté; it is ungodliness (see Mk. 7:20-23). Godliness involves a practical understanding of how the world works, joined with a habit of making sound decisions, and the competence to carry them out. This may sound like the kind of worldly-wisdom which Paul rejects (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:19; 2 Cor. 1:12), but it is not. That “wisdom” is limited to the concerns of this world, and is thus by definition incomplete and faulty. It excludes consideration of that which is eternal and heavenly, and so it is short-sighted, leading nowhere (see Lk. 12:20). Godly wisdom, in contrast, takes into account all of reality. It is concerned with how to honor the Lord in every aspect of one’s life.

In Proverbs, we see this theme repeated throughout the book: the wise, godly person versus the foolish, ungodly one (see 14:16; 17:7). The fool rejects instruction (1:7), advice (12:15), correction (9:8), and discipline (15:5); is “quick to quarrel” (20:3); is unreliable (26:6, 10), and is proud and arrogant (26:12). Simply put, he or she has no common sense. The wise person, on the other hand, listens and heeds instruction (1:5; 2:2; 8:33; 9:8; 10:8), is humble (11:2), and brings peace and healing (12:18; 19:11; 29:8, 11).

v. 18 **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.”** Throughout the New Testament, drunkenness is condemned as one of the “deeds of darkness” (Rom. 12:12-13), and evidence that one’s profession of faith is spurious (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Gal. 5:21). It is associated with the practices of pagan unbelievers, including “debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” (1 Pet. 4:3; see Lk. 12:45-46; 1 Thess. 5:6-8; 1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Tit. 2:3). In addition, the Old Testament contains warnings against this practice (Gen. 19:32-33; 27:25; Lev. 23:13; Prov. 20:1; 23:19-21; 26:10; Isa. 5:11).

However, the Scriptures do not require abstinence, except in specific circumstances (Lev. 10:9; Num. 6:3; Judg. 13:3-5); rather, they counsel moderation. Wine is mentioned positively many times in the Bible (Gen. 14:18; Deut. 7:13; 11:14; 14:26; Judg. 9:13; Ps. 104:15; Prov. 3:10; Eccl. 9:7; Isa. 25:6; 55:1; Jer. 31:12; Joel 2:24; 3:18; 1 Tim. 5:23). Jesus provided wine at a wedding (Jn. 2:1-10) and at the last supper (Mt. 26:27-29; Lk. 22:18), and it is likely that in Luke 7:34, he is referring to drinking wine (which is why he was falsely accused of drunkenness).

Nevertheless, for some Christians, the wisest course of action will be to avoid alcohol altogether. And for all believers, there will be occasions when voluntarily abstaining, whether from wine or certain types of foods, will be the more loving choice (Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Cor. 10:23-33). On the other hand, to abstain from food or drink in response to a religious prohibition can itself be injurious to the truth of the gospel (Col. 2:16, 20-23). So discernment is required.

“Instead, be filled with the Spirit,” In the context, this appears to be an exhortation to allow the Holy Spirit to control and direct us, rather than permitting alcohol to do so. As we yield more and more to the Holy Spirit, who indwells all believers (Rom. 8:9), the result will be, *“speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit . . . always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (vv. 19-20). And so the results of the Spirit’s influence in our lives will be the exact opposite of the influence of excessive wine: worship rather than debauchery.

However, this can also be translated as “be filled by the Spirit”. This rendering would present the Holy Spirit as the agent, that is, the one who fills, rather than as the one we are filled up with. In this interpretation, we are being called to yield to the Spirit’s work in our lives as he fills us with “all the fullness of” God and of Christ (Eph. 3:19; 4:13).

v. 21 **“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** Taken alone, this verse could be interpreted to mean that every believer should submit to every other believer (see Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3). However, the examples which Paul provides (5:22-6:9) show that his meaning is that we are all to submit to those who are in authority over us, whether the relationship is that of a husband and a wife (vv. 22-33), a parent and a child (6:1-4), or a master and a servant (6:5-9). Note that in none of these cases is the order reversed; for example, Paul does not instruct parents to submit to children (see also Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5).

v. 22 **“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.”** For many modern-day Americans, this is one of the more contentious, and even offensive, passages in the Scriptures. However, much of the negative reaction is due to confusion concerning what Paul is, and is not, teaching. First of all, he is not saying that women are inferior to men. Many today believe that any kind of subordination or obedience implies inferiority. However, we have the clearest possible refutation of this notion in the relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father. Jesus was and is wholly divine, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit (Isa. 9:6; John 1:1; 8:57-59; 10:30; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 22:13-16). And yet, he voluntarily chose to submit to God the Father (Mt. 26:39; John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:31; 20:27-29; Phil. 2:8). Similarly, Paul’s command to submit to civil authority (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13) does not imply that private citizens are inferior to those in government. A hierarchy of roles does not, then, imply any distinction in dignity or worth.

Second, this is not a statement that women in society should be subordinate to men; it concerns the marriage relationship only. Paul is not teaching that women should submit to men generally, but that each woman should submit to one specific man, her own husband. Third, this submission is voluntary. It must be freely given. Paul is not asserting that husbands have a right or duty to demand submission; they are not charged with enforcement of this command. In fact, if a husband did attempt to coerce or manipulate his wife into yielding to his will, he would himself be in violation of the injunctions which follow (vv. 25-30), and the “submission” which resulted would not be what God desires.

v. 23 **“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”** It has been argued that the call for wives to submit to husbands is culturally conditioned; i.e., that Paul based this command on the gender roles of first-century Asia Minor, perhaps out of a

reluctance to challenge the social norms of his day; and that therefore it is not necessary, or even beneficial, for wives to submit to husbands in a modern egalitarian society such as that of the United States. Additional arguments have been made which would limit the applicability of this command; for example, that the Biblical gender roles are based on outdated views of the capacities of women, so that as women are shown to be equally as competent as men in most areas, there is no longer any rationale for gender-based role distinctions.

These arguments have some validity. Gender roles in any human society are somewhat arbitrary. And many earlier ideas about the inability of women to perform certain tasks have been shown to be false. However, they also miss the point. Paul is not reasoning from culture or capacity, he is reasoning from the relationship between Christ and the church, which is represented by the relationship between a husband and wife. Gender roles in marriage exist not merely to provide a framework for efficient household management; they also serve as a picture-in-life of a fundamental spiritual reality. If a husband and wife (or a society) disregard those roles, they may be able to devise alternatives that “work”. The children may still get raised, and the bills may still get paid. But there is more at stake here than pragmatism. God designed the marriage relationship to reveal something about himself, and when we depart from his design, we obscure that revelation. This matters to God, and should matter to us.

Another argument is sometimes made, that differing roles for men and women contradict the principle that in Christ, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female”* (Gal. 3:28). However, in the Galatians passage, Paul is making a different point, which is that every person, regardless of their gender, ethnic identity, or station in life, has equal standing before God through faith in Christ; all are accepted by God on the basis of faith.

v. 24 **“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”** The scope of this principle is comprehensive: it is *“in everything,”* i.e. in every area of life. However, it is also *“as the church submits to Christ,”* which implicitly limits the wife’s submission to that which does not contradict the commands of Christ (Acts 5:29). A caution is in order here. When invoking this exception, it is necessary for the wife to examine her heart attitude, for it is possible to construe virtually anything as contrary to the teaching and example of Christ, especially when it is also contrary to one’s own desires. Discernment is needed.

Unit 11 – Love and Obey

Ephesians 5:25-6:9

Text

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing^a her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”^b ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”^c

⁴ Fathers,^d do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people,^e because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

^a26 Or having cleansed ^b31 Gen. 2:24 ^c3 Deut. 5:16
^d4 Or parents

Open

How did you and your spouse first meet?

How accurately do recent movies portray the reality of married life?

Discover

1. What do you think it means for husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church” (v. 25)? What attitudes and actions would characterize such love?

2. In your opinion, who has the more difficult assignment, husbands or wives? Why?

3. What was the result of Christ's love for the church? (vv. 26-27; see 1 Cor. 6:11; Col. 1:22)

4. What does it mean that "He who loves his wife loves himself"? (vv. 28, 31; see Mt. 19:6)

5. To what degree are a husband's, or a wife's, responsibilities conditional on their partner living up to the standard Paul sets forth in this letter? (v. 33)

6. What reasons does Paul give for children to obey their parents? (vv. 1-3)

7. Describe how fathers should treat their children. (vv. 4-5) What kinds of behavior would this exclude?

8. How should someone in the position of a "slave" (i.e. someone who is under the authority of another person concerning their work) conduct themselves in doing their work? Why?

9. How should someone in the position of a "master" (i.e. someone who has authority over another person regarding their work) conduct themselves in this relationship? Why?

Apply

As you were reading through this passage, did you find yourself thinking more of what others ought to do, or what you should do? Ask God to help you focus on your own responsibilities.

For at least one of the relationships which applies to you (husband/wife, parent/child, master/slave), identify one specific change you will make this week.

Commentary

v. 25 **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”** If the obligation of the wife to submit to her husband is comprehensive (“in everything”, v. 24), the husband’s responsibility to love his wife is no less so. The example of Christ, who gave his own life for the sake of the church, tells us that the husband’s love for his wife requires him to place her welfare ahead of his own, even when the cost is very high; indeed, even when the cost is everything he has. The love Paul is writing about is not merely kind, or considerate, or gentle—although it will be all of those things—it is also radically selfless and sacrificial. It involves a willingness to relinquish even one’s legitimate rights, needs, wants, preferences, plans and goals, for the sake of another person. It requires dying to self on a daily basis, not merely in one’s public conduct, but (where it is most difficult to sustain) in one’s private life. Thus the marriage relationship becomes a crucible of sanctification unlike any other. The intimacy of marriage means that we are constantly confronted, at the most basic and personal level, with the conflict between our own selfishness, the impulse to seek our own good above all, and the often conflicting needs and demands of another.

Given the thought and effort that are involved in loving one’s wife in this way, it follows that a married man cannot devote himself to other pursuits, such as business, or career, or sports, as single-mindedly as an unmarried man. This is a part of what he must sacrifice. Nor is it legitimate for a husband’s ministry to trump consideration for the welfare of his wife (see Mk. 7:10-12). Paul acknowledges this in 1 Cor. 7:32-35, where he cautions those contemplating marriage that,

“An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided.”

vv. 26-27 Christ’s death for the church had a purpose: to cleanse her of sin and guilt, to remove all moral impurity, and to eliminate completely the barrier of sin which stood between man and God so that we could fellowship with him eternally. This cleansing was accomplished on the cross (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 1:3), and was applied to each of us through hearing the word of the gospel (Jn. 15:3). As a result, when Christ returns, we will be absolutely pure, with not even a hint of unrighteousness remaining (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 1:4; Phil. 1:10; Col. 1:22; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23; 2 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 19:6-8; 21:1-2, 9-11). The transformation which began on the day we came to faith will be brought to completion (Phil. 1:6), and we will be like Christ (1 Jn. 3:2).

v. 28 **“In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”** This verse brings out the truth that a husband’s responsibility to care for his wife is a specific example of the responsibility which every Christian has to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:38-40; Mk. 12:30-31; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8). This does not mean that a man should treat his wife just like he would treat anyone else. However, the principle is the same; we are to consider the needs of others to have equal weight as our own. And if that is true of a complete stranger (Lk. 10:25-37), how much more is it true of the one with whom we have been made “one flesh”! This one flesh relationship (see Mt. 19:5-6; Mk. 10:8; Eph. 5:31) is what Paul is appealing to here. Unlike others to whom he has a responsibility of care and concern, a man’s wife is actually a part of him. In the words of Christ, God has joined them together and “they are no longer two” (Mt. 19:6). And so when a husband loves his wife “as himself”, he is actually caring for himself at the same time.

vv. 29-30 Paul supports his argument in two ways. First, from logic. If in fact a man’s wife is a part of him, it follows that he would want to care and provide for her just as devotedly as he cares and provides for himself. And second, he argues from the example of Christ, who is the husband *par excellence*. Just as Christ provides for all the needs of his body, the church (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Mt. 25:40), so a man should provide for the needs of his wife, who likewise is a part of his own being.

vv. 31-32 The “profound mystery” which Paul refers to has been interpreted: (1) as marriage itself, (2) as the relationship between Christ and the church, and (3) as the fact that human marriage is a picture, or “type”, of the relationship between Christ and the church. This last interpretation of the “mystery” is to be preferred, due to the way in which Paul puts these two ideas in close proximity. It is clear that Gen. 2:24, which Paul quotes in v. 31, applies to marriage. But immediately afterward, in v. 32, he states, “I am talking about Christ and the church.” In other words, when Paul uses the Gen. 2:24 passage to instruct husbands and wives, he is at the same time describing how Christ relates to his church.

v. 33 This verse summarizes Paul’s exhortations to husbands and wives, with the phrase “each one of you” emphasizing the personal nature of the application. Note that although this summary addresses the responsibilities of both partners, it does not make them dependent on one another. Each one of us is accountable to God to obey the instructions which apply to us, whether or not our spouse also does so.

- v. 1 **“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”** Several observations can be made here. First, these children are not adult offspring, but are still being raised by their parents (v. 4). And so Paul is not teaching that parents have authority over their sons and daughters for as long as they live (see also v. 31). Second, he addresses children directly, as responsible moral agents who have the ability and obligation to follow Christ. Thus, the education and discipleship of children is a necessary and valuable ministry.
- Third, the verb used to indicate the responsibility of children and servants, “obey” (*hypakouō*), is stronger than the term used with respect to wives, “submit” (*hypotassō*). Although both indicate yielding to the authority of another, the term used here is stronger, with a connotation of absolute obedience.
- Fourth, children are to obey both of their parents, not just the father. The wife not only yields to authority, she also exercises it in her own sphere. We tend to devalue this authority, because we judge in human terms (“they’re only children”). But God values the souls of children as highly as those of adults (Mt. 18:10).
- vv. 2-3 Paul’s appeal to the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) affirms its continuing validity as moral law; i.e. that which is “right” (v. 1). This is not an endorsement of the entire Old Testament legal code, nor even of all ten commandments, but a recognition that this law expressed an ethical obligation which is not limited to either the old or new covenants. That is why a failure of children to respect and obey their parents is evidence of depravity, even for those who do not have the Bible (Mt. 10:21; Mk. 13:12; Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2).
- The fact that this is the first of the Ten Commandments with an explicit promise attached is an added incentive to heed it. Note that Paul has modified the promise to replace “in the land” (i.e., Israel) with “on the earth”. Nevertheless, the fact that he repeats, not only the law, but also the promise, indicates that both remain applicable today. Should we take this in a literal, temporal sense, or in a spiritual, prophetic sense? Yes. Those who respect and obey their parents can generally look forward to earthly blessings and longer lives. But this does not exhaust the promise; those things are a foretaste of the greater blessings and eternal life to come.
- v. 4 In the words of scholar A.T. Lincoln, quoted in Peter O’Brien’s commentary, the type of conduct likely to provoke one’s children to anger, and thus to be avoided, would include, “excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child’s needs and sensibilities”. In other words, fathers should treat their children with consideration and kindness, rather than crushing their spirits. One reason for this is that the father has a responsibility to instruct and guide his children in following Christ. It will be difficult to do that if they hate him.
- vv. 5-8 Paul is not here addressing the issue of slavery in society (see 1 Cor. 7:21-24). Rather he is answering the question of how those who found themselves in a position of slavery should conduct themselves. The core of his exhortation is that their service, although involuntary according to the law, was to be sincere and diligent. They were not only to work when their labor could be observed, or for the purpose of currying favor, but they were to devote themselves to their work “from the heart” as if they were serving Christ, which in fact they were. Why? Because the goal of their labor was not only to benefit and serve people; it had a greater purpose—to honor and glorify Christ. And so His reward was the one they were ultimately seeking (see Mt. 6:33).
- In a way, this subtly subverts the master/slave relationship. For one who serves voluntarily is not truly a slave, but at heart a free man or woman. Consider Christ’s teaching that “*If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles*” (Mt. 5:41). A Roman soldier could legally require a citizen to carry his equipment for one mile, but choosing to go further transformed the armor-bearer from an unwilling conscript into a volunteer. As Paul writes in 1 Cor. 7:22, “*the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person*”. Or take an example from popular culture: In the movie, “Cool Hand Luke”, there is a scene in which the prisoners make a contest out of tarring the road, replacing oppressive drudgery with enjoyment. In the process, they challenge the guards’ view of them and also their view of themselves.
- Can an employee apply Eph. 6:5-8? Since people in the ancient world often entered into slavery in order to pay off a debt, the parallels with those who work today to pay off mortgages and car loans are strong. According to Proverbs 22:7, “the borrower is slave to the lender”.
- v. 9 Paul’s point here is that, contrary to common practice in the ancient world, slaves are not to be treated as mere property, to be abused and threatened. They are fellow servants of Christ, to be treated with respect and dignity. On the last day, masters will be judged by the same standard as their slaves. Thus, slaves and their masters are both accountable to God, and equal before Him.

Unit 12 – Be Strong in the Lord

Ephesians 6:10-24

Text

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

²¹ Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.

²³ Peace to the brothers and sisters,^a and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.^b

^a23 The Greek word for brothers and sisters (adelphoi) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God's family. ^b24 Or Grace and immortality to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Open

- Have you served in the military, or do you know someone who has? How does military life, especially in wartime, differ from civilian life?

Discover

1. Circle the words or phrases in this passages which indicate the challenges that we will face as we follow Christ. How does this compare with the view that is presented in the popular Christian media?
2. What do the following verses tell us about what we can expect as followers of Christ?

Luke 9:23-24

John 15:18-25

Luke 14:25-33

John 16:33

1 Peter 4:12

2 Corinthians 12:10

3. Who is our primary opponent? (vv. 11-12; 1 Jn. 5:19) How does this affect the way in which we do battle?

4. In this battle, are we on the offensive, or defensive? (vv. 10-17; see 2 Cor. 10:4)

5. Given the strength, cleverness, and ruthlessness of our enemy, how can we survive and prevail?

6. What will happen if we do not do this?

7. What will be the eventual outcome of this conflict? How can we be assured of this?

John 16:11	Hebrews 2:14
Colossians 2:15	Ephesians 1:19-22
1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 56-57	Revelation 20:7-10

8. In the space below, identify the various components of the armor of God, and why each is important.

Apply

How have you found prayer to make a difference in facing your own struggles?

How has this passage either changed or reinforced your view of the Christian life?

Commentary

v. 10 **“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”** Paul concludes this letter on a sobering, yet confident, note. We must recognize that a life dedicated to following Christ will be a life of struggle, one that requires perseverance and strength. It will be a life of hardships and difficulties, a life of *“conflicts on the outside, fears within”* (2 Cor. 7:5; 12:10). At times, we may be *“under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we [despair] of life itself”* (2 Cor. 1:8). And so a decision to set out on this journey must not be taken lightly (Lk. 9:23-24; 14:25-33). But often we forget this. Thus, we react with surprise, outrage, or plaintive bewilderment when the floods of life overwhelm the levees which we have built to keep out the pain and chaos of this fallen world. We react as if something strange and unexpected were happening to us (1 Pet. 4:12), rather than exactly what Christ promised would occur (Jn. 15:18-25; 16:33).

How then, can we succeed, and reach our goal (Phil. 3:12-14), rather than failing? By recognizing that the strength and power we need are not within ourselves but come from the Lord, and by drawing on that power daily through prayer and obedient faith. As Paul writes in 2 Cor. 12:9-11:

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

If we do this, then no matter how life may disappoint or assault us, we will not be destroyed. It may not be pretty, but we will prevail; we will stand. (v. 13; Isa. 40:29-31; 43:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:7-10; Phil. 4:12-13).

v. 11 **“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”** This description draws upon Old Testament passages (Isa. 11:4-5; 59:17) in which God puts on his armor in order to do battle on behalf of his people. Thus, the armor is “of” God in the sense that it comes from him, and also in the sense that it belongs to him. It is his own power and weaponry which we receive. This armor is both offensive and defensive; needed for attacking Satan’s strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4) and also for extinguishing “all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (v. 16). The use of martial imagery underscores the deadly seriousness of our work. Although it is spiritual rather than physical, this is none the less real warfare, with all the tragedy, heroism, suffering, and glory which that term implies. But the stakes are infinitely greater than in ordinary warfare: the eternal souls of men rather than their mortal bodies (Mt. 10:28).

Two things can be noted concerning this war. First, that only as we are clothed in God’s armor, and using his weapons, can we prevail against Satan. To rush into spiritual battle without being equipped in this way would be presumptuous and ultimately disastrous (Acts 19:13-16; Num. 14:39-45). And second, the outcome of this war is not in doubt; Christ won the victory when he died on the cross and rose from the dead (Jn. 16:11; 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 56-57; Eph. 1:19-22; 4:8; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14). Although the battle still rages, Satan is a defeated foe, and he knows that his time is growing short (Mt. 8:29).

v. 12 The Greek word used here is not one of the generic terms for “battle” or “struggle”, but *palē*, which means wrestling, or grappling. Here, it implies hand-to-hand combat. This kind of battle is up close and personal, which means that the likelihood of engaging in it without getting bruised and bloodied is very slight. To say that our struggle is “not against flesh and blood” does not mean that no human agency is involved (2 Cor. 11:13-15). But ultimately, those who are pulling the strings, either directly, or indirectly through the corrupt economic, religious, political, and social structures of this world, are Satan and the demonic beings who serve his purposes (v. 16; Lk. 4:5-6; Eph. 2:2; Jam. 3:15; 1 Jn. 5:19). These powers have no authority over believers; we have been transferred out of their domain through faith in Christ (Col. 1:13).

v. 13 Note that Paul does not say “if”, but “when” the day of evil comes. This “day of evil” has been understood as: (1) the present age as a whole; i.e. the time between Christ’s resurrection and his return (Eph. 5:16; Gal. 1:4), (2) a specific time prior to Christ’s return when Satan will be especially active, or, (3) any time in a believer’s life when he or she is under attack spiritually.

In the end, the application for us is the same, whether all, any, or a combination of these is intended: Christians must at all times be clothed in the armor of God and ready to resist the work of Satan, both in their own lives and in the world.

vv. 14-15 For the fourth time in this passage, Paul uses the term “stand” to indicate how we should respond to the enemy. We are not to flee, or retreat, or cower in fear; rather, we must stand firm in opposition to Satan and his works. As Charles Spurgeon put it, in his book, “An All-Round Ministry”,

“Forward is your only way; you are shut up to it. You have no armor for your backs; and whatever dangers lie in front, there are ten thousand times as many behind. It is onward or nothing; nay, onward or dishonor; onward or death.”

The "**belt of truth**" could refer to two kinds of truth addressed in this letter: the facts of the gospel message (1:13; 4:21), and also the outworking of the gospel in the life of the believer (4:15; 4:25; 5:9). Both of these, the word itself and the testimony of its power in our lives, are needed to refute the lies of Satan (Jn. 8:44). Putting on a belt ("girding up one's loins" in the language of the King James Version) implies a readiness for decisive action (see Ex. 12:11; 1 Ki. 18:46; 2 Ki. 9:1; Jer. 1:17; Job 38:3; Lk. 12:35; 1 Pet. 1:13).

The "**breastplate of righteousness**" (see Isa. 59:17) could indicate either the forensic, or legal, righteousness by which we are declared holy through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:22; 4:5), or the moral and ethical behavior which characterizes those who are in Christ (Rom. 6:19; 14:17; 2 Cor. 9:10; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 12:11; 1 Jn. 2:29). The second meaning would be consistent with the use of the term in Ephesians (4:24; 5:9). However, since the two are inseparable (1 Jn. 3:7, 10), Paul may not intend a distinction here.

The phrase, "**feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace**" refers to Isa. 52:7, "*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace*". Here, the "readiness of the gospel" could be the readiness which *comes from* the gospel, as the NIV translation implies. In that case, it would be a general readiness to engage and resist the enemy (Jam. 4:7). Or, it could be a readiness to *share* the gospel; i.e. being prepared to spread the good news about Christ.

The peace which the gospel brings, and which we announce, is the peace with God that results from the propitiation of our sins (Eph. 2:17; Rom. 5:1), and also peace between Jew and non-Jew, which results from the barrier of the Mosaic Law being removed (Eph. 2:14-15)

- v. 16 This **shield** (*gr. thureos*) was the *scutum*, a large, semi-cylindrical shield with an oblong or rectangular shape. It covered the whole body, measuring about 2 ½ feet in width and 4 feet in height. This is the shield which would be used to shelter a Roman soldier when under a barrage of arrows. Similarly, our faith protects us and allows us to persevere when Satan's attacks are raining down on our heads; it "extinguishes" them, rendering them ineffective.
- v. 17 While a helmet was primarily defensive, a sword was primarily offensive. The phrase "**sword of the Spirit**" could indicate "the sword which is the Spirit", but more likely it means "the sword which the Spirit wields; i.e., the word of God" (see 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:5). The Scriptures were inspired by the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16), and he is the one who makes them powerful (Heb. 4:12).

- v. 18 In order to be strong (v. 10), to make effective use of the armor of God (v. 13), and to stand firm (v. 14), we must pray. Without prayer, there will be no power and no strength (Eph. 3:16; see Judg. 16:28; Neh. 6:9; Mt. 26:41; Lk. 21:36; 22:32; Col. 4:2-3; 2 Thess. 1:11; Jam. 5:16). The crucial importance of prayer is underlined by the repetition of "all" phrases: "on all occasions", "with all kinds of prayers", "always keep on praying", and "for all the Lord's people". In other words, there is no circumstance when we ought not to be in prayer; no type of prayer that we should omit; no time of the week or time of life when it is safe to neglect prayer; and no person for whom we should not pray. Our churches, our marriages, our families, our ministries, and our vocations should all be saturated with prayer (Luke 18:1; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17). To do otherwise makes us spiritually weak and leaves us open and vulnerable to Satan's attacks. A failure to pray indicates spiritual complacency and lethargy instead of the alertness which the Scriptures command (1 Pet. 4:7; 5:8)

We are to pray "in the Spirit", i.e., to pray as we are guided and enabled by the Spirit (see Eph. 5:18). Since the Holy Spirit lives in every believer (Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:4-16; Gal. 5:25; 6:1; 2 Tim. 1:14), such prayer does not require a special mystical experience, but rather a willingness to submit to what the Spirit is teaching us through the word of God.

- vv. 19-20 The fact that Paul requests prayer for himself emphasizes how necessary prayer is for all of us. If Paul, author of several books of the New Testament, needed prayer that the right words might be given him, then certainly we need to pray for our own communications as well. If Paul needed prayers for courage, this being a man who faced down murderous mobs (Acts 14:19), assassination attempts (Acts 23:12), "wild beasts" (1 Cor. 15:32), arrests, imprisonments, whippings, beatings, and many other perils (2 Cor. 11:24-26), then how much more do we need prayer in order to prevail in our own struggles!
- vv. 21-24 Note that vv. 21-22 matches Col. 4:7-8, indicating perhaps that both letters were written at the same time and sent by the hand of Tychicus on the same journey. The fact that we are studying this letter twenty centuries later indicates that Paul's appraisal of him as a "faithful servant", one who could be entrusted with such a precious missive, was accurate. What a loss it would have been to the church if he had failed in his task! May we be equally faithful in bringing the truths of this epistle to the world in which we live, and to the next generation.

Acknowledgments

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