

Notes on Ephesians

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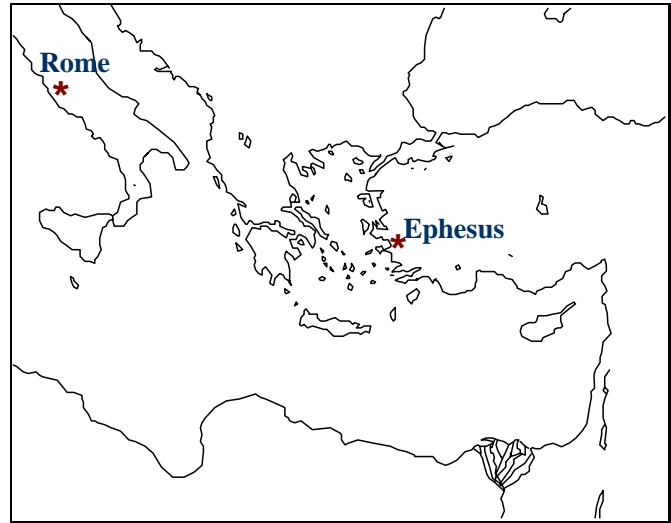
Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Almost all Christians believed in the Pauline authorship of Ephesians—until the nineteenth century, when destructive biblical criticism gained much influence (cf. 1:1; 3:1).¹ The critics built a case against Pauline authorship from linguistic and stylistic features, literary comparisons chiefly with Colossians, historical evidence, and doctrinal peculiarities.

"When all the objections are carefully considered it will be seen that the weight of evidence is inadequate to overthrow the overwhelming external attestation to Pauline authorship, and the Epistle's own claims."²

Most conservative New Testament scholars hold to the tradition that Paul wrote Ephesians along with Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians, the other "Prison Epistles," during his first Roman imprisonment, A.D. 60-62 (3:1; 4:1; 6:20; cf. Acts 28:16-31). During that time Paul was under house arrest. He lived in his own rented quarters, under guard by Roman soldiers. He was allowed visitors and could minister, without hindrance, as far as his confinement permitted (Acts 28:16, 30-31). He was not chained in a prison cell at this time, as he was during his second Roman imprisonment when he wrote 2



Timothy (cf. 2 Tim. 1:16). For some interpreters, the reference in 2 Timothy 4:12, to Paul having recently sent Tychicus to Ephesus, seems to put the composition of Ephesians in the second imprisonment (cf. Eph. 6:21-22). However, the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians have led most scholars to conclude that Paul wrote these two letters at the

¹See the charts of which scholars held Pauline authorship and which did not in Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 9-20.

²Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:127. See also Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 480-86.

same time.³ The evidence for his having written Colossians and Philemon during the first imprisonment is strong.

"Ephesians bears much the same relation to Colossians that Romans does to Galatians, a fuller treatment of the same general theme in a more detached and impersonal manner."⁴

Robertson believed Paul wrote Colossians before Ephesians. A significant difference between these very similar epistles is that in Colossians, Paul was combating a false doctrine concerning Christ. In Ephesians, he did not address a particular problem or situation that occasioned that epistle.

Paul knew Ephesus and the church in that city very well. He had ministered in Asia Minor, the Roman province of which Ephesus was the capital, with Ephesus as his headquarters, for about three years: A.D. 53-56 (Acts 19:1—20:1). It appears that he sent this epistle to the Ephesian church, so that the Christians there would subsequently circulate it among the other churches.⁵ At least three other New Testament books went first to Ephesus: 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:1). John's Gospel and his three epistles probably did as well. Tychicus evidently delivered this epistle to the Ephesian church (Eph. 6:21-22).

PURPOSE

Paul's frequent references to the church as a "mystery" (secret), previously unknown but now revealed, identify the apostle's main purpose in writing, as having been the exposition of the mystery of the church (1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). His emphasis on the church as Christ's body, in which both Jewish and Gentile believers are one, suggests that Paul wrote to promote *unity* in the Ephesian church and in the universal church. The emphasis on the importance of *love* is also strong.⁶ More than one-sixth of Paul's references to "love" in his 13 epistles occur in Ephesians. This also shows that he wanted to promote Christian unity in the church.

"Possibly realizing that the Ephesians were starting to forsake their first love, Paul wrote this letter to encourage them to love both God and their fellow saints more deeply."⁷

"The letter focuses on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and does through his Spirit today, in order to build his new society in the midst of the old."⁸

³See the chart of comparisons of Ephesians and Colossians in Hoehner, p. 34.

⁴A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:514.

⁵See my comments on 1:1.

⁶See Hoehner, pp. 104-6.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 106. Cf. Rev. 2:4.

⁸John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 24.

EMPHASES

In addition to the church and love, Ephesians emphasizes God's action in planning, decreeing, and providing salvation, the importance of the Christian's growth in knowledge, the importance of living out one's faith consistently, and spiritual warfare. Ephesians is one of the most well-loved of Paul's epistles, because it is both very important doctrinally and extremely practical.

GENRE

Though the general genre of Ephesians is a letter, it is not a letter in the same form as most of Paul's other letters. There is no evidence in Ephesians that Paul wrote it to respond to a particular situation; it is not an "occasional" epistle. In this, it is similar to Romans. Both epistles are more like public speeches than private conversations.

"He [the writer] is meditating, and developing certain thoughts—and clothes them in the form of a letter."⁹

OUTLINE

- I. Salutation 1:1-2
- II. The Christian's calling 1:3—3:21
 - A. Individual calling 1:3—2:10
 - 1. The purpose: glory 1:3-14
 - 2. The means: knowledge 1:15-23
 - 3. The motive: grace 2:1-10
 - B. Corporate calling 2:11-3:19
 - 1. Present unity 2:11-22
 - 2. Past ignorance 3:1-13
 - 3. Future comprehension 3:14-19
 - C. Doxology 3:20-21
- III. The Christian's conduct 4:1—6:20
 - A. Spiritual walk 4:1—6:9
 - 1. Walking in unity 4:1-16
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 - 3. Walking in love 5:1-6
 - 4. Walking in light 5:7-14
 - 5. Walking in wisdom 5:15—6:9
 - B. Spiritual warfare 6:10-20
- IV. Conclusion 6:21-24

⁹Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 192.

MESSAGE

The Book of Ephesians enables us to view God's creation from an alpine altitude. When we study this book, it is as though we have climbed a high mountain peak, because the book gives us that kind of perspective on what God has created. Recall the opening scenes in "The Sound of Music" movie, where Maria Von Trapp is standing in a high meadow looking out over the valleys and mountains beyond. Yet the "creation" Ephesians opens up to our vision is not the physical creation, but the church and its position and importance in the panorama of God's program. The church is the subject of Ephesians. The church began on the Day of Pentecost, and will end at the Rapture.

One of the features of this book, that distinguishes it from other Pauline epistles, is its universal character. Ephesians deals with matters of perspective that are important to all churches of all periods of church history. Ephesians is not like 1 Corinthians, which concerns itself primarily with the situation of one local congregation. It is more like Romans, which deals with the great revelations that transcend local church polity.

Ephesians is an exposition of one of the most important statements Jesus ever uttered during His earthly ministry. That statement is in Matthew 16:18: "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." Various epistles similarly expound other teachings that Jesus gave while He walked this earth. For example, the Epistle of James is an exposition of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. John's first epistle is an exposition of Jesus' Upper Room Discourse. Likewise, Ephesians explains Jesus' teaching concerning the church. All the New Testament epistles deal with the church, of course. But Ephesians lifts us above all the other revelation on this subject, and puts the church in perspective within the plan of God. Paul developed both the building of the church and the conflict of the church, suggested in Jesus' statement, in Ephesians.

Paul introduced the central teaching of Ephesians in its first verse. We read, "To the saints . . . in Christ Jesus." This phrase indicates the composition of the church, and it alerts us to what will follow in the epistle. The phrase "the saints" reflects the diversity and differences that exist within the church. Paul had much to say in this letter about God's individual blessing of believers (e.g., 1:3—2:10). However, the phrase "in Christ Jesus" emphasizes the unification of these *individuals* in one united church. Paul also had much to say about the *corporate* calling of believers in this letter (e.g., 2:11—3:19). The church is one *organism* that God has created from individual believers in this age, whom God has united in a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. The figure of the human body, with its diverse members controlled by one head (2:14-16), is the perfect illustration of the church.

As we examine the central teaching in Ephesians, we can see that it falls into two parts. First, there is revelation concerning the *eternal character* of the church. Second, there is teaching about the *temporal conduct* of the church.

Consider first the revelation concerning the eternal character of the church. Ephesians tells us three things about the character of the church.

First, it reveals its *conception*. The church was in the plan of God from eternity past. It was not something that God devised (concocted) on the day that Jesus Christ died because the Jews had rejected their Messiah. Some dispensational expositors have referred to the church as a "parenthetical" part of God's eternal plan. That does not mean the church was an after-thought by God. The church is just as much a part of God's plan for human history as the nation of Israel. God did not reveal it in the Old Testament. It was a mystery, a New Testament revelation not previously revealed. Nevertheless it was always part of God's plan. This is important for us to realize, because when we see that God brought the church into existence, it is easier to believe that Satan will never destroy the church.

The second thing Ephesians reveals about the eternal character of the church is its *construction*. Whereas God viewed the church in the past as part of His eternal plan, He is constructing it in the present by His eternal power. In Ephesians, there is much emphasis on "power"—the tremendous power of God. Paul prayed that his readers would grow in their understanding of the eternal power of God, the power that raised Jesus from the grave (1:18-19). Paul used four different Greek words for power in 1:19. This "resurrection power" is the same power that has raised the Christian up, and seated him or her with Christ in the heavenly realms now (2:4-6). Also, it is the same power available to us Christians as we engage our spiritual enemy, who is trying to tear down the church (6:10-11). Too often Christians fail because they think the church cannot succeed. They fail to appreciate the eternal divine power presently available to build the church and to defeat its foes.

The third thing we learn from this epistle about the character of the church is its *consummation*. This too involves an eternal perspective. Ephesians reveals that the church will serve the purpose of God throughout eternity future (2:4-7; 3:8-10). The church will demonstrate the richness of God's *grace* to all beings forever (2:7). It will also demonstrate the richness of God's wisdom to all beings forever (3:10).

In summary, Ephesians reveals the important place that the church has in God's eternal plan for history. In the past, He conceived of it as part of His eternal plan. In the present, He is constructing it with His eternal power. In the future, He will bring it to consummation in fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

Whereas the revelation of the church's eternal character constitutes a major portion of this epistle, Paul also taught much about the *temporal conduct* of the church. The church's eternal character has major implications for its temporal conduct (4:1). We can organize this part of the revelation under three headings as well.

The first implication of the character of the church that Paul stressed relates to its "construction." Since the church is what it is, the unified body of Christ, it is very important that Christians preserve this unity (4:1-3). Note that this is not a unity among professing Christians that we must achieve. It is a unity among genuine Christians that we must preserve. We must be very careful to avoid causing divisions in the body of Christ. One of the seven things Solomon wrote that the Lord hates is someone who spreads strife among his brothers (Prov. 6:19).

A second implication of the character of the church relates to its "confession." The church, Paul urged, must make a confession, or give testimony, to God. This is the will of God (5:15-17). Christians do this by sanctifying all of life to God, setting it apart to Him for His honor and glory. Consequently, Paul talked about the basic relationships of life—husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees. Our faith must have an impact on these relationships. The church makes its confession before the world, not primarily by formulating creeds of belief, but by demonstrating sanctification in conduct.

Third, another implication of the character of the church that Paul explained relates to its "conflict" with the forces opposed to God's purposes. Christians must arm themselves, stay alert, and take a stand against these spiritual forces (6:10-11).

To summarize, the church must maintain unity as it grows. It must sanctify every relationship as it makes its confession to the world. And it must stand firm against its spiritual enemies as it conflicts with Satan's forces. These points clarify Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." The church cooperates with God as He builds it in three ways. First, it must remain united itself. Second, it must present a message of purity and holiness to the world by its sanctified relationships. And third, it must fight God's enemies after putting on the whole armor of God.

Attempting to summarize the teaching of Ephesians into a short message statement, I would phrase it this way. Ephesians reveals that the church is part of God's eternal plan, and it grows as a result of God's power working through believers' lives, overcoming their spiritual enemies.

We consider next the abiding appeal that this letter contains. I previously said that Paul summarized the central revelation of Ephesians in 1:1: "the saints . . . in Christ Jesus." Similarly, he summarized the timeless exhortation of this letter in 4:1: "Walk . . . worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

First, Christians are to walk *in view of God's eternal plan*. That is, we should live now with God's purposes throughout eternity clearly in view. God chose us before the creation of the world so that He could conform us to the image of His Son (1:4; Rom. 8:29). We are to "grow up . . . into Him . . . even Christ" (4:15). The extent to which we are living in holiness and in love is the extent to which we are conforming to God's eternal plan. Paul did not tell us to be holy because decency demands it, or because God may discipline us if we do not. We are to live thinking about God's eternal plan and remembering that God had our individual lives in His mind from eternity past. Reading Scripture regularly is one way to remind ourselves of this.

Second, we can walk according to God's plan only by *appropriating His almighty power*. God is able to enable us to walk in this plan by His power. "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding . . ." (3:20-21). We have the power to walk worthily. However, we must allow God's Spirit to control us if we want to walk in harmony with God's will (5:18). This involves consciously yielding control to Him (cf. Rom. 6:13).

Third, we are to walk *opposing God's unseen enemies*, as well as in view of God's eternal plan and appropriating God's almighty power. We need to balance the passive "be filled with the Spirit" with the active "stand firm" (6:14). Our enemies are not primarily other people but the unseen demonic personalities behind them. In former years, many people scoffed at the idea of demons and malignant spiritual forces. Today, there is a more realistic awareness of their existence and powerful influence in the world. We must engage spiritual enemies with spiritual arms: truthfulness, righteous conduct, the gospel, trust in God, the Word of God appropriate to the need, and prayer (6:14-18).

Finally, let us apply the message of this epistle to ourselves.

The measure of the church's power to change the world is the measure of her other-worldliness. Many in our day criticize the church for being uninvolved, or at least not involved enough, with the physical problems of people. Ephesians teaches us that the way to help people the most is by dealing with unseen issues: unity, love, holiness, prayer, and evangelism. We do the church's work much more effectively by praying, than by picketing, protesting, or politicking. The measure of the church's power to help the world is the measure of her other-worldliness. The church must remember her heavenly calling in the eternal plan of God in order to realize all that God purposes for her.

"The church of God can never help God when she ceases to be other-worldly. When she is other-worldly she helps the world; and cannot avoid doing so."¹⁰

Conversely, the measure of the church's other-worldliness is the measure of her influence in the world. If we really see God's purpose for the church, we can never remain unconcerned about, or uninvolved with, the physical problems of people. Was our Lord insensitive to suffering, unconcerned about injustice, or lacking in compassion toward the oppressed? Never! And He is the Head into whom we are to grow up.¹¹

¹⁰G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:183.

¹¹Adapted from *ibid.*, 2:1:167-84.

Exposition

I. SALUTATION 1:1-2

In most of his epistles, Paul began by setting forth foundational truth, and then concluded by applying that truth to the lives of his readers. This pattern is very obvious in Ephesians, where the first three chapters deal with doctrine (teaching), and the last three with practice (application). Of course, there is some doctrine in the last three chapters and some application in the first three, but generally this is how Paul organized his material. Compare the Book of Romans, in which chapters 1—11 contain mainly doctrine and chapters 12—16 mostly practice.

The salutation contains Paul's introduction of himself to the original recipients of this letter and his greeting to them.

1:1 Paul referred to himself by name, twice, as the writer of this book (cf. 3:1). Even though some critics have denied the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, largely because of the vocabulary, style, and doctrine it contains, the early church accepted it without dispute.¹²

"Ephesians, then, was unhesitatingly assigned to Paul from the time when the New Testament corpus began to be recognized as such in the mid-second century. Since Clement of Rome reflected its language when he wrote to Corinth in A.D. 95, it is likely that this attestation runs back to the first century."¹³

The New Testament writers used the word "apostle" (lit. "sent one") in either a general or in a particular sense. Sometimes it refers generally to anyone sent out as a representative of Jesus Christ (Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). A modern equivalent would be a missionary. Usually it refers to one of the 12 apostles or Paul who saw the risen Christ, as here. The Lord Jesus commissioned and sent Paul out with the gospel message. Paul received his apostleship on the Damascus Road because of God's "will" or decision, not his own choosing (Acts 26:16-18).

The original recipients of this epistle were "saints" (Gr. *hagiois*, holy ones), people set apart by God for His use. They lived in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia, where Paul had ministered for three years during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:31).

The words "at Ephesus" or "in Ephesus" do not appear in three early Alexandrian (Egyptian) manuscripts. This omission has led some scholars to conclude that Paul originally sent this epistle to several undesigned

¹²W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 357.

¹³A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in *Ephesians-Philemon*, vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 4.

local churches, probably in the province of Asia, for the recipients to circulate among them. Advocates of this view have pointed to the absence of any reference to individuals, as evidence that Paul meant it to go to several churches rather than just to the Ephesian church. However, it seems best to regard the Ephesian church as the original audience for the following reasons: Most ancient manuscripts do contain the words "at Ephesus" or "in Ephesus." Moreover, no manuscript contains the name of any other city, or even the Greek words translated "at" or "in." Furthermore, all of Paul's other inspired epistles mention the recipients.

Perhaps Paul omitted personal names of Ephesian believers because he felt no need to greet them, since this letter would circulate to other churches, as well. Another possible reason may be that if he had named believers, he would have had to mention many, since he knew so many in the Ephesian church.

It is quite possible that Paul intended Ephesians to be an encyclical letter. All the New Testament writings circulated among the churches, and Paul may have written Ephesians with this in view (cf. Col. 4:16). Since Ephesus was a strategic city in both the Roman Empire and in Paul's ministry, it would have been natural for him to send this letter to that city first.

Not all saints are "faithful" (2 Tim. 2:13), but the Ephesian believers were. They had been holding fast to the teaching they had received when Paul wrote this epistle (cf. Acts 20:28-32; Rev. 2:1-7).

"In Christ" describes all who are saints. Every believer occupies a location in space. These saints were in Ephesus. However, every Christian saint also lives within the sphere of God's family because of Jesus' saving work, which Paul spoke of as being "in Christ." This phrase was a favorite of Paul's. He used it nine times in 1:1-14 and about 27 times in this epistle. It occurs approximately 130 times in the New Testament. Much of what follows in chapters 1—3 is an explanation of what it means to be "in Christ."

"Thus our being in Christ means that the Lord Jesus surrounds and embraces the believer in His own life, and separates him at the same time from all outside and hostile influences. He protects the believer from all perils and foes, and supplies him with all that is necessary. In Ephesians the meaning of this being 'in Christ' reaches its highest thought. The peculiar truth in Ephesians is the heavenly nature and divine fullness of this sphere of our new life."¹⁴

¹⁴August Van Ryn, *Ephesians: The Glory of His Grace*, p. 17. See also A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Some Observations on Paul's Use of the Phrases 'In Christ' and 'With Christ,'" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (October 1985):83-97.

"That phrase *in Christ* strikes the keynote of the entire Epistle; from that prolific germ ramifies the branching oak of the forest."¹⁵

1:2 Paul greeted his readers by wishing God's "grace" and "peace" on them, as he did in all of his other epistles. "Grace" (Gr. *charis*) expresses God's unmerited favor and divine enablement, which are the portion of every saint. "Peace" (Gr. *eirene*, which translates the Hebrew *shalom*) is our condition resulting from God's grace to us. We have peace *with* God, and we can experience the peace *of* God—the fullness of His blessing—because of His grace (cf. Num. 6:25-26).

"So if we want a concise summary of the good news which the whole letter announces, we could not find a better one than the three monosyllables 'peace through grace'."¹⁶

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING 1:3—3:21

". . . the first three chapters are *one long prayer*, culminating in the great doxology at the end of chapter 3. There is in fact nothing like this in all Paul's letters. This is the language of lyrical prayer, not the language of argument, and controversy, and rebuke."¹⁷

A. INDIVIDUAL CALLING 1:3—2:10

Paul began the body of his letter by revealing the spiritual blessings that God has planned for believers in His Son.

"The opening section of Ephesians (1:3—2:10), which describes the new life God has given us in Christ, divides itself naturally into two halves, the first consisting of praise and the second of prayer. In the 'praise' half Paul blesses God that he has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (1:3-14), while in the 'prayer' half he asks that God will open our eyes to grasp the fullness of this blessing (1:15—2:10)."¹⁸

1. The purpose: glory 1:3-14

In the Greek text, verses 3-14 are one sentence. The Holy Spirit carried Paul along in his thinking, as he contemplated God's provision, so that he moved quickly from one blessing to the next. It is as though he was ecstatically opening a treasure chest, lifting its jewels with his hands, letting them cascade through his fingers, and marveling briefly at them as they caught his eye.

¹⁵E. K. Simpson, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, p. 24.

¹⁶Stott, p. 28.

¹⁷William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 76.

¹⁸Stott, p. 31.

"Each section ends with a note of praise for God (vv. 6, 11, 14), focusing on a different member of the Trinity. After an opening summary of all the saints' spiritual blessings (v. 3), the first section (vv. 4-6) offers up praise that the Father has chosen us in eternity past; the second section (vv. 7-11) offers up praise that the Son has redeemed us in the historical past (i.e., at the cross); the third section (vv. 12-14) offers up praise that the Holy Spirit has sealed us in our personal past, at the point of conversion."¹⁹

"Normally, after the greeting Paul gives an introductory thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter. In this epistle he changes the order, for before he gives his thanksgiving in verses 15-23, he has in verses 3-14 a paean of praise for what God has done for the believer."²⁰

". . . Ephesians 1:3-14 is one of the longest psalms of the New Testament, and it is a praise psalm in its form."²¹

The believer's position in Christ 1:3

"This verse marks not only the introduction but also the main sentence of the eulogy. It is in essence a summary of the whole eulogy."²²

God is "blessed" because He "has blessed" believers. However, Christians should also bless or praise (Gr. *eulogetos*, speak well of) God the Father for bestowing these blessings. Paul was thinking of God as both the Father of believers ("our Father"; v. 2), and the Father of His Son ("Father of the Lord Jesus Christ"; v. 3). God has *already* blessed believers in the ways the apostle proceeded to identify. This blessing happened before creation, as will become evident in the following verses. "Spiritual" blessings are benefits that relate to our spiritual life in contrast to our physical life. In Israel, God's promised blessings were mainly physical, but in the church, they are mainly spiritual. Since God has already given us these things, we do not need to ask for them, but should appropriate them by faith—and give thanks for them.

"When you were born again into God's family, you were born rich."²³

"In the heavenly places" or "realms" refers to the location from which these blessings come. The heavenly realms are where Paul spoke of the believer as being presently in his or her spiritual life. Whereas physically we are on the earth, spiritually we are already with Christ in the heavens (cf. v. 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). God has united us with Jesus Christ, so we are in that sense with Him where He is now. When we die, our immaterial part will go into Christ's presence (2 Cor. 5:6-8). When God resurrects our bodies, they will go into His presence and unite with our immaterial part. Presently our lives are

¹⁹The NET Bible note on 1:3.

²⁰Hoehner, p. 153.

²¹Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Paul's Prison Epistles," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 309. Cf. Luke 1:46-55 and 1:67-79.

²²Hoehner, p. 162.

²³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:9.

already with the Lord—spiritually—"in the heavenly" realms. We are there because of our present union with Christ. We are "in Christ." The expression "in Christ" and its parallels occur 36 times in Ephesians.²⁴

Union with Christ by saving faith places us in the "heavenly" realms. *Ouranos* (heaven or heavenly) appears in 1:10; 3:15; 4:10; and 6:9, while *epouranios* (heaven or heavenly realms) occurs in 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; and 6:12.

"*En tois epouraniois* [in the heavens or heavenlies] is the location of the current conflict in which believers participate through their presence there 'in' Christ. But *hoi epouranioi* [the heavens or heavenlies] in Ephesians is primarily viewed as the location of the exalted Christ, the place where He now is and from which He exercises His universal sovereignty in the present age."²⁵

"The key thought of *Ephesians* is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ."²⁶

"Ephesians 1:3 tells much about God's blessings on believers: (a) *when*: eternity past; (b): *with what*: every spiritual [not material] blessing; (c): *where*: in the heavenly realms; (d): *how*: in Christ."²⁷

"Ephesus was considered the bank of Asia. One of the seven wonders of the world, the great temple of Diana, was in Ephesus, and was not only a center for idolatrous worship, but also a depository for wealth. . . .

"Paul's letter to the Ephesians is as carefully structured as that great temple of Diana, and it contains greater beauty and wealth!"²⁸

The selection of the Father 1:4-6

The spiritual blessings that have come to us are the work of all three members of the Trinity. God Himself is the basis of these blessings.

1:4 The first blessing is election. God has sovereignly "chosen" some people for salvation (cf. v. 11; Rom. 8:30; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 1:1). Salvation is ultimately God's doing, not man's (Eph. 2:8-9). Belief in divine election is probably the most fundamental tenet of Calvinistic theology. Someone who denies it is not a Calvinist. Salvation comes to the elect when they trust in Jesus Christ (v. 13; 2 Thess. 2:13).

"Now everybody finds the doctrine of election difficult.
'Didn't I choose God?' somebody asks indignantly; to which

²⁴For a chart, see Hoehner, pp. 173-74.

²⁵W. Hall Harris, "'The Heavenlies' Reconsidered: *Ouranos* and *Epouranios* in Ephesians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):89.

²⁶Barclay, p. 77.

²⁷Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 616.

²⁸Wiersbe, 2:10.

we must answer 'Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first chosen you.' 'Didn't I decide for Christ?' asks somebody else; to which we must reply 'Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first decided for you.'"²⁹

"It [election] involves a paradox that the New Testament does not seek to resolve, and that our finite minds cannot fathom. Paul emphasizes both the sovereign purpose of God and man's free will."³⁰

God chose us "in Him" (Christ, v. 3) in the sense that He is our representative. When we trusted Christ as Savior, we became a member of the redeemed race, within mankind, of which Jesus Christ is the Head (vv. 10, 22; Rom. 5:12-21; Col. 1:18). God has ordained that all the elect should be under Christ's authority. Some interpreters have concluded that God chose Jesus, and that all who believe in Him become elect by their faith (but not individually "chosen" by God).³¹ However, this verse states that God chose "us" to be in Christ.

"Though it is true that Christ is God's Elect One (Isa 42:1, 6f.; cf. Matt 12:18) and that apart from His election there could be no realization of the election of unbelievers, His election is of a different nature. Christ was elected to be the redeemer in contrast to sinners being elected for redemption. Thus Christ's election does not truly parallel that of Christians, and so theirs cannot be contained in His."³²

"Here is a vast host of people hurrying down the broad road with their minds fixed upon their sins, and one stands calling attention to yonder door, the entrance into the narrow way that leads to life eternal. On it is plainly depicted the text, 'Whosoever will, let him come.' Every man is invited, no one need hesitate. Some may say, 'Well, I may not be of the elect, and so it would be useless for me to endeavor to come, for the door will not open for me.' But God's invitation is absolutely sincere; it is addressed to every man, 'Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely' (Rev. 22:17). If men refuse to come, if they pursue their own godless way down to the pit, whom can they blame but themselves for their eternal judgment? The messenger addressed himself to all, the call came to all, the

²⁹Stott, p. 37.

³⁰Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 46.

³¹E.g., Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, pp. 46-47.

³²L. J. Crawford, "Ephesians 1:3-4 and the Nature of Election," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 11:1 (Spring 2000):85.

door could be entered by all, but many refused to come and perished in their sins. Such men can never blame God for their eternal destruction. The door was open, the invitation was given, they refused, and He says to them sorrowfully, 'Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.' But see, as the invitation goes forth, every minute or two some one stops and says, 'What is that?' 'The way to life,' is the reply. 'Ah, that I might find the way to life! I have found no satisfaction in this poor world.' We read, 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' 'I should like to know how to be free from my sin, how to be made fit for the presence of God.' And such an one draws near and listens, and the Spirit of God impresses the message upon his heart and conscience and he says, 'I am going inside: I will accept the invitation; I will enter that door,' and he presses his way in and it shuts behind him. As he turns about he finds written on the inside of the door the words, 'Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.' 'What!' he says, 'had God His heart fixed on me before ever the world came into being?' Yes, but he could not find it out until he got inside. You see, you can pass the door if you will, you can trample the love of God beneath your feet, you can spurn His grace if you are determined to do it, but you will go down to the pit and you will be responsible for your own doom."³³

"The doctrine of election is never presented in Scripture as something to be afraid of, but always as something for believers to rejoice in."³⁴

The time of our individual election was before God created the world ("before the foundation of the world"). The purpose for which God chose us was two-fold. First, it was that we should be "holy" (Gr. *hagious*; cf. *hagiois*, "saints," v. 1), which means different and set apart to God.³⁵ Second, it was that we should be "blameless" (Gr. *amomous*), which means without blemish (cf. 5:27; Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:22; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 14:5). This word elsewhere describes the paschal lamb and Jesus Christ (Heb., 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19).

"In love" probably modifies "to be holy and blameless in His sight" rather than "He chose us" (v. 4) or "He predestined us" (v. 5). Normally the modifying phrases follow the action words in this context (cf. vv. 3, 6, 8-10). Also the other occurrences of the phrase "in love" in Ephesians refer to human rather than divine love (cf. 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2). Furthermore,

³³H. A. Ironside, *In the Heavens*, pp. 27-29.

³⁴Alfred Martin, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1303.

³⁵See Barclay, p. 89.

love is appropriate to connect with holiness and blamelessness, since it provides a balance. Our duty is to love God as well as to be pure.

"The point, then, is that holiness of life is only made perfect in and through love (cf. I Thes. iii. 12f.)."³⁶

". . . the freer the Lord's paramount choice, the deeper the debt of the chosen to live divine."³⁷

1:5 Predestination is the means by which God chose us (cf. Rom 8:30). God chose us by marking us out beforehand (the meaning of *proorisas*, translated "predestined"). Predestination looks more at the "how" than at the "who" of election. Election emphasizes the people and predestination the means (cf. v. 11; Acts 4:25-28; Rom. 8:29-30). God *predetermined* the final destiny of the elect, namely, that we would be His full-fledged "sons" (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:4-7). "Jesus Christ" was the Agent who made that "adoption" possible by His death. Sons adopted in Roman culture received the same rights and privileges as children born into the family. Likewise, our adoption does not imply an inferior status in relation to God. God "predestined us to adoption" because He delighted to bless us in this way.

"You do not get into God's family by adoption. You get into His family by regeneration, the new birth (John 3:1-18; 1 Peter 1:22-25). Adoption is the act of God by which He gives His 'born ones' an adult standing in the family. Why does He do this? So that we might *immediately* begin to claim our inheritance and enjoy our spiritual wealth!"³⁸

Some Calvinistic interpreters have concluded that, since God predetermined the final destiny of those He chose for salvation, it is only logical that he also predetermined the damnation of the non-elect.³⁹ Some of them say that it is therefore unnecessary for us to concern ourselves with the salvation of individuals, since God has predetermined this. This view, called "double predestination," goes beyond the explicit teaching of Scripture. The Scriptures never state that God has predetermined the fate of the non-elect. The emphasis of Scripture, on the other hand, is on the possibility, from the human viewpoint, of anyone trusting in Jesus Christ and receiving salvation (John 3:16, et al.).⁴⁰

³⁶Foulkes, p. 47.

³⁷Simpson, p. 26.

³⁸Wiersbe, 2:11.

³⁹See John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:21:5-7; 3:23:1; et al. See his refutations of arguments against his view in 3:22-25.

⁴⁰For four views of two Calvinists (John Feinberg and Norman Geisler) and two Arminians (Bruce Reichenbach and Clark Pinnock) on the problem of harmonizing Scriptural revelation on the subject of divine sovereignty and human freedom, see David and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will*.

"We should not see predestination as a grim process whereby God condemns great numbers of people to eternal loss. Rather, it is the outworking of a loving purpose whereby he delivers great numbers of people for salvation."⁴¹

1:6 The ultimate goal of predestination and election is that believers will contribute "to the praise" of the magnificence of God's undeserved favor ("glory of His grace") that He has shown toward humankind (cf. vv. 12, 14). This grace was "freely bestowed" or "given" in the sense that the elect need do nothing to merit it. It comes to us through Jesus Christ, described here as "the Beloved" of the Father (cf. Col. 1:13). Since God loves His Son, believers who are in Christ can rejoice that we, too, are the objects of God's love ("freely bestowed on us").

The sacrifice of the Son 1:7-12

1:7 The "Him" in view is the beloved Son (v. 6). God can pour out His grace on us only because of what Christ has done for us.

"Redemption" (Gr. *apolytrosis*) means release from slavery (cf. v. 14; 4:30; Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 11:35). It involves buying back and setting free by paying a ransom price. Jesus Christ has redeemed us from sin (Heb. 9:15), namely, set us free from slavery to it (cf. Rom. 6). The blood, representative of the life, of the perfect Sacrifice, had to flow out of Him for this to happen (Rom. 3:24-25; cf. Heb. 9:22).

NEW TESTAMENT WORDS FOR REDEMPTION ⁴²		
Greek Words	English Meanings	References
<i>agorazo</i> (verb)	To buy, to purchase in the market (or slave market)	1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4
<i>exagorazo</i> (verb)	To buy out, to purchase out of the market (or slave market)	Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5
<i>lytron</i> (noun)	Ransom, price of release	Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45
<i>lytroomai</i> (verb)	To ransom, to free by paying a ransom price	Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18
<i>lytrosis</i> (noun)	Act of freeing by paying a ransom price	Luke 1:68; 2:38; Heb. 9:12

⁴¹Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, pp. 17-18.

⁴²Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 153.

<i>apolytroisis</i> (noun)	A buying back, a setting free by paying a ransom price	Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 11:35
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The immediate result of our liberation from sin's slavery is that God has forgiven our sins (Gr. *paraptoma*, false steps, transgressions).

"Thus, the believer is accepted eternally into the family of the redeemed; yet, in that family relationship he will, time and again, need to be forgiven—in the sense of being restored, not into the family, but into the fellowship of the Father and the Son (1 John 1:9)."⁴³

Jesus Christ's death accomplished our redemption. This was the extent to which God was willing to go for us. God's grace was that great. The gift of Jesus Christ did not exhaust the supply of God's grace, however (cf. Phil. 4:19). Rather, that gift is an evidence of the extent of God's favor to us (cf. v. 5).

1:8 God has given abundant "grace" to us ("lavished on us"), not just the bare essential amount needed. This reference hints at many other benefits of Christ's death that Paul did not enumerate here. Chafer discussed 33 riches of divine grace that become ours when we trust Christ as our Savior.⁴⁴

"Wisdom" (Gr. *sophia*) is what is highest and noblest, and "insight" or "understanding" (Gr. *phronesei*) is the means by which we perceive it.⁴⁵ Once again, we have to decide whether the last part of this verse modifies the first part of verse 8, or the first part of verse 9 (cf. v. 4). As I pointed out above, normally the modifying phrases follow the action words in this passage. Paul's idea, therefore, seems to have been that God lavished His grace on us *in His infinite wisdom*, knowing in advance how we would respond to it. The wisdom and insight are God's, not ours.

1:9 This verse probably begins a new thought, as the HCSB translators suggested by putting a period at the end of verse 8. The New Testament uses the term "mystery" to refer to a truth that was previously hidden, but has now been made known by divine revelation (cf. Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25-26; et al.).⁴⁶

"In classical Greek the word *musterion* had two meanings. The root meaning was that into which one was initiated, and from this it came to mean also a secret of any kind. In the LXX it is used of what is revealed by God (e.g. Dn. ii.

⁴³Lewis Sperry Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter*, p. 48.

⁴⁴Idem, *Systematic Theology*, 3:234-65.

⁴⁵Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 263-67.

⁴⁶See my note on 3:3.

19), and also of the secret that a tale-bearer tells (e.g. Eccclus. xxii. 22). Thus its Christian use is not of necessity derived from its use in the heathen mystery cults so common in New Testament days."⁴⁷

The "mystery" (lit. secret) revealed here is God's purpose to bring everything into submission to Jesus Christ in the future (v. 10). God's "kind intention" (NASB) is His "good pleasure" (NIV, cf. v. 5). "In Him" (NASB) means "in Christ" (NIV).

1:10 The Greek word translated "administration" in the NASB (*oikonomia*), and not translated in the NIV, means "dispensation," "arrangement," or "administration." The main idea in this word is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household.⁴⁸ The Greek word translated "times" is *kairos*, which means particular times (periods; eras), rather than the passage of time (*chronos*). The "dispensation" in view is the millennial reign of Christ on earth, during which everything will be under His rule (1 Cor. 15:27; Col. 1:20). Even though in one sense, everything is under Christ's authority now, Jesus Christ will be the openly recognized head of all things, in a more direct way, in the messianic kingdom. Everyone and everything will acknowledge and respond to His authority then (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 11:1-10).

"This verse has been used as the keystone of the doctrine of 'Universalism', that all men shall be saved in the end. It does imply that in the end everything and every being in existence will be under His authority, but it is dangerous to press a doctrine from a verse without regard for the balance of the evidence of Scripture as a whole, and, in this case, without respect for the solemn presentation from one end of Scripture to the other of the alternatives of life and death dependent on the acceptance or rejection of God's salvation."⁴⁹

1:11 "In Him" (v. 10) probably begins the thought continued in this verse, as the NIV indicates.

For the first time in this epistle, Paul made a distinction among believers. Until now he spoke of all believers, but here he contrasted "we" and "you" (v. 13). The "we" evidently refers to Jewish Christians, and the "you" to Gentile believers, as the context suggests (vv. 12-13). Note the presence of "also," in both verses 11 and 13, that provides continuity as well as marking discontinuity.

⁴⁷Foulkes, p. 51.

⁴⁸See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 22-47; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 23-43.

⁴⁹Foulkes, p. 53.

Some translators who rendered the Greek word *eklerothemen*, "obtained an inheritance" (NASB), introduced the idea of the believer's inheritance. The word really means "chosen" (NIV, lit. appointed or obtained by lot). God has *chosen* Jewish believers for salvation, because He "predestined" them to have a part in His sovereign plan. Paul would say later that God's plan for the present involves the church, which consists of both Jewish and Gentile believers (2:14-22). However, God chose the Jews first (cf. Acts 3:26; Rom. 1:16).

This verse contains one of the strongest statements in Scripture that God is sovereign (cf. Ps. 115:3; Prov. 16:9, 33; Dan. 4:34-35). God is sovereign over "all things": "according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." This includes the election of some people to salvation. "Purpose" (Gr. *prothesin*) refers to the goal God intends to accomplish. "Counsel" (Gr. *boule*) refers to God's wise purposeful planning or deliberation. "Will" (Gr. *thelema*) denotes willingness. The idea contained in this verse is that God chose a plan after deliberating on the wisest course of action to accomplish his purpose.⁵⁰

How does God carry out His plan? He accomplishes some things directly and exclusively—Himself—without using other agents. He accomplishes other purposes through the agency of others, secondary causes, which include angels and humans. Unquestionably God is absolutely sovereign (i.e., the ultimate authority over all things). How He carries out His plans—working with secondary causes, giving people freedom to choose, and then justly holding them responsible for their choices—is difficult to understand and explain.⁵¹ I believe the solution to this puzzle lies beyond the ability of human beings to understand and explain fully. However, Scripture clearly teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.⁵²

1:12 God chose Jews to be believers "for (to) the praise of His glory" (cf. v. 6). This verse shows that the Jews are the "we" in view in verse 11. The Jews "were the first" to put their trust ("hope") in Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 1:8; 13:46; 28:25; Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10).

The work of the Son in salvation was: setting the sinner free from his or her sin, and revealing God's plan to head up "all things in Christ" at the end of the ages. This includes the salvation of Jewish believers.

⁵⁰B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 15; T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, p. 20.

⁵¹See Basinger and Basinger for four explanations.

⁵²See the note in *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1273, for a clear, concise distinction between predestination and election. For a very helpful article on how prayer fits into the sovereign plan of God, see John Munro, "Prayer to a Sovereign God," *Interest* 56:2 (February 1990):20-21. See also Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 149-52.

The seal of the Spirit 1:13-14

"God's spiritual blessings for believers are based not only on the sovereign election of the Father (vv. 3-6) and the redemptive work of the Son (vv. 7-12), but also on the seal of the Holy Spirit."⁵³

1:13 In contrast to the Jews, who were the first to hope in Christ (v. 12), Gentiles also had come to salvation when Paul wrote this epistle. The vehicle God uses to bring His elect to faith is "the message of truth," namely, the "gospel" message, the good news of "salvation." When Gentiles heard it, they listened to it and "believed" it. This resulted in their salvation and their *sealing* by the "Holy Spirit." There are about 59 references to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians, one-fourth of the total references in the New Testament. The AV translation implies that the sequence is hearing, believing, and then sealing. However the sealing takes place at the same time as believing (cf. Acts 19:2). It is not a second or later work of grace.

When the Gentiles in view believed, God "sealed" them in Christ. This provided a guarantee of their eternal security.⁵⁴ Seals, at the time Paul wrote, indicated security (Matt. 27:66; Eph. 4:30), authentication and approval (John 6:27), genuineness (John 3:33), and ownership (2 Cor. 1:22; Rev. 7:2; 9:4). God seals the believer by giving him or her the indwelling "Holy Spirit," who *keeps* the Christian in Christ. The Jews incorrectly regarded circumcision as a seal of their salvation (Rom. 4:11). The Lord Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would permanently indwell believers (Luke 24:49; John 14:16; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 1:5). That is evidently why Paul referred to Him as "the Holy Spirit of promise" (NASB).

"The *arrabon* [pledge, deposit, earnest, guarantee] was a regular feature of the Greek business world. The *arrabon* was a part of the purchase price of anything paid in advance as a guarantee that the rest of the price should in due time be paid."⁵⁵

The Spirit seals all believers, not just Gentile believers. Though Paul addressed Gentile believers in particular in this verse, "you also" shows that what he said of them was also true of Jewish believers (cf. v. 11). All the blessings that Paul spoke of become the possession of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

⁵³Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 619.

⁵⁴See Eldon Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):139-63; Robert G. Gromacki, *Salvation is Forever*; Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*.

⁵⁵Barclay, p. 101.

1:14 The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is a "pledge" of all that God will give us as His children ("our inheritance"). This pledge is not just a promise, but the first part of our inheritance, the *down payment*, so to speak (cf. Gen. 38:17-20 LXX). The fact that we possess Him now (the "already" aspect of our salvation) assures us that the rest of our salvation (the "not yet" portion) will inevitably follow.⁵⁶ An engagement ring is this kind of pledge.

"The content of the inheritance here is life in heaven with God."⁵⁷

The "redemption" in view here (Gr. *apolytrosis*) is a different aspect of our salvation than the redemption mentioned in verse 7. Here it is not release from sin's guilt (v. 7), but release from sin's presence (cf. Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20-21). In verse 7, justification is in view, but here *glorification* is, the final aspect of our redemption. We experience redemption in three stages: we have been redeemed in Christ (1:7), we are being redeemed as the Spirit makes us more like Christ (Rom. 8:1-4), and we shall be redeemed when Christ returns and we become sinless, as He is. "God's [own] possession" is the believer, whom He has chosen (vv. 3-6), redeemed (vv. 7-12), and sealed (vv. 13-14) "to the praise of His glory" (cf. vv. 6, 12, 18). Another view is that the inheritance in verse 11, as well as the possession in verse 14, is the church.⁵⁸ However, the context seems to be describing blessings that every individual Christian enjoys, rather than blessings that God enjoys.

"This beautiful phrase needs to be unpacked. The glory of God is the revelation of God, and the glory of his grace is his self-disclosure as a gracious God. To live to the praise of the glory of his grace is both to worship him ourselves by our words and deeds as the gracious God he is, and to cause others to see and to praise him too."⁵⁹

The nine spiritual blessings Paul identified in verses 3-14 are: election, predestination, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, knowledge, sealing, and inheritance. Stott summarized them as three: past election, present adoption, and future unification.⁶⁰ The recurrence of the phrase "in Christ" and equivalent expressions emphasizes that all these blessings come with our union with our Savior (vv. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 [twice]). Likewise the repetition of "His will" and its equivalents emphasizes that the sovereign God is responsible for all these blessings (vv. 5, 9, 11). These verses (3-14) contain a compact statement of every believer's spiritual riches. The passage is similar to a bank statement because it lists every Christian's spiritual assets.

⁵⁶See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):449-50.

⁵⁷Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 90.

⁵⁸E.g., Stott, p. 47.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 50.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 36.

"We have been listening to an overture of the hallelujahs of the blest, and it closes, as it began, on the note of the praise of God's glory, the highest of all themes. . . . False and true theology may be discriminated by a simple criterion. Do they magnify God or man?"⁶¹

In August of 1989, Mary and I took a 25th anniversary trip to Bermuda. We made reservations for a standard room in a large hotel there: the Southampton Princess. When we arrived, we were placed in a much nicer, more expensive room at no extra cost. We had been upgraded four price levels by the hotel, apparently because we had made our reservation months earlier! At first, we did not know that we had been upgraded; we thought that we were in a standard room. But soon it became apparent that we had privileges that the other guests did not. We inquired about these privileges and learned what they were: terry-cloth bathrobes, a safe in the room, as much free fruit as we wanted, daily newspapers, a special lounge area, and lots of beach equipment that the other guests had to pay for. Had we not inquired, we would not have known of these privileges, and would have spent our whole vacation not enjoying them. God has revealed many privileges that He has given us as Christians in His Word. But many Christians are unaware of them. Consequently, they go through life not taking advantage of them or appreciating them.

2. The means: knowledge 1:15-23

Having reviewed his readers' blessings in Christ, Paul next prayed that they would appreciate and appropriate these good things in their own lives. He moved from benediction to intercession. Verses 15-23 are one sentence in the Greek text, as are verses 3-14. Intellectual understanding is one thing, but it is also important that we use this knowledge to come into intimate relationship with God. That is what Paul prayed for in this prayer.

"For a healthy Christian life today it is of the utmost importance to follow Paul's example and keep Christian praise and Christian prayer together. Yet many do not manage to preserve this balance. Some Christians seem to do little but pray for new spiritual blessings, apparently oblivious of the fact that God has already blessed them in Christ with every spiritual blessing. Others lay such emphasis on the undoubted truth that everything is already theirs in Christ, that they become complacent and appear to have no appetite to know or experience their Christian privileges more deeply."⁶²

Commendation 1:15-16

As was his custom, Paul first commended his readers for what they were doing well. Then he told them what his prayer requests for them were.

⁶¹Simpson, p. 36.

⁶²Stott, p. 52.

1:15 In view of their spiritual blessings, Paul felt constrained to pray for his original readers. He could pray for them as he did because they were true believers. Even though God had greatly blessed them, they needed even more from God. In addition to informing them, Paul also interceded for them.

The apostle had personally witnessed the "faith" and "love" of the Ephesians five or six years earlier, but he had evidently received fresh reports of their recent condition. His statement also suggests that "you" may include other churches besides the one or ones located in Ephesus. "Faith" is the expression of the believer's trust in God, our vertical relationship. "Love" is the evidence of his or her proper relationship with other people, our horizontal relationship (cf. 6:23; Col. 1:14; 2 Thess. 1:3).

1:16 These qualities in his readers stimulated Paul to give "thanks" to God for their present condition, and to petition Him for their present and future needs. He said he prayed for them repeatedly.⁶³

Supplication 1:17-23

1:17 Paul returned to his concept of "God" as the Father of the "Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3; cf. Matt. 6:9). He combined with this the idea that all "glory" belongs to the "Father" (vv. 6, 12, 14; cf. Acts 7:2; 1 Cor. 2:8).

Paul asked God to give the Ephesians a "spirit of wisdom and of revelation." The "spirit" in view probably refers to an attitude, rather than to the Holy Spirit, wisdom and revelation being the description of that attitude (cf. 1 Cor. 4:21). They had already received the Holy Spirit. These attitudes become ours through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us, however (cf. Isa. 11:2). "Wisdom" (Gr. *sophia*, v. 8; 3:10) enables one to perceive reality accurately. "Revelation" is the unveiling of the subject contemplated, in this case God Himself ("in the knowledge of Him"). "Wisdom by revelation" is the idea (a *hendiadys*). Paul was evidently praying for a specific enablement by the Spirit so his readers would understand God's mysteries.⁶⁴

"William Chillingworth said: 'The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.' That is true; but so often we would not think so. The exposition of scripture from the pulpit is a first necessity of religious wakening. We are interested, not in what a preacher thinks, but in what God says."⁶⁵

The goal in view was that the readers might gain greater "knowledge of" God. The Greek word translated "knowledge" (*epignosis*) refers to exact,

⁶³See W. B. Pope, *The Prayers of St. Paul*.

⁶⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 256.

⁶⁵Barclay, p. 105.

complete, experiential knowledge, not just abstract knowledge of God or even facts about Him.⁶⁶ Paul wanted his readers to get to know God more intimately as their own personal heavenly Father, to become closer friends with Him (cf. John 15:14).

"Growth in knowledge is indispensable to growth in holiness."⁶⁷

"The Christian life could be described as getting to know God better every day. A friendship which does not grow closer with the years tends to vanish with the years. And it is so with us and God."⁶⁸

"To know God personally is salvation (John 17:3). To know Him increasingly is sanctification (Phil 3:10). To know Him perfectly is glorification (1 Cor. 13:9-12)."⁶⁹

1:18 They would gain this greater knowledge as God would "enlighten" their understanding. The "heart" refers to the center of personality in the Bible, the whole inward self, comprising mind and emotion. The "eyes of the heart," a vivid mixed metaphor, suggests not just intellectual understanding, but total apprehension of God. In Hebrew thinking, which Paul employed, mixed metaphors enriched the thought rather than confusing it, as in English.⁷⁰

The reason Paul prayed this prayer was three-fold. He wanted his readers "to know" (Gr. *eidenai*), factually, three things. First, he wanted them to know "the hope" that was theirs because God had called them to salvation through election. Every Christian should appreciate his or her sure "hope" for the future, that rests on his or her "calling" to salvation in the past.

Second, the readers needed to realize that they themselves would be an "inheritance" that God would receive when they went to be with Him. Paul spoke before of the believer's inheritance in verse 14. Here he spoke of God's inheritance ("*in the saints*"). This inheritance will be valuable ("what are the riches"), because believers are people for whom God paid dearly with the blood (death) of His own Son. It will be glorious ("of the glory"), because when we see the Lord we will experience glorification, cleansing, and removal from sin (cf. vv. 6, 17 for other glorious things).

1:19 Third, Paul wanted the Ephesians to know the great "power" of God ("surpassing greatness of His power") that impacts the Christian.

⁶⁶Trench, pp. 268-69.

⁶⁷Stott, p. 54.

⁶⁸Barclay, p. 105.

⁶⁹Wiersbe, 2:15.

⁷⁰See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1—72*, p. 151.

"If God's 'call' looks back to the beginning, and God's 'inheritance' looks on to the end, then surely God's 'power' spans the interim period in between."⁷¹

"Power" (Gr. *dynamis*) refers to a spiritually dynamic living force. "Working," "strength," and "might" or "mighty" further describe this power. These three words describe it as energetic, inherent in God, and able to overcome resistance, respectively. This is the power of God that is available to believers.

"By making us His inheritance, God has shown His love. By promising us a wonderful future, He has encouraged our hope. Paul offered something to challenge our faith: 'the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe' (Eph. 1:19)."⁷²

- 1:20 God manifested this power in Christ in three instances, that Paul cited to help us appreciate it more. God's power resurrected ("raised") Jesus "from the dead," and exalted Him to, "and seated Him at," God's "right hand" in heaven. Jesus Christ's present rule, on His Father's throne over the church, is not the same as His rule on David's throne over David's kingdom. The first is present and heavenly, but the second is future and earthly.⁷³ The same divine power is available to us now, and is indispensable for us in order to live lives pleasing to God (cf. Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:11).
- 1:21 Christ's ascension has resulted in His exaltation over every other ("far above all") "authority" (cf. Col. 1:16): human and angelic (cf. Phil. 2:8-11), present and future (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23-28). The Jews believed angels controlled human destiny, but Paul saw Jesus Christ doing this. The "rule," "authority," "power," and "dominion" in view are probably descriptions of evil angelic rulers.⁷⁴
- 1:22 The second manifestation of God's power in Christ was the Father's "subjection" of "all things" to Christ. Adam lost *his* lordship over creation when he sinned, but Jesus gained *His* Lordship over creation by His obedience (1:10; Rom. 5:12-21). His Lordship over creation will be obvious in the future, when He reigns during the Millennium (Ps. 8:6; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:6-8).⁷⁵

⁷¹Stott, p. 57.

⁷²Wiersbe, 2:16.

⁷³See Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):81-82.

⁷⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 279.

⁷⁵See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 45.

The third manifestation of God's power in Christ is the Son's appointment "as Head over . . . the church" (cf. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18). This aspect of His Lordship is evident now.

"There is given to the Church, and for the Church's benefit, a Head who is also Head over all things. The church has authority and power to overcome all opposition because her Leader and Head is Lord of all."⁷⁶

Morris, however, took "the head" here, and in 4:15, as "the beginning."⁷⁷

1:23 The church is both the "body" of Christ (all true believers), and "the fullness of Him who fills" everything in every way ("all in all"), namely: Jesus Christ Himself. The church is the "fullness" of Christ, probably in the sense that He fills for Himself (middle voice in Greek) the church with blessings (cf. 4:10-11). Other views are that the church completes Christ, or that Christ fills the church with Himself.⁷⁸ Jesus Christ, who fills all things with all things (i.e., with blessings), is filling the church with blessings. The church could not come into existence until Jesus Christ had ascended into heaven to become her Head.⁷⁹

After showing that believers have received all spiritual blessings (vv. 3-14), Paul prayed that believers might come to know God intimately (v. 17). This is necessary so we might better appreciate our past calling to salvation, which gives us: hope (v. 18), the future inheritance that we constitute for God (v. 18), and the present power of God available to us (v. 19). God manifested this power in the past at Christ's resurrection and ascension (v. 20-21). He will manifest it in the future by making Jesus Christ the Head over all creation (v. 22). He is now manifesting this power in Jesus Christ's headship over the church (vv. 22-23).

3. The motive: grace 2:1-10

Paul proceeded to conclude his revelation of the Christian's individual calling in Christ (1:3—2:10). He began this section of the epistle by explaining the purpose of our calling (i.e., the glory of God, 1:3-14). He then expounded the means whereby we appreciate our calling (i.e., knowledge given by the Holy Spirit through God's revelation, 1:15-23). Finally, He enunciated the motive for our calling (i.e., the unmerited grace of God, 2:1-10).

These verses continue the theme of redemption (1:7). This pericope is a condensation of Paul's exposition of redemption in Romans. Whereas we were once dead to God (vv. 1-3), we are now alive in God (vv. 4-10).

⁷⁶Foulkes, p. 65. See also Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS5 (1954):211-15.

⁷⁷Morris, p. 36.

⁷⁸See Stott, pp. 61-64, or Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 294-301, for discussions of the views.

⁷⁹See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 117.

". . . what Paul does in this passage is to paint a vivid contrast between what man is by nature and what he can become by grace."⁸⁰

"Having described our spiritual *possessions* in Christ, Paul turns to a complementary truth: our spiritual *position* in Christ. First he explains what God has done for all sinners in general; then he explains what God did for the Gentiles in particular."⁸¹

Once dead to God 2:1-3

These verses are really preliminary to Paul's main point. They describe the Christian's condition as an unbeliever, before God justified him or her. In the Greek text, verses 1-7 are one sentence. The subject of this sentence is "God" (v. 4). The three main verbs are "made alive" (v. 5), "raised up" (v. 6), and "seated" (v. 6). The object is "us," and the prepositional phrase "with Christ" describes "us." The main point then is that God has made believers alive, raised them up, and seated them with Christ. Everything else in verse 1-7 is of subordinate importance.

2:1 Before their regeneration, believers were spiritually "dead," separated from God, and unable to have fellowship with Him (cf. 4:18; John 17:3). We were living in the sphere of rebellion against God (cf. v. 2). "Transgressions" (false steps, cf. 1:7; 2:5) and "sins" (acts of missing the mark) describe deliberate offenses against God.

"There are three outstanding schools of moral pathology traceable throughout the centuries. Pelagianism asserts the convalescence of human nature. Man merely needs teaching. Semi-pelagianism admits his ill-health, but affirms that the symptoms will yield to proper treatment, to a course of tonic drugs and a scrupulous regimen. But Biblical Christianity probes the patient to the quick. Its searching diagnosis pronounces that mortification has set in and that nothing less than infusion of fresh lifeblood can work a cure. Nostrums and palliatives aggravate rather than allay the disease. Sin is an organic epidemical malady, a slow devitalizing poison issuing in moral necrosis; not a stage of arrested or incomplete development, but a seed-plot of impending ruin."⁸²

"The unbeliever is not sick; he is dead! He does not need resuscitation; he needs resurrection. All lost sinners are dead, and the only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay."⁸³

⁸⁰Stott, p. 69.

⁸¹Wiersbe, 2:17.

⁸²Simpson, p. 46.

⁸³Wiersbe, 2:18.

2:2 The apostle further described, in three ways, the sphere in which unbelievers live. First, it is a lifestyle in which people follow the ways of the "world." The philosophy that seeks to eliminate God from every aspect of life dominates this lifestyle (cf. John 15:18, 23).

"The Jews called their laws of conduct *Halachah*, which means 'Walking' (cf. Mk. vii. 5; Acts xxi. 21; Heb. xiii. 9, RV mg.)."⁸⁴

Second, the unsaved follow the person who is promoting this philosophy, namely: Satan. As "prince of the power of the air," Satan received temporary freedom to lead this rebellion against God (cf. 1 John 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9). The "spirit" now working probably refers to the "power" or "kingdom" (lit. authority) of the air, since that word is its nearest antecedent.

". . . by speaking of the devil's authority as 'in the air', Paul was not necessarily accepting the current notion of the air being the abode and realm of evil spirits. Basically his thought was of an evil power with control in the world (see on vi. 12), but whose existence was not material but spiritual."⁸⁵

"Sons of disobedience" is a way of referring to people characterized by disobedience, as a son bears the traits of his parent. Unbelievers resemble Satan in their rebellion.

2:3 Third, not only does the philosophy of the world guide unbelievers, and Satan control them, but they also "indulge the flesh." The term "flesh" (NASB, Gr. *sarkos*), when used metaphorically as here, refers to the sinful nature that everyone possesses. It is our human nature that is sinful. The unbeliever characteristically gives in to his or her fleshly desires and thoughts, whereas the believer should not and need not do so (cf. Rom. 7—8).

"Children of wrath" and "sons of disobedience" are both phrases that describe unbelievers. "Children" (Gr. *tekna*) highlights the close relationship between a child and his or her parents. "Sons" (Gr. *huiioi*) stresses the distinctive characteristics of the parents that the child displays. Unbelievers have a close relationship to God's wrath because of their rebellion against Him (cf. Rom. 1:18—2:29; John 3:36).

These verses (1-3) picture the hopeless unbeliever as a part of the world system, controlled by Satan, indulging the flesh, and destined to experience God's wrath. When an unbeliever trusts in Jesus Christ: the world, the devil, and the flesh become his or her three-fold enemy.

⁸⁴Foulkes, p. 69.

⁸⁵Ibid.

Now alive in God 2:4-10

The wrath of God on the unbeliever (v. 3) contrasts with the grace of God on the believer (vv. 5, 7, 8). God's special grace toward some unbelievers gives them life (vv. 4-5), raises them up (v. 6), and seats them in heavenly realms with Christ (vv. 6-10).

2:4 Paul introduced the contrast between the condition of the unbeliever and that of the believer with "But." God, the subject of this passage (vv. 1-7), makes all the difference. "Mercy" (Gr. *eleos*, the word the Septuagint translators used to render the Hebrew *hesed*, loyal love) means undeserved kindness. God's "great love" (Gr. *agape*) sought the highest good in the objects of His choice, even though we were rebellious sinners.

2:5 Unbelievers are spiritually "dead" in their "transgressions" and sins (cf. v. 1). However, God has given new life to believers. The only way a dead person can have any fellowship with the living God, is for God to give him or her new life (cf. Rom. 4:17). Regeneration (getting "saved") is an act of God in "grace." Regeneration results in the commencement and continuation of new life. "Have been saved" is in the perfect tense in Greek, indicating an ongoing permanent condition.

2:6 God has, second, "raised us up with" Christ. This describes our spiritual, not physical experience. He will yet raise us physically, but spiritually He has already raised us to a new type of life (cf. Col. 3:1-2). Like our Lord's resurrection life, ours is also powerful and eternal.

Third, God has "seated us . . . in the heavenly *realms*" with Christ (cf. 1:20). That is where our heavenly citizenship lies (Phil. 3:20), and where our final home is. What Christ did physically (i.e., died, arose, and took His seat in heaven), God has already done for the believer spiritually. The fact that God enabled Christ to do these things, physically, should help us believe that He has done these things for us spiritually.

"Of the immediate spiritual blessings which are wrought for the individual at the moment he believes, some are to be classified as *possessions*, and some as *positions*. Likewise some are wrought *in* him, and some are wrought *for* him. These distinctions occur in verses 5 and 6 . . ." ⁸⁶

2:7 God's ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself. The "ages to come" include all future ages. God will use the regeneration of believers to demonstrate the wealth and richness ("riches") "of His grace" (cf. 1:7). Specifically His "kindness toward believers (us)," as displayed in all that we have "in Christ," is in view. We especially see God's kindness in His giving life to those who were dead in sin.

⁸⁶Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, p. 73.

Note that verses 1-3 describe what we were in the past, verses 4-6 what we are in the present, and verse 7 what we shall be in the future.

2:8 Verses 8 and 9 explain the "surpassing riches of God's grace" (v. 7), and elaborate the parenthetical statement in verse 5.

The basis of our salvation is God's "grace" (unmerited favor and divine enablement; cf. Rom. 3:22, 25; Gal. 2:16; 1 Pet. 1:5). The instrument by which we receive salvation is "faith" (i.e., trust in Christ). Faith is not an act or work that earns merit with God, which He rewards with salvation. When a person puts out his hand to take a gift that someone else offers, he or she is doing nothing to merit that gift. The giver gets credit for the gift, not the receiver. Likewise faith is not a meritorious work.⁸⁷

To what does "that" or "this" refer? Since it is a neuter pronoun it evidently does not refer to "grace" or "faith," both of which are feminine in gender in the Greek text. Probably it refers to the whole preceding clause that describes salvation (cf. 1:15; 3:1). *Salvation* is "the gift of God."⁸⁸

"If we breathe, it is because life has been breathed into us; if we exercise the hearing of faith it is because our ears have been unstopped. We are born from above. Spiritual life is not of the nature of a subsidy supplementing dogged exertion or ruthless self-flagellation, but a largess from the overflowing well-spring of divine compassion, lavished on a set of spiritual incapables."⁸⁹

2:9 Salvation is not by "works," since its basis is grace, and its means of reception is faith. "No one" will be able to "boast" that he or she has done something that earned him or her salvation. All the glory will go to God for accomplishing salvation.

"Since we have not been saved by our good works, we cannot be lost by our bad works."⁹⁰

2:10 Here Paul gave the reason salvation is not from man or by works. Rather than salvation being a masterpiece that we have produced, regenerated believers are a masterpiece that God has produced. "Workmanship" (Gr. *poieme*, from which we get the word "poem"; cf. Rom. 1:20) means a work of art, a masterpiece. The Jerusalem Bible translated it "work of art" here. As a master worker, God has created us in Christ Jesus. The word

⁸⁷See Morris, p. 104; and René A. López, "Is Faith a Gift from God or a Human Exercise?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July-September 2007):259-76.

⁸⁸See Roy L. Aldrich, "The Gift of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:487 (July-September 1965):248-53; and Gary L. Nebeker, "Is Faith a Gift of God? Ephesians 2:8 Reconsidered," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 4:7 (July 1989):1, 4.

⁸⁹Simpson, p. 55.

⁹⁰Wiersbe, 2:19.

translated "created" here (Gr. *ktizo*) describes only God's activity, and denotes something He alone can produce.

"Good works" are not the roots from which salvation grows, but the fruit that God intends it to bear. God has not saved us because of our works (vv. 8-9), but He has saved us to do good works (v. 10). God saves us by faith for good works. Good works are what God intended for us to practice, with His divine enablement. He intended that we "would walk in them," as a pedestrian walks along a path, before He saved us (cf. 1:4). This verse reveals that God is ultimately responsible for our good works (cf. Rom. 9:23; Phil. 2:13). Paul developed the idea of walking in good works further in chapters 4—6.

". . . God has prepared a path of good works for believers which He will perform in and through them as they walk by faith. This does not mean doing a work for God; instead, it is God's performing His work in and through believers . . ."91

However, this verse does not say that Christians will inevitably "walk" in the "good works" that God has freed us from sin's penalty and power to pursue. God has saved us so we can do works that are good in His sight, but this is obviously only part of His purpose in saving us. He has also saved us to take us to heaven, for example (John 14:1-3). He has guaranteed that all who trust in His Son will reach heaven (our glorification, John 10:28-29). He has not guaranteed that all who trust in Jesus Christ will persevere in good works (our progressive sanctification). That depends on our obedience (4:1; Titus 3:8).

God desires that everyone experience salvation (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), but the fact that some will perish does not put God's desires or power in question. He has given us enough freedom to choose if we will believe or not (cf. John 3:36). Likewise, God has provided salvation so His children will be able to obey Him and do good works, but He does not compel us to do so (Titus 2:11-12).

"One could legitimately characterize the whole lordship controversy as a dispute over efficacious grace. All points in the discussion ultimately come back to this: Does God's saving grace inevitably obtain its desired effects? If all sides could come to consensus on that one question, the debate would be settled."⁹²

God's saving grace inevitably obtains all that God has said it will inevitably obtain, including the believer's justification, positional sanctification, and glorification. However, it does not inevitably obtain

⁹¹Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 624.

⁹²John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p. 61.

what God has said depends on the choices of His people. We must be careful to distinguish what God wants to happen from what He has said He will make happen. His desires are not the same as His decrees.⁹³

The doctrine of God's sovereignty means that God is the ultimate authority in the universe. It implies that He has sufficient power to control everything that happens. It does not mean that God will inevitably bring to pass everything that He wishes would happen. If that were the case, no one would go to hell, and everyone would obey Him perfectly.

God does not force Christians to persevere in good works, any more than He forced the Israelites to persevere in good works. The Israelites' failure to walk in the good works that God had foreordained for them does not mean that His efficacious grace failed. Neither does a Christian's failure to do so mean God's grace has failed.

This section of the epistle (2:1-10) contrasts what the believer was before regeneration with what he or she is afterward. All the glory for the change goes to God. He provided salvation for people. We do not need to do good works to merit salvation, but we should do good works because we have received salvation. This is God's plan for the believer.

B. CORPORATE CALLING 2:11—3:19

New spiritual life does not just mean that we have experienced regeneration individually. Additionally God brings every Christian into union with every other Christian. In Christ we have solidarity with other believers as well as solidarity with God. Paul next explained this corporate aspect of our being in Christ.

" . . . a major focus of this letter and of the Prison Epistles in general is the corporate nature of those who are in the body of Christ. Believers do not have a private faith; they have corporate relationship and responsibility to each other."⁹⁴

1. Present ministry 2:11-22

The apostle first stated the reality of the union of all believers in Christ (vv. 11-13). Then he explained what this involves (vv. 14-18). Finally he described the consequences of this union (vv. 19-22).

The reality of Gentile believers' union with Jewish believers 2:11-13

2:11 In view of what God has done for us in changing us, Gentile believers need to remember certain things. Paul used "flesh" here in the literal sense (i.e., the body), rather than in one of its metaphorical senses (i.e., the sinful human nature, or all that we are in Adam). Great differences existed between Jewish and Gentile believers before the Cross.

⁹³See Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* pp. 73-74.

⁹⁴Bock, p. 308.

"The one word that best describes the Gentiles is *without*. They were 'outside' in several respects."⁹⁵

2:12 Paul listed five privileges Gentile believers did not enjoy, that Jewish believers did enjoy before the Cross. First, Gentile believers were "separate from Christ," Messiah. They had no corporate national hope centered in a Messiah, as the Jews did. Second, God "excluded" them as a people from citizenship in "the commonwealth of Israel." Individual Gentiles could become members of the nation of Israel, but as a whole, the Gentiles had no part in what God planned to do in and through Israel. The Gentiles were aliens from Israel in this sense. Third, they had no direct part in the promises of God to Israel contained in the biblical "covenants" (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic). Morris, an amillennialist, believed the singular "promise" refers to "God's promise to send his Messiah."⁹⁶ Probably the singular "promise" simply stresses the promise element that is foundational to all the biblical covenants. Fourth, as a race of people, the Gentiles had no corporate future promised by God, to which they could look and in which they could "hope," as Israel did. Fifth, they were separate from ("without") "God." In contrast, God had reached out to Israel and drawn her to Himself.

"The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made. The best of the serpents crush, they said, the best of the Gentiles kill. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death."⁹⁷

Even today, some strict Jews despise Gentiles. Jewish hostility toward Gentiles carried over into the church, to some extent. Jewish Christians tended to look down on Gentile Christians.

2:13 "But" points to another great contrast (cf. v. 4). Because of Jesus Christ's death ("blood"), God has "brought" Gentiles "near" to Himself and to the Jews, in a sense never before true. The rabbis spoke of Gentiles, who were far from the privileges of the Mosaic Covenant, as being "brought near" by becoming proselytes.⁹⁸ Sin results in death and separation. However,

⁹⁵Wiersbe, 2:22.

⁹⁶Morris, p. 62.

⁹⁷Barclay, p. 125. Cf. Jonah.

⁹⁸For the original sources, see Abbott, p. 60.

Christ's obedience resulted in life and reconciliation with other people, as well as with God, for Gentiles. Perhaps Paul referred to the "blood of Christ," in part, to correct the Gnostic denial of Christ's real humanity.⁹⁹

There is obvious continuity between the redeemed people of God in the Old Testament, and the redeemed people of God in the New Testament. However here, Paul stressed the differences between these two groups.¹⁰⁰ Covenant theology stresses the continuity between the two groups, whereas dispensational theology stresses the differences between them. Many covenant theologians deny these differences.

The significance of Gentile believers' union with Jewish believers 2:14-18

Essentially Jesus Christ's death has resulted in peace between Gentile believers and Jewish believers, and peace between Gentile believers and God.

2:14 To understand this verse, we must discover what "dividing wall" Paul had in mind. Perhaps it was the wall in Herod's Temple courtyard, that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Jews.¹⁰¹ This seems improbable, since that wall still stood and divided Jews and Gentiles when Paul wrote this epistle. Perhaps he had in mind the *veil* between the "holy" and "most holy" places in that temple. However, that veil—it was not a wall—did not separate Jews from Gentiles, but *all people from God*. It seems most probable that Paul had in mind a spiritual, rather than a physical barrier, that had separated Jews and Gentiles since Abraham's time. This is in harmony with Paul's emphasis on spiritual realities that marks Ephesians.

"This new institution [the church] does not dissolve ethnic distinctions, but displays reconciliation, with every believer equally qualified to share in the benefits of salvation and peace that emerge from the uniting of Jews and Gentiles into a new living community."¹⁰²

This verse is a strong testimony to the fact that with the death of Jesus Christ, God began dealing with humankind on a different basis than He had in the past. He now stopped working with and through the Jews, and Judaism, primarily (though temporarily, cf. Rom. 11). Instead, He began dealing with Jews and Gentiles on the same basis, namely: faith in His Son. In other words, He began a new dispensation or administration in His dealings with humanity.

"When verse 14 says Christ is our peace, it means that Jesus is the source of restored relationships, not only between an individual and God but also between

⁹⁹Robertson, 4:526.

¹⁰⁰See Carl B. Hoch Jr., "The New Man in Ephesians 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 98-126.

¹⁰¹Morris, p. 65. Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15:11:5; *ibid.*, *The Wars of the Jews*, 5:5:2.

¹⁰²Bock, p. 314.

individuals. Now people form a new community, the household of God, which itself is compared to a holy temple, a sacred work of God (2:18-22)."¹⁰³

2:15 The body of Jesus ("His flesh") sacrificed on the cross terminated the "enmity" between Jews and Gentiles. It did so in the sense that when Jesus Christ died, He fulfilled all the demands of the Mosaic Law. When He did that, God ended the Mosaic Law as His rule of life for the Jews. The word "abolished" (Gr. *kataresas*) means "rendered inoperative." The Mosaic Law ceased to be God's standard for regulating the life of His people (Rom. 10:4; et al.). The Mosaic Law had been the cause of the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. Its dietary distinctions and laws requiring separation, in particular, created hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The NASB translation implies that the Law was the barrier. Actually the Law was the cause of the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus Christ destroyed the barrier, and the hostility that resulted from it, by terminating the Mosaic Law.¹⁰⁴

Jesus Christ had two purposes in ending Jewish Gentile hostility. First, He wanted to "create" one new man, the church (v. 6), out of the two former groups, Jews and Gentiles (v. 11). Here the "new man" is not the individual believer but the church, the body of Christ (cf. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 3:10-11; Heb. 12:23). In the church, God does not deal with Gentiles as He did with Jews, nor does He deal with Jews as He did Gentiles. Jews do not become Gentiles, nor do Gentiles become Jews. Rather, God has created a whole new (Gr. *kainon*, fresh) entity: the church. In the church economy, believing Jews become Christians, and believing Gentiles become Christians. God now deals with both believing Jews and believing Gentiles equally: as Christians.¹⁰⁵

2:16 Jesus Christ's second purpose for ending Jewish Gentile hostility was to bring ("reconcile") Jewish and Gentile believers *to Himself* in "one body": the church. The Old Testament never spoke of Jewish and Gentile believers as being in "one body." Ironically, the Cross in one sense terminated Jesus, but Jesus terminated the enmity between Jews and Gentiles "with (through) the Cross." Not only have Jews and Gentiles experienced reconciliation with one another (vv. 14-15), but they have also experienced reconciliation with God by the Cross (v. 16).

"The most unexpected and unprepared-for revelation, from the Jewish point of view, was that of the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, the taking away of the enmity of the law, and the nailing it to

¹⁰³Idem, "'The New Man' as Community in Colossians and Ephesians," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁴See Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

¹⁰⁵See Fruchtenbaum, p. 118.

His Cross. There was nothing analogous to it; not a hint of it to be found, either in the teaching or the spirit of the times."¹⁰⁶

2:17 Not only is Jesus Christ our peace (v. 14), but He also "preached peace." He kept preaching the message of peace, the gospel, through His apostles following His ascension (cf. Acts 1:1-2, 8), to both Gentiles and Jews (vv. 12-13).

2:18 As a result of the Cross, both Jewish and Gentile believers have "access" to God ("the Father"). Formerly, access to God was through Judaism, but now it is "through Christ (Him)" by the Holy "Spirit." As a result of Christ's death, all believers now have direct access to the Father (cf. 3:12; Rom. 5:2). The Holy Spirit gives Jewish and Gentile Christians equal ("we both have") access to God. Note that all three members of the Godhead appear again here.

Controversy over whether Gentile believers had to come to God through Judaism, or if they could come directly to God as Gentiles, raged in the early church (Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 1—2). Paul gave the solution to this problem again here (cf. Acts 15:6-21; Gal. 3—4). God has made Jewish and Gentile believers "one" in the church (v. 14). He created a new entity, the church, out of two others, namely, Jewish believers and Gentile believers (v. 15). Both kinds of believers experience reconciliation with each other and with God in that body (vv. 15-16), and both have access to God by one Spirit (v. 18).¹⁰⁷

The consequences of Gentile believers' union with Jewish believers 2:19-22

2:19 Because of this union, Christians "are no longer strangers (foreigners) and aliens" in relation to believers of former ages. They are "fellow citizens with all the saints," namely, believers who lived before Pentecost. Elsewhere Paul spoke of the local church as a household (1 Tim. 3:15), but here the "household" in view is all believers of all ages.¹⁰⁸

2:20 Paul, third, compared the church to a "temple" (v. 21). It rests on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Evidently New Testament prophets are in view, since the word "prophets" follows "apostles" (cf. 3:5; 4:11). These men constituted the foundation of the church, since it was through them that God revealed and established the church.

"If the teaching of the prophets and apostles is the foundation, this must have had authority before the church began to exist."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷See Bruce W. Fong, "Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principle of Eph 2:11-22," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:4 (December 1995):565-80.

¹⁰⁸See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 395-96.

¹⁰⁹Calvin, 1:7:2. "Church" here means both the Christian church, generally, and the Roman Catholic Church, specifically.

"In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures."¹¹⁰

At the time Paul wrote, the "cornerstone" was the crucial part of the foundation of a building. It was the stone with which the builder squared up every other stone, including the other foundation stones.¹¹¹

"In the East it was considered to be even more important than the foundation."¹¹²

(Calvin wrote: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."¹¹³ These two elements, he believed, constitute a true church.)

2:21 Paul pictured the church as under construction ("the whole building, being fitted together"), with God adding new believers ("growing") constantly (cf. 4:15-16; Matt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 2:5). The individual stones represent believers, both Jewish and Gentile. Today God does not inhabit a physical temple somewhere on earth, as He did in Old Testament times. He indwells His church, which is a spiritual (and "holy") "temple" spread over all the earth. It began on the day of Pentecost, and it will continue until the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). As physical temples glorified the "gods" they represented in ancient times, so the church glorifies the "one true God" today.

Paul may very well have used the illustration of a "temple," because the Temple of Artemis, near the Christians in Ephesus, was the city's most outstanding claim to fame. It was four times as big as the Parthenon that still stands in Athens. One hundred twenty-seven white columns rose 60 feet high, and surrounded an image of the goddess Artemis (Diana).¹¹⁴ Authorities still regard the Temple of Artemis as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (cf. Acts 19:23-41).

2:22 The Holy Spirit indwells the church universal. He, of course, also indwells every believer individually (John 14:17; Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:2; 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). Paul compared the individual believer to "a temple of God" elsewhere (1 Cor. 6:19). He also referred to the local Christian congregation as a "temple" (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16). However here, he revealed that all Christians are part of one great "holy temple": the church universal.

¹¹⁰Stott, p. 107.

¹¹¹Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 627.

¹¹²Wood, p. 42.

¹¹³Calvin, 4:1:9.

¹¹⁴Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 36.21 §96.

"Israel *had* a building in which God was pleased to dwell: the Church *is* a building in which God is pleased to dwell."¹¹⁵

"Now His presence is dispersed, not localized. Now His presence is incarnated, instead of confined behind a veil."¹¹⁶

"What a fellowship rivets our gaze in the communion of saints! Where shall we find its like? Gathered from east and west, from patriarchs of the prior and laggards of the last times, from the courts of kings and the cabins of beggars, from babes-in-arms and centenarians, right honourables and ragamuffins, from the ranks of the learned and the ignorant, the pharisee and the publican, the sharp-witted and the feeble-minded, the respectable and the criminal classes—what a divine power must be put forth to mould all these incongruous elements into one consentient [united in opinion] whole, stamped with one regenerate likeness for evermore, the radiant image of the 'Alpha and Omega,' God's Yokefellow and theirs, coequally David's Son and David's Lord!"¹¹⁷

God's plan for believers included the building of a new entity after Jesus Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. Matt. 16:18). It was to be the church. The church is not just a continuation and modernization of Israel under a new name but a new creation (v. 15). In the church, Jewish and Gentile believers stand with equal rights and privileges before God. Membership in this new body is one of the great blessings of believers in the present age, along with individual blessings (vv. 1-10). Paul glorified God for that blessing in this section of Ephesians.

"I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honour of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is—a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as Peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due to his name."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, p. 93.

¹¹⁶Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 314.

¹¹⁷Simpson, p. 68.

¹¹⁸Stott, pp. 111-12.

2. Past ignorance 3:1-13

Paul began to pray for his readers again (cf. vv. 1, 14), but he interrupted himself to tell them more about the church. What he said in this section gives background information concerning the church as a mystery.

3:1 "For this reason" refers to what Paul had said in the first two chapters, about God's blessings that are now the possession of both Gentile and Jewish believers. Since God has blessed us so greatly, Paul prayed that his readers would comprehend fully the extent of God's love for them (vv. 14-21).

His reference to himself, as Christ's "prisoner" for the "sake of [the] Gentiles," led him to digress and explain why he was such. When Paul wrote this epistle, he was under house arrest in Rome. This imprisonment had resulted from his service for Christ, specifically his ministry among Gentiles, for which the Jews had mobbed him in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:21, 18; 2 Tim. 1:11-12). Thus the apostle regarded his imprisonment as God's will for him.

3:2 This verse begins another long sentence in the Greek text, that runs through verse 13. "If indeed" (NASB) means "Surely" (NIV, cf. 4:21). The Ephesians had indeed heard of Paul's ministry.

"Stewardship" or "administration" (Gr. *oikonomia*, dispensation, v. 9; 1:10) here has the idea of the management of someone else's business (cf. 1 Cor. 9:17; Col. 1:25). Paul viewed God as in the process of dispensing His grace, throughout history, through various administrators. Paul's responsibility was to carry God's grace to all people, but particularly to the Gentiles (cf. v. 8; 2:7).

"God's principles do not change, but His methods of dealing with mankind do change over the course of history. 'Distinguish the ages,' wrote St. Augustine, 'and the Scriptures harmonize.'"¹¹⁹

3:3 Paul's duty involved receiving "revelation" not previously given (i.e., "the mystery," secret), specifically that Gentiles and Jews were equal partners in the church (2:16; 3:6). Paul had written of this mystery before in this epistle (1:9-10; 2:11-22).

¹¹⁹Wiersbe, 2:27.

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO "MYSTERIES"(THINGS PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN BUT NOW REVEALED)¹²⁰	
Matt. 13:11	The secrets of the kingdom of heaven
Luke 8:10	The secrets (mysteries) of the kingdom of God
Rom. 11:25	Israel experiencing a hardening of heart
Rom. 16:25-26	The plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.
1 Cor. 4:1	New Testament revelation
1 Cor. 15:51	The Rapture
Eph. 1:9	God's will
Eph. 3:2-3	The administration of God's grace
Eph. 3:4	Christ
Eph. 3:9	The church
Eph. 5:32	Christ and the church
Col. 1:26	Christ in us, the hope of glory
Col. 1:27	Christ in us
Col. 2:2	Christ
Col. 4:3	Christ
2 Thess. 2:7	The secret power of lawlessness already at work
1 Tim. 3:9	The deep truths of the faith
1 Tim. 3:16	Godliness
Rev. 1:20	The seven stars (angels)
Rev. 10:7	The details of the Tribulation
Rev. 17:5	Babylon the great

3:4 What Paul had already written about this mystery revealed his understanding of ("insight into") it.

3:5 The mystery was unknown before God revealed it to the New Testament "apostles and prophets." "Prophets" may be a more specific description of "apostles" here (cf. 2:20). That means God did not reveal the church in the Old Testament.

¹²⁰Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 48. See also the excursus in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 428-34.

Specifically what is the mystery in view here? Traditional dispensationalists, as distinguished from "progressive dispensationalists" and covenant theologians, have understood the mystery to be *the church*, the body of Christ.¹²¹ By "traditional dispensationalists," I am referring to normative dispensationalists, which some "progressive dispensationalists" have subdivided into "classical" and "revised" dispensationalists.

"Paul then, is explaining, not limiting the mystery there set forth [by his reference to the equality of Jews and Gentiles]. The concept must stand that this whole age with its program was not revealed in the Old Testament, but constitutes a new program and a new line of revelation in this present age."¹²²

"At least four defining characteristics of the church are described as a mystery. (1) The body concept of Jewish and Gentile believers united into one body is designated as a mystery in Ephesians 3:1-12. (2) The doctrine of Christ indwelling every believer, the Christ-in-you concept, is called a mystery in Colossians 1:24-27 (cf. Col. 2:10-19; 3:4, 11). (3) The church as the Bride of Christ is called a mystery in Ephesians 5:22-32. (4) The Rapture is called a mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. These four mysteries describe qualities that distinguish the church from Israel."¹²³

Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists say that the mystery is not the church itself, but the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church.¹²⁴ Some of them see the church in the Old Testament.¹²⁵

"The mystery referred to in the 'dispensation of the mystery' (Eph. 3:9) is the relationship of Jews and Gentiles to Christ and to one another. This relationship is the distinguishing characteristic of the church."¹²⁶

"The mystery of verse 6 may thus be summed up as the coequal participation of the Gentiles with Israel in the full messianic salvation that is realized in the crucified and risen Christ and made effective to both through the

¹²¹E.g., *ibid.*, pp. 98-100; Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 133-34; Gary W. Derickson, "The New Testament Church as a Mystery," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:664 (October-December 2009):436-45.

¹²²J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 137. See also Charles C. Ryrie, "The Mystery in Ephesians 3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:489 (January-March 1966):25.

¹²³Fruchtenbaum, pp. 117-18.

¹²⁴E.g., Morris, pp. 87-89, 93.

¹²⁵For refutation, see Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, pp. 100-102.

¹²⁶Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensations in Biblical Theology," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 121.

apostolic proclamation of the gospel. This truth of the unity of Gentiles and Israel in the church, which has already been introduced in connection with the 'mystery of his will' (1:9-14, esp. vv. 12-13) and elaborated in 2:11-22, stands behind all of the teachings of the epistle as the central theme."¹²⁷

These two groups of interpreters view the church differently. Traditional dispensationalists understand the church to be an intercalation or parenthesis in God's kingdom program. Some of them refer to the church as the "mystery form of the kingdom." They see the church as a hiatus in God's dealings with Israel on the earth. Consequently the church is a new entity, not simply the continuation of the Old Testament theocracy.¹²⁸

Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists view the nature of the church differently. They believe the church is a progressive stage in the historical unfolding of God's kingdom program on earth. It is from this progressive unfolding of the dispensations or economies in God's earthly kingdom program, that the term "progressive dispensationalism" comes.¹²⁹ They stress the continuity between the past, present, and future rules of God over the earth. Non-dispensationalists typically refer to the church as the "new Israel." Traditional dispensationalists stress the discontinuity between Israel and the church, both in the past and in the future.

Was the mystery revealed in any sense in the Old Testament, or was this revelation something entirely new in Paul's day? Traditional dispensationalists respond that neither the church as a distinct entity, nor the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church, was previously revealed. They appeal to the meaning of "mystery" for support. "Mystery" (Gr. *mysterion*) in the New Testament refers to "'a truth which was once hidden but now is revealed,' 'a truth which without special revelation would have been unknown.'"¹³⁰ "As" (v. 5) does not mean that God had revealed it previously, but now revealed it more fully in Paul's day, as the context (v. 9; cf. 2:16) and Colossians 1:26 make clear. God had not explicitly revealed anything about the church in the Old Testament.

"The general assertion, sometimes made, that these mysteries did not appear at all in the Old Testament should be modified. They are not there advanced in any clearness or fullness of revelation. However, certain New Testament

¹²⁷Robert L. Saucy, "The Church as the Mystery of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 136-37.

¹²⁸See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 133-34; idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 124-25; John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 232-37; and James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 254.

¹²⁹See Craig A. Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 49.

¹³⁰J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 166.

mysteries are anticipated in Old Testament prophecy and type."¹³¹

Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists say "yes and no." The church was revealed in the Old Testament, not by that name, perhaps, but as a future stage in the earthly kingdom of God. Nevertheless the equality of Gentiles and Jews in one body (2:15-16) was new revelation. On this last point, all of these interpreters agree. Allis, an amillennialist, wrote the following:

". . . it [the mystery] was new and unknown in a relative sense only, being in its essentials an important theme of prophecy from the time of Abraham . . ."132

". . . a 'mystery' need not even have been unknown or unappreciated previously, except perhaps relatively so . . ."133

"A mystery may be hidden in the sense that its truth has not yet been realized."¹³⁴

The correct interpretation depends on a proper identification of the mystery and an accurate understanding of the nature of the church.

The question of whether or not the Davidic (messianic) kingdom has already begun relates to the answer. Traditional dispensationalists say that it has not begun, since the Davidic kingdom is an earthly kingdom, and therefore Christ will only begin to reign over it when He returns to earth. Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists all say that the messianic kingdom has begun, since Christ is now enthroned in heaven.

These groups, however, interpret the nature of the messianic kingdom differently. Some amillennialists say the messianic kingdom is Christ's heavenly rule. Others say that it will be His earthly rule in the new heavens and earth. Covenant premillennialists and progressive dispensationalists say that the messianic kingdom is a two-stage rule. Christ now rules from heaven through the church, and in the future He will return and reign on earth. Thus there is an "already" aspect, and there is also a "not yet" aspect to the messianic kingdom.

¹³¹Chafer, *The Ephesian* . . . , p. 97.

¹³²Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 97. See W. Harold Mare, "Paul's Mystery in Ephesians 3," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 8:2 (Spring 1965):83.

¹³³J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*, p. 126. See J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2:448-49.

¹³⁴Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 150. See his ch. 6, "The Church and the Revelation of the Mysteries," for a fuller explanation of the progressive dispensational interpretation of the mysteries.

If the Davidic kingdom is an exclusively earthly reign of Messiah, then it seems that the church is not just a segment of this kingdom. Messiah would need to be present to reign over this kingdom. Unquestionably He exercises universal sovereignty presently, but this seems to be different from His reign as David's heir over David's earthly kingdom. The church enters into many blessings because of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, not because He rules as the Davidic king from heaven now. Some of these blessings are identical to what believers will enjoy when Christ returns to reign on the earth. This should not lead us to conclude, however, that the church is the first stage of Christ's messianic kingdom.

I believe that the mystery in view, here, is the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church (v. 6).¹³⁵ But this is only one mystery concerning the church that the New Testament reveals. Taken together, all these mysteries present the church as a distinct entity in God's plan, and not a continuation of Israel or just one aspect of the messianic kingdom. Neither the church, nor the present equal relationship of Jews and Gentiles, was explicitly revealed in the Old Testament, though Gentile blessing through Israel was. God had revealed His purpose to bless Gentiles along with Jews from Genesis 12:3 onward (cf. Isa. 2:1-4; 61:5-6).

Note that Paul said God revealed the mystery "to His holy apostles and prophets" by the Spirit. He did not reveal the church only to Paul. Ultradispensationalists claim that the church could not have begun before Paul appeared on the scene, since he was the apostle through whom revelation concerning this mystery came.¹³⁶

3:6 This is the content of the mystery (cf. 2:11-22). First, Gentiles and Jews are "fellow heirs" of God's riches that He presently bestows on believers (cf. 2:19; 1:13-14; Gal. 3:29; 4:7). Second, they are "fellow members of the body" of Christ, which is the church (Col. 1:18). Third, they are "fellow partakers of the promise" concerning Christ in "the gospel" (i.e., that whoever trusts in Him has everlasting life; John 3:16; et al.). The mystery is not that Gentiles would enjoy salvation and enter into blessing along with Israel. God revealed that in the Old Testament (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 42:6; et al.). It is that God has joined Jews and Gentiles as equals in one new body, which is the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).¹³⁷

"That Gentiles were to be saved was no mystery (Rom. 9:24-33; 10:19-21). The mystery 'hidden in God' was the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing—the Church, which is his [Christ's] body,' formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13) and in

¹³⁵Cf. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 432, 501.

¹³⁶Cornelius R. Stam, *Acts Dispensationally Considered*, 2:17-19. For a brief discussion of ultradispensationalism, see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 192-205; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 197-207.

¹³⁷See Martin, p. 1308.

which the earthly distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears (Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 3:10-11). The revelation of this 'mystery' of the Church was foretold but not explained by Christ (Mt. 16:18). The details concerning the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the Church were committed to Paul and his fellow 'apostles and prophets by the Spirit' (Eph. 3:5)."¹³⁸

3:7 God graciously gave Paul the opportunity to serve Him by proclaiming the gospel ("the gift of God's grace . . . given to me"), aided by God's supernatural enablement ("the working of His power"). "Minister" (Gr. *diakonos*, deacon) emphasizes service, not servitude (cf. Gr. *doulos*, slave).

3:8 Paul considered himself the "least" worthy (lit. the "leaster") "of all the saints" (1:1) to have received such a privilege. This unusual expression is "a comparative of the superlative."¹³⁹ Rather than thinking God owed him something, Paul regarded God's entrusting him with the gospel as *pure grace*, unmerited favor (cf. 2 Cor. 12:11).

"Perhaps he was deliberately playing on the meaning of his name. For his Roman surname 'Paulus' is Latin for 'little' or 'small', and tradition says he was a little man. 'I am little,' he may be saying, 'little by name, little in stature, and morally and spiritually littler than the littlest of all Christians.'"¹⁴⁰

The "unfathomable riches of Christ" are what Paul preached, and what he particularly expounded in this epistle (cf. Rom. 11:33).

3:9 The second part of Paul's ministry, besides preaching to the Gentiles, was explaining ("to bring to light") the mystery of the church to everyone. Even though God had not revealed the church earlier, it was in His plan from the beginning (1 Cor. 2:7; Rom. 16:25-26).

3:10 Paul ministered in these two ways, so that the manifold wisdom of God might appear clearly ("be made known") to the angelic hosts (cf. 1:21; 6:12). "Manifold" (Gr. *polypoikilos*) means variegated or made up of many different kinds. Individual redemption is not in view here, but the church—composed of people of many different types, all within two main groups, Jews and Gentiles—is.

"The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. No other human

¹³⁸*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1275.

¹³⁹Martin, p. 1308.

¹⁴⁰Stott, p. 119.

community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique."¹⁴¹

God's "manifold wisdom" is reflected in the church's variegated construction. The angels marvel at God's wisdom as they observe Jews and Gentiles united in one body.

". . . the church is to be an audio-visual display of God's reconciling work. In this primary way she testifies to God's grace and wisdom. So Paul encouraged living life in Christ in such a way that reconciliation is the dominant feature of church life."¹⁴²

3:11 This plan was part of God's "eternal purpose" (cf. 1:11). God brought this part of His plan to fruition through our Lord's earthly ministry. Specifically, the Jews' rejection of their Messiah resulted in the postponement (from the human viewpoint) of the messianic (Davidic) kingdom, and the beginning of the church.

"God's program today is not 'the headship of Israel' (Deut. 28:1-13), but the headship of Christ over His church."¹⁴³

3:12 Jesus Christ's past work has an abiding present effect for believers today. Because of His work, we now enjoy the rights of address ("boldness") and "confident access" to God. We can address God boldly and approach Him confidently because our Savior's work has brought us to God (cf. Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:2).

"Forgiven sinners do not come to God hesitantly, wondering about their likely reception. They rest not on their own achievement but on what Christ has done for them, and for that reason they come full of confidence."¹⁴⁴

3:13 In this verse the apostle returned to the thought with which he began this section (v. 1). God had entrusted Paul with the mystery of the church, and had given him the ministry of evangelizing the Gentiles. "Therefore," his Ephesian readers should not view his present imprisonment as a tragedy, but simply as part of his ministry. His ministry was for them and for *their* "glory," so they should view his "tribulations" as part of God's good will for him and for them (cf. Phil. 1:7).

"The mystery of Ephesians 3 is the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. This equality and this body were not revealed in the Old Testament. They were made known only after the coming of Christ by the

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁴²Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 315.

¹⁴³Wiersbe, 2:29.

¹⁴⁴Morris, p. 97.

Spirit to the apostles and prophets including Paul but not excluding others."¹⁴⁵

Saucy, a "progressive dispensationalist," interpreted the mystery in a slightly different way.

"Our examination of the mystery in Ephesians 3 leads us to a mediating position between traditional dispensational and nondispensational views [i.e., the progressive dispensational view]. The unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ is taking place in the church in partial fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Messianic days have dawned, albeit in a way not clearly anticipated in the prophecies. Rather than one grand age of fulfillment under the messianic reign, the prophetic fulfillment has been divided into two ages related to the two comings of Christ. In this first age of fulfillment, the spiritual messianic salvation is already present in the gospel. This gospel is broadly spoken of as the mystery, or the mystery of Christ, or the mystery of the gospel. The specific spiritual unity of all peoples entailed in this gospel is the content of the mystery of Ephesians 3."¹⁴⁶

Whereas the Old Testament predicted the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers, it did not reveal their complete equality in Christ. On this point, all dispensationalists and covenant theologians agree.

3. Future comprehension 3:14-19

Paul had explained that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (2:15). Therefore he prayed that they might experience the unity, that was theirs spiritually, in their relations with one another. He turned from exposition to intercession (cf. ch. 1; John 13—17). Verses 14-19 are also one sentence in the Greek text.

"In the first prayer [1:15-23], the emphasis is on *enlightenment*; but in this prayer, the emphasis is on *enablement*. It is not so much a matter of *knowing* as *being*—laying our hands on what God has for us and by faith making it a vital part of our lives."¹⁴⁷

"Whereas the first prayer centers in knowledge, this prayer has its focal point in love."¹⁴⁸

3:14 "For this reason" goes back to verse 1, from which Paul departed in verses 2-13 to give more information about the mystery. Bowing the "knees" and kneeling in prayer were postures that reflected an attitude of submission to

¹⁴⁵Ryrie, "The Mystery . . .," p. 31. This article contains an excellent explanation of the mystery from the dispensational viewpoint as well as refutation of the amillennial, covenant premillennial, and ultradispensational views.

¹⁴⁶Saucy, "The Church . . .," p. 151.

¹⁴⁷Wiersbe, 2:30-31.

¹⁴⁸Martin, p. 1309.

God. Kneeling was not the most common posture for prayer in Paul's culture. Usually people stood when they prayed (cf. Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13). Praying on one's knees signified especially fervent praying (cf. Luke 22:41; Acts 7:40, 60; 20:36; 21:5).¹⁴⁹ "Before" suggests intimate face-to-face contact with the heavenly Father (cf. Matt. 6:9).

- 3:15 Paul made a word play from the word "father" (v. 14, Gr. *patera*). A father is the head of the typical family (Gr. *patria*). God is not only the Father of "the family" in which Gentile and Jewish believers are one (i.e., the church)—He is the prototypical father. He is the ultimate Father over all families that have a father. Every human family exists as a "family" *with a father*, because of God's relationships as a "Father."
- 3:16 In this prayer, Paul requested one thing: that God would *strengthen* his readers "in the inner man." He asked that God would provide this "power" (Gr. *dynamis*) "according to" His vast resources ("riches"; cf. 1:18). The power comes to us "through" the indwelling Holy "Spirit" (cf. Phil. 1:19), who strengthens our "inner man," namely, our innermost being (i.e., not just our muscles but our entire person).
- 3:17 The result of this request is that Christ may be "at home" in the personality of the believer. He *indwells* every Christian (1 Cor. 12:13), but is especially at home ("dwells") in the lives of those believers who let Him be first in their attitudes and activities (John 15:14). As the believer keeps trusting and obeying, Jesus Christ can continue to occupy this place in his or her life. Paul was praying that his readers would enjoy intimate fellowship with their Lord (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).
- The believer may grasp Christ's love, because God has "rooted" the Christian as a plant, and "grounded" him or her as a building "in love." Jesus Christ's Lordship over the life produces the love in view here.
- Here is another reference to the Trinity, in verses 14-17: Father (v. 14), Spirit (v. 16), and Son (v. 17; cf. 1:13-14, 17; 2:18, 22).
- 3:18 When believers accept Jesus Christ's revelation of the mystery of the church, they are able to comprehend that God's love is broad enough ("breadth") to embrace both Jews and Gentiles in the church. They can appreciate that it is long enough ("length") to reach the far off (Gentiles) as well as the near (Jews), and to stretch from eternity to eternity. They can see that it is high enough ("height") to raise both Jews and Gentiles into the heavenly places. They can understand that it is deep enough ("depth") to rescue both kinds of people from sin's degradation and from Satan's grip.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹Foulkes, p. 101; Morris, pp. 100-101.

¹⁵⁰See Barclay, p. 155, for a slightly different interpretation of the meaning of these dimensions.

3:19 Paul desired that his readers would apprehend "the love of Christ" fully. Yet he acknowledged that full comprehension of that love is impossible, because it is greater than mortals can conceive.

"The four words seem intended to indicate, not so much the thoroughness of the comprehension as the vastness of the thing to be comprehended."¹⁵¹

"No matter how much we know of the love of Christ, there is always more to know."¹⁵²

The ultimate goal of Paul's request, was that his readers might be so full of the knowledge of Christ's love and appreciation for God, that they might allow Christ to control them fully (4:13).

"These four requests are more like four parts to a telescope. One request leads into the next one, and so on."¹⁵³

"I like to think of the apostle's petition as a staircase by which he climbs higher and higher in his aspiration for his readers. His prayer-staircase has four steps, whose key words are 'strength', 'love', 'knowledge' and 'fullness'.¹⁵⁴

"There are really five petitions in this greatest of all Paul's prayers (one already in 1:16-23), two by the infinitives after *hina doi* ["that he would grant you," v. 16] (*krataiothenai* ["to be strengthened," v. 16], *katoikesai* ["that Christ may dwell," v. 17]), two infinitives after *hina exischusete* ["that you . . . may be able," vv. 17-18] (*katalabesthai* ["to comprehend," v. 18], *gnonai* ["to know," v. 19]), and the last clause *hina plerothete* ["that you may be filled up," v. 19]. Nowhere does Paul sound such depths of spiritual emotion or rise to such heights of spiritual passion as here."¹⁵⁵

"There could be no doubt but that the Apostle Paul believed in the divine sovereignty, yet he prayed that God would grant three [?] important blessings to these saints, and he prayed with evident confidence that *prayer does change things*.¹⁵⁶

C. DOXOLOGY 3:20-21

"The doxology is plainly the climax of the first half of Ephesians; it may be regarded as the climax of the whole letter, which rises to a spiritual peak at this point and then concentrates on practical outworkings."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹Abbott, p. 99.

¹⁵²Morris, p. 107.

¹⁵³Wiersbe, 2:31.

¹⁵⁴Stott, p. 134.

¹⁵⁵Robertson, 4:532.

¹⁵⁶Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, pp. 108-9.

¹⁵⁷Wood, pp. 52-53.

". . . doctrine leads to doxology as well as to duty."¹⁵⁸

The basis for Paul's confidence, that God "is able to do far more abundantly beyond" what he had prayed for ("what we ask"), or could even imagine ("or think")—was God's bringing Jews and Gentiles together in one body. With God's provision of love, both groups could function harmoniously together in the church. "Glory" would come to God "in the church," for uniting these two previously irreconcilable groups, and for enabling them to love and work together as fellow members of the same body. This praise will continue "forever" (lit. to all the courses of the age of the ages).¹⁵⁹

This is one of the clearest passages in the New Testament that sets forth the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father (cf. John 17:24; 1 Cor. 15:24, 28; Phil. 2:9-11).¹⁶⁰

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S CONDUCT 4:1—6:20

Practical application (chs. 4—6) now follows doctrinal instruction (chs. 1—3).

"Now the apostle moves on from the new society to the new standards which are expected of it. So he turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done (in the indicative), to what we must be and do (in the imperative), from doctrine to duty, . . . from mind-stretching theology to its down-to-earth, concrete implications in everyday living."¹⁶¹

It is interesting to contrast these chapters with the revelation of the Israelites' conduct requirements in Exodus 20 through Numbers 10: the Mosaic Law. Paul's instructions are more general principles and less specific regulations, more gracious and less legal.

A. SPIRITUAL WALK 4:1—6:9

Paul had explained the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in the church, and had prayed for the realization of that unity in experience (2:11—3:21). He now told how to attain a spiritual walk, namely, a life that manifests the Holy Spirit's control.

"The key word in this last half of the book is *walk* (Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), while the key idea in the first half is wealth."¹⁶²

1. Walking in unity 4:1-16

The apostle began by stressing the importance of walking (or living) in unity. This is one of two classic New Testament passages on unity, the other being John 17. God will not enforce unity in answer to prayer. Believers have a responsibility to obey Him as well.

¹⁵⁸Stott, p. 45.

¹⁵⁹Martin, p. 1309.

¹⁶⁰See John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64.

¹⁶¹Stott, p. 146.

¹⁶²Wiersbe, 2:34.

"Instruction, intercession and exhortation constitute a formidable trio of weapons in any Christian teacher's armoury."¹⁶³

Charity, unity, diversity, and maturity are the key concepts in this section.

The basis of unity 4:1-6

- 4:1 "Therefore" or "then" refers to what Paul had said in chapters 1—3. To "walk" worthily ("in a manner worthy"), or in balance, means to harmonize one's conduct with his or her calling. "Calling" here refers to God's calling to live in unity as Jews and Gentiles in the church (2:13-16). To walk worthily, then, would involve behaving in a united way, living in unity with Jewish brethren if one is a Gentile, or vice versa, in the church. By referring to himself as the Lord's "prisoner" again (3:1), Paul reminded his readers of his authority to urge ("implore") them to live this way. He was in prison because he had followed God's will faithfully.
- 4:2 Three virtues contribute to unity in the church. "Humility" is a proper assessment of oneself in God's program.

". . . it would be natural for the flesh to be lifted up with pride because of the exalted position obtained."¹⁶⁴

"To face oneself is the most humiliating thing in the world."¹⁶⁵

A humble Jew or Gentile would regard his ethnic counterpart as equal with himself, not as inferior or superior to himself.

"Gentleness" is the opposite of self-assertion. A gentle person is one whose emotions are under control. Whereas "humility" may have one's relationship to God and His blessings in view, "gentleness" may have the believer's relationship to the world in view.¹⁶⁶

". . . meekness is a virtue of the strong, those who could exert force to get their own way but choose not to."¹⁶⁷

Meekness is "the absence of the disposition to assert personal rights, either in the presence of God or of men."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³Stott, p. 146.

¹⁶⁴Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, p. 118.

¹⁶⁵Barclay, p. 159.

¹⁶⁶Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁷Morris, p. 114.

¹⁶⁸G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 265.

"Patience" is endurance even under affliction. When wronged, the patient person does not retaliate (cf. Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:11; 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:2). Relationship to fellow believers may be especially in view.¹⁶⁹

"*Makrothumia*, patience, long-suffering is the spirit which bears insult and injury without bitterness and without complaint. It is the spirit which bears the sheer foolishness of men without irritation. It is the spirit which can suffer unpleasant people with graciousness and fools without complaint."¹⁷⁰

Believers should practice all these virtues with loving forbearance toward one another (cf. Rom. 2:4).

4:3 Christians must "preserve the unity" between believers that God has established in the church. Paul viewed "peace" as what keeps potential factions together. He had in mind peace between all kinds of diverse groups in the church, the most basic being Jews and Gentiles.

4:4 Seven elements of unity follow that unite believers in the church. Believers should remember them when tempted to break unity. Again, all three members of the Trinity are in view, and play a part in this process.

"Paul now gives the basis [for unity] by explaining in more detail how elements of the Christian faith revolve around the three persons of the Trinity. Unity is stressed by the sevenfold use of 'one' (*eis, mia, en*)."¹⁷¹

The "one body" is the church, the universal body of believers in the present age (1:23; 2:16; 3:6). The "one Spirit" is the Holy Spirit, who indwells the church as a whole, as well as every individual believer in the church (2:22; 1 Cor. 12:13). The "one hope" is the hope of the future, that each Christian has, and that the whole church has (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3; 3:15). This hope began when God called us to salvation (1:4, 18; 2:7; 4:1). These identifications seem clear from their occurrences elsewhere in the epistle.

4:5 The "one Lord" is Jesus Christ, the Head of the church (1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The "one faith" is probably the faith that each Christian, and the whole church, have placed or exercised in Christ, more than Christianity viewed as a faith (cf. Col. 2:7). This identification links faith to Christ in the context (2:8).

The "one baptism" may be the baptism that unites all believers in the body of Christ. This is Spirit baptism, which water baptism symbolizes. Both kinds of baptism were probably in Paul's mind.¹⁷² However, baptism falls

¹⁶⁹Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, p. 120.

¹⁷⁰Barclay, p. 163-64.

¹⁷¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 513.

¹⁷²Morris, p. 119.

in the second triad of elements that relate to Christ, rather than to the first that relate to the Spirit, in this verse. Therefore it may refer to water, rather than to Spirit, baptism. Another possibility is that it refers metaphorically to the believer's baptism into Christ's death. In this case, the "one baptism" would refer to the internal reality, of having been baptized into (identified with) the "one Lord," by means of the "one faith."¹⁷³

4:6 "All" refers to all believers. God is "the one God and Father" of *all* believers, who are His children. He is "over" them in the sense of being their sovereign. He lives "through" them and manifests Himself "in" them.

Evidently Paul began this list of seven elements of unity with the Spirit's work, because he had been speaking of the unity of the Spirit (v. 3). He then proceeded to discuss the gifts of the Spirit (vv. 7-13; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-6).

"The unity of the church is due to *charis*, God's grace having reconciled us to himself; but the diversity of the church is due to *charismata*, God's gifts distributed to church members."¹⁷⁴

The preservation of unity 4:7-16

Having described the basis of Christian unity, Paul next explained the means by which Christians can preserve it, namely, with the gifts that the Spirit gives. Paul's emphasis was more on the growth of the body of Christ, the church, in this section, than on individual Christian growth. Each believer contributes to the spiritual growth of the church as he or she exercises his or her particular abilities in service.

4:7 Whereas each believer has received "grace" (unmerited favor and divine enablement) from God (3:2), God does not give each Christian the same "measure" of grace. Paul was speaking of God's "gift" of grace here as the specially provided ability to serve God. Though Jews and Gentiles both receive enabling grace from God, He gives this ability to different individuals in different kinds and amounts (cf. v. 11; Rom. 12:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:4-6).¹⁷⁵

"Gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools to build with. And if they are not used in love, they become weapons to fight with . . . (1 Cor. 12—14)."¹⁷⁶

4:8 Paul's paraphrase of Psalm 68:18 confirms his statement that God gives "gifts" to people. A military victor has the right to give gifts to those

¹⁷³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 518.

¹⁷⁴Stott, pp. 155-56.

¹⁷⁵For defense of the view that spiritual gifts are ministries rather than abilities, see Kenneth Berding, "Confusing Word and Concept in 'Spiritual Gifts': Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):37-51.

¹⁷⁶Wiersbe, 2:37.

identified with him. Christ, the Victor over sinful people, has the right to give those people to the church as "gifts."¹⁷⁷ In Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Paul spoke of gifts given to people (cf. v. 7), but here he spoke of people given to the church as gifts.

"Some have alleged that Paul erred in his citation from Psalm 68:18 on at least two counts: (1) he altered the verb of the psalm from 'received' to 'gave,' thus reversing its meaning, and (2) he gave an interpretation to the Old Testament passage that is unwarranted. With regard to the first point, the origin of the reading 'gave' is not to be found in Ephesians 4:8. Rather, this is a variant reading for Psalm 68:18 that has an ancient pedigree, as may be seen by its presence in both the Aramaic Targum and the Syriac Peshitta. However, Paul was not necessarily quoting with one of these sources in mind; the reading probably had a history not limited to its appearance in these particular sources. It was apparently a variant reading that was well known, especially within Jewish rabbinic circles. Furthermore, Paul must be permitted some latitude in his citation. His purpose was not to provide a formal and exact representation of the Old Testament phraseology, but rather to expound and apply the passage to the work of Christ as Lord of the church. That the apostle used a variant reading of the psalm should not in itself be overly surprising.

"Regarding the second point, it seems clear that Paul used an analogical patterning of Old Testament teaching within the New Testament context. This was common among New Testament writers. Such a practice does not obviate the Old Testament contextual setting, nor does it purport to provide the only fulfillment of the Old Testament passage. When Matthew, for example, related Hosea 11:1 ('Out of Egypt have I called My son') to the flight of the holy family, he did not thereby deny that Hosea 11:1 refers to the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. He simply drew an analogy between the two events. Likewise in Ephesians 4:8 the application of Psalm 68:18 to Jesus as the bestower of gifts for ministry within the church does not eliminate or contradict the Old Testament application of the words to the victorious Israelite King. In keeping with common *Midrash peshar* techniques, but in a way that avoids the excesses to which the method was pushed by some nonbiblical writers, Paul made a valid application of Christological significance to the Old Testament passage.

¹⁷⁷Who the captives were seems to have been of less interest to Paul than the fact that Christ won a great victory (Morris, pp. 123-24).

On the one hand, according to Psalm 68:18, God ascended Zion as a victorious king worthy of being the recipient of gifts of homage. On the other hand, according to Ephesians 4:8, Jesus also ascended to the heavenly Zion as the victorious Lord who lovingly bestowed on His church the gifts of ministry essential to her future well-being. The one passage provides the pattern for the other."¹⁷⁸

A slightly different interpretation follows.

". . . Paul apparently followed the Jewish interpretation of the day (the Targum), which paraphrased this verse as follows: 'You did ascend to the firmament, O Prophet Moses! You led captivity captive; you taught the words of the Law; you gave [not 'received,' as in the Heb.] gifts to the sons of men.' (This interpretation saw Moses as God's representative.) Paul followed this Jewish exegesis because it explained that the conqueror *distributed* the gifts to His loyal subjects. The apostle applied that idea to Christ's victory over the forces of evil and His granting spiritual gifts (cf. Eph. 4:11) to those on His side. By this analogy (based more on the Jewish interpretation of the psalm than on the exact Heb. wording) Paul emphasized the greatness of believers' spiritual victory in Christ."¹⁷⁹

Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, wrote many times that various royal people received and gave gifts to their friends, sometimes to express gratitude and or to win favor. This was true especially among the royals in New Testament times. I think it is likely that Paul had this custom in mind when he wrote this verse. Christ both received gifts (praise, honor, adulation) from many people for His defeat of Satan at the Cross, and He gave gifts (gifted people, in this case) to the church as the Victor.

4:9 In verses 9-11, Paul commented on the meaning of "ascended" and "gave" in his citation.

For Christ to have ascended to heaven, He first had to descend to "the lower parts of the earth." This is probably a reference to Jesus' tomb or grave (genitive of possession),¹⁸⁰ rather than to the earth (genitive of apposition)¹⁸¹ or to Hades (genitive of comparison),¹⁸² in view of the

¹⁷⁸Richard A. Taylor, "The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 in Light of the Ancient Versions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):335-36.

¹⁷⁹Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 843.

¹⁸⁰Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 634; Simpson, p. 92; Chafer, *The Ephesian . . .*, p. 129.

¹⁸¹John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, pp. 293-95; Abbott, pp. 115-16; A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 242-48; W. Hall Harris III, "The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):198-214; Robertson, 4:536; Martin, p. 1310.

¹⁸²Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, pp. 521-22.

context. In His death, Jesus Christ gained the victory over sin, and He redeemed those whom He would give as gifts to the church.

- 4:10 Paul identified the "descended" Christ as the same Person as the "ascended" Christ, who now is in position to rule over all (cf. 1:22). He "fill[s] all things" with His fullness (cf. Col. 1:18-19; 2:9; Prov. 30:4).
- 4:11 This verse explains "gave" (v. 8) and begins a sentence that runs through verse 16 in the Greek text.

After Jesus Christ ascended, "He gave," as Victor over death, *gifts* to the church that enabled it to function. This order of events is in harmony with the revelation that the church is a new entity that came into existence after Jesus' ascension.¹⁸³

Christ gave *gifted people* to the church as gifts to the church. He gave some individuals to be "apostles" in the church. "Apostle" means someone sent as an authoritative delegate. Twelve men plus Paul were the official apostles, who had seen the risen Christ and had received personal appointment from Him (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 15:8-9; Gal. 1:1; 2:6-9). However, there were other men who, while not apostles in this limited sense, functioned as apostles. The New Testament writers called them "apostles," too (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:6; Rom. 16:7; cf. 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:7; 1 Cor. 4:6, 9). The duty of the apostles was to establish the church and the churches (2:20; 3:5). The word *apostolos* also describes any servant who is sent by his master on any mission (John 13:16). "Missionary" is a modern equivalent term. It is probably according to their spiritual gifts, rather than their offices, that Paul was thinking of these individuals.¹⁸⁴

New Testament "prophets" (Gr. *prophetes*, one who speaks forth) provided edification, exhortation, and comfort to the church (1 Cor. 14:3). Some of them conveyed new authoritative revelation to the church (2:20; 3:5; Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). Much of this is the revelation that we have in our New Testament books. Most of the prophets, however, simply "spoke forth" truth that God had previously revealed (cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26-33).¹⁸⁵ Prophets also led in worship of God, including leading in public prayer (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1; 1 Cor. 11:5). This aspect of prophesying was regarded as a less authoritative function in the church than teaching, since a teacher interpreted the written Word of God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Tim. 2:12).

¹⁸³See Fruchtenbaum, p. 117.

¹⁸⁴Foulkes, p. 117.

¹⁸⁵See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

"Christians today do not get their spiritual knowledge *immediately* from the Holy Spirit, but *mediately* through the spirit teaching the Word."¹⁸⁶

"Evangelists" preached the gospel both at home and abroad (Acts 21:8; 8:6-40; 2 Tim. 4:5). Paul did not identify these people as foundational to the church, as he did the apostles and prophets (2:20). Nevertheless their ministry was and is essential. They equipped people to minister (vv. 12-13), at least by leading them to faith in Christ.

We might better translate the Greek phrase rendered "pastors and teachers" as "pastor-teachers." The Greek construction suggests that one kind, rather than two kinds of people, is in view. The Greek article translated "the" occurs only before "pastor." Moreover, the Greek conjunction translated "and," between "pastors" and "teachers," is different from the one used elsewhere in the verse (*kai* rather than *de*). However, the Greek construction may describe two types of gifted people whose ministries are among settled congregations, in contrast to the itinerant ministries of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Probably the phrase describes the overseers of local churches who both pastor and teach (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

". . . because the nouns ["pastor" and "teacher"] are plural, it is extremely unlikely that they refer to the same group, but only that the apostle Paul is linking them closely together. It is better to regard the pastors as a subset of teachers. In other words, all pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors."¹⁸⁷

"In 1 Cor. 12:8-28) the Holy Spirit is seen as enduing the members of the body of Christ with spiritual gifts, or enablements for a varied service; here certain Spirit-endued men, i.e. apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are themselves the gifts whom the glorified Christ bestows upon His body, the church. In 1 Corinthians, the gifts are spiritual enablements for specific service; in Ephesians, the gifts are people who have such enablements."¹⁸⁸

(Calvin believed that apostles, prophets, and evangelists were given as temporary gifts to the church, during the Apostolic Age, and that only pastors and teachers are given today. He did concede, however, that occasionally God does raise up the first three to meet some special need in the church.¹⁸⁹)

¹⁸⁶Wiersbe, 2:37.

¹⁸⁷The NET Bible note on 4:11.

¹⁸⁸*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1276.

¹⁸⁹Calvin, 4:3:4.

- 4:12 The purpose of all these gifted leaders is to prepare (by "equipping") the rest of the saints to minister, and so to build up the body of Christ, the church. "Equipping" (Gr. *katartismos*) means preparing, mending, or restoring people to their proper use (Gal. 6:1; cf. Matt. 4:21; 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 13:21). The role of these leaders is to minister the Word to the saints in the church, so that the saints can minister the Word in the world (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). All the saints should participate in service, not just the leaders. One writer cautioned against viewing only the leaders as doing equipping ministry.¹⁹⁰ Every Christian has a gift, or gifts, with which he or she can and should serve (4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).¹⁹¹
- 4:13 The end in view is completeness (maturity) in Christ. As each believer exercises the gifts (abilities God has given him or her, v. 7), three things happen: First, the body enjoys unity (vv. 3-6). Second, it becomes more spiritually mature (v. 15). Third, it becomes more Christ-like (cf. 1:23; 3:19). Unity of the faith (cf. v. 5), full knowledge (cf. 1:17), and maturity constitute the three-fold goal in view. This equals the "fullness of Christ."
- "God is not trying to produce successful Christian business people who can impress the world with their money and influence. He is not trying to fashion successful church leaders who can influence people with their organizational and administrative skills. Nor is He trying to fashion great orators who can move people with persuasive words. He wants to reproduce in His followers the character of His son—His love, His kindness, His compassion, His holiness, His humility, His unselfishness, His servant attitude, His willingness to suffer wrongfully, His ability to forgive, and so much more that characterized His life on earth."¹⁹²
- 4:14 One result of gifted people equipping the saints to serve the Lord and others, is that believers will become stable in their faith. Infants ("children") are easily swayed and confused, as "waves" blown by the "wind." False teachers create such winds (of doctrinal confusion), sometimes with hurricane or tornado force, by their teaching, and seek to trick people into following them.
- 4:15 Another result is that believers can maintain "truth in love," in both speech and conduct. Paul contrasted the deception of heresy with the integrity of the gospel.

¹⁹⁰T. David Gordon, "Equipping' Ministry in Ephesians 4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):69-78.

¹⁹¹For a free personalized spiritual gifts questionnaire and analysis, go to www.churchgrowth.org.

¹⁹²Richard L. Strauss, "Like Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:571 (July-September 1986):264.

"This fundamental concern for the truth is the secret of maturity in the church."¹⁹³

The church that stresses both "the truth" and "love" will produce spiritually mature, Christ-like believers.

Loving, effective confrontation requires "speaking the truth in love." The truth may be as medicine to the person who needs it, but love is the sugar that, added to the medicine, makes it palatable. Remember Mary Poppins' prescription: "A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down."

4:16 Jesus Christ is both the One into whom we grow individually (v. 15), and the One out of whom we grow as a "whole" church. "The whole body" grows as "each individual part" carries out its proper function. All the parts of the body alluded to in this verse are Christians, except for the Head, Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁴

The church therefore is a diverse body, composed of many different people who must give attention to preserving their unity (vv. 7-16). Paul's emphasis was more on body "growth" than on individual growth in this passage. Each believer contributes to body growth as he or she exercises his or her particular gifts (abilities) in the service of Christ.

2. Walking in holiness 4:17-32

In the first part of this chapter, Paul stressed the importance of living in unity in the church. He turned next to the importance of living in holiness.

"The Bible was written to be obeyed, and not simply studied, and this is why the words 'therefore' and 'wherefore' are repeated so often in the second half of Ephesians (4:1, 17, 25; 5:1, 7, 14, 17, 24)."¹⁹⁵

The old man 4:17-19

The apostle began by reminding his readers how not to walk, namely, as they used to walk before their conversion to Christianity.

4:17 The "therefore" in this verse is coordinate with the one in verse 1. Here we have more instruction concerning walking worthily. Paul's exhortation that follows repeats Jesus' teaching on the importance of holiness. Christians should not conduct themselves ("walk") "as the Gentiles," who do not know the Lord. Those unbelievers do not typically have a worthy aim or goal in life, the idea behind "the futility of their mind [thinking]."

¹⁹³Wood, p. 59.

¹⁹⁴See Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):139-44.

¹⁹⁵Wiersbe, 2:39.

"What is immediately noteworthy is the apostle's emphasis on the intellectual factor in everybody's way of life [cf. Rom. 12:2]. . . . Scripture bears an unwavering testimony to the power of ignorance and error to corrupt, and the power of truth to liberate, ennoble and refine."¹⁹⁶

- 4:18 Here Paul traced the attitude of typical unsaved Gentiles to its source: Lack of worthy purpose rests on unclear "understanding" ("darkened"; cf. Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4). This in turn results from separation (exclusion) "from the life that comes from (of) God" (cf. 2:12). Separation arises from natural "ignorance" of God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14). That in turn rests on insensitivity ("hardness of their heart") to God and His ways (cf. Rom. 1).
- 4:19 As a result of this condition, unsaved Gentiles typically "have given themselves over to sensuality," to live lives of sensual self-indulgence ("every kind of impurity"; cf. Rom. 1:24-28). The Greek word *aselgeia*, translated "sensuality," contains the idea of wanton violence.¹⁹⁷ "Greediness" (*pleonexia*) refers to an increasing desire for more.

The new man 4:20-32

Paul here turned from how not to walk, to the positive responsibility Christians have to live in holiness.

- 4:20 In contrast to unsaved Gentiles, Christians' minds are no longer dark, they are no longer aliens (excluded) from God, and their hearts are no longer hard and impure. They did not "learn" to follow "Christ" by the natural mental processes that customarily have led to the degradation of unsaved Gentiles. They learned to follow Him as His disciples from the gospel.

"Usually we learn subjects, not persons; but the Christian's choicest lesson-book is his lovable Lord."¹⁹⁸

- 4:21 "If indeed" (NASB) means "surely" (NIV, cf. 3:2). The Ephesian believers had received teaching about Christ, and had learned to live in the sphere of His will. This is the "truth . . . in Jesus" that is in view. Whenever Paul used the name of "Jesus" in Ephesians, as here, he drew attention to the death and resurrection of the Savior. He did so here to remind his readers of the essence of the gospel message, as an incentive to live for Christ.
- 4:22 Here is what the Ephesian Christians had "heard": Christians should put their "former" unsaved "manner of life . . . aside." The "old self (or man)" is the person the Christian was before his or her regeneration. That person was experiencing progressive (continually worsening) corruption because of desires that appeal to the physical senses. Lusts are deceitful because they promise real joy but fail to deliver it.

¹⁹⁶Stott, p. 175.

¹⁹⁷Morris, p. 137.

¹⁹⁸Simpson, p. 104.

4:23 This verse is not primarily a command. The verb is not an imperative, but an "infinitive" in the Greek text. The verse is a description of what has already happened in the life of every believer (cf. Col. 3:9-10). However, the verse does make an appeal to the reader, even though its main point is revelation. The infinitive has the force of an imperative.¹⁹⁹

Rather than being futile, darkened, and ignorant (vv. 18-19), the Christian has taken on a new attitude ("renewed in the spirit of your mind"; cf. Rom. 6:2-10; 2 Cor. 5:17). This *renewing* is an ongoing process in the life of the Christian (i.e., progressive sanctification). The verb is passive ("be renewed"), which emphasizes that God is at work in us (cf. Rom. 12:2).

4:24 Paul identified our responsibility in this verse. We are to "put on the new self" like putting on a garment. The "new self" (or man) is the person the Christian is after he or she experiences regeneration. We "put on the new" man as we pursue the things of Christ rather than the desires of the flesh. God has created the new self (the Christian) at regeneration, after the image of ("in the likeness of") our spiritual parent: "God" Himself. "Righteousness" and "holiness" mark our new life, rather than sensuality, impurity, and greed (vv. 18-19). Moreover, it is a life based on the "truth" rather than on ignorance (v. 18).²⁰⁰

4:25 As the practice of the old man follows his condition (vv. 17-19), so the practice of the new man (vv. 25-32) should follow his condition (vv. 20-24). In verses 25-32, we find five exhortations to Christians regarding our conduct. Each one has three parts: a negative command, a positive command, and the reason for the positive command.

The first exhortation is to stop deceiving ("falsehood"). Deception is a mask that false teachers (v. 14) and the old man (v. 22) wear. Instead, the Christian should "speak truth," namely, what is in harmony with reality (cf. Col. 3:8-9; Zech. 8:16). The reason is that the Christian belongs to, and must function honestly in, a group—the church. Truthful speech is essential to unity in the body. Obviously it is important for other reasons also.

"Lying may be an accepted weapon in the warfare waged by the worldly, but it has no place in the life of the Christian."²⁰¹

"A lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹Bock, "The New . . .," pp. 162-63; idem, "A Theology . . .," p. 316, footnote 10.

²⁰⁰See Don Matzat, *Christ-Esteem*.

²⁰¹Morris, p. 142.

²⁰²John A. Mackay, *God's Order: The Ephesian Letter and this Present Time*, p. 213.

- 4:26 The second exhortation is to avoid sinning when angry, and to deal with sin quickly if it does accompany anger (cf. Ps. 4:4). The emotion of anger is not sinful in itself (cf. John 2:13-16). There is such a thing as righteous indignation (cf. 5:6; Mark 3:5).²⁰³ Still, it is easy to lose control of our anger, to let it control us instead of controlling it. Anger becomes sinful when it is inappropriate. The way to deal with sinful anger is to confess it as sin (1 John 1:9). If apologies to other people are necessary, we should offer them quickly as well. Letting the sun go down on one's wrath is a figure of speech that emphasizes the need to deal with sin soon (cf. Deut. 24:13-15). That we need not take it literally should be clear, since the sun does not literally set on one's anger, as anger is not a physical object.
- 4:27 It is important to deal with anger appropriately because, if we do not do so, Satan will have "an opportunity" to lead us into further sin.
- "Horace was right when he said, 'Anger is momentary insanity.' . . .
- "'Anyone can become angry,' wrote Aristotle. 'But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.'"²⁰⁴
- 4:28 The third exhortation is to refrain from stealing, but to work ("labor") instead, so "we will have something to share" with the needy. Paul did not mention other benefits of work here, such as providing for one's own needs and doing something useful. He emphasized the most noble of motives. Stealing (Gr. *klepton*) covers all forms of misappropriation. This verse is a reaffirmation of the teaching of the seventh commandment (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19).
- 4:29 The fourth exhortation is to speak "good" things, as well as to do good things (v. 28). Anything that injures others or causes dissension in the body is "unwholesome" (Gr. *sapros*, rotten, defiling). Christians should use words to build up people ("for edification") rather than to tear them down. Words can "give grace" (help), in the sense that they communicate encouragement and direction, and thus enable the hearer to do right.
- "It is said that a man once came to Mohammed and asked how he could make amends for falsely accusing a friend. Mohammed told him to put a feather on every doorstep in the village. Next day he told the man to collect them. 'But that is impossible,' said the man, 'the wind has scattered them beyond recall!' The prophet replied, 'So is it with your reckless words.'"²⁰⁵

²⁰³See Daniel B. Wallace, "Orgizesthe in Ephesians 4:26: Command or Condition?" *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989):352-72.

²⁰⁴Wiersbe, 2:41.

²⁰⁵Morris, p. 146.

4:30 "And" connects this verse with the former one. Some English versions do not translate this conjunction, but it is present in the Greek text. We can "grieve (bring sorrow or pain to) the Holy Spirit" by our speech. It is inappropriate for us to do so, because He is the One by whom we "were sealed" (1:13-14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5). He is also the pledge (down payment) of God's final "redemption" of us, that will happen at our resurrection (Phil. 3:20-21). Grieving the Holy Spirit amounts to rejecting a priceless gift from God.²⁰⁶

"That which grieves the Holy Spirit is sin."²⁰⁷

4:31 The fifth exhortation is to get rid of six vices, and to adopt three virtues. Paul now listed some sins that grieve the Spirit. "Bitterness" is the opposite of sweetness and kindness (cf. Col. 3:19). It harbors resentment and keeps a record of wrongs done (cf. 1 Cor. 13:5).

"Every Christian might well pray that God would teach him how to forget."²⁰⁸

"Wrath" or rage flows from bitterness, and refers to outbursts of uncontrolled passionate frustration. "Anger" is inappropriate noisy assertiveness and abuse. "Clamor" or brawling describes shouting. "Slander" refers to words that hurt another person. "Malice" is bad feelings toward another person or people, and is the source of the other five vices.²⁰⁹

This verse may seem to contradict verse 26. There Paul permitted anger, but here he seems to condemn it (cf. James 1:19-20). Two explanations are possible: First, we may view the command in verse 26 as governing angry behavior, even though anger is never God's will (v. 31). Similarly, God gave instructions concerning whom divorced Israelites could remarry, even though divorce was never God's will (Deut. 24:1-4; Mal. 2:16). A second possibility is that verse 26 means anger is proper in certain circumstances, but we should normally avoid it. This seems to me to be a better explanation. Jesus Himself was angry occasionally (cf. Mark 3:5). Anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires, so as a rule we should avoid it (James 1:20).

4:32 We are "kind" when we say or do what is suitable or fitting to a need with a sweet and generous disposition. We are "tender-hearted" or compassionate when we feel affection for someone else. We are "forgiving" when we let offenses and grievances go, freely and graciously.

²⁰⁶See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 82-104.

²⁰⁷Martin, p. 1312.

²⁰⁸Barclay, p. 188.

²⁰⁹See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

The reason we should be forgiving, that underlies all the commands in this verse, is that God has forgiven us freely in Jesus Christ.

Demonstrating an attitude of constant forgiveness will greatly enrich a marriage. It enables a spouse to develop transparency and oneness with his or her mate. To resolve conflict, there must be a willingness to forgive. We need to seek forgiveness when we wrong our mate, and to communicate understanding to that person. Try restating or verbalizing to your mate how he or she feels, and then ask for forgiveness. Say, "I was wrong; I'm sorry; will you forgive me?" It is important to be specific in this process.

"The Epistle to the Hebrews is characterized by contrasts which are drawn between the features of the Mosaic order and those of Christianity, while the Epistle to the Ephesians is characterized by its contrasts between the estate of the lost and the estate of the saved."²¹⁰

3. Walking in love 5:1-6

In addition to calling his readers to walk in unity (4:1) and holiness (4:17), Paul urged them to walk in love (5:2). He first advocated positive love (vv. 1-2), and then, negatively, warned to abstain from evil (vv. 3-6).

5:1 "Therefore" in this verse does not introduce a conclusion to what has preceded, but it gives a reason for what follows. It is only normal and natural for children to imitate their parents. So, too, should the "children" of God "be imitators of" their heavenly Father (cf. Matt. 5:48; Luke 6:36). We are to imitate God's gracious attitude and generous actions toward us.

5:2 This verse explains how we are to imitate God, namely, by loving. The measure and model of our love should be Christ's love for us. He loved us to the extent of dying for us. His self-sacrifice was pleasing and acceptable to God, "as a sweet (fragrant) aroma." Jesus' death was both an offering of worship to God, like the burnt and meal offerings in Judaism, and a sacrifice of expiation, like the sin and trespass offerings. We also express our love most when we lay down our lives for those we love, particularly for God (1 John 3:16).

". . . there is not a single place in Paul's writings, nor in the New Testament generally, where the death of Christ can be spoken of as only an example to be followed, without the further expression of its atoning significance."²¹¹

5:3 The self-centered practices introduced here ("immorality"; lust) are the opposite of love. Self-indulgence is the opposite of self-sacrifice. There should be no hint of these perversions of love in the believer's life, even in

²¹⁰Chafer, *The Ephesian* . . . , p. 143.

²¹¹Foulkes, p. 139.

our speech (cf. Exod. 23:13; Deut. 12:30; Ps. 16:4). Sexual "immorality" was common among unsaved Gentiles, but it is totally inappropriate ("must not even be named") for "saints." "Impurity" is a broader term that includes all types of uncleanness (cf. 4:19). "Greed" is the lust (sinful desire) for more, and is essentially idolatry (v. 5). Here the greed in view is probably the coveting of someone else's body for selfish gratification.

"Immorality' (RSV) and sexual perversion of almost every kind might be included under the [Greek] word *porneia*, translated *fornication* in AV; it involves all that works against the life-long union of one man and one woman within the sanctity of the marriage bond."²¹²

5:4 Paul proceeded from immorality to vulgarity. The Christian's speech should also demonstrate love (cf. 4:29). "Filthiness" or obscenity refers to dirty speech. "Silly" or foolish "talk" (lit. stupid words) probably describes talk that just wastes time, not necessarily "small talk." "Coarse jesting" does not mean joking necessarily, but vulgar joking that uses clever wordplays, such as double entendres. This type of speech is inappropriate for saints, who should be full of thanksgiving since they have received so much. Thanksgiving is also edifying.

"All God's gifts, including sex, are subjects for thanksgiving, rather than for joking. To joke about them is bound to degrade them; to thank God for them is the way to preserve their worth as the blessings of a loving Creator."²¹³

5:5 Paul warned his readers against improper conduct, by reminding them that people who practice such things sacrifice "an inheritance in the kingdom" to come, namely, in the millennial kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21). The AV, NKJV, and NIV have "any inheritance," and the NASB has "an inheritance," but the Greek text omits the article: "does not have inheritance." Since Paul had already said that all believers have an inheritance in Christ (1:3-14), he was evidently contrasting unbelievers with believers (cf. v. 6; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:21; Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). His point seems to have been that this type of behavior, which typifies unbelievers, should not characterize believers.

Interpreters, who take this verse as evidence that a truly saved person cannot and will not practice these vices, overlook the fact that some genuine believers live carnal lives (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4).²¹⁴

²¹²Ibid., p. 141.

²¹³Stott, p. 193.

²¹⁴For further study, see Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 109-20; idem, *Grace in Eclipse*, pp. 76-77; Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, pp. 59-65; and René A. López, "Paul's Vice List in Ephesians 5:3-5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:674 (April-June 2012):203-18.

5:6 This verse further stresses the urgency of living lives of love rather than selfishness. The "empty words" in view would be words teaching that living a moral Christian life is unimportant. They are "empty" because they are void of content, containing no truth. If the "wrath of God" is presently coming on the "sons of disobedience" (cf. 2:2), certainly His own sons can expect His discipline when they practice the same things. Since God is holy, He deals with sin wherever He finds it: in unbelievers or believers alike.

4. Walking in light 5:7-14

The resumptive inferential particle translated "Therefore" marks the beginning of a new paragraph in Paul's thought (cf. 4:1, 17; 5:1, 15). He related three commands concerning "walking (living) in the light," in these verses, and added reasons and explanations to motivate and to assist his readers.

5:7 It is inconsistent for the objects of God's love (v. 2) to become fellow "partakers" (3:6) with the objects of God's wrath (v. 6)—by joining in selfish, immoral, impure conduct. This verse contains the first command.

5:8 The reason we as Christians should not partake with unbelievers in their evil deeds is that we were "formerly darkness" (cf. 4:17-19), but are *now* "light in the Lord," having trusted Jesus Christ (2:1-3; 3:17-24; cf. Matt. 5:14; Col. 1:12-13). The second command is to "walk as children of light." Obviously it is possible for the children of light to *not* walk (live) as "children of light" (cf. 1 John 1:6-7). Otherwise the command would be unnecessary.

"The gravest disservice that any man can do to a fellow man is to make him think lightly of sin."²¹⁵

5:9 The "fruit of the light" is those qualities that characterize God's life (i.e., the fruit that the Spirit produces). The three qualities mentioned here ("goodness," "righteousness," "truth") are the opposite of the fruit of darkness (4:18-19). If the child of light does not walk in the light, he will not bear much of the fruit of the light (cf. John 15:1-6). He might even be outwardly indistinguishable from a child of darkness (cf. Matt. 13:24-30).

5:10 While the child of light walks as a child of light (v. 8b), he will continually be "trying" to discover what the will of God is ("what is pleasing to the Lord"), so he or she can do it and please God.

5:11 Children of light should also abstain from joining the sons of disobedience in their "deeds," but should instead reprove ("expose") believers who do them, because these deeds are "unfruitful" (cf. v. 9).²¹⁶ This is Paul's third

²¹⁵Barclay, p. 194.

²¹⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 679.

command in this section. It is the *deeds* of unbelievers that Christians must shun, not the unbelievers who do them. We reprove the deeds of believers who practice such evil deeds when we bring the light (v. 9) next to them. This exposes them for what they are.

5:12 Believers should not even discuss the "secret" dark deeds of people in normal conversation. Discussing these things will just draw attention to them, and may make them attractive to the carnal-minded. It is better to keep what they do in the dark *in the dark*.

5:13 On the other hand, when light shines on evil deeds, other people see them for what they are, namely, evil. This verse is not contradicting the previous one. Paul was assuring his readers that God will bring evil to the light (to "become visible") one day, and show it to be what it is. He Himself will bring "all" evil ("things") to "the light" eventually. Everything that becomes visible "is light," in the sense that it becomes obvious, but that it also becomes *good*.

"This may mean that Christians who lead a righteous life thereby restrain and reform evildoers, yes, and even convert them."²¹⁷

"Turn on the light. Often the preacher is the only man brave enough to turn the light on the private sins of men and women or even those of a community."²¹⁸

5:14 Since God will bring all things into the light (v. 13), it is important that believers wake up and rise from the deadness of their former unsaved lifestyles: "Awake . . . and arise from the dead." If they do, "Christ will shine on" them in blessing, as the sun warms what its rays touch. The source from which Paul quoted seems to have been an early Christian poem or hymn based on Isaiah 60:1.²¹⁹

5. Walking in wisdom 5:15—6:9

Paul introduced a new thought, with the repetition of "Therefore" and "walk," for the fifth time (cf. 4:1, 25; 5:1-2, 7-8). We can walk (live) wisely by letting the Holy Spirit control our lives.

"For Paul, the Christian faith was not an abstract exercise in theological discourse. Instead it called for a different way to relate to others."²²⁰

²¹⁷Stott, p. 200. See also Foulkes, p. 148.

²¹⁸Robertson, 4:543.

²¹⁹Wood, p. 71. Cf. 1 Tim. 3:16; et al.

²²⁰Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 317.

The basic admonition 5:15-21

Paul began this section with a basic admonition (vv. 15-21). Then he applied this instruction to various groups of Christians (5:22—6:9).

5:15 The word order and usage in the Greek text suggest that "careful" modifies "walk" rather than "be." We could translate the clause: "See to it that you walk (live) carefully." "Careful" living is essential to being "wise" (skillful) and to pleasing the Lord (v. 10). The "wise" person is one who views and sees things the way God does.

Mary and I lived in England all of 1992. While there I observed that some Brits had built high brick walls around buildings to protect them from intruders. Their concrete tops are often imbedded with broken shards of glass, with their jagged points protruding upward, threatening to pierce any trespasser. It was interesting to watch a cat walk on such a wall. With extreme care and slow, deliberate moves, it deftly and cautiously placed its paws, one at a time, between the sharp cutting edges. That is walking circumspectly. You and I need to walk like that. We cannot go through a single day carelessly. We need to take every step carefully.

5:16 We live wisely when we use every opportunity ("making the most of [our] time") to please and glorify the Lord. Every day and every hour provide opportunities, and we should seize them for these purposes. This is important, because we live in "days" that "evil" influences and evil individuals dominate.

Someone mathematically calculated a schedule that compares the average lifetime with a single day, beginning at 7 a.m. If your age is 15, the time is 10:25 a.m. If your age is 25, the time is 12:42 p.m. If you are 35, the time is 3:00 p.m. If you are 45, the time is 5:16 p.m. If you are 55, the time is 7:34 p.m. If you are 65, the time is 9:55 p.m. And if you are 70, the time is 11:00 p.m.

5:17 The unwise (v. 15) simply lack wisdom, but the "foolish" (v. 17) behave contrary to what they know to be right. To be wise, we must comprehend intellectually (Gr. *syniete*, understand) what God's "will" is. Only after we do that can we please God (v. 10). The "will of the Lord" should be the Christian's primary blueprint, since He is the Head of the body. God's will includes allowing Him to control (fill) us, being thankful always, and being subject to one another, as the following verses clarify. Wise people not only make the most of their time (v. 16), but they also seek to discover and do God's will.

5:18 Specifically, we should not let "wine" control us, but God's Holy "Spirit." Both forces are internal. "Be filled" is a passive command. It amounts to letting the Holy Spirit, who indwells us, control us completely. We do this by trusting and obeying the Lord as His Word directs. The "wine" that fills a person controls every area of his or her life, as long as that person

consumes it. Drunkenness results in incorrigible behavior. Likewise the believer, who allows the "Spirit" to influence and direct his thinking and behavior, will experience *His* control as long as he maintains that relationship to the Spirit (cf. Luke 1:15; Acts 2:12-21). Another translation of the command is: "Be being kept filled by the Spirit."²²¹ This is our ongoing responsibility (present tense), and it is obligatory for every Christian, not optional.

"The baptism of the Spirit means that I belong to Christ's body. The filling of the Spirit means that my body belongs to Christ."²²²

5:19 Paul referred to four of the many results of Spirit filling. He set them forth as participles, but they virtually amount to imperatives in their force. All four deal with *praise*, and all are public rather than private activities. "Psalms" refers to the Old Testament psalms, that the Christians as well as the Jews used in their worship. "Hymns" were songs that eulogized some person or god in Greek culture, and the true God in Christian worship (v. 14). "Spiritual songs" is a general term that probably covers all other kinds of vocal praise. When God controls us, we are joyful.²²³

In addition to communicating with one another using the means already described, Christians should also use these means to communicate with the Lord. Praise should spring from the heart, not just the lips. "Singing" refers to vocal praise, and "making melody with your heart" implies inaudible praise.

5:20 Third, we should thank God the Father "for all things" (cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Christians can engage in thanksgiving even when they are not offering praise corporately. Praying "in the name of . . . Jesus Christ" means praying because of His merits and work, and in harmony with His will (cf. John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; 1 John 5:14-15). It is possible to be thankful in "all things"—when we recognize that God is at work in our lives for His glory and our good (Rom. 8:28). Someone once wrote, "I grumbled because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet." When God controls us, we are thankful.

5:21 The fourth result of fullness with (control by) the Spirit is willingness to submit ("be subject") to other people, specifically believers. The opposite would be to dominate others and exalt oneself over them. This attitude of

²²¹See Chafer, *He That . . .*, pp. 39-81. See also Randall Gleason, "B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):241-56; Andreas J. Köstenberger, "What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):229-40; and Eldon Woodcock, "The Filling of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:625 (January-March 2000):68-87.

²²²Wiersbe, 2:48. See also *ibid.*, p. 49, for some helpful contrasts between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit.

²²³See Steven R. Guthrie, "Singing, in the Body and in the Spirit," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46:4 (December 2003):633-46.

submission is only reasonable, and carries over from reverence for ("fear of") "Christ." When God controls us, we have submissive (supportive) spirits.

Having explained the basic admonition to be filled with the Spirit (vv. 15-21), Paul next applied the implication of this exhortation to various groups of Christians.

"What is beyond question is that the three paragraphs which follow are given as examples of Christian submission, and that the emphasis throughout is on submission."²²⁴

He addressed six groups: wives and husbands (5:22-33), children and parents (6:1-4), and slaves and masters (6:5-9). In each of the three pairings, the first partner is responsible to be submissive or obedient (5:22; 6:1, 5). However, the second partner is also to show a submissive spirit. All are to relate to one another "as unto the Lord." This is one of several "house-rule" lists in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 5:22—6:9; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 2:18—3:7). The writings of some Apostolic Fathers also contain such lists. Luther referred to these sections as *haustafel*, and some scholars still use this technical term when referring to these lists.²²⁵

"Too much so-called 'holiness teaching' emphasizes a personal relationship to Jesus Christ without any attempt to indicate its consequences in terms of relationships with the people we live and work with. In contrast to such holiness-in-a-vacuum, which magnifies experiences and minimizes ethics, the apostles spelled out Christian duty in the concrete situations of everyday life and work."²²⁶

When God controls us individually, we can experience harmony in the home and in the workplace, in spite of possible friction, tension, and opposition there.

The duty of wives 5:22-24

"After centuries of Christian teaching, we scarcely appreciate the revolutionary nature of Paul's views on family life set forth in this passage. Among the Jews of his day, as also among the Romans and the Greeks, women were seen as secondary citizens with few or no rights. The pious male Jew daily said a prayer in which he thanked God for not making him a woman. And he could divorce his wife by simply writing 'a bill of divorcement' (which must include the provision that she was then free to marry whomever she wanted). The wife had no such right."²²⁷

²²⁴Stott, p. 215.

²²⁵See the excursus in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 720-29; and Timothy G. Gombis, "A Radically New Humanity: The Function of the *Haustafel* in Ephesians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:2 (June 2005):317-30.

²²⁶Stott, p. 214.

²²⁷Morris, pp. 180-81.

5:22

Paul addressed wives first. Christian "wives" are to "be subject" (v. 21) to their "own husbands," as an expression of their submission to the Lord Jesus. Paul did not say they were to be subject to their own husbands *in proportion* as they are submissive to the Lord. In submitting to her husband, the wife is obeying the Lord who has commanded her to do so. In this section, Paul was speaking of relationships in marriage, as the context clarifies (vv. 22-33). He was not saying all women are to be subject to all men, nor was he saying that women are inferior to men (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7).

People often misunderstand submission. It does not indicate inferiority or involve losing one's identity and becoming a non-person. Some women fear that submission will lead to abuse, and or a feeling of being used. Submission does not mean blind obedience or passivity. It means giving oneself up to someone else.

"Equality of worth is not identity of role."²²⁸

We live in an ordered universe, in which there is authority and submission to authority everywhere (cf. Rom. 13:1). Authority and submission relationships are therefore natural and necessary to maintain order: God has authority over man (James 4:5). Man has authority over nature (Gen. 1:28). Husbands have authority over their wives (Eph. 5:22). Parents have authority over their children (Eph. 6:1). Governors have authority over those they govern (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Employers have authority over their employees (1 Pet. 2:18). Spiritual leaders have authority over those they lead spiritually (1 Pet. 5:2).

Submission means: organizing voluntarily to fill out a pattern that constitutes a complete whole. The word "support" is a good synonym for the biblical concept of "submit." A wife submits to her husband when she voluntarily "organizes" herself so she can complete her husband. A good example of this is illustrated by her cooperating with him when they run a three-legged race. They have to work together to succeed. Submission is essential for achieving oneness in marriage.²²⁹

Submission involves four responsibilities: First, it begins with an attitude of entrusting oneself to God. The focus of life must be on Jesus Christ. The ability to submit comes from Him (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24). He is similar to the cables that enable a suspension bridge to carry out its purpose. Second, submission requires respectful behavior (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-2). This rules out nagging. Nagging is similar to having a duck nibble you to death. Third, submission means developing a godly character (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3-5). Fourth, submission involves doing what is right (cf. 1 Pet. 3:6). Submission should not extend to participating in conduct that is contrary to Scripture. Every Christian's primary responsibility is to do God's will.²³⁰

²²⁸J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 177, footnote 23.

²²⁹See *Family Life Conference*, pp. 104-6.

²³⁰See Stott, pp. 218-19.

5:23 The reason for the wife's willing submission is that God has placed wives in a position under their husbands' authority (cf. 1 Cor. 11:12). Likewise He has chosen to place Jesus Christ in authority over (as "the head of") the church. Also, Jesus Christ is the "Savior of the church (body)," as the husband is similarly the deliverer (protector) of his wife. The husband's headship additionally involves loving, serving, caring for, and leading his wife. These are all things that Jesus Christ does for the church.

"To speak in terms of functional equality for husband and wife erroneously removes the complementary quality of the relationship and invalidates the comparison to Christ and the church, who are not functionally equal."²³¹

Leadership should involve a recognition that God has placed the husband in a position of responsibility. The husband occupies his role by divine placement. Taking on this role does not mean that the husband must execute all of his responsibilities perfectly, since that would be impossible. It does mean that he is accountable to God for his wife and children. Even though Eve ate the fruit first, God approached Adam first to question him about what he and Eve had done (Gen. 3:9). The husband's leadership makes the wife's submission reasonable. It requires taking the initiative, integrity, and serving the wife (i.e., lightening the load of those who follow; cf. Matt. 11:28-30; Mark 10:42-45). Leadership also involves managing the home, not dominating it. A good manager creates an environment in which each person can achieve his or her maximum potential. A responsible father also keeps his children under control (1 Tim. 3:4). Leading is one of the husband's primary responsibilities in marriage.²³²

"Those who are busy undermining the chastity of wedlock to-day are the worst enemies of the commonweal [public good]. Its inviolability is not a question to be settled on grounds of expediency. The corner-stone of society is at stake in the matter."²³³

5:24 This verse continues the comparison. Submission is the proper response to sovereignly designated authority: both in the church-Christ relationship and in the wife-husband relationship.²³⁴ "In everything" means in everything within the wife-husband relationship, the context within which the apostle was speaking. Paul probably did not mean in absolutely

²³¹Bock, "A Theology . . .," pp. 317-18.

²³²*Family Life* . . . , pp. 118-19.

²³³Simpson, p. 128.

²³⁴See Wayne Grudem, "Does *kephale* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6NS (1985):38-59; idem. "The Meaning of *kephale*: A Response to Recent Studies," *Trinity Journal* 11NS (1990):3-72; and idem, "The Meaning of *kephale* ('head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):25-65.

everything, since the wife has a higher responsibility to obey the Lord: When she encounters conflicting authorities—the Lord, through His Word, telling her to do one thing, and her husband telling her to do a contradictory thing—she should obey the Lord.²³⁵

"The Scripture is the guide for faith and life in the Christian home. A husband's authority in the home is derivative: as a servant of God, his authority comes from God. He is, therefore, subject to Scripture in all that he does, and has no freedom to guide his family in ways which contradict it. Should he clearly do so, individual members must follow God before man. The example of Sapphira's willing sin and personal accountability makes this clear (Acts 5:9)."²³⁶

What about a Christian wife whose unsaved husband beats or otherwise abuses her? Is she to be submissive to him in everything? Peter addressed such a situation in 1 Peter 3:1-3, and commanded wives in those situations to "be submissive." He did not add "in everything." I would counsel such a woman to maintain a submissive attitude, but to take measures to protect herself from danger. In commanding submission, neither Paul nor Peter were saying wives must submit to situations in which they are in danger. They wanted them to submit to their husbands as God's appointed heads over them. The apostles dealt with the basic principles believers should observe, not all the possible situations that might arise.

"The final addition *in every thing* might seem more than can be accepted as God's purpose by this present generation with its stress on emancipation of womanhood, and the place of woman outside the home in every sphere of life that man occupies. Has not a woman equal rights with a man to self-determination? May not a married woman make herself a career as well as her husband? The answer that the New Testament would give is that she may do so, provided that it does not mean the sacrifice of the divine pattern for home life, for family relationships and for the whole Christian community. She may fulfill any function and any responsibility in society, but if she has accepted before God the responsibility of marriage and of a family these must be her first concern, and this is expressed here in terms of her relationship to her husband as head of the home."²³⁷

²³⁵See Eadie, p. 413.

²³⁶James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, pp. 150-51.

²³⁷Foulkes, pp. 156-57.

The duty of husbands 5:25-33

5:25 In the Greco-Roman world in which Paul lived, people recognized that wives had certain responsibilities to their husbands—but not vice versa.²³⁸ Paul summarized the wife's duty as *submission*, and the husband's duty as *love*. The word he used for "love" (*agapate*) means much more than sexual passion (*eros*), or even family affection (*philia*). It means seeking the highest good for another person (cf. 2:4). Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church. The extent to which He went for her welfare, was giving Himself up in death to provide salvation for her (cf. v. 2; Phil. 2:5-11). He gave up His rights, yet maintained His responsibilities. The biblical concept of authority emphasizes responsibility, not tyranny.

"Love" requires an attitude of unconditional acceptance of an imperfect person, not based on her performance, but on her intrinsic worth as God's gift to her husband. The verbalization of this acceptance is part of loving. A cartoon of an elderly couple sitting on the porch of their New England home portrays the problem. The husband is saying, "Sometimes, Sarah, when I think how much you mean to me, I can hardly keep from telling you so." He needed to recapture the joy of expressing his love.

Love also requires sacrificial action. It involves doing something, specifically: placing the wife's needs before his own, such as doing something for her that she hates to do. It also involves self-denial, such as giving up something he would enjoy doing, in order to do something she would like to do. This kind of love arises out of a commitment of the will, not just passing feelings.

Different people feel loved as a result of receiving different expressions of love. Giving words of affirmation effectively communicates love to some people, giving quality time does to others, giving gifts, giving acts of service, and or giving physical touches communicates love to others.²³⁹ The husband who wishes to make his wife feel loved should discover which of these expressions of love best communicate his love to his wife.

5:26 The purpose Jesus Christ had in mind when He sacrificed Himself for His bride, the church, was to set her apart ("sanctify," make her holy) for Himself as His own forever (cf. Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12).²⁴⁰ Logically, cleansing comes before setting apart, but in reality, these things occur simultaneously when a person trusts in Christ. The cleansing ("washing of water") here is spiritual ("in the Word") rather than physical. The Word of God "cleanse[s]" us in the sense that, when we believe the gospel, it

²³⁸Wood, p. 76.

²³⁹Gary D. Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*.

²⁴⁰See Richard D. Patterson, "Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):689-702.

washes our sins away as water washes dirt away (cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11). Thus washing is a good metaphor for redemption.²⁴¹

5:27 What was Jesus Christ's ultimate purpose in giving Himself for the church (v. 25)? It was to "present" her "to Himself . . . in all her glory" in the end, namely, "without" any blemishes ("spots"), effects of sin ("wrinkles"), or anything that would diminish her glory. Positively, God will eventually present the church to His Son—as exclusively His, and spotless (cf. 1:4). This will happen at the Rapture, when all Christians will experience full sanctification (i.e., glorification), and will join our Lord forever (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).

"Spots are caused by defilement on the outside, while wrinkles are caused by decay on the inside."²⁴²

"Christ's labor of love on behalf of the Church is threefold: past, present, and future: (1) for love He gave Himself to redeem the Church (v. 25); (2) in love He is sanctifying the Church (v. 26); and (3) for the reward of His sacrifice and labor of love He will present the Church to Himself in flawless perfection, 'one pearl of great price' (v. 27; Mt. 13:46)."²⁴³

5:28 This verse and the following two verses apply the truth just stated in verses 25-27. Since in marriage two people become one flesh (Gen. 2:24), in a figurative sense a man's wife becomes part of his own body.²⁴⁴ Consequently "husbands" should "love" and treat "their own wives" as they love and treat "their own bodies" (cf. Lev. 19:18).

"As he does not think about loving himself because it is natural, so also, should the husband's love of his wife be something that is as natural as loving himself."²⁴⁵

5:29-30 The truth that no normal person "ever hated his own body (flesh)" is clear, because everyone who is of sound mind maintains his physical body. The idea that we all need to learn to love ourselves, which some psychologists stress, is foreign to the apostle's thought here. Christ likewise feeds and cares for His *[own] body*, "the church." The obvious implication is that husbands should, like Christ, care for their wives—since the wife is a "member" of his own body.

²⁴¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 753.

²⁴²Wiersbe, 2:51.

²⁴³*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1277.

²⁴⁴For refutation of the view that marriage is a sacrament, see Calvin, 4:19:35.

²⁴⁵Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 765.

"Nourishing" involves providing security. "Cherishing" involves protecting by watching out for and caring for. Here are some other basic needs that most wives feel: They need to feel wanted, to have their husbands acknowledge their equality, to feel secure, and to feel fulfilled. They also need to enjoy sex without feeling like an object, to bear and love children with their husbands, and to enjoy companionship with their husbands.²⁴⁶

"No admonition to husbands could have been more countercultural to the Roman, Greek or Jewish man. Instead of being the ruler of the household, he is to be its servant. The husband's obligation goes far beyond being sexually faithful to his wife. And in no teaching anywhere in Roman, Greek, or Jewish writings is such a solution to the problem of disunity within marriage put forth. Rather than focusing on the rights of the husbands and wives, rather than providing financial incentives for the promotion of marriage, Paul drove right to the heart of marital unity by presenting the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as the model for the relationship of the husband to the wife."²⁴⁷

5:31 Adam acknowledged that Eve was part of himself: "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). When a man and a woman unite in marriage, they become part of one another ("one flesh"): in as close a unity as the one that existed before God physically "separated" Eve (when He formed her) from Adam. The Scriptures regard this tie as more fundamental, more binding, and more permanent, than any other tie that unites any other two human beings, including parent and child.²⁴⁸ It is partially because of this high view of marriage, that Christianity has traditionally taken a strong stand, not only for the indissolubility of the marriage bond, but also against polygamy, adultery, and divorce.

"This statement from the creation story is the most profound and fundamental statement in the whole of Scripture concerning God's plan for marriage."²⁴⁹

5:32 "This mystery" in view is the truth previously hidden but now brought to light. The relationship that exists between a husband and his wife is the same as the one that exists between Christ and His church. The church has as close a tie to Christ spiritually as a wife has to her husband spiritually. Paul revealed that Genesis 2:24 contains a more profound truth than people previously realized. The mystery is "great" because it has far-reaching implications.

²⁴⁶See Willard F. Harley Jr., *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-proof Marriage*.

²⁴⁷Jack J. Gibson, "Ephesians 5:21-33 and the Lack of Marital Unity in the Roman Empire," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:670 (April-June 2011):176-77.

²⁴⁸Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 641.

²⁴⁹Foulkes, p. 161.

One of the purposes of marriage is to *model* Jesus Christ's relationship with the church. He leads, loves, and serves the church. The church reverently submits to and is subject to Him. When husbands and wives fulfill these responsibilities to one another, their marriage models the relationship between Christ and His bride.

5:33 Even if Paul's original readers did not fully grasp the significance of Christ's intimate relationship to the church, "every (each) individual" (Gr. *humeis hoi kath' hena*) Christian husband, one by one, was responsible "to love his own wife . . . as himself." Likewise, "every" (the same Greek phrase) Christian "wife" should, one by one, "respect" (*phobetai*, fear, reverence) "her husband" (vv. 21-22). Paul did not instruct wives to respect their husbands because submission is the primary expression of love that God requires. If the husband loves his wife the way Christ demonstrated His love for the church, the wife will naturally "respect" (fear), and consequently love, her husband.

Respecting means voluntarily lifting up another person for special consideration, treatment, and obedience. It involves having consideration for his responsibilities and needs, and praying for him. Words of encouragement that have a positive focus and build him up show respect for a husband, as does doing things that please him. Probably most men have a poor self-image.²⁵⁰ A man must have the "respect" of his wife to feel successful as a man.²⁵¹

The duty of children 6:1-3

The next basic human relationship that needs affecting by the filling of the Spirit (5:15-21) is the one between children and parents.

6:1 Children express their submission by obeying their "parents" (plural). "In the Lord" modifies "obey," not "parents." Children should not obey their parents if their parents tell them to disobey the Lord.²⁵²

"Hence, if they spur us to transgress the law, we have a perfect right to regard them not as parents, but as strangers who are trying to lead us away from obedience to our true Father. So should we act toward princes, lords, and every kind of superiors."²⁵³

Children's primary responsibility is to the Lord, as is also true of wives. Obedience "is right" (proper) in the sense that it is in harmony with God's will for children (cf. Col. 3:20). Children should "obey" their parents as long as they are still children living under their parents' authority. When a

²⁵⁰See Walter Trobisch, *All a Man Can Be & What a Woman Should Know*.

²⁵¹See Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect*.

²⁵²Morris, p. 190.

²⁵³Calvin, 2:8:38.

child becomes an adult, he or she no longer has to obey his or her parents, but should continue to honor them.²⁵⁴

"So long as they are regarded in their culture as children or minors, they should continue to obey their parents."²⁵⁵

6:2 Even though as Christians we are no longer under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 7:6; 10:4; et. al.), Paul quoted the fifth commandment (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) to stress the importance of children obeying their parents. He restated this command as now being part of the Law of Christ. Honoring (v. 2) is a larger concept than obeying (v. 1). It involves a proper attitude as well as appropriate behavior.²⁵⁶

The "first commandment" in the Decalogue "with a promise" was really the second commandment, not the fifth. Evidently Paul meant that *for children*, the fifth one was the primary commandment, and it contained a promise.

6:3 When Paul restated the promise connected with obeying the fifth commandment, he rephrased it. God promised obedient Jewish children, who lived under the Mosaic Law, "long life" *in the Promised Land* (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Since He has not promised Christians a particular piece of land, Paul stated the more general promise that lay behind the specific promise, namely, longer physical life "on the earth." Normally, children who obey their parents end up avoiding many perils that would otherwise shorten their lives.

The duty of fathers 6:4

Paul addressed "fathers" because they are God's ordained family heads on whom the primary responsibility for child-raising rests. When a father is absent in a family, the mother usually assumes this responsibility. In Greco-Roman society, the father's authority over his children was absolute.

"This idea would have been revolutionary in its day; in the first-century Roman Empire, fathers could do pretty much what they liked in their families. They could even sentence family members to death . . ."²⁵⁷

Christianity stressed consideration for the feelings of the children in parental responsibility.

Essentially, this command forbids making unreasonable demands on children in the everyday course of family life. "Provoke" (Gr. *parorgizete*) means *to exasperate* (cf. Rom. 10:19; Col. 3:21). Exasperating provocation can enflame the child's anger

²⁵⁴Morris, p. 190.

²⁵⁵Stott, p. 243.

²⁵⁶See Mollie Ann Frye, "How to Honor Your Parents When They've Hurt You," *Psychology for Living* 28:6 (June 1986):12-14.

²⁵⁷Morris, p. 191. Cf. Gen. 22:1-14; 38:24; Deut. 21:18-21. See also Barclay, p. 208.

unnecessarily (cf. 4:31). Studies indicate that the factor that causes rage in teenagers, more than any other, is having to face life without adequate direction from their parents. Instead of being uninvolved in child-raising, fathers should be there to "bring them up," and provide for the physical and spiritual (non-material) needs of their children (cf. 5:29). "Discipline" or "training" refers to directing and correcting the child (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 12:8). "Instruction" denotes correction by word of mouth, including advice and encouragement (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Titus 3:10). Fathers are to do all this with "the Lord" at the center of the relationship and training.

"Responsible authority does not wield power; it serves with it."²⁵⁸

". . . too many parents nowadays foster the latent mischief by a policy of *laissez faire*, pampering their pert urchins like pet monkeys whose escapades furnish a fund of amusement as irresponsible freaks of no serious import. Such unbridled young scamps, for lack of correction, develop too often into headstrong, peevish, self-seeking characters, menaces to the community where they dwell, and the blame rests with their supine and duty-shirking seniors."²⁵⁹

The duty of slaves 6:5-8

The third social set that Paul addressed was slaves and masters (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24). Most slaves served in the home in Paul's day, so this section fits in well with what precedes about other household relationships. Some students of Roman history have estimated that about one-third of the population in the Roman Empire at the time were slaves, approximately 60 million individuals.²⁶⁰ Many of these people were Christians. Most ancient Greeks and Romans regarded slaves as little more than living tools.²⁶¹

"Aristotle lays it down that there can never be friendship between master and slave, for master and slave have nothing in common; 'for a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.' A slave was nothing better, and had no more rights, than a tool. Varro, writing on agriculture, divided agricultural instruments into three classes—the articulate, the inarticulate and the mute. The articulate comprises the slaves; the inarticulate the cattle; and the mute the vehicles. The slave is no better than a beast who happens to be able to talk. Cato gives advice to a man taking over a farm. He must go over it and throw out everything that is past its work; and old slaves too must be thrown out on the scrap heap to starve. When a slave is ill it is sheer extravagance to issue him with normal rations. The old and sick slave is only a broken and inefficient tool."²⁶²

²⁵⁸Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 318.

²⁵⁹Simpson, p. 136. See also Wiersbe, 2:54-55.

²⁶⁰Wood, p. 83.

²⁶¹See the excursus on slavery in Paul's time in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 800—04.

²⁶²Barclay, p. 213.

6:5 Paul contrasted "masters according to the flesh" with the Master of the human spirit, namely, Jesus Christ. Christian slaves owed their earthly masters obedience. Obedience demonstrated their submission to Christ (cf. 5:22).

"Christianity does not offer us escape from circumstances; it offers us conquest of circumstances."²⁶³

Seven qualifications describe proper obedience. Service was to be *respectful* ("with fear," reverence; cf. 5:33). Second, it was to be with "trembling" that is, with "care" that the slave not make a mistake. Third, it was to be with "sincerity" of the "heart," without hypocrisy or duplicity. Fourth, service should be as "to the Lord (Christ)."

6:6 Fifth, service was to be consistent ("not by way of eyeservice"), whether the master was watching or not. Paul may have also had in mind doing work that the human master could not check on. Sixth, it needed to arise from proper motives, not to please men only ("as men-pleasers") but, more importantly, to please the Lord ("as slaves of Christ").

6:7 Seventh, the slave should have an attitude of "good will" toward his or her master. He should serve for the master's welfare. Such good will "does not wait to be compelled."²⁶⁴ This kind of service is to be done "as to the Lord," not *as if* to the Lord. The *Lord* is the One whom the Christian slave really serves, not merely the earthly master.

6:8 Paul reminded *faithful* slaves that they would receive a reward from Jesus Christ in the future, whether their masters on earth acknowledged their good service or not ("whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord"). This reward will come at the judgment seat of Christ, if not earlier.

"Like Jesus himself, Paul does not shrink from referring to rewards."²⁶⁵

This principle of reward for faithful service applies to all who serve the Lord, "whether slave or free."

". . . although the numerous slaves who had come into the Christian fold were in the apostle's mind as he wrote these words, the principles of the whole section apply to employees and employers in every age, whether in the home, in business, or in the state."²⁶⁶

²⁶³Ibid., p. 214.

²⁶⁴J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 211.

²⁶⁵Wood, p. 84.

²⁶⁶Foulkes, p. 167.

The duty of masters 6:9

"Masters" should seek to please the Lord in their dealings with their slaves, even as slaves should try to please Christ as they serve their masters. They should not threaten because our heavenly Master does not threaten us. "Threatening" means harsh intimidation with the promise of inevitable, imminent, and severe or violent punishment (cf. Acts 4:17, 29; 9:1); it goes beyond simply warning. The opposite of threatening is gracious, just, and fair treatment (cf. Col. 4:1; James 5:4). Masters should also remember that their Master in heaven will not show favoritism ("no partiality with Him") to them because of their social or economic status. He will evaluate them by the same standard that they have used to judge others (Matt. 7:1-5).

"This is a gentle reminder that earthly rank has no relevance in heaven."²⁶⁷

Stott identified and discussed three major reasons he believed the apostles did not urge the abolition of slavery: First, Christians were an insignificant group in the Roman Empire during the first century, and were politically powerless. Second, it was fairly easy to make the transition from slavery to freedom, and there was a growing tendency for Romans to free their slaves, and even establish them in a trade or profession. Third, by this time, the legal status of slaves was beginning to be eased, and it showed signs of further improvement.²⁶⁸

"The application of this passage to contemporary times must be done with caution. Paul was writing specifically for a society where slavery was a legal institution. However, there are certainly some principles from the passage that can be applied to employee/employer relationships in the present time. Primarily, Christian employees should serve their employers with fear, diligence, integrity, and good will and Christian employers should deal with their employees with integrity and goodwill, without threats. Both Christian employees and Christian employers need also to realize that they have a heavenly master to whom they are accountable for their attitudes and conduct. Furthermore, the behavior of both parties should be a testimony to the unbelievers with whom they work."²⁶⁹

William Webb did not believe these exhortations apply to employer/employee relationships.²⁷⁰ Wayne Grudem rejected Webb's "redemptive-movement hermeneutic," because he believed it nullifies in principle the moral authority of the entire New Testament.²⁷¹ I agree with Grudem's analysis.

As we review this section of duties, we need to remind ourselves that only a Spirit-filled believer will be able to fulfill them (5:15-20). Essentially what Paul urged was humility that expresses itself in loving submissiveness to others, rather than arrogant self-assertiveness.

²⁶⁷Morris, p. 198.

²⁶⁸Stott, pp. 254-59.

²⁶⁹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 816.

²⁷⁰William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*.

²⁷¹Wayne Grudem, "Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:2 (June 2004):299-346.

So ends Paul's commands concerning how the Christian is to walk (live; 4:1—6:9): in unity, in holiness, in love, in light, and in wisdom.

B. SPIRITUAL WARFARE 6:10-20

That this section is distinct from the five that precede it is evident from two facts. Paul introduced it differently, and the emphasis in it is on God's resources. Earlier Paul urged the strengthening and growth of the body of Christ (4:12, 16). Now he explained the need for this. The church is at war with a spiritual enemy. We do not just walk, but we also war.

"These two responsibilities (home and work on the one hand, and spiritual combat on the other) are quite different from each other. Husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants are visible, tangible human beings, while the 'principalities and powers' arrayed against us are invisible, intangible demonic beings."²⁷²

"Sooner or later every believer discovers that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground, and that he faces an enemy who is much stronger than he is—apart from the Lord."²⁷³

"The image of the cosmic struggle or confrontation with evil is frequent in the book, but it hits its high point here (1:19-23; 2:1-7; 4:7-10; 5:7-14, 17)."²⁷⁴

According to the Book of Acts and other sources, there was an unusual amount of demonic activity in Ephesus, and Paul encountered it when he ministered there (cf. Acts 19:13-20).²⁷⁵ It was, therefore, appropriate that he addressed this subject at some length in this letter to the Ephesians.

6:10 "Finally" means "For the rest," and introduces what else the readers are to do. "Be strong" is a passive or middle imperative in the Greek text. It probably means both "allow the Lord to strengthen you" (passive) and "strengthen yourself in the Lord" (middle; cf. 1 Sam. 30:6). It is *the Lord* who provides the power in both cases. The theme of "power," introduced earlier in this epistle, recurs here (cf. 1:19-20; 2:1; 3:16-21). Three different words for "power" in this verse ("power," "strength," and "might"), all of which appear in 1:19, remind us that *all* of the Lord's *almighty* "power" and "strength" is available to us in our spiritual warfare.

"The strength of his power' is a striking use of two words for might. There is probably no great difference in meaning

²⁷²Stott, p. 213.

²⁷³Wiersbe, 2:56.

²⁷⁴Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 318.

²⁷⁵See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Ephesus," by E. M. B. Green.

here, but the combination puts emphasis on the importance of the divine power at work in believers."²⁷⁶

This may be a figure of speech meaning powerful strength. A *hendiadys* is the expression of a single complex idea, formed by joining two substantives with "and," rather than by using an adjective and a substantive. Another example of this figure is "the sacrifice and service of your faith" (Phil. 2:17), which means "the sacrificial service of your faith."

6:11 To "be strong in the Lord" (v. 10), the Christian must "put on" (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8) "the full armor of God" (that is God's). He supplies it for the believer (cf. Isa. 11:5; 59:17).

"Both commands are conspicuous examples of the balanced teaching of Scripture. Some Christians are so self-confident that they think they can manage by themselves without the Lord's strength and armour. Others are so self-distrustful that they imagine they have nothing to contribute to their victory in spiritual warfare. Both are mistaken. Paul expresses the proper combination of divine enabling [*sic*] and human co-operation."²⁷⁷

The purpose of accepting the equipment ("full armor") that God provides for waging spiritual warfare is, essentially, to equip one to withstand ("stand firm against") all of Satan's attacks. In the context of this epistle, the aim of Satan in view, primarily, has been the disunity of the body of Christ. However, what Paul said here doubtless applies to all of Satan's aims and attacks. These offensives ("schemes") come to us from a very intelligent and experienced strategist, and they are frequently deceptive (cf. 4:14).

From other Scripture passages, we know that Satan is behind many of our temptations, having received permission to assail us from God (e.g., Job 1—2). He uses the world system and our flesh (sinful nature) as his tools. He also attacks us directly, by himself, and through his malevolent, fallen angelic emissaries. God has given us specific instruction in Scripture about how to combat these attacks. We are to resist the devil (1 Peter 5:8-9), flee the temptations of the world system (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22), and deny the flesh (Rom. 6:12-13; 7:18-24; 8:13). How do we know the source of a given temptation so we can respond to it appropriately?

Satan has consistently aimed his personal attacks at getting people to doubt, to deny, to disregard, and to disobey the revealed will of God (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4). The world system seeks to get people to believe that they

²⁷⁶Morris, p. 201.

²⁷⁷Stott, p. 266.

do not need God, but can get along very well without Him (1 John 2). The flesh tempts us to think that we can find satisfaction, joy, and fulfillment on the physical, material level of life alone (Rom. 7).²⁷⁸

"A thorough knowledge of the enemy and a healthy respect for his prowess are a necessary preliminary to victory in war. Similarly, if we underestimate our spiritual enemy, we shall see no need for God's armour, we shall go out to the battle unarmed, with no weapons but our own puny strength, and we shall be quickly and ignominiously defeated."²⁷⁹

6:12 If we want to obey God and resist the devil, we are in for a struggle. It is not easy to become a mature Christian nor is it automatic. It takes diligent, sustained effort (cf. Phil. 2:12-13). This is part of our human responsibility in progressive sanctification.

This "struggle" does not take place on the physical level primarily, though saying "no" to certain temptations may involve certain physical behavior. It is essentially warfare on the spiritual level, with an enemy that we cannot see. This enemy is Satan and his hosts, as well as the philosophies and feelings he promotes that people implement. Stott refuted the view that the principalities ("rulers") and "powers" are only structures of thought, especially embodied in the state and its institutions.²⁸⁰

Some commentators believe that Paul described four different orders of angelic beings here. Probably the four terms used of our spiritual enemies, in this verse, do not identify four separate kinds of adversaries, as much as they point out four *characteristics* of all of them. "Rulers" stresses their *authority*, and "powers" or "authorities" their *strength*. "World forces of this darkness" or "powers of this dark world" point to their *wide influence in the world*, and forces "of wickedness" or "spiritual forces of evil" relate to their *evil character*. They operate in the heavenly realms (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10). Presently Satan and his hosts have access to God, in the sense that they can communicate with Him, but not in the sense that they can coexist in fellowship with Him (cf. Job 1—2).

The idea that certain demons have special authority over specific geopolitical territories comes from Daniel 10:13, where we read that the "prince [Heb. *sar*, head, official, captain] of *Persia*" withstood Michael, one of the "chief princes [same Hebrew word]." It is impossible to know whether all demons have territorial authority, or whether all territories have demonic heads (superiors), because we do not have sufficient

²⁷⁸See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Your Adversary the Devil*, and C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, for further insight into the devil's strategies.

²⁷⁹Stott, p. 263.

²⁸⁰See *ibid.*, pp. 267-75.

revelation. Clearly some demons have territorial assignments, but it seems unwarranted to conclude that all of them do.

"Nowhere in the NT do we find a territorial view of demons. Jesus never casts out a territorial demon or attributes the resistance of Nazareth or Jerusalem to such entities. Paul never refers to territorial spirits, nor does he attribute power to them—despite the paganism of cities where he established churches."²⁸¹

John Armstrong refuted from Scripture several of the teachings of some modern deliverance ministries. He wrote the following:

"In the face of growing citizen militia groups, committed to arming themselves in order to defend personal freedoms, it seems ironic that the church has forgotten that she is spiritually armed for an entirely different battle. As the church, in response to various culture wars, increasingly turns to numerous battles 'with flesh and blood' rather than to the primary battle with 'the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12), one must wonder if we have forgotten the teaching of the New Testament itself."²⁸²

6:13 This verse summarizes what has just preceded. It does not describe the Christian standing in victory *after* his or her conflict, as is clear from verses 14-18. Probably Paul repeated himself here, because of the urgency of taking up God's provisions in view of the serious struggle ahead that face ("so that you *will be able* to resist . . . to stand firm").

"The evil day" in view probably describes any day (any time) in the *present evil age*, during which the evil forces are attacking. A less likely possibility is that it is some day yet future that is more evil than the rest, such as the day of the Lord. Every day of temptation is an "evil day" for the Christian.

6:14 This verse begins the eighth long-running sentence (in the Greek) in this epistle, and it runs through verse 20 (cf. 1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:1-13, 14-19; 4:1-7, 11-16). The main verbs in this sentence are "stand" (v. 14) and "take" (v. 17). They are imperatives, denoting urgency (cf. vv. 11, 13). Four participles follow in verses 14-16 that describe *how* to stand.

Isaiah described God as a Soldier (called by scholars the "Divine Warrior"; cf. Isa. 11:5; 49:2; 52:7; 59:17). Paul may have had these descriptions in mind, but he probably used this figure to describe God's

²⁸¹Gerry Breshears, "The Body of Christ: Prophet, Priest, or King?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):15. See also Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti," *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 13:1 (Spring 1991):33-64.

²⁸²John H. Armstrong, "How Shall We Wage Our Warfare?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 227.

protection because armored Roman infantrymen were commonplace throughout the empire. One may have even been guarding Paul when he wrote this epistle (cf. Act 28:16). Everyone knew what they looked like.

Paul described the items that the Roman infantryman wore in the order in which he would have put them on. He first put on, over his short tunic (long shirt), a *belt* that would hold both the "breastplate" and scabbard (sheathe) in place. The "truth" could refer to both God's revealed truth, that the Christian has believed, and the Christian's own truthfulness, specifically: a lifestyle that reflects the *truth*. The "full truth" of God (i.e., His Word and its power), combined with the Christian's spiritual integrity, are together the only adequate basis for a defense against Satan (cf. 4:25).

"A man of integrity, with a clear conscience, can face the enemy without fear. The girdle also held the sword. Unless we practice the truth, we cannot use the Word of truth. Once a lie gets into the life of a believer, everything begins to fall apart. For over a year, King David lied about his sin with Bathsheba, and nothing went right."²⁸³

"People of that time did not normally wear a belt in the house, but when they faced some vigorous action such as running, or when a soldier was preparing for battle, they raised their loose robes above the knees and fastened them in place with a belt . . . Thus the 'girding' of the loins meant preparation for physical activity or, as here, for engaging in conflict."²⁸⁴

Similarly, righteous conduct (personal righteousness) seems to be in view as well as the righteousness of Christ that becomes ours at regeneration, both forms of righteousness being represented by the "breastplate of righteousness.". The "breastplate" covered the soldier's body from the neck to the thighs. It was usually bronze or chain mail.²⁸⁵ It had a back piece, but it was the front part that gave it its name.

6:15 Roman infantrymen wore tough sandals studded with sharp, thick nails on the bottoms to increase traction.²⁸⁶ The "gospel," that has brought "peace" to the Christian, enables him or her to stand firmly, on the defense, against temptation. Likewise, the gospel is what enables us to move forward, on the offense, against our enemies (cf. Isa. 52:7). The "preparation of the gospel of peace" probably refers to the powerful gospel of salvation and peace which the Christian soldier has believed, that enables him to stand his ground when attacked. We must be so familiar with the gospel that we

²⁸³Wiersbe, 2:58.

²⁸⁴Morris, p. 205.

²⁸⁵Wood, p. 87.

²⁸⁶Josephus, *The Wars* . . . , 6:1:8.

can share it with others (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). That grip on the gospel will enable us to hold our ground—and even advance—when tempted. The "gospel of peace" in view is the whole Christian message viewed as "good news," not just how to become a Christian.

". . . protection comes from reflecting the unity that the gospel provides within the community ('shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel,' 6:16 [sic, 6:15], looks back to 2:11-22; it is not a reference to evangelism)."²⁸⁷

6:16 The Roman soldier's "shield" was wooden, covered with leather to make it flame retardant. It was rectangular in shape, and about two and one-half feet wide by four feet long. With this large shield the soldier could protect his whole body.

"Before a battle in which flaming arrows might be shot at them, the soldiers wet the leather covering with water to extinguish the arrows. The Roman legionaries could close ranks with these shields, the first row holding theirs edge to edge in front, and the rows behind holding the shields above their heads. In this formation they were practically invulnerable to arrows, rocks, and even spears."²⁸⁸

"These darts were sometimes ablaze in order to set fire to the enemies' clothing or camp or homes just as the American Indians used to shoot poisoned arrows."²⁸⁹

The "faith" that provides such a defense for the Christian in his or her spiritual warfare, which is "able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one," is two-fold: First, it is to trust in all that God has revealed, and secondly, the active application of that trust at the moment of spiritual attack.

The first three participles that explain how to stand fast are: "having girded" or "buckled" (v. 14), "having put on" or "in place" (v. 14), and "having shod" or "fitted" (v. 15). The fourth participle is "taking up" or "take up" (v. 16).

6:17 The second main verb in this long sentence (vv. 14-20) is "take" or, better, "receive" or "accept" (Gr. *dexasthe*). In addition to standing firm, having received and having already put on four pieces of armor, we also need to receive and put on two more.

²⁸⁷Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 318.

²⁸⁸The NET Bible note on 6:18.

²⁸⁹Robertson, 4:551.

Since Christians are to put this "salvation" on, the salvation or deliverance in view seems to refer to the present and future deliverance we need when under attack by Satan (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8). We have already received salvation from condemnation. We subsequently receive this present salvation (deliverance) as we receive all of our salvation (including the physical part in our earthly bodies), namely, by calling on God and requesting it (cf. 1:15-23; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13).

This salvation is evidently similar to a "helmet," because deliverance involves a mental choice, namely, trust in God rather than self, and obedience to Him. Confidence in God becomes our "salvation," and thus protects our thinking while we are under attack.

The "sword" carried by the Roman infantryman (Gr. *machaira*) was short and two-edged. Soldiers used it to thrust and cut in hand-to-hand combat. In Paul's armor description, this sword is the soldier's only offensive weapon. Infantrymen usually carried a long spear as well, but Paul did not mention that in his analogy. The "word of God" is similar to this short sword for the Christian. "Word" (Gr. *rhema*) here refers to the utterance of God, rather than to the written Word or the living Word of God (Gr. *logos*). It seems most likely to refer to the spoken or applied "words" of Scripture that we use to counteract the particular temptation we face. It is the *appropriate* Scripture, spoken or put to use by the Christian in a given instance of temptation, that is in view (e.g., Matt. 4:4, 6, 10).

"As Jesus used the words of Scripture to repulse the tempter, so must the Christian the words the Spirit has inspired to drive away Satan."²⁹⁰

The Holy Spirit both gives "the word (*rhema*)," and empowers it as we use it. It is His "sword" (cf. Isa. 49:2).

6:18 Prayer and alertness (two participles in the Greek text) describe how we should "receive" our present salvation and use the word appropriate to our trial. We should be in constant prayer, in preparation for our spiritual battles, and as we engage our enemy (cf. Mark 14:34-38; Col. 4:2). The Spirit prays for us (Rom. 8:26) and enables us to pray, as He enables us to do everything else.

"Man very easily takes his difficulties to his fellows instead of to God."²⁹¹

"Prayer" refers to our communication with God generally, and "petition" to our supplications specifically. The antecedent of "this" is the first clause of the verse: "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit". In addition to praying for our own needs, we should also, as good soldiers,

²⁹⁰John A. Allen, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 138.

²⁹¹Foulkes, p. 178.

keep alert to the needs of other fellow soldiers, namely, "all the saints." We must not fail them, but pray for them persistently ("with all perseverance"). The great need for prayer that exists is obvious in Paul's use of the word "all" four times in this verse (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1).

"Prayer is an engine wieldable by every believer, mightier than all the embattled artillery of hell."²⁹²

". . . nuclear wars cannot be won with rifles. Likewise, satanic wars cannot be won by human energy."²⁹³

Donna Reinhard pointed out that in the flow of Paul's argument in Ephesians, we should understand spiritual warfare as influencing body life within the church, not just as a personal matter.²⁹⁴

"Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees."²⁹⁵

6:19-20

Paul sensed his own great need for the prayer support of his readers. It seemed incongruous that an "ambassador" of Christ should be in "chains." He was in heavenly places, but he was also in earthly confinement. An encounter with spiritual enemies awaited him when he would make his defense before Caesar Nero. Paul wanted "utterance" and "boldness" to characterize his witness. "Utterance" probably refers to clarity of communication, and "boldness" to courage. He needed bold utterance and courageous clarity in all of his ministry opportunities, but especially in the defense he anticipated in the imperial court (cf. Acts 28:30-31). There are nine references in Acts alone to various people witnessing "boldly" (Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-29; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 13:46), plus others elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor. 3:12).

"The word for 'boldness' is made up of two words meaning 'all' and 'speech.' It signifies the attitude when one is completely at home and the words flow freely. Thus it may mean 'outspokenness,' or 'frankness.' When a person is speaking in this way, he or she is not in the least afraid, and thus the expression comes to signify 'boldly.'"²⁹⁶

"Note that Paul did not ask them to pray for his comfort or safety, but for the effectiveness of his witness and ministry."²⁹⁷

²⁹²Simpson, p. 153.

²⁹³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 859.

²⁹⁴Donna B. Reinhard, "Ephesians 6:10-18: A Call to Personal Piety or Another Way of Describing Union with Christ?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:3 (September 2005):521-32.

²⁹⁵Anonymous.

²⁹⁶Morris, p. 211.

²⁹⁷Wiersbe, 2:60.

The "mystery of the gospel" (i.e., God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ) needed defending in Rome because the Romans viewed Christianity as simply a sect within Judaism (cf. Acts 18:12-17). The Jews saw it as a heretical religion (cf. Acts 21:27-28).

Some time ago, during a Sunday morning service, a lady in the church that I attend testified that while her family lived in our town, she had witnessed to her next-door neighbor, who was on drugs, and was not interested in hearing the gospel. Some years later, however, after her family had moved to a neighboring town, the former neighbor lady called her on the phone, came over, and Kathy led her to Christ. Boldness may not appear effective at times, but sometimes the seed sown just needs time to germinate.²⁹⁸

IV. CONCLUSION 6:21-24

Paul's anticipation of his defense before Nero brought him back to the present in his thinking. His exposition of the mystery of the church to his readers had ended. He had also explained their proper conduct in view of their calling. All that remained was to share with them some personal information and to pray God's blessing on them.

6:21-22 "Tychicus" (lit. Chance) accompanied this letter to Ephesus, and may have carried it. What Paul wrote about Tychicus, and his purpose in sending Tychicus to Ephesus, was almost identical to what he wrote in Colossians 4:7-8. Tychicus' mission was to give the Ephesian Christians further information about Paul, and to "comfort" and encourage them (cf. Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7; Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:12).

6:23 "Peace," "love," and "faith" are all important communal virtues in the Christian life. "Peace" was necessary because of the Jewish Gentile problems Paul wrote Ephesians to ameliorate (2:14-16; 3:15, 19; 4:3). Mutual "love" is the key to peace (1:15; 3:17-18; 4:2, 16), and mutual love rests on a common "faith" (1:15; 3:17; 4:5; cf. Gal. 5:6). The ultimate source of all three of these essential qualities is "God" and "Jesus Christ," united here in perfect equality.

6:24 As the apostle opened his epistle by referring to God's grace, so he ended it (1:2). God's "grace" was the key to both the calling of the Christian and the creation of the church. It is also essential to the conduct of the Christian (cf. 1:7; 2:5, 7-8; 3:2, 8; 4:7). Paul wished God's unmerited favor and divine enablement on "all those who love" Jesus Christ purely ("with incorruptible *love*"), without wrong motives or secret disloyalties (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22). As God has poured out His grace to us in all purity, so we should pour out our love to Him in purity.

²⁹⁸See the Appendix "Spiritual Warfare Involving Demons" at the end of these notes.

"Ephesians is ultimately about how God has powerfully equipped the church to experience blessing in Christ, by creating a new community that is able to honor God and resist the forces of evil. No longer does one's Jewish or Gentile identity dominate. They are part of a new, reconciled community, a reconciliation that involves not only God but also one another. All enablement in this new sacred community is rooted in what the exalted Christ has provided for His people. That is why believers can have hope, since they have begun participation in a wealth of benefits distributed from heaven. The church's members are citizens raised and seated with Jesus in a heavenly citizenship, though they represent Him now as light on the earth, fully enabled for the task. In all of this, God is taking steps toward the ultimate summation of all things in Christ."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 319.

Appendix

Spiritual Warfare Involving Demons

Here are some suggestions for ministering in situations involving demons.

How do you know if you are in the presence of demons? When people act very unusual, demons may be present. For example, if they speak with a voice that does not sound like their normal voice, if their eyes seem to be responding unusually, if their behavior is abnormal for them, or if they demonstrate unusual strength, demons may be involved.

When confronting demons, I would claim the victory and power of Jesus Christ over Satan verbally and, if necessary, command them to depart on the authority of Jesus Christ. Missionaries that I respect have said this works. But sometimes it takes much prayer and perseverance.

People who become dependent on drugs seem to open themselves up to demonic attack by doing so. So do people who abuse alcohol, listen to a lot of hard rock music, and use tarot cards or Ouija boards. Some games have been said by some to open people up to demonic activity, too.

We may not be able to prove that Christians can be demon-*possessed* from Scripture; the Scriptures do not speak in those terms. However, demons definitely do *afflict* certain Christians severely. In speaking on this subject, I try to avoid *possession* terminology and use *affliction* terminology instead. I do not believe that a Christian can be demon-possessed, since the Holy Spirit indwells him or her (cf. 1 John 4:4). But a Christian can be influenced by demons to the extent that he or she appears to be possessed by them.

Regarding how we should speak about Satan, and to him, Jude 9 is helpful: "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" We should respect Satan's great power and wisdom as our adversary, but we should never let thoughts of his power paralyze us, because "greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). "Christian rap" sometimes takes Satan on (thus inviting demonic activity) in what I consider inappropriate language.

It seems that some people have greater sensitivity to the spirit world than others do. Likewise some people seem to be the targets of Satanic attack more than others are, or at least are more aware of it. For example, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said that he felt unusual opposition when he was writing his section on demons in his *Systematic Theology*. A former pastor of mine said the same thing when he was preaching a series of messages on spiritual warfare. But I have never felt this type of opposition myself.

More important than being able to understand these differences, however, is being able to stand firm ourselves and to help others stand firm (v. 11). Paul could have told us a lot more about spiritual warfare from his own experience, but what he gave us in Ephesians 6, and the other pertinent passages in the Bible, is what is essential for every Christian to know.

*Here are some resources that I would recommend for further study of spiritual warfare. There are undoubtedly many other helpful resources available.

Alex Konya, *Demons: A Biblical Perspective* (Reg. Bapt. Press)

Ray Stedman, *Spiritual Warfare* (Multnomah)

Neal T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Harvest House)

Tim Warner, *Spiritual Warfare*

C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian Life*

Mark Bubeck, (3 books)

Ed Murphy, a 16-tape series on spiritual warfare

Frances Frangipane, *The Three Battlegrounds*

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