

A Commentary on Ephesians

BY
CHARLES HODGE

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Introduction

The apostle addresses himself principally to Gentile Christians. His object was:

1. To bring them to a just appreciation of the plan of redemption, as a scheme devised from eternity by God, for the manifestation of the glory of his grace.
2. To make them aware of the greatness of the blessing which they enjoyed by sharing its benefits.
3. To lead them to enter into the spirit of the Gospel, as a system which ignored the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and united all the members of the church in one living body, destined to be brought into full conformity to the image of Christ.
4. To induce them to live as suited a religion which had delivered them from

the degradation of their heathen condition, and exalted them to the dignity of sons of God.

He begins, therefore, with the primal fountain of all spiritual blessings. He refers them to their predestination to sonship, and their consequent election to holiness, before the foundation of the world. From this flowed their actual redemption by the blood of Christ; and the revelation of the divine purpose to unite all the subjects of redemption in one body in Christ; in whom first the Jews, and then the Gentiles, had been made the heirs of eternal life ([Ephesians 1:1–14](#)).

He next earnestly prays that God would enable them to appreciate the hope which they were thus entitled to cherish; the glory of the inheritance in reserve for them; and the exceeding greatness of that power which had already wrought in them

a change analogous to that effected in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. For as Christ was dead and deposited in the tomb, so they were spiritually dead; and as Christ was raised and exalted above all creatures, so they also were quickened and exalted to a heavenly state in him ([Ephesians 1:15–2:10](#)).

He therefore calls on them to contrast their former condition as heathen, with their present state. Formerly they were without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, without God, and without hope. But by the blood of Christ a two-fold reconciliation had been effected: the Jews and Gentiles are united as one body, and both are reconciled to God and have equally free access to his presence. The Gentiles, therefore, are now fellow citizens with the saints, members of the family of God, and living stones in that

temple in which God dwells by his Spirit ([Ephesians 2:11–22](#)).

This great mystery of the union of Jews and Gentiles had been partially revealed under the old dispensation; but it was not then made known as clearly as it had since been revealed to the apostles and prophets of the new dispensation. It was their great vocation to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make everyone understand the plan of redemption, hidden for ages in God, but now revealed, that God's manifold wisdom might be made known to principalities and powers through the church ([Ephesians 3:1–13](#)).

The apostle, therefore, bows his knees before the common Father of the redeemed, and prays that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith; that they, being rooted and grounded in love, might be

able to apprehend the infinite love of Christ, and be filled with the fullness of God, who is able to do for us far more than we are able either to ask or to think ([Ephesians 3:14–21](#)).

The Gentiles, therefore, are bound to enter into the spirit of this great scheme – to remember that the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, wise and unwise, is one body, filled by one Spirit, subject to the same Lord, having one faith, one hope, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is in, through, and over all. They should also bear in mind that diversity in gifts and office was not inconsistent with this unity of the church, but essential to its edification. For the ascended Saviour had constituted some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the very purpose of building up the

church; and through them, as the channels of the truth and grace of Christ, the church was to be brought to the end of its high calling ([Ephesians 4:1–16](#)).

They should not, therefore, live as the other Gentiles did, who, being in a state of darkness and alienation from God, gave themselves up to impurity and greed. On the contrary, having been taught by Christ, they should put off the old self, and be renewed in the image of God. Avoiding all falsehood, all undue anger, all dishonesty, all improper language, all malice, all impurity and covetousness, they should walk as children of the light, reproving evil, striving to do good, and expressing their joy by singing hymns to Christ, and giving thanks to God ([Ephesians 4:17–5:20](#)).

He impresses upon his readers reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great principle of Christian obedience. He

applies this principle especially to people's domestic obligations. The marriage relationship is illustrated by a reference to the union between Christ and the church. The former is an obscure foreshadowing of the latter. Marriage is shown to be not merely a civil contract, not simply a voluntary compact between the parties, but a vital union producing a sacred identity. The violation of the marriage relationship is, therefore, presented as one of the greatest of crimes and one of the greatest of evils. Parents and children are bound together not only by natural ties but also by spiritual bonds; and, therefore, the obedience on the part of the child, and nurture on the part of the parent, should be religious. Masters and slaves, however different their condition in human eyes, stand on the same level before God – a consideration which exalts the slave, and

humbles and restrains the master. Finally, the apostle teaches his readers the nature of that great spiritual conflict on which they have entered; a conflict, not with men, but with the powers of darkness. He tells them what armor they need, how it is to be used, and where they are to find strength to bring them off victorious ([Ephesians 5:21–6:20](#)).

Chapter 1

Verses 1–2

1:1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. The word apostle is used in three senses in the New Testament:

1. In its primary sense of 'messenger': John 13:16 (the messenger).

2. In the sense of missionaries, men sent by the church to preach the Gospel. In this sense Paul and Barnabas are called apostles, Acts 14:4, 14; and probably Andronicus and Junias, Romans 16:7.

3. In the sense of plenipotentiaries of Christ; men whom he personally selected and sent out invested with full authority to teach and rule in his name. In this sense it is always used when 'the apostles,' 'the

twelve,' or 'the apostles of the Lord' are spoken of as a well-known, definite category of people. They were appointed as witnesses of Christ's miracles, doctrines, resurrection; and therefore it was necessary that they should not only have seen him after his resurrection, but that their knowledge of the Gospel should be immediately from Christ, [John 15:26](#); [Acts 1:22](#), [2:32](#), [3:15](#), [13:31](#), [26:16](#); [1 Corinthians 9:1](#); [Galatians 1:12](#). They were not confined to any one territory, but had a general jurisdiction over the churches, as is manifest from their letters. To qualify for this office of authoritative teaching, organizing, and governing the church, they were made infallible by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and their divine mission was confirmed by miraculous powers. Their authority, therefore, rested, first, on their

commission, and secondly on their inspiration. Hence, it is evident that no one can have the authority of an apostle who does not have apostolic gifts.

To the saints who are in Ephesus. The Israelites, under the old dispensation, were called saints, because they were separated from other nations and consecrated to God. In the New Testament the word is applied to believers, not merely as externally consecrated, but as reconciled to God and inwardly purified. The Greek word from which the word 'saint' is derived signifies 'to cleanse,' either from guilt by a propitiatory sacrifice, as in [Hebrews 2:11](#) and [9:10, 14](#), or from inward pollution, and also to consecrate. Hence, saints are those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ, and by the renewing of the Holy Spirit, and thus separated from the world and consecrated to God.

Are faithful in Christ Jesus. The faithful are believers.

[1:2](#). This verse contains the usual apostolic blessing. Paul prays that grace and peace may be granted to his readers. Grace is unmerited favour; and the grace or favour of God is the source of all good. Peace, according to how the corresponding Hebrew word is used, means well-being in general. It includes all blessings flowing from the goodness of God.

Verses 3–14

Analysis

The apostle blesses God for the spiritual gifts bestowed on his people ([Ephesians 1:3](#)). Of these the first in order and the source of all the others is election ([Ephesians 1:4](#)). This election is; 1. Of individuals. 2. In Christ. 3. It is from eternity. 4. It is to holiness, and to the dignity of sons of God. 5. It is founded on the sovereign pleasure of God ([verses 4–5](#)). 6. Its final object is the glory of God, or the manifestation of his grace ([Ephesians 1:6](#)).

The second blessing mentioned here is actual redemption through the blood of Christ; the free remission of sins according to the riches of his grace ([verses 7–8](#)).

The third blessing is the revelation of the divine purpose in relation to the system of redemption; which has for its object the reduction of all things to a harmonious whole under Jesus Christ ([verses 9–10](#)).

Through this Redeemer, the Jewish Christians, who had long looked for the Messiah, are made heirs of God, in accordance with the divine purpose ([verses 11–12](#)).

The Gentile converts are partakers of the same inheritance, because, having believed in Christ, they are assured of their redemption by the possession of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of the inheritance until its actual and complete enjoyment ([verses 13–14](#)).

Commentary

[1:3](#). The Greek word used here, like its English equivalent, 'to bless,' signifies to praise, as when we bless God; to pray for blessings, as when we bless others; and to bestow blessings, as when God blesses us. 'Praise to the God who has blessed us' is then the expression of thanksgiving and praise to God on account of those special benefits which we receive from him through Christ.

In the heavenly places. The meaning is that these blessings pertain to that heavenly state into which the believer is introduced. Here on earth he is, as the apostle says in [Ephesians 3:6](#), 'in the heavenly realms.' He is a citizen of heaven ([Philippians 3:20](#)). The word 'heaven,' in Scripture, is not confined to the place or state of future blessedness, but is sometimes nearly equivalent to 'kingdom of heaven.'

[1:4](#). All these blessings have their source in the electing love of God. He blessed us – because he

chose us. Election is the cause or source of all subsequent benefits.

If election is for holiness, as the apostle teaches here, it follows, first, that individuals, and not communities or nations, are the objects of election; secondly, that holiness cannot in any form be the ground of election. If men are chosen to be holy, they cannot be chosen because they are holy. And, thirdly, it follows that holiness is the only evidence of election. For one who lives in sin to claim to be elected for holiness is a contradiction.

[1:5](#). The apostle says, God has chosen us for holiness, having predestinated us to sonship; that is, because he has thus predestinated us. Holiness, therefore, must be a necessary condition or prerequisite for the sonship here spoken of. Sonship, in reference to God, includes:

1. Participation of his nature, or conformity to his image.
2. The enjoyment of his favour, or being the special objects of his love.
3. Heirship, or a participation of the glory and blessedness of God.

The ground of this predestination, and of the election founded on it, is expressed by the clause, according to the good pleasure of his will.

[1:6](#). The final purpose of election is the glory of God. He has predestinated us to sonship, to the praise of his glorious grace. That is, in order that in the exaltation and blessedness of his people there might be abundant reason for celebrating his grace. It is worth noting that here, as in [Ephesians 2:7](#), [1 Corinthians 1:27–29](#), and elsewhere, the specific purpose of redemption and of the way in which its blessings are dispensed, is declared to be the manifestation of the grace or unmerited favour of God. Nothing, therefore, can be more foreign to the nature of the Gospel than the doctrine of merit in any form. It is uncongenial with that great scheme of mercy whose principal purpose is to exhibit the grace of God.

[1:7](#). In him we have redemption. In him, means not in ourselves. We are not self- redeemed. Christ is our Redeemer. The word 'redemption' sometimes means deliverance in the general, without reference to the way in which it is accomplished. When it refers to the work of Christ it is always to be understood in its strict sense, namely deliverance by ransom, because this particular way of redemption is always either expressed or implied. We are redeemed neither by power, nor truth, but by blood; that is, by the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. A sacrifice is a

ransom, as to its effect. It delivers those for whom it is offered and accepted. The words through his blood explain the words in him. In him, i.e., by means of his blood. They serve to explain the method by which Christ redeems.

The redemption which the apostle speaks about here is not the inner deliverance from sin, but it is an outer work, i.e., the forgiveness of our trespasses.

[1:8](#). That he lavished on us. We are redeemed according to the riches of that grace which God has so freely exercised toward us.

[1:9](#). God has caused this wisdom to abound, or has communicated it: he has made known to us the mystery of his will, in other words, by the revelation of the Gospel. The word mystery means a secret, something into which we must be initiated; something which we cannot discover ourselves and which can be known only as it is revealed. In this sense the Gospel is a mystery; and any fact or truth, however simple in itself, in the New Testament sense of the word, is a mystery, if it lies beyond the reach of our powers. Compare [Romans 16:25](#); [1 Corinthians 2:7–10](#); [Ephesians 3:9](#); [Colossians 1:26](#). For the same reason, any doctrine imperfectly revealed is a mystery. It remains in a measure secret. Thus, in [Ephesians 5:32](#), Paul calls the union of Christ and

believers 'a great mystery'; and in [1 Timothy 3:16](#) he refers to the manifestation of God in the flesh, and writes, 'the mystery of religion is great.'

In the present case the mystery of his will means 'his secret purpose,' that purpose of redemption which was hidden for ages, but which he has now graciously revealed.

[1:10](#). The general sense of this verse seems to be this. The purpose spoken of in the preceding verse had reference to the scheme of redemption, the design of which is to unite all the subjects of redemption, as one harmonious body, under Jesus Christ.

[1:11](#). God having formed and revealed the purpose of gathering the redeemed as one body in Christ, it is in carrying out this purpose that, the apostle says, in Christ we have also obtained an inheritance. 'We,' in this clause, is not to be understood to refer either to the apostle individually, or believers indiscriminately, but we who first hoped in Christ; we as contrasted with 'you also' in [verse 13](#); 'you' who were formerly Gentiles in the flesh ([Ephesians 2:11](#)). This clause, therefore, refers to the Jewish Christians.

According to his counsel and will means the purpose which has its origin in his will; neither suggested by others, nor determined by anything

apart from him. It is therefore equivalent to his sovereign will.

[1:12](#). So that we ... might live for the praise of his glory, that is, that we should be the means of causing his divine majesty or excellence to be praised. Here, as in [verse 6](#), the glory of God is declared to be the purpose of the plan of redemption, and of everything connected with its outworking. The people spoken about here are described as the first to set our hope on Christ. That is, who hoped in him of old, or before his coming; or, who hoped in him before others, mentioned in [verse 13](#), had heard of him. In either case it designates not the first converts to Christianity, but the Jews who, before the Gentiles, had the Messiah as the object of their hopes. The expression hope used here does not mean simply 'to expect,' but to place one's hope or confidence in anyone. Compare [1 Corinthians 15:19](#). It is not, therefore, the Jews as such, but the believing Jews, who are spoken of here as those who are in Christ, the partakers of the inheritance which he has purchased.

[1:13](#). The apostle having, in [verse 10](#), declared that God's purpose is to bring all the subjects of redemption into one harmonious body, says in [verse 11](#) that this purpose is realised in the conversion of

the Jewish Christians; and here he adds that another group of people, namely the Gentile Christians, to whom his letter is specially addressed, are included in the same purpose.

Had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. This is more than a translation – it is an exposition of the original. In Christ, the Gentile Christians had obtained an inheritance, and in him, also, they were sealed, after having believed. Whatever is meant by sealing, it is something which follows faith.

There are several uses for a seal:

1. To authenticate or confirm as genuine and true.
2. To mark as one's property.
3. To make secure.

In all these senses believers are sealed. They are authenticated as the true children of God; they have the witness within themselves ([1 John 5:10](#); [Romans 8:16](#) and [5:5](#)). They are thus assured of their reconciliation and acceptance. They are, moreover, marked as belonging to God ([Revelation 7:3](#)); that is, they show other people, by the seal impressed on them, that they are God's chosen ones. And, thirdly, they are sealed for salvation; i.e., they are certain of being saved. The sealing of God secures their safety. Thus believers were 'marked with a seal for the day

of redemption' ([Ephesians 4:30](#)). See [2 Corinthians 1:21-22](#). So the sealing which this passage speaks about answers all these ends. It assures us of God's favour; it indicates who belong to him; and it makes their salvation certain.

The promised Holy Spirit; that is, by the Spirit who was promised, or who comes in virtue of the promise. This promise was given frequently through the ancient prophets, who predicted that when the Messiah came, and in virtue of his mediation, God would pour his Spirit on all flesh. When on earth, Christ frequently repeated this promise, assuring his disciples that when he had gone to the Father, he would send them the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, to stay with them forever. After his resurrection he commanded the apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they had received 'the promise my Father promised' ([Acts 1:4](#)), meaning the gift of the Holy Spirit. [Galatians 3:14](#) says it is the reason why Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, that we should receive the promise of the Spirit. This, then, is the great gift which Christ secures for his people – the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as the source of truth, holiness, consolation, and eternal life.

[1:14](#). This Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance. It is both the foretaste and the pledge of all that is laid up

for the believer in heaven. The word pledge is a Hebrew term, which passed into the Greek and then into the Latin vocabulary, retaining its original sense. It means, first, a part of the price of anything purchased, paid as a security for the full payment, and then more generally a pledge. Three times it refers to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, in [2 Corinthians 1:22](#) and [5:5](#), and in the passage before us. In the same sense the Scriptures speak of 'the first fruits of the Spirit' ([Romans 8:23](#)). Those influences of the Spirit which believers now enjoy are both a foretaste of future blessedness, the same in kind though immeasurably less in degree, and a pledge of the certain enjoyment of that blessedness; just as the first fruits were a part of the harvest, and a guarantee of its ingathering. It is because the Spirit is a guarantee of our inheritance that his indwelling is a seal. It assures those in whom he dwells of their salvation, and renders that salvation certain. Hence it is a most precious gift, to be most religiously cherished.

[Verses 15–23](#)

Analysis

Having, in the preceding section, unfolded the nature of those blessings which the Ephesians had shared, the apostle gives thanks to God for their conversion, and assures them of his prayers ([verses 15–16](#)). He prays that God will give them that wisdom and knowledge of himself of which the Spirit is the author ([Ephesians 1:17](#)); that their eyes might be enlightened properly to understand the nature and value of that hope which is founded in the call of God, and the glory of the inheritance to be enjoyed among the saints ([Ephesians 1:18](#)); and the greatness of that power which had already been exercised in their conversion ([Ephesians](#)

[1:19](#)). The power which effected their spiritual resurrection was the same as that which raised Christ from the dead, and exalted him above all created beings and associated him in the glory and dominion of God ([verses 20–21](#)). To him all things are made subject, and he is constituted the supreme head of the church, which is his body, the fullness or complement of the mystical person of him who fills the universe with his presence and power ([verses 22–23](#)).

Commentary

[1:15](#). Your love towards all the saints, i.e., for those who are saints – those who have been cleansed, separated from the world, and consecrated to God. This love is founded on the character of its objects as

the people of God, and therefore it embraces all the saints.

[1:16](#). I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember. ... This does not mean, 'praying I give thanks,' but two things are mentioned: constant thanksgiving on their account, and intercession.

[1:17](#). The burden of his prayer is contained in this and the following verses. The object of his prayer, or the person to whom it is addressed, is designated, first, as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, i.e., the God whose work Christ came to do, by whom he was sent, of whom he testified, and to whom he has gone; and, secondly, the Father of glory.

[1:18](#). With the eyes of your heart enlightened. The word 'heart' in Scripture is often used as we use the word 'soul,' to designate the whole spiritual nature in people. [Romans 1:21](#); [2 Corinthians 4:6](#).

You may know what is the hope to which he has called you, i.e., the hope of which his calling is the source, or to which he has called you. The vocation spoken of here is not merely the external call of the Gospel, but the effectual call of God by the Spirit, to which the word 'calling' in the letters of Paul always refers. It is a great thing to know, or estimate aright, the value of a well-founded hope of salvation.

The riches of his glorious inheritance, i.e., what is the abundance and greatness of the excellence of that inheritance of which God is the author. The apostle labours here, and still more in the following verses, for language to express the greatness of his conceptions. This inheritance is not only divine, as it has God as its author; but it is a glorious inheritance; and not simply glorious, but the glory of it is inconceivably great.

[1:19](#). And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe. This is the third petition in the apostle's prayer. He prays that his readers may have right apprehensions of the greatness of the change which they had experienced. It was no mere moral reformation effected by rational considerations; nor was it a self-wrought change, but one due to the almighty power of God.

The prayer recorded in these verses is a very comprehensive one. In praying that the Ephesians might be enlightened with spiritual understanding of the truth, the apostle prays for their sanctification. In praying that they might have just conceptions of the inheritance to which they were called, he prayed that they might be elevated above the world. And in praying that they might know the exceeding greatness of the power

exercised in their conversion he prayed that they might be at once humble and confident – humble, in view of the death of sin from which they had been raised; and confident, in view of the omnipotence of that God who had begun their salvation.

[1:20](#). This power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead. There are two things clearly intended in these words:

1. That the power which raises the believer from spiritual death is the same as that which raised Christ from the grave.

2. That there is a striking analogy between these events and an intimate connection between them. The one was not only the symbol, but the pledge and agency for the other. The resurrection of Christ is both the type and the cause of the spiritual resurrection of his people, as well of their future rising from the grave in his glorious likeness. The apostle speaks at

length about this analogy and connection in [Romans 6:1–10](#), and also in the following chapters of this letter. Therefore, as often as the believer contemplates Christ as risen and seated at the right hand of God, he has at once an illustration of the change which has been effected in his own spiritual state, and a pledge that the work commenced in regeneration will be consummated in glory.

And seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places. Kings place at their right hand those whom they wish to honour, or whom they associate with themselves in regal authority. No creature can be thus associated in honour and authority with God, and therefore to none of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand' ([Hebrews 1:13](#)). That divine honour and authority are expressed by sitting at the right hand of God, is further seen from

those passages which speak of the extent of that dominion and of the nature of that honour to which the exalted Redeemer is entitled. It is a universal dominion, [Matthew 28:18](#); [Philippians 2:9](#); [1 Peter 3:22](#); and it is an honour that is due to God alone, [John 5:23](#).

The immediate subject under discussion in this chapter is the blessings of redemption conferred on believers. The resurrection and exaltation of Christ are introduced incidentally, by way of illustration. The apostle dwells for a moment on the nature of this exaltation, and on the relation of Christ, at the right hand of God, to his church; and then, at the beginning of the following chapter, reverts to his main topic.

[1:21](#). To illustrate the exaltation of Christ mentioned in [verse 20](#), the apostle says here that he is seated far above all rule and

authority and power and dominion. That these terms refer to angels is plain from the context, and from such passages as [Romans 8:38](#), [Colossians 1:16](#), and [Ephesians 3:10](#) and [6:12](#), where angels are either specifically mentioned, or they are opposed to 'flesh and blood,' i.e. mankind, as a different order of beings.

[1:22](#). And he placed all things under his feet. Christ is not only exalted above all creatures, but he has dominion over them; all are placed in absolute subjection to him. They are under his feet. This passage is a quotation from [Psalm 8:6](#). It is applied to Christ by this same apostle in [1 Corinthians 15:27](#) and [Hebrews 2:8](#). In both of these passages the word 'all' is pressed to the full extent of its meaning. It is made to include all creatures, all capable of subjection; all beings except God alone are made subject to man in the person of

Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords, and King of kings.

The sense in which Christ is the head of the church is, that he is the source of its life, its supreme ruler, ever present with it, sympathizing with it, and loving it as a man loves his own flesh. See [Ephesians 4:15–16](#) and [5:23](#), [29](#); [Romans 12:5](#); [1 Corinthians 12:27](#). Intimate union, dependence, and community of life, are the main ideas expressed by this metaphor.

[1:23](#). Which is his body. This is the radical or formative idea of the church. It is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ that constitutes the church his body. And, therefore, only those in whom the Spirit dwells are constituent members of the true church.

Chapter 2

Verses 1–10

Analysis

There are three principal topics treated in this section: First, the spiritual state of the Ephesians before their conversion. Second, the change which God had made in them. Third, the purpose for which that change had been made.

1. The state of the Ephesians before their conversion, and the natural state of mankind universally, is spiritual death, which includes (a) a state of sin; (b) a state of subjection to Satan and to our own corrupt affections; (c) a state of condemnation. ([Verses 1–3.](#))

2. The change which they had experienced was a spiritual resurrection, concerning which the apostle teaches (a) that God is its author; (b) that it is a work of love and grace; (c) that it was through Christ, or in virtue of union with him; (d) that it involves great exaltation, even an association with Christ in his glory. ([Verses 4–6.](#))

3. The purpose of this dispensation is to reveal God's grace through all coming ages. It reveals grace (a) because salvation, in general, is of grace; (b) because the fact that the Ephesian Christians believed or accepted this salvation was due not to themselves but to God – faith is his gift; (c) because good works are the fruits not of nature but of grace – we are created for good works. ([Verses 7–10.](#))

Commentary

[2:1.You](#) were dead through the trespasses and sins. There is an intimate connection between this clause and the preceding paragraph. In [Ephesians 1:19](#) the apostle prays that the Ephesians might duly appreciate the greatness of the power which had been exercised in their conversion. It was to be known from its effects. It was that power which was exercised in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, and which had brought about an analogous change in them. The same power which brought Christ to life has brought you to life.

[2:2.](#) In which you once lived. Their former condition was briefly described in [verse 1](#) as a state of spiritual death. In this and the following verses it is described in more detail. They walked in sin. They were daily conversant with it, and devoted to it. They

were surrounded by it, and clothed with it. They lived according to the course of this world. In this clause is stated not only the character of their life, but the governing principle which controlled their conduct. They lived according to, and under the control of, the spirit of the world.

[2:3](#). We were by nature children of wrath. The expression children of wrath agrees with the Hebrew 'sons of' idiom meaning those to be punished. This wrath is God's displeasure and, of course, the idea of ill-desert is necessarily implied.

[2:4](#). Thus the apostle has described people's natural state; and in this and the following verses he unfolds the manner in which those to whom he wrote had been delivered from that dreadful condition. It was by a spiritual resurrection. God, and not themselves, was the author of the change. It was not to be referred to any

goodness in them, but to the abounding love of God. The objects of this love were not Jews, as opposed to Gentiles, nor the Gentiles as such, nor people in general, but us, i.e., Christians, the actual subjects of the life-giving power spoken of here. All this is included in this verse.

But God, i.e., notwithstanding our guilt and corruption, God, who is rich in mercy, 'because he is rich in mercy.' Mercy is 'the desire to succour the miserable.' Love is more than either pity or mercy. It was not merely mercy, which has all the miserable for its object; but love, which has definite individual people for its objects, which constrained this intervention of God for our salvation.

[2:5](#). Made us alive together with Christ. The Greek word translated 'to make alive' means 'to impart life.' In the New Testament it almost always refers to the

giving of the life of which Christ is the author.

[2:6](#). And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. This is an amplification of what precedes. In its broadest sense the life, which in [verse 5](#) is said to be given to us, includes the exaltation expressed in this verse. It is, therefore, only by way of amplification that the apostle, after saying we are made sharers of the life of Christ, adds that we are raised ... up and enthroned with him in heaven.

[2:7](#). Why has God done all this? Why from eternity has he chosen us to be holy before him in love? Why has he made us accepted in the beloved? Why, when dead in trespasses and sins, has he made us alive, raised us up, and made us to sit together in heavenly realms with Christ? The answer to these questions is given in this verse. It

was so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. The revelation of the grace of God, i.e., of his unmerited love, is declared to be the specific object of redemption. From this it follows that whatever clouds the grace of God, or clashes with the free nature of the blessings promised in the Gospel, must be inconsistent with its nature and purpose. If the salvation of sinners is intended as an exhibition of the grace of God, it has to be free.

[2:8–9](#). These verses confirm the preceding declaration. The manifestation of the grace of God is the great end of redemption. This is plain, for salvation is entirely of grace. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ([Ephesians 2:8](#)). So here we have a

manifold assertion, affirmative and negative, of the free nature of salvation. It is not only said in general, 'You are saved by grace,' but further, that salvation is by faith, i.e., by simply receiving or apprehending the offered blessing. From the very nature of faith, as an act of assent and trust, it excludes the idea of merit. If it is by faith, it is of grace; if it is by works, it is earned by him; as the apostle argues in [Romans 4:4–5](#). Faith, therefore, is the mere act of accepting, and not the ground on which salvation is bestowed.

Not the result of works ([Ephesians 2:9](#)). The apostle says works, without qualification or limitation. It is not, therefore, ceremonial, as distinguished from good works; or legal, as distinguished from evangelical or gracious works; but works of all kinds, as distinguished from faith, which are

excluded. Salvation is in no sense, and in no degree, of works; for the person who attains the reward has earned it. But salvation is of grace, and therefore not of works, lest any man should boast.

[2:10](#). That salvation is thus entirely the work of God, and that good works cannot be the ground of our acceptance with him, is proved in this [verse 1](#). By showing that we are God's workmanship – he, not we, has made us what we are. And 2. By the consideration that we are created for good works. As the fact that men are elected for holiness proves that holiness is not the ground of their election, so their being created for good works shows that good works are not the ground on which they are made the subjects of this new creation, which is itself incipient salvation.

The apostle has clearly taught in this paragraph that the natural state of man is

one of condemnation and spiritual death; that from that condition believers are delivered by the grace of God in Christ Jesus; and the purpose of this deliverance is the manifestation, through all coming ages, of the exceeding riches of his grace.

Verses 11–22

Analysis

In the preceding paragraph the apostle set out:

1. The moral and spiritual condition of the Ephesians by nature.
2. The spiritual renovation and exaltation which they had experienced.
3. God's purpose in this dispensation.

In this paragraph he exhibits the corresponding change in their relationships. In doing this he sets out:

1. Their former relationship ([verses 11–12](#)).
 - (a) to the church: they were foreigners and aliens;
 - (b) to God: they were far off, without any saving knowledge of him, or interest in his promises.

2. The means by which this alienation from God and the church had been removed, namely, by the blood of Christ ([verses 13–18](#)). His death had a double effect:

(a) By satisfying the demands of justice, it secured reconciliation with God.

(b) By abolishing the law in the form of the Mosaic institutions, it removed the wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles.

A double reconciliation was thus accomplished: the Jews and Gentiles are united in one body, and both are reconciled to God.

3. As a result of this double reconciliation, the Ephesians were intimately united with God and his people ([verses 19–22](#)). This idea is set out in three ways:

(a) They are represented as fellow-citizens of the saints.

(b) They are members of the family of God.

(c) They are constituent parts of that temple in which God dwells by his Spirit.

The idea of the church, which underlies this paragraph, is presented everywhere in the New Testament. The church is the body of Christ. It consists of those in whom he dwells by his Spirit. To be alien from the church, therefore, is to be an alien from God. It is to be without Christ and without hope. The church about which this is said is not the nominal, external, visible church as such, but the true people of God. As, however, the Scriptures always speak of people according to what they profess, calling those who profess faith 'believers' and those who confess Christ 'Christians,' so they speak of the visible church as the true church, and predicate of the former what is true only of the latter.

The Gentiles while they were aliens were without Christ, without God, and without hope; when amalgamated with the church, they are lived in by God through the Spirit. Many of them were really like this, all of them professed to be like this, and they are therefore addressed in this way. But union with the visible church no more made them real partakers of the Spirit of Christ, than the profession of faith made them living believers.

Commentary

[2:11](#). So then, remember – i.e., since God has done such great things for you, call to mind your former condition, as a motive both for humility and for gratitude. That at one time you Gentiles by birth, i.e., uncircumcised heathen. This gives, in a word, the description of their former state.

All that follows, in this and the next verse, is merely an amplification of this idea. The context shows that the words by birth refer to circumcision, which is a sign in the flesh.

[2:12](#). The sentence begun in [verse 11](#) is resumed here: Remember that you were at that time without Christ. This means more than that they were, as heathen, destitute of the knowledge and expectation of the Messiah. As Christ is the only Redeemer of men, and the only Mediator between God and man, to be without Christ was to be without redemption, and without access to God. To possess Christ, to be in him, is the sum of all blessedness; to be without Christ includes all evil.

[2:13](#). But now in Christ Jesus – in virtue of union with Christ, you who were once far off have been brought near. As under the old dispensation God lived in the temple,

those living near his dwelling place and having access to him were his people. Israel was near; the Gentiles were far away. They lived at a distance, and had no freedom of access to the place where God revealed his presence. Hence in the prophets, as in [Isaiah 49:1](#) and [57:19](#), those who are near means the Jews, and those who are far away are the Gentiles. This expression came over to the New Testament writers: [Acts 2:39](#), 'The promise is for you, for you children, and for all who are far away'; [Ephesians 2:17](#), 'proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.' Among the later Jews the act of receiving a proselyte was called 'making him near.' Being far from God included both separation from his people and spiritual distance or alienation from God himself; so to be brought near

includes both introduction into the church and reconciliation with God.

[2:14–15](#). These verses contain a confirmation and illustration of what precedes: 'You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ' ([Ephesians 2:13](#)). For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall ... This he has accomplished by abolishing the law.

The breaking down of the dividing wall which the apostle speaks of, does not consist in setting the law aside, or suspending it by a sovereign, executive act. It is no longer active or binding. Its demands have been satisfied, so that we are judicially free from it; free not by the act of a sovereign, but by the sentence of a judge – not by mere pardon, but by

justification. Who is he that condemns, when God justifies? (See [Romans 8:34](#).)

[2:16](#). The second part of Christ's purpose is expressed in this verse. It was that he might reconcile the two, united in one body, to God, by means of the cross, having thereby slain the enmity. The goal achieved was reconciliation with God; the subjects of this reconciliation are the church, the one body into which Jews and Gentiles are merged (they are member together of one body, [Ephesians 4:4](#)); the means of this reconciliation is the cross, because the crucifixion of our Lord removes the enmity which prevented the reconciliation spoken about here.

And might reconcile is to effect peace and union between parties previously at variance.

[2:17](#). So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. The preaching is the annunciation of the favour of God made by Christ, either in person, or through his apostles and his Spirit. Christ announced that peace with God had by the cross been secured for those who were far off, the Gentiles, as well as for the Jews, or those who were near.

[2:18](#). The proof that peace has thus been obtained for both is that both have the same free access to God. If his wrath had not been removed ([Romans 5:10](#)) – the hostility put to death – we could never have had access to God just as the Jews do, on the same terms and in the same way. It follows that the peace procured by the death of Christ was designed for the one group of people as well as for the other.

Access is not mere liberty of approach; it is 'introduction.' Christ did not die simply to open the way of access to God, but actually to introduce us into his presence and favour.

[2:19](#). The consequences of this reconciliation are that the Gentiles are now citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, and part of that temple in which God dwells by his Spirit. Previously, they were strangers and aliens; now they are citizens. Previously the Gentiles stood in the same relation to the theocracy or commonwealth of Israel that we do to a foreign state. They had no share in its privileges, no participation in its blessings. Now they are citizens with the saints. The word saints does not refer to the Jews, nor the ancient patriarchs, but to the people of God. Christians have become, under the

new dispensation, what the Jews once were, namely saints, people selected and separated from the world, and consecrated to God as his special people. They now constitute the theocracy, which is no longer confined to any one people or country, but embraces everyone in every country who has access to God by Christ Jesus.

In this spiritual kingdom the Gentiles now have the right of citizenship. They are on terms of perfect equality with all other members of that kingdom. And that kingdom is the kingdom of heaven. The same terms of admission are required, and neither more nor less, for membership in that kingdom, and for admission into heaven; all who enter the one enter the other; one leads to the other; we are now, says Paul, the citizens of heaven. It is not therefore to the participation of the

privileges of the old, external, visible theocracy, nor simply to the pale of the visible Christian church, that the apostle here welcomes his Gentile brothers, but to the spiritual Israel, the communion of saints; to citizenship in that kingdom of which Christ is king, and membership in that body of which he is the head.

[2:20](#). As the Greek word for a family and a house is the same, the apostle passes from one figure to the other. The Gentiles are members of the family of God, and they are parts of his house. They are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

[2:21](#). Christ being the cornerstone, everything depends on union with him. Therefore the apostle adds, In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Christ is the principle both of support and of growth. He not only sustains the building, but carries it on to its consummation.

Into a holy temple – i.e., increasing so as to become a holy temple. A temple is a building in which God lives. Such a temple is holy, as sacred to him. It belongs to him, is consecrated to his use, and can neither be appropriated by anyone else nor used for anything except his service, without causing it to be profaned. This is true of the church as a whole, and of all its constituent members. The money-changers of the world cannot, with impunity, make the church a place of commerce, or use it in any way to answer their sordid or secular ends. The church does not belong to the state, and cannot lawfully be controlled by it. It is sacred, set

apart for God. It is his house, in which he alone has any authority.

[2:22](#). What was said about the whole body of believers is here affirmed of the Ephesian Christians: In whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

Chapter 3

Verses 1–13

Analysis

The office which Paul had received was that of an apostle to the Gentiles ([verses 1–2](#)). For this office he was qualified by direct revelation from Jesus Christ, concerning the purpose of redemption – the preceding parts of the letter were sufficient evidence of this knowledge of his ([verses 3–4](#)). The special truth, now revealed more plainly than ever before, was the union of the Gentiles with the Jews as joint partakers of the promise of redemption, by means of the Gospel ([verses 5–6](#)). As the Gospel is the means of bringing the Gentiles to this fellowship

with the saints, Paul was, by the special grace and almighty power of God, converted and made a minister of the Gospel ([verses 7–8](#)). The object of his ministry was to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ, and enlighten people about the purpose of redemption which had from eternity been hidden in the divine mind ([Ephesians 3:9](#)). And the object of redemption itself is the manifestation of God's wisdom to principalities and power in heaven ([Ephesians 3:10](#)). This glorious purpose has been executed in Christ, in whom we, as redeemed, have free access to God. Afflictions endured in such a cause were no ground of depression, but rather of glory ([verses 11–13](#)).

Commentary

[3:1](#). This is the reason, – because you Gentiles are fellow citizens with God's people, and especially because you Ephesians are included in the temple of God.

The expression a prisoner for Christ does not mean 'prisoner on account of Christ.' Those for whom he suffered chains are immediately said to be the Gentiles. It means Christ's prisoner. As he was Christ's servant, apostle, and minister, so he was Christ's prisoner for the sake of you Gentiles. It was preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles which brought down on him the hatred of his countrymen, and led them to accuse him before the Roman magistrates, and to him being sent as a prisoner to Rome.

[3:2](#). The expression the commission of God's grace that was given to me is the designation of his office. It was a

stewardship. A stewardship of the grace given means either a stewardship which is a grace or favour, or which flows from grace – i.e., was graciously conferred. Compare [verse 8](#), in which he says, 'this grace was given to me.' Not infrequently the office itself is called a grace or favour: [Romans 12:3](#) and [15:15](#); [1 Corinthians 3:10](#); [Galatians 2:9](#). Paul esteemed the office of a messenger of Christ as a manifestation of the undeserved kindness of God towards him, and he always speaks of it with gratitude and humility. It was not its honours, nor its authority, which gave it value in his eyes; but the privilege which it involved of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ.

[3:3](#). The mystery was made known to me by revelation – i.e., a secret, something which cannot be discovered by human reason, which could only be attained by

revelation. This revelation was a grace or favour conferred on the apostle himself.

[3:4](#). By reading what he had written they could judge about his knowledge of the mystery of Christ. What he had written might be taken as the standard or evidence of his knowledge.

[3:5](#). Through revelation, God had made known to Paul a mystery, or purpose, which was not revealed as it now was to the apostles. That the Gentiles were to partake of the blessings of the Messiah's reign, and to be united as one body with the Jews in his kingdom, is not only frequently predicted by the ancient prophets, but Paul himself repeatedly and at length quotes their declarations on this point, to prove that what he taught was in accordance with the Old Testament; see [Romans 9:25–33](#). The emphasis must therefore be placed on the word as. This

doctrine was not formerly revealed as, i.e. not so fully or so clearly as under the Gospel.

As it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. The apostles and prophets of the new dispensation were the only types of inspired men; the former being the permanent, the latter the occasional organs of the Spirit. Therefore they were the only recipients of direct revelations. They are called holy here in the sense of 'sacred,' 'consecrated.' They were men set apart for God's special service. In the same sense the prophets of the old economy are called holy ([Luke 1:70](#)).

By the Spirit – i.e., revealed by the Spirit. Spirit, though without the article, refers to the Holy Spirit, the immediate author of these divine communications. It follows from the scriptural doctrine of the Trinity,

which teaches the identity about the substance of the Father, Son, and Spirit, that the action of the one is the action of the others. Paul therefore refers the revelations which he received sometimes to God, as in [verse 3](#); sometimes to Christ, as in [Galatians 1:12](#); sometimes to the Spirit.

[3:6](#). The mystery made known to the apostles and prophets of the new dispensation was that the Gentiles are to be heirs together, that the Gentiles *are*, in fact, fellow-heirs of the same body, and sharers in the promise. The way in which the calling of the Gentiles was predicted in the Old Testament led to the general impression that they were to take part in the blessings of the Messiah's reign by becoming Jews, by becoming proselytes merged into the old theocracy, which was to remain in all its peculiarities. It seems

never to have occurred to anyone until the day of Pentecost that the theocracy itself would be abolished, and a new form of religion introduced, designed and adapted equally for all mankind, under which the distinction between Jew and Gentile was to be done away. It was this catholicity of the Gospel which was the expanding and elevating revelation made to the apostles, and which raised them from sectarians to Christians.

[3:7](#). I became a servant. A servant, 'a runner,' 'minister.' A minister of the Gospel, meaning one whose business it is to preach the Gospel. This is his service, the work for which he is engaged, and to which he is bound to devote himself. There are two things which Paul here and in the following verse says about his introduction into the ministry: first, it was

a great favour, and secondly, it involved the exercise of divine power.

[3:8](#). Although, adds the apostle, I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ.

By the words all the saints we should understand, not the apostles, but the people of God, who are 'called to be saints' ([1 Corinthians 1:2](#); [Romans 1:7](#)). The very least of all is a comparative formed from a superlative. It was not merely the sense of his sinfulness in general which weighed so heavily on the apostle's conscience; it was the sin of persecuting Christ, which he could never forgive himself.

The boundless riches of Christ are the fullness of the Godhead, the plenitude of all divine glories and perfections which dwell in him; the fullness of grace to

pardon, to sanctify and save; everything, in short, which makes him satisfy the soul.

[3:9](#). The words translated to make everyone see really means 'to shine,' as any luminous body does, and then 'to illuminate,' to impart light to, as a candle does to those on whom it shines, and as God does to people's minds, and as the Gospel does, which is like a light shining in a dark place, and hence the apostle in [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) speaks of the 'light of the gospel.' The church is compared to a candlestick, and ministers to stars. Their office is to dispense light. The light imparted by the Gospel was knowledge, and hence to illuminate is in fact to teach; which is the idea the word is intended to express here.

[3:10](#). The wisdom of God in its rich variety refers to the various aspects under which the wisdom of God is displayed in

redemption; in reconciling justice and mercy; in exalting the unworthy, while it effectually humbles them; in the person of the Redeemer, in his work; in the works of the Holy Spirit; in the varied dispensations of the old and new economy; and in the whole conduct of the work of mercy, and in its glorious consummation.

[3:11](#). This exhibition of God's manifold wisdom was contemplated in the original conception of the plan of redemption; for the apostle adds that it was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. The purpose of God to make provision for the redemption of mankind has been fulfilled in the incarnation and death of his Son.

[3:12](#). Hence, as the consequence of this accomplished work, we have access to God in boldness and confidence, i.e., free and unrestricted access to God, as children

to a father. We come with the assurance of being accepted, because our confidence does not rest on our own merit, but on the infinite merit of an infinite Saviour. It is in him we have this liberty. We have this free access to God – we believers; not any particular group, a priesthood among Christians to whom alone access is permitted, but all believers, without any priestly intervention other than that of one great High Priest who has passed through the heavens – Jesus, the Son of God. The word confidence, as used in Scripture, is not 'frankness,' but 'fearlessness,' freedom from apprehension of rejection or of evil. This is what Christ has procured for us. Even the vilest may, in Christ, approach the Infinitely Holy, who is a consuming fire, with fearlessness. Nothing short of an infinite Saviour could effect such a redemption. The accumulation of

substantives in this sentence – boldness, confidence – shows that there was no word which could express what Paul felt in view of the complete reconciliation of men to God through Jesus Christ.

[3:13](#). Therefore, i.e., because we have this access to God, the sum of all good, we ought to be superior to all the afflictions of this life, and always maintain a joyful spirit. Being the subjects of such a redemption, and having this liberty of access to God, believers ought not to be discouraged by all the apparently adverse circumstances which come with the propagation of the Gospel.

Verses 14–21

Analysis

The apostle's prayer is addressed to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also in him our Father. He offers only one petition, namely, that his readers might be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner being; or that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. The consequence of this would be that they would be confirmed in love, and thus enabled, in some measure, to understand the infinite love of Christ, which would enlarge their capacity to the fullness of God; that is, ultimately render them, in their measure, as full of holiness and blessedness as God is in his.

Commentary

[3:14](#). This verse follows on from [verse 1](#). The prayer which the apostle commenced there he here begins afresh. For this reason is repeated from [verse 1](#), and therefore the connection is the same here as there, i.e., 'Because you Ephesians are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ.'

I bow my knees. The posture of prayer, kneeling, means prayer itself.

[3:15](#). From whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. The word family is a collective term for the descendants of the same father, immediate or remote. In [Luke 2:4](#), we read of the house and family of David, and in [Acts 3:25](#), of all the families of the earth.

[3:16](#). This verse contains the apostle's prayer on behalf of the Ephesians. He prays that God, according to the riches of

his glory, would strengthen them with might through his Spirit in the inner being.

The riches of his glory means the fullness of divine perfection. It is not his power to the exclusion of his mercy, nor his mercy to the exclusion of his power, but it is everything in God that makes him glorious, the proper object of adoration. The apostle prays that God would deal with his people according to that fullness of grace and power which constitutes his glory, and makes him the source of all good to his creatures.

[3:17](#). That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Christ dwells in his people; he dwells in their hearts; he dwells in them through faith. These are the truths contained in this passage.

[3:18–19](#). The love in which we are to be rooted is not the love of God or of Christ for us, but either brotherly love or love as

a Christian grace, without determining its object. It is that love which flows from faith, and which both God and the brothers are objects of. The apostle here prays for the increase and ascendancy of this grace through the indwelling of Christ, till it sustains and strengthens the whole inner being, so that the believer may stand like a firmly planted tree or like a building with firm foundations.

[3:20–21](#). Paul's prayer had apparently reached a height beyond which neither faith, nor hope, nor even imagination could go, and yet he is not satisfied. Much still lay in the future. God was able to do not only what he had asked, but infinitely more than he knew how either to ask or think. Having exhausted all the forms of prayer, he casts himself on God's infinitude, in full confidence that he can and will do all that omni-potence itself can

effect. His power, not our prayers nor our highest conceptions, is the measure of the apostle's anticipations and desires. This idea he weaves into a doxology, which has in it more of heaven than of earth.

Paul says, now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. God is not only unlimited in himself, but is unrestricted by our prayers or knowledge. No definite bounds, therefore, can be set on what people may expect in whom Christ dwells, and who are the objects of his infinite love.

Chapter [4:1](#)–Chapter [5:2](#)

[Verses 1–16](#)

Analysis

The apostle exhorts his readers to walk in a way that is worthy of their vocation. Such a walk should be characterized by humility, meekness, longsuffering, and zeal, to promote spiritual unity and peace ([verses 1–3](#).) The church is one, because it is one body, has one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over, through, and in all its members ([verses 4–6](#)).

This unity, however, is consistent with great diversity of gifts, which Christ distributes according to his own will

([Ephesians 4:7](#)). This is confirmed by a passage from the Psalms, which speaks of the Messiah giving gifts to men. This passage must refer to Christ, since it speaks of a divine person ascending to heaven, which necessarily implies a previous descent to the earth ([verses 8–10](#)). The gifts which Christ bestows on his church are the various categories of ministers, apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors, who are teachers ([Ephesians 4:11](#)). The purpose of the ministry is the building up of the church, and to bring all its members to unity of faith and knowledge, and to the full stature of Christ; that they should no longer have the instability of children, but be a firm, compact, and growing body in living union with Christ its head ([verses 12–16](#)).

Commentary

[4:1-3](#). I Therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you. ... The exhortation is a general one; it flows from the preceding doctrines, and is enforced by the authority and the sufferings of the person who gave it. As you are partakers of the redemption bought by Christ, I beg you. 'I the prisoner, not of, but 'for' the Lord,' literally 'in' the Lord. He was a prisoner because he was in the Lord. It was as a Christian, and in the cause of Christ, that he suffered imprisonment.

The exhortation is, to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. That calling was to sonship ([Ephesians 1:5](#)). This includes three things: holiness, exaltation, and unity. They were called to be conformed to the image of Christ, to share in his exaltation and glory, and to constitute one family, since they are all

God's children. A life fitting for such a calling, therefore, should be characterized by holiness, humility, and mutual forbearance and brotherly love. The apostle, therefore, immediately adds, with all humility and gentleness. Undeserved honour always produces these effects on the ingenuous.

Gentleness is 'softness,' 'mildness,' which, when united with strength, is one of the loveliest attributes of our nature. The blessed Saviour says of himself, 'I am gentle and humble in heart' ([Matthew 11:29](#)); and the apostle speaks of 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ' ([2 Corinthians 10:1](#)).

The third virtue which is becoming for this calling is patience. Patience leads to anger being suppressed ([2 Corinthians 6:6](#); [Galatians 5:22](#); [Colossians 3:12](#)). Patience defers the infliction of punishment, and is

therefore often attributed to God ([Romans 2:4](#); [9:22](#); [1 Peter 3:20](#)). Patience refers to forbearance towards our fellow human beings ([2 Timothy 4:2](#); [1 Timothy 1:16](#)). It is explained by what follows: bearing with one another in love. Or, rather, the three virtues, humility, gentleness, and patience are all illustrated and shown in this mutual forbearance.

[4:4-5](#). Having urged the duty of preserving unity, the apostle proceeds to state both its nature and grounds. It is a unity which arises from the fact that there is and can be but one body and one Spirit, ... one hope, ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.

[4:6](#). One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. As the church is one because it is pervaded by one Spirit, and because it is owned and governed by one Lord, so it is one because

it has one God and Father, one glorious Being with whom it sustains the double relationship of creature and child. This God is not merely above us, from a distance, but through all and in all, i.e. pervading and filling all with his sustaining and life-giving presence. There are many passages where the doctrine of the Trinity gives a sacred rhythm, though the doctrine itself is not directly asserted. This is the case here. There is one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father. The unity of the church is founded on this doctrine. It is one, because there is over us one God the Father, one Lord, one Spirit. It is a truly mystical union; not a mere union of opinion, of interest, or of feeling, but something supernatural arising from a common principle of life.

[4:7](#). This unity of the church, although it involves the essential equality of all

believers, is still consistent with great diversity as to gifts, influence, and honour. According to the apostle's favourite illustration, it is like the human body, which is composed of many parts with different functions. It is not all eye nor all ear. This diversity of gifts is not only consistent with unity, but is essential to it.

[4:8](#). The position which the previous verse gives to the Lord Jesus as the source of all life and power in the church is so exalted that the apostle interrupts himself to show that this representation is in accordance with what the Scriptures had already taught on this subject. [Verse 7](#) speaks about Christ giving gifts. As this was his office, the Scriptures speak of him as a conqueror laden with spoils, enriched by his victories, and giving gifts to men.

[4:9-10](#). When he says, 'he ascended', what does it mean but that he had also

descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.

The obvious purpose of these verses is to show that the passage quoted from the Psalmist refers to Christ. The proof lies in the fact that ascension in the case of a divine person, a giver of spiritual gifts to men, implies a previous descent. It was Christ who descended, and therefore it is Christ who ascended. It is true the Old Testament often speaks of God's descending, and therefore they may speak of his ascending. But according to the apostle, the divine person intended in those representations was the Son, and no previous descent or ascent, no previous triumph over his enemies, included all that the Spirit or prophecy intended by such representations. And, therefore, the

Psalmist must have included in his language the most conspicuous and illustrious of God's condescensions and exaltations. All other comings were only typical of his ascension from the grave.

The apostle, therefore, teaches here that God, the subject of [Psalm 68](#), descended into the lower parts of the earth, and that he ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.

[4:11](#). The gifts he gave. He, the ascended Saviour, to whom all power and all resources have been given – he gift was that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. These were among the gifts which Christ gave to his church; which, though implying diversity of grace and office, were necessary to its unity as an organized whole. These offices are mentioned in order of their importance:

1. The apostles – the immediate messengers of Christ; his witnesses concerning his doctrines, his miracles, and his resurrection; infallible as teachers, and absolute as rulers, because of the gift of inspiration and because of their commission. No man, therefore, could be an apostle unless

- (a) he was appointed by Christ;
- (b) he had seen him after his resurrection, and had received the knowledge of the Gospel by direct revelation;
- (c) he was made infallible by the gift of inspiration.

These things constituted the office, and were essential to its authority. Those who claimed the office without having these gifts and qualifications are called 'false apostles.'

2. Prophets. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of someone else, a

spokesman, as Aaron was the prophet of Moses. Those whom God spoke through to people were prophets, whether their communications were doctrinal, moral, or prophetic, in the restricted sense of the term. Everyone who spoke by inspiration was a prophet. The New Testament prophets differed from the apostles in that their inspiration was occasional, and therefore their authority as teachers was subordinate. The nature of their office is taught in detail in [1 Corinthians 14:1–40](#). As the gift of infallibility was essential for the apostolic office, so the gift of occasional inspiration was essential for the prophetic office. It is inconceivable that God should invest any set of men with the authority claimed and exercised by the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, requiring everyone to believe their teaching and submit to their authority, on pain of

perdition, without giving the inner gifts qualifying them for their work.

3. Some evangelists. Evangelists were itinerant preachers.

4. Some pastors and teachers. This refers to a twofold name for the same officers, who were both the guides and instructors of the people.

[4:12](#). Having mentioned the officers Christ gave his church, the apostle states why this gift was conferred. It was to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ may be built up.

[4:13](#). The ministry is not a temporary institution, it is to continue until the church has reached the goal of its high calling. This does not prove that all the offices mentioned above are permanent. By common consent the prophets were temporary officers. It is the ministry, and

not those particular offices, that is to continue. The church's goal is described here in three equivalent forms: unity of faith and of knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Until all of come to the unity in the faith. The all mentioned here is not all people, but all the people of Christ.

[4:14](#). Children are not only unstable but are easily deceived. They fall easy prey to the deceitful and scheming. The apostle therefore adds, by people's trickery. Trickery comes from a word which means 'cube,' 'die,' which comes to mean 'dice-playing,' in which there are many deceptive tricks, and therefore the word is used for craft or deceit. It is explained by the next phrase, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. The craftiness is that craft which is used by seducers or people

in error. The preposition in may mean 'according to': 'Cunning according to the craft which error uses, or which is characteristic of error.' Or it may, in line with its usual meaning, indicate direction of tendency: 'The cunning which is directed to the craft of error – i.e., that craft which is designed to seduce.' The sense is the same.

The word deceitful occurs only here and in [Ephesians 6:11](#), where in the plural form it is translated 'wiles' – 'the wiles of the devil.' It is derived from a word which means 'to follow anyone,' 'to track him,' as a wild animal tracks its prey.

[4:15](#). These remarks are relevant to the subject in hand; for the apostle, while condemning all instability in connection with faith, and while denouncing the cunning of false teachers, immediately adds the injunction to adhere to the truth

in love. It is not mere stability in sound doctrine, but faith which is combined with love that God requires. The only saving, salutary faith is that which works by love, and purifies the heart.

[4:16](#). From whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. The church is Christ's body; he is the head. The body grows. About this growth, the apostle says:

1. It is from him. He is the causal source, from whom all life and power are derived.
2. It depends on the intimate union of all the parts of the body with the head, by means of appropriate links.
3. It is symmetrical.
4. It is a growth in love.

Verses [4:17–5:2](#)

Analysis

This section contains, first, a general exhortation to holiness ([4:17–24](#)); and, secondly, injunctions concerning specific duties ([4:25–5:2](#)). The exhortation to holiness is, in keeping with the apostle's style, first in the negative form, not to walk as the heathen do ([verses 17–19](#)); and then positively, to walk as Christ had taught them ([verses 20–24](#)). The heathen walk in the futility of their thinking, i.e., in a state of moral and spiritual fatuity, not knowing what they are about, nor where they are going ([Ephesians 4:17](#)); because they are in mental darkness, and are alienated from God's life through the ignorance that is in them, and through the hardness of their

hearts ([Ephesians 4:18](#)); as is shown as they give themselves over to sensuality ([Ephesians 4:19](#)). The Christian walk is the opposite of this, because believers have been taught. Instead of ignorance, truth dwells in them, enlightening and purifying. Hence they are led to put off the old self, and to put on the new self, which is more and more conformed to the image of God ([verses 20–24](#)). Therefore, they must avoid lying and speak the truth ([Ephesians 4:25](#)); abstain from anger, and guard against giving the devil a foothold ([verses 26–27](#)); avoid stealing, and work and share with those in need ([Ephesians 4:28](#)); avoid all unwholesome talk, but build others up by what they say and so not grieve the Holy Spirit ([verses 29–30](#)); instead of malicious feelings, they should be kind, compassionate and forgiving, as God forgives them ([4:31–5:2](#)).

Commentary

17. In the preceding section, the apostle taught that Christ had destined his church to perfect conformity to himself, and made provision for that end. Now, as a natural consequence, Paul solemnly enjoins those who profess to be Christians to live in accordance with this high vocation: Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds.

Insist, here, means to say solemnly, like a person who calls on God to bear witness to the truth and importance of what he says. Insist here means 'to invoke as a witness,' rather than 'to act as a witness.' In the Lord means in communion with the Lord. Paul speaks as one who had access to the mind of Christ, knew his will, and

could therefore speak in his name. The exhortation is, no longer live as the Gentiles live. The word translated live literally means 'walk.' 'To walk,' in Scripture, includes all the manifestations of life, inner and outer, seen and unseen. It does not merely express the outer, visible action. People are said to walk with God, which refers to the secret fellowship of the soul with its Maker, more than to the outer life. So here the walk which the apostle tells us to avoid is not only the visible actions which characterize the Gentiles, but also the inner life which the outer actions reveal.

[4:18](#). They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. This verse explains and confirms the preceding statement. The heathen live in futility, i.e., in intellectual

and moral darkness, because their understanding is darkened, and because they are alienated from the life of God.

Alienated from the life of God means strangers to that life. The life of God means the life of which God is the author. It is spiritual life; that is, the life of which the indwelling Spirit is the principle or source.

[4:19](#). The practical proof of their being in the state described is found in the fact that they live without feeling, they give themselves over to the sins which are mentioned.

They have lost all sensibility. Conscience ceases to upbraid or to restrain them. Therefore, they practise themselves and indulge in all kinds of impurity – i.e. they are insatiable.

[4:20](#). That is not the way you learned Christ! That is, your knowledge of Christ

has not led you to live like the Gentiles. As we say we can learn a thing, but never 'learn' a person, the expression you learned Christ has no comparison. But as the Scriptures refer to preaching Christ, which does not just mean preaching his doctrines but preaching Christ himself, setting him out as the object of supreme love and confidence, so 'to learn Christ' does not just mean learning his doctrines, but attaining the knowledge of Christ as the Son of God – God in our nature, the Holy One of God, the Saviour from sin, whom to know is holiness and life. Anyone who has learned Christ like this cannot live in darkness and sin. Such knowledge is in its very nature light. Where it enters, the mind is irradiated, refined, and purified.

[4:21](#). For surely you have heard about him. The Greek does not mean 'to hear about him.' In writing to Christians, the

apostle could not express this in a hypothetical way. He knew that the Ephesian Christians had heard about Christ. To hear, in this context, implies intelligence and obedience, as in the frequently occurring phrase, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear'; and, 'Today if you will hear his voice ... ,' and in many other cases. To hear the voice of God or of Christ, therefore, is not merely to perceive with the outer ear, but to receive with the understanding and the heart. The apostle assumes that they were obedient to the truth: 'You have not so learned Christ that you live like the Gentiles do, if, as I assume, you have really heard his voice and have been taught by him.'

[4:22](#). Sanctification includes dying to sin, or mortification of the flesh, and living to righteousness; or, as it says here, putting off the old self and putting on the new self.

The obvious allusions is to a change of clothing. To put off is to renounce, to remove from us, like clothes that are set aside. To put on is to adopt, to make our own. We are called on to put off the works of darkness ([Romans 13:12](#)); to put away lying ([Ephesians 4:25](#)); to put off anger, wrath, malice, etc. ([Colossians 3:8](#)); to get rid of all moral filth ([James 1:21](#)). On the other hand, we are called on to put on the Lord Jesus Christ ([Romans 13:14](#); [Galatians 3:27](#)); the armour of light ([Romans 13:12](#)); compassion ([Colossians 3:12](#)); and people are said to be clothed with power from on high ([Luke 24:49](#)); with the imperishable and with immortality ([1 Corinthians 15:53](#)).

[4:23](#). In this verse and the following verse we have the positive part of sanctification, which is expressed by 'renewing' and 'putting on the new self.' The verb to be renewed is passive. This renewal is always

represented as the work of God. 'For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works' ([Ephesians 2:10](#)). It is therefore called 'renewal by the Holy Spirit' ([Titus 3:5](#)). Both these phrases, to be renewed and 'clothe yourselves with the new self,' may express either the instantaneous act of regeneration or the gradual work of sanctification. Thus in [Romans 12:2](#) we are told, 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.' So, here and in the parallel passage in [Colossians 3:9–10](#), these terms express the whole process by which the soul is restored to God's image. It is a process of renewal from the beginning to the end. The apostle says, 'our inner nature is being renewed day by day' ([2 Corinthians 4:16](#)).

[4:24](#). And to clothe yourselves with the new self. As we are called to put off our corrupt nature as a ragged and filthy garment, so we are required to put on our new nature as a garment of light. And as the former was personified as an old self, decrepit, deformed, and tending to corruption, so the latter is personified as a new self, fresh, beautiful, and vigorous, like God, for it is created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

[4:25](#). Having enforced the general duty of holiness, or of being conformed to the image of God, the apostle insists on specific duties. It will be noted that in almost every case there is first a negative, then a positive statement of the duty, and then a motive. Thus here: Putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth ... for we are members of one another.

[4:26-27](#). His next exhortation refers to anger, about which he teaches that we are not to allow anger to be an occasion of sin; we are not to cherish it; we are not to give Satan any advantage over us when we are angry.

Do not let the sun go down on your anger. The word anger here is 'paroxysm' or 'excitement.' Anger, even when justifiable, is not to be cherished. The wise man says, 'Anger lodges in the bosom of fools' ([Ecclesiastes 7:9](#)).

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aside all bitterness, is a command to lay aside everything which corrodes our own minds or wounds the feelings of others. Under this heading are the particulars which follow: Wrath (from the word 'to burn') means the mind itself, and the seat of emotions and desires; then the mind in the work of passion. Anger is the passion itself, i.e., the manifestation of wrath, as wrangling and slander are the outward expression of anger. The context shows that slander is neither blasphemy against God nor merely slander against men, but any form of speech springing from anger, and designed either to wound or to injure others.

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forgives us far more than we can ever be called on to forgive others. God forgives us in Christ. Out of Christ, he is, in virtue of his holiness and justice, a consuming fire; but in him, he is long-suffering, abundant in mercy, and ready to forgive.

[5:1–2](#). As God has placed us under such a great obligation, therefore be imitators of God. The exhortation is enlarged. We are not only to imitate God in being forgiving, but also as becomes beloved loved children. We are to live in love. As God is live, and as we, by regeneration and adoption, are his children, we are bound to exercise love habitually. Our whole walk should be characterized by it.

As Christ loved us. This is the reason why we should love one another. We should be like Christ, which is being like God, for Christ is God. The apostle makes no distinction between our being the objects

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[5:1-2](#). As God has placed us under such a great obligation, therefore be imitators of God. The exhortation is enlarged. We are not only to imitate God in being forgiving, but also as becomes beloved loved children. We are to live in love. As God is live, and as we, by regeneration and adoption, are his children, we are bound to exercise love habitually. Our whole walk should be characterized by it.

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Chapter 5

Verses 3–20

Analysis

It becomes saints to avoid not only the sins of uncleanness and covetousness, but also all impropriety of conduct and frivolity of language ([verses 3–4](#)); because uncleanness and covetousness not only exclude us from heaven, but, whatever people may say, bring down the wrath of God ([verses 5–6](#)). Christians, therefore, should not participate in those sins, seeing they have been divinely enlightened and made the recipients of that light whose fruits are goodness, righteousness, and truth. They are bound to exemplify this in their conduct, avoiding and reproving the

deeds of darkness ([verses 7–10](#)). Those deeds are too shameful to be named, but they may still be corrected by the power of that light which it is the prerogative of believers to disseminate; therefore the Scriptures speak of the light which flows from Christ as reaching even the dead ([verses 12–14](#)). Christians, therefore, should be wise, making the most of every occasion for good, in the midst of the evils by which they are surrounded ([verses 13–16](#)). They should seek exhilaration not from wine, but from the Holy Spirit, and give expression to their gladness in psalms and hymns, praising and thanking God through Jesus Christ ([verses 17–20](#)).

Commentary

[5:3](#). But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be

mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. In the preceding section the apostle had spoken about sins against our neighbors; here, from [verse 3](#) to [verse 20](#), he talks mainly about sins against ourselves. Not only fornication but everything of the same nature, or which leads to it, is to be avoided – and not only avoided, but not even mentioned among believers. The inconsistency of all such sins with the character of Christians, as saints, people selected from the world and consecrated to God, is such as should forbid the very mention of them in a Christian society. With the sins of uncleanness the apostle here, as in [Ephesians 4:19](#), connects greed.

[5:4](#). Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk. The word here for obscene includes whatever is morally hateful. The adjective derived from this word means

'deformed,' 'revolting,' what causes disgust, physical or moral. It is the opposite of 'good,' which means both beautiful and good.

[5:5](#). The apostle reverts to what he said in [verse 3](#), and enforces the exhortation given there: Be sure of this, that no fornicator, or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

[5:6](#). It is common not only among the Gentiles, but among the mass of humanity in all ages and nations, to extenuate the particular sins which the apostle refers to here. It is urged that they have their origin in the very constitution of our nature; that they are not malignant; that they may coexist with amiable tempers; and that they are not harmful to others; that no one is the worse for them, if no one knows

about them, etc. Paul, therefore, cautions his readers in every age of the church not to be deceived by such vain words, assuring them that on these things (immorality and greed) that the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience.

Empty words are words which contain no truth, and are therefore both false and fallacious, as people will discover who trust in them.

God's wrath. This expression is a fearful one, because human wrath is the disposition to inflict evil, limited by human feebleness; whereas God's wrath is the determination to punish in a being whose presence and power are unlimited.

[5:7](#). God is determined to punish the impure and the greedy, so the apostle says, Therefore do not be associated with them; that is, do not be their partners in

these sins, which would necessarily expose you to the penalty threatened against them.

[5:8](#). This is enforced by a reference to their conversion from a previous state of sin and misery, to one of holiness and blessedness. For once you were darkness. As light stands for knowledge, and as knowledge, in the scriptural sense of the word, produces holiness, and holiness happiness; so darkness stands for ignorance, such ignorance inevitably produces sin, and sin misery. Therefore, the expression once you were darkness means, 'you were ignorant, polluted, and wretched.' But now in the Lord you are light, – i.e., in virtue of union with the Lord, you are enlightened, sanctified, and blessed. Live as children of light, i.e., as the children of holiness and truth. Children of light means 'enlightened.'

[5:10](#). [Verse 9](#) is a parenthesis, as [verse 10](#) is grammatically connected with [verse 8](#). Live as children of light – Find out is to try, to put to the test, to examine, then to judge or estimate, and then to approve. Thus it is said, 'The fire shall try every man's work'; God is said 'to try the heart'; we are said to 'discern what is the will of God' ([Romans 12:2](#)), that is, to examine and determine what the will of God is. And so in this passage believers are required to walk as children of light, examining and determining what is acceptable to the Lord. They are to regulate their conduct by thinking what pleases him.

[5:11](#). The apostle, having in the previous verse insisted on the duty of Christians to walk in such a way as to show by their works that they were the subjects of divine illumination, adds here a statement about their duty with reference to the sins of

those still in darkness. Those sins he calls unfruitful works of darkness. By unfruitful is meant not merely 'barren' or 'worthless,' but positively evil. Works of darkness are those works which spring from darkness, i.e., from ignorance of God, as works of light are those deeds which light or divine knowledge produces.

[5:12](#). These works of darkness should be exposed like this, for it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly. There are two reasons why sins are called 'works of darkness.' The first and principal one is, as has been stated, because they spring from darkness or ignorance of God; and the second is, because they are committed in darkness. They shun the light. The great turpitude of these sins is the apostle's reason why they should be reproved.

[5:13](#). However, vile as those sins are, they are capable of being corrected. They are not beyond cure. Reprove them. Let in the light of divine truth on them, and they will be corrected or healed, for the truth is divinely efficacious.

[5:14](#). As light is thus efficacious, and as it is accessible, or may be obtained, therefore the Scriptures call even on the sleeping and the dead to wake up and meet its life-giving beams.

[5:15](#). Believers, as children of light, are required to have no fellowship with the works of darkness, but rather to reprove them. Be careful, i.e. take heed therefore, how you live, in what manner. 'See in what manner you render your deportment accurate.' Careful ... live is to walk strictly by rule, so as not to deviate by a hair's breadth. Not as unwise people but as wise. Paul often uses the word wise for divine

truth. The wise are those who possess this truth, which he had earlier called light, and the unwise are those who do not have it. So wise and unwise here are equivalent to the 'enlightened' and 'those in darkness.' His exhortation, therefore, is that believers should take care how they live, not as the heathen and unrenewed, who do not have the divine light of which he had been speaking, but as those who are enlightened from above, and are therefore wise.

[5:16](#). Making the most of the time. This is one manifestation of wisdom, one method in which their Christian character as the children of light should be exhibited.

[5:17](#). So, i.e., either 'because the days are evil,' or 'because you are bound to walk as wise people.' The latter is to be preferred, because the reference is to the main idea

of [verses 15–16](#), and not to a subordinate clause. Compare [Luke 11:40](#).

[5:18](#). Do not get drunk on wine. This is an example of folly, a lack of sense, especially inconsistent with the intelligence of the true believer. The person who has correct discernment will not seek refreshment of excitement from wine, but from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the apostle adds, but be filled with the Spirit. In drunkenness, he says, there is debauchery, 'revelry,' 'riot,' whatever tends to destruction; for the word is derived from a word which means 'what cannot be saved,' one given up to a destructive course of life. Compare [Titus 1:6](#); [1 Peter 4:4](#).

People are said to be filled with wine when they are completely under its influence; so they are said to be filled with the Spirit when he controls all their thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. The

expression is a common one in Scripture. Of our Lord himself it was said that he was 'full of the Holy Spirit' ([Luke 4:1](#)); and of Stephen, that he was 'full of faith and the Holy Spirit' ([Acts 6:5](#)); and of Barnabas ([Acts 11:24](#)), etc. To the Christians, therefore, the source of strength and joy is not wine, but the blessed Spirit of God. And as drunkenness produces rioting and debauchery, so the Holy Spirit produces a joy which expresses itself in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.

5:19. Among yourselves – as in [Ephesians 4:32](#) and elsewhere – not 'to yourselves.' Compare [Colossians 3:16](#), where it is 'teach and admonish one another.' Speaking and singing among yourselves signifies the interchange of thoughts and feelings expressed in the psalms and hymns used.

The early use of the words for psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs appears to

have been as loose as that of the corresponding English terms.

[5:20](#). Therefore the apostle connects the two: 'Be filled with the Spirit, singing hymns to Christ, and giving thanks to God the Father.' The Spirit dictates the one as naturally as the other. We are to give thanks at all times. It is not a duty to be performed once for all, nor merely when new mercies are received; but always, because we are under obligation for blessings temporal and spiritual already received, which calls for perpetual acknowledgment. We are to give thanks for everything – afflictions as well as for our joys, say the ancient commentators. This is not in the text, though Paul, as we learn from other passages, gloried in his afflictions.

Verses 21–33

Analysis

The apostle enjoins mutual obedience as a Christian duty ([Ephesians 5:21](#)). Under this heading he treats the relative duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the duties of husbands and wives. As the married relationship is analogous to that which Christ sustains to the church, the one serves to illustrate the other. The apostle, therefore, combines the two subjects throughout the paragraph.

Wives should submit to their husbands, as the church does to Christ. The motive for this submission is a regard for the Lord ([Ephesians 5:22](#)). The ground for it is that

the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church ([Ephesians 5:23](#)). This subjection is not confined to any one sphere, but extends to all ([Ephesians 5:24](#)).

Husbands should love their wives. 1. The extent of this love is Christ's love for the church, for whose redemption he died ([verses 25–27](#)). 2. The ground of love is in both cases the same. The wife is flesh of her husband's flesh and bone of his bone; so the church is flesh of Christ's flesh, and bone of his bone. Husband and wife are one flesh; so are Christ and the church. What is true of the one is true of the other ([verses 29–31](#)). 3. The union between Christ and his church is indeed of a higher order than that between husband and wife; nevertheless, the analogy between the two cases is such as to render it obligatory on the husband to love his wife

as being himself and on the wife to reverence her husband ([verses 32–33](#)).

Commentary

[5:21](#). This command to submit to one another is found in other passages of the New Testament, as in [1 Peter 5:5](#), 'accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another.' See also [Romans 12:10](#) and [Philippians 2:3](#). The scriptural teaching on this subject is that people are not isolated individuals, each one independent of everyone else. No one lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. People's essential equality and their mutual dependence lay the foundation for the obligation of mutual subjection. The apostle, however, is here speaking about the duties of Christians. Therefore, this

passage is about the Christian duty of mutual submission.

[5:22](#). Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. The general duty of mutual submission includes the specific duty of wives to be subject to their husbands, and this leads the apostle to speak about the relative duties of husbands and wives. And as the marriage relation is analogous to the relation between Christ and his church, he is thus led to illustrate the one by the other. As the relationship is the same, the duties flowing from it are the same: obedience on the part of the wife, and love on the part of the husband.

[5:23](#). The scriptural doctrine, while it lays the foundation for order in requiring wives to obey their husbands, at the same time exalts the wife to be the companion and ministering angel to her husband. The

man, therefore, so far as this particular point is concerned, stands in the same relation to his wife that Christ does to the church.

[5:24](#). Just as – i.e., notwithstanding this peculiarity in the relationship of Christ to the church which has no parallel in the relationship of wife to husband, 'nevertheless, as the husband is the head of the wife, let the wife be subject to her husband in everything, just as the church is subject to Christ her head.'

[5:25](#). As the special duty of the wife is submission, the special duty of the husband is love. With regard to this, the apostle teaches its measure and its ground. In its measure, it should be analogous to the love which Christ has for his church. Its ground is the intimate and mysterious union which exists between a man and his wife.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Husbands should love their wives just as, i.e., both 'because' and 'as.' As their relationship to their wives is analogous to that of Christ to his church, it imposes the obligation to love them as he loves the church. But Christ loved the church so much that he died for her. Husbands, therefore, should be willing to die for their wives.

[5:26–27](#). As the apostle unites with his purpose of teaching the duties arising from the marriage relationship, in order to illustrate the nature of the union between Christ and his church, these verses relate to the latter point and not to the former. They set out the purpose of Christ's death. Its overall purpose was to gain the church for himself, as an object of delight. Its immediate purpose was to prepare it for

that high destiny. These ideas are presented figuratively. The church is regarded as the bride of Christ.

[5:27](#). The ultimate end for which Christ gave himself for the church, and for which he sanctifies it, is to present it to himself, i.e., to gain it for himself as his special possession.

[5:28](#). In this same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. As Christ loves the church and gave himself for it, and as the church is his body, in this same way, and in keeping with the analogous relationship between them, husbands should love their wives, as, i.e., as being, or because they are, their own bodies. Christ loves his church because it is his body. Husbands should love their wives because they are their bodies. In this same way is not comparative, but argumentative. It does

not indicate the measure of the husband's love, as if it meant he should love his wife as much as he loves his own body; but it indicates the nature of the relationship which is the ground of his love. He should love his wife because she is his body.

So also it is a fact which the apostle declares, when he says, He who loves his wife loves himself.

[5:29](#). Married love, therefore, is as much a dictate of nature as self-love; and it is just as unnatural for a man to hate his wife as it would be for him to hate himself or his own body.

Just as Christ does for the church, i.e., Christ also nourishes and cherishes the church as a man does his own body. The relationship between a man and his wife is analogous to that between a man and his own body; and the relationship between Christ and his church is analogous to that

between a husband and his wife: therefore, Christ nourishes and cherishes the church as man does his own body.

[5:30](#). This verse assigns the reason of the preceding declaration. Christ acts towards his church as a man does towards his body, because we are members of his body. This might mean, simply, that we stand before him in the same intimate and vital union that a man's body sustains to the man himself.

[5:31](#). 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. That is, because the relationship between husband and wife is more intimate than any other, even than that between parents and children, therefore a man shall consider all other relationships subordinate to that which he has with his

wife, with whom he is connected in the bonds of a common life.

[5:32](#). This is a great mystery. The word mystery does not refer to the passage in [Genesis 2:24](#), as though the apostle intended to say that that passage had a mystical sense, which he had just unfolded by applying it to the relationship between Christ and his church. It is the union between Christ and his people, the fact that they are 'one flesh,' that he declares to be a great mystery. The word mystery is used here, as it is everywhere else, for something hidden, something beyond the reach of human knowledge.

[5:33](#). Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself. The meaning is the same as in [verse 28](#). The husband is to love his wife as being himself.

Chapter 6

Verses 1–9

Analysis

Children should obey their parents. This obedience should be in the Lord, determined and regulated by a regard for Christ ([Ephesians 6:1](#)). The basis for the obligation is, first, that it is right in itself; and secondly, that it is enforced by an express command in the Ten Commandments, to which a special promise is added ([verses 1–3](#)).

Parents should do nothing to cherish evil feelings in the minds of their children, but bring them up in the disciplines of Christianity ([verses 4–5](#)).

Servants should be obedient to their masters. This obedience should be rendered (1) with solicitude; (2) with singleness of mind; (3) as part of their obedience to Christ ([Ephesians 6:5](#)). Therefore, not only when observed by men, or from the desire to please men, but as serving Christ, and desiring to please him; rendering their services with readiness, as to the Lord, and not to men, because they know that at his bar all men, whether slave or free, will be treated according to their works ([verses 6–8](#)).

Masters are to act on the same principles of regard for the authority of Christ, and of their responsibility to him in their conduct towards their slaves, avoiding all harshness, because master and slave have a common Master in heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons ([Ephesians 6:8](#)).

Commentary

[6:1](#). Children, obey your parents. The nature of character of this obedience is expressed by the words in the Lord. It should be religious, arising out of the conviction that such obedience is the will of the Lord.

[6:2–3](#). This consideration is enforced by a reference to the express command of God. The duty is so important that it is included in that brief summary of the moral law given by God on Mount Sinai. It was engraved by God's finger on the tablets of stone, 'Honour your father and mother.' Any flagrant breach of this command was, according to the Mosaic law, punished with death. To Honour is to reverence; and, therefore, the command refers to the inner feeling as well as to outer behaviour.

This precept is said to be the first commandment with a promise.

[6:4](#). The duty of parents, who are here represented by the father, is stated in a negative and positive form. Fathers, do not provoke your children. This is what they are not to do. They are not to excite the bad passions of their children by severity, injustice, partiality, or unreasonable exercise of authority. A parent would do better to sow weeds in a field from which he expects to derive food for himself and his family, than by his own bad behaviour to nurture evil in the heart of his child.

[6:5](#). The five following verses deal with the duties of masters and servants. Slaves and masters are relative terms here, although in Greek the antithetical term to 'slave' is used in [1 Timothy 6:1](#) and [Titus 2:9](#); compare also [1 Peter 2:18](#). The word

for 'slave' comes from the word 'to bind,' and means a slave as distinguished from a hired servant. We can see that this meaning is clearly contrasted here because of the normal use of the word, and also from the antithesis between 'slave' and 'free' in [verse 8](#).

The word here for 'master' means 'possessor' or 'owner.' It implies the relationship which a man may have both with people and with things.

[6:6](#). The apostle explains in the two following verses what he means by from the heart or sincere obedience. It is not only while being watched, in order to please them that is, such service as is only given when the eye of the master sees what is done, as though the only object was to please men. Servants are required to act as the slaves of Christ, whose eyes are everywhere; and, therefore, if their

desire is to please him, they must be as faithful in their master's absence as in his presence.

[6:7](#). The whole character of the obedience of the slave is summed up in this verse: Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women. This, as the Scriptures teach, is not peculiar to the obedience of the slave to his master, but applies to all other cases in which obedience is required from one person to another.

The word enthusiasm qualifies service. This is contrasted with the sullenness and inner indignation with which a service extorted by fear of punishment is often given. No service given to Christ can be like that; it is given with alacrity and cheerfulness.

[6:8](#). This verse presents, for the encouragement of the slave, the elevating

truth that everyone stands on equal ground before the bar of Christ. In him and before him there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female (see [Galatians 3:28](#)), but, so far as these external distinctions are concerned, all are alike. The apostle, therefore, says to slaves, 'Give this cheerful obedience knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free. 'In this world some people are masters and some are slaves. In the next, these distinctions will cease.

[6:9](#). Having enjoined on slaves their special duties, the apostle turns to masters: And, masters. The force of and here is, 'Not only do slaves have their duties; you masters have your special obligations.' Masters are to act towards their slaves with the same regard for God's will, with the same recognition of Christ's

authority, with the same sincerity and good feeling, which had been enjoined on the slaves themselves.

Verses 10–24

Analysis

Directions about the spiritual conflict. As such a conflict is inevitable, the believer should (1) muster strength for the struggle. (2) He should seek that strength from Christ. (3) Since his enemies are not human, but superhuman, Satan and all the powers of darkness, the believer needs not only more than human strength, but also divine armour. He should, therefore, take the armour of God, that he may be able to stand in the evil day. That armour consists (1) in the knowledge and reception of the truth; (2) in the righteousness of Christ; (3) in the alacrity which flows from the peace of the Gospel; (4) in the consciousness of salvation; (5) in faith; (6) in the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit.

To obtain strength to use this armour correctly, and to secure victory for ourselves and for the army of which we are a part, we should pray. These prayers should be (1) of all kinds; (2) on every occasion; (3) importunate and persevering; (4) with the help of the Holy Spirit; (5) for all saints.

Believing in the efficacy of such prayers, the apostle begs the Ephesians believers to pray for him, that God would enable him to preach the Gospel in a suitable way.

To relieve their anxiety, he had sent Tychicus to inform them of his circumstances and of his health.

He invokes the Father and Son to bestow on the brothers the blessings of divine peace and love, united with faith; and implores the special favour of God for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ with a love that cannot die.

Commentary

[6:10](#). Though the redemption purchased by Christ, as described in this letter, is so complete and so free, yet between the beginning and the end of the work there is a protracted conflict. This is not a figure of speech. It is something real and arduous. Salvation, however gratuitous, is not to be obtained without great effort. The Christian conflict is not only real, it is difficult and dangerous. It is one in which true believers are often grievously wounded, and multitudes of reputed believers entirely succumb.

Finally, be strong in the Lord. He concludes his letter, so full of elevated views, and so rich in disclosures of the mysteries of redemption, with directions about the struggle necessary to secure

salvation. His first exhortation is to muster strength for the inevitable conflict, and to seek that strength from the right source. We are to be strong in the Lord. A Christian separated from Christ is like a branch separated from the vine, or like a limb severed from the body. Therefore, whoever rushes into this conflict without thinking of Christ, without putting his trust in him, and without continually looking to him for strength, and regarding himself as a member of his body, deriving all life and vigour from him, is demented. He does not know what he is doing. He has not strength even to reach the field. With him the whole conflict is a sham.

The words in the strength of his power mean, 'in the vigour derived from his strength.' The vigour of a man's arm is derived from the strength of his body. It is

only as members of Christ's body that we have either life or power.

[6:11](#). The second direction refers to the weapons necessary for the successful conduct of this conflict: put on the whole armour of God. In this verse, armour includes both the defensive and the offensive armour of the soldier. The believer has not only to defend himself, but also to attack his spiritual enemies; and the latter is as necessary for his safety as the former.

The whole armour of God means that armour which God has provided, and which he gives. Thus we are taught from the outset that as the strength we need is not from ourselves.

[6:12](#). For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness,

against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. The significance of the terms used here, the context, and the analogy of Scripture, make it certain that the reference is to evil spirits. In Scripture they are called 'demons,' who are declared to be fallen angels ([2 Peter 3:4](#); [Jude 6](#)), and are now subject to Satan, their prince. They are called rulers, those who are first or high in rank; and authorities, those invested with authority. These terms probably refer to the relationship of the spirits among themselves. The designation powers of this present darkness expresses the power or authority which they exercise over the world. Mankind is subject to them. Compare [2 Corinthians 4:4](#); [John 16:11](#). The word world correctly refers only to those rulers whose dominion is universal. These evil spirits are the rulers of this darkness. The meaning is either that

they reign over the existing state of ignorance and alienation from God, i.e., the world in its apostasy is subject to their control; or this present darkness is equivalent to 'kingdom of darkness.' Rulers of the kingdom of darkness – which, Scripture teaches us, includes the world as distinguished from the true people of God. The word 'dark' is used elsewhere, the abstract for the concrete, for those in darkness, i.e., for those who belong to or constitute the kingdom of darkness: see [Luke 22:53](#) and [Colossians 1:13](#). Our struggle, therefore, is with the potentates who are rulers of the kingdom of darkness as it now is.

[6:13](#). Therefore, 'because you have such formidable enemies, and because the conflict is inevitable, not only arm yourselves, but put on the whole armour of God; no other is adequate for the

emergency.' You may be able to withstand, i.e., 'successfully to resist,' on that evil day. The evil day is the day of trial.

[6:14](#). With the flowing garments of the East, the first thing to be done in preparing for any active work was to gird the loins. The apostle therefore says, Stand therefore, and fasten your belt of truth around your waist. In this verse truth is not here to be understood as divine truth, as objectively revealed, i.e., the Word of God; for that is mentioned in the following verse as the sword. Nor does it mean 'sincerity of mind,' for that is a natural virtue, and does not belong to God's armour; which, according to the context, consists of supernatural gifts and graces. But it means truth subjectively considered; that is, the knowledge and belief of the truth. This is the first and indispensable qualification for a Christian soldier. To

enter on this spiritual conflict ignorant or doubting would be to enter battle blind and lame.

As the belt gives strength and freedom of action, and therefore confidence, so does the truth when spiritually apprehended and believed. Truth alone, as abiding in the mind in the form of divine knowledge, can give strength of confidence even in the ordinary conflicts of the Christian life, much more in any really evil day.

Put on the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was the armour covering the body from the neck to the thighs, consisting of two parts, one covering the front and the other the back. A warrior without his breastplate was naked, exposed to every thrust of his enemy, and even to every random spear. In such a state flight or death is inevitable. In [Isaiah 59:17](#), Jehovah is described as putting on

'righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head'; as in [Isaiah 11:5](#), it refers to the Messiah, 'Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his waist.'

[6:15](#). In ancient warfare, which was most often hand to hand combat, swiftness of foot was one of the most important qualifications for a good soldier. So the apostle says, as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

[6:16](#). With all of these. Not 'above all,' as of greatest importance. Besides the parts of armour already mentioned, they were to take the shield of faith. In this verse shield means, literally, a door, and then came to mean a large oblong shield, like a door. Being four feet long and two and a half feet broad, it completely covered the

body, and was essential for the safety of the combatant. Hence the appropriateness of the apostle's metaphor. Such a protection, and thus essential, is faith. The more ways in which a shield is used, the more suitable is the illustration. The faith intended here is that through which we are justified, and reconciled to God through the blood of Christ.

[6:17](#). The most ornamental part of ancient armour, and scarcely less important than the breastplate or the shield, was the helmet. The Christian, therefore, is exhorted to take the helmet of salvation. According to the analogy of the preceding expressions, 'the breastplate of righteousness' and 'shield of faith,' salvation is itself the helmet. What adorns and protects the Christian, which enables him to hold up his head with confidence

and joy, is the fact that he is saved. He is one of the redeemed, translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. If still under condemnation, if still estranged from God, a foreigner, and alien, without God and without Christ, he could have no courage to enter into this conflict. It is because he is a fellow citizen of the saints, a child of God, a partaker of the salvation of the Gospel, that he can face even the most potent enemies with confidence, knowing that he will become more than a conqueror through him that loved him (see [Romans 8:37](#)).

Up until now, the armour mentioned is defensive. The only offensive weapon of the Christian is the sword of the Spirit. Here of the Spirit cannot be the genitive of apposition. The Spirit is not the sword; this would be incongruous, as the sword is

something which the soldier wields, but the Christian cannot control the Spirit. Besides, the explanation immediately follows, which is the word of God. The sword of the Spirit means the sword which the Spirit gives. The word of God does not mean the divine precepts, nor the threatenings of God against his enemies. There is nothing to limit the expression. It is what God has spoken, his Word, the Bible. This is sharper than any double edged sword (see [Galatians 4:12](#)). It is the wisdom of God and the power of God. It has a self-authenticating light. It commends itself to the reason and conscience.

[6:18](#). It is not armour or weapons which make the warrior. There must be courage and strength – and even then he often needs help. As the Christian has no resources of strength in himself, and can

succeed only as helped from above, the apostle urges the duty of prayer. The believer is to avail himself of all kinds of prayer; he is to pray on every suitable occasion; he is to pray in the Spirit; he is to be alert and persevering in the discharge of this duty; and he is to pray for all the saints, and the Ephesians were urged by the apostle to pray for him.

[6:19](#). The importance which the apostle attributed to intercessory prayer, and his faith in its efficacy, are evident from the frequency with which he enjoins the duty, and from the earnestness with which he solicits such prayers for himself. What the apostle wishes the Ephesians to pray for was not any temporal blessing, not even his deliverance from prison so that he might be at liberty to preach the Gospel more freely, but that God would enable him to preach with the freedom and

boldness with which he ought to preach. The literal translation is, 'that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth, with boldness to make known. ...' What Paul desired was divine assistance in preaching. He begs his reader to pray that a message may be given to me, 'that the power of speech,' or 'freedom of utterance,' might be given to him, when he opened his mouth.

[6:20](#). For which I am an ambassador in chains. An ambassador is one through whom a sovereign speaks. 'So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God' ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#)). The apostles, as sent by Christ with authority to speak in his name, and to negotiate with men, proposing the terms of reconciliation, and urging their acceptance, were in an

eminent sense his ambassadors. As all ministers are sent by Christ, and are commissioned by him to propose the terms of salvation, they too are entitled to the same honourable designation. Paul was an ambassador in chains, and yet he did not lose his courage, but preached with as much boldness as ever.

[6:21](#). In conclusion, the apostle informs the Ephesians that he had sent Tychicus to them to relieve their anxiety concerning him. So that you also may know – i.e., you as well as other Christian friends who had shown concern about me in my chains – how I am and what I am doing, – i.e., my circumstances. His health, as well as his situation, was a matter of anxiety to his friends.

[6:24](#). True to the last, as a needle to the pole, the apostle turns to Christ, and implores the divine favour on all who have

an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Love for Christ includes adoring admiration of his person, desire for his presence, zeal for his glory, and devotion to his service. It need not be ecstatic, but it must control us.