

Ten Week Study Outline for Ephesians

1st Week:

Introduction to Ephesus, the city and its people.

2nd Week:

The Blessings of Redemption.

CHAPTER 1

Verse 1-2 Opening Remarks.

- v1 (Apostello) Apostle. Which means “to send forth”. Paul stresses by “will of God” as opposed to the church stressing us.
- v1 (Hagioi) Saints. Which means “Separated” or “Set Apart”. This is the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament Hebrew word (qādēš) which was used for the temple vessels which were “set apart” for God. (qdš) is the Hebrew root dating back to the earliest Semitic languages which meant simply “to cut”.
- v1 **To the “faith ones”...** Not “faithful” but “full of faith”.
- v2 (Charis) Grace. “A flow of divine benevolence”. Its very essence is a word of giving. Not “unmerited favor”. The adjective “unmerited” is not an intrinsic part of the word “grace”. It is, in fact, something of a redundancy, because obviously God’s favor is unmerited. It is unfashionable to remind the recipient of it.
- v2 (Eirene) Peace. Means serenity and harmony. It does not necessarily involve cessation from hostilities. It is essential to understand that peace in the spirit and peace in the flesh are two different things. See (John 14:27). Peace is a fruit of the Spirit. See (Galatians 5:22).
- v2 **“...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is the guarantee of the grace and the peace by the Captain of our salvation, communicated through the Holy Spirit, not just a casual salutation by Paul.

Verse 3-6 Our spiritual heritage.

- v3 (Eulogeo) Blessed is God...How do we bless God? (Logos and the prefix – eu – which means “well” or “good” or “harmonious”) Thus, we bless God in terms of offering to Him words that are filled with appreciation and good will.
- v3 **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,...”** Paul encompasses that Christ is part of the Godhead.
- v3 **“spiritual blessing...”** The essence of this passage. What is our spiritual heritage?
- v3 (Ouranos) Heaven. To this word there has been added a prepositional prefix – epi. Epi carries the idea of on or above or beyond. For sure it’s beyond in this usage. So what is beyond the heavens? Apparently it is referring to a spirit dimension rather than a material one.
- v4 **“Chosen out in Him before the foundation of the world...”** In the realm of the blessings of the spirit, the first one Paul identifies is our election. It is essential to understand that this is a corporate election-that is the choosing out of the Body of Christ or the Church. It does not have to do with individuals, any more than the election of Israel had to do with individuals. God did not elect beforehand certain ones to be included in the family of Israel and certain ones that were not to be included. The Church is the present replacement for Israel and partakes of the same kind of election. This election took place before the foundation of the world. That is, God chose to bring into being a special body of people who would belong to Him as Israel belonged to Him.

- v4 **“That we should be set apart and blameless before Him in love...”** Collectively the Church would be a special family set apart for Him, as the vessels of the temple were set apart for worship. Again, we are not dealing here with piety or religious fervor, but with a setting apart or sanctifying as the vessels of the temple were set apart for the service of God. Similarly, the word “blameless” refers not to flawlessness, but faultlessness. We are all faultless before God through the righteousness of Christ. His capacity to present us “faultless before God” is the Divine answer to the tragedy of Eden.
- v5 **“Having established us beforehand unto a sonship...”** The Greek word (proorisas) simply means to decree or establish beforehand. Our word predestination has acquired through the years, a number of complex ideas which have gotten us into a good deal of trouble. Our theological vocabulary often does that for us. We establish something of a “straw man” in our usage of words and then deal with that straw man. The whole debate over whether or not individuals are destined to be saved or destined to be lost is something of that straw man. What Paul is declaring here is that as God had established or decreed the family of Israel, so He has decreed now the family of the Church. It has nothing to do with individuals, but with a collective election. The major difference in these two elections is that God has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within the individuals and to give them the capacity or power to be His own sons or children in essence more than just in title. The word (hiothesian) is improperly translated by “adoption,” since it really is not the same as our legal process. In many respects, the introducing of a legal factor here is as unfortunate as would be the introducing of a legal factor in a natural child. If a child is born into a family, it is hardly impressive to say that the child has also legal rights in the family. We belong to the family of Christ by virtue of a spiritual birth and not by virtue of a legal decree. The spiritual birth carries with it the legal privileges of sonship (the Greek word includes both male and female). Thus, the translation “place as a child” is more significant than the translation “adoption,” which is a binding legal term, but rather sterile in its concept. The idea of the natural child is equally binding, but a much richer kind of relationship. So God determined, before the world began, to establish a family on the earth that would, by reason of the Holy Spirit, become His natural children and natural heirs. It was this that was predetermined and not individual members of that family.
- v5 **“According to the good purpose of His will...”** The Greek word (eudokia) is better translated by “purpose” than by “pleasure.” It was not merely something that pleased Him, but rather something that was intrinsic to the creation of the universe. We reflect His glory through the voluntary offering of praise and worship.
- v6 **“Unto the praise of the glory of His grace...”** There is no higher glory than the glory of God. Grace (Charis) is a river of Divine benevolence flowing out of His very Being which is by nature, the very essence of love—“God is love.”

[Verse 7-14 Our heritage further explored.](#)

- v7 **In whom we have redemption...** Redemption is the central issue of the Bible. Without it there would be no Bible and no need for God to communicate with his creatures. “To redeem” simply means to buy back or to recover. Greek word (apolutrosis), does not suggest the means by which the redemption takes place, but it does suggest the completeness of the transaction.
- v7 **Through His blood...** But why the shedding of blood? Why blood? Is there some special power in blood? What we humans need to know is that there is a place of reconciliation with God; it was accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ; it was a once for all thing that requires no new sacrifice, but merely an acceptance of the one made by Christ; it provided for us a permanent and eternal recovery to the ultimate position that God had originally intended for His creation.
- v7 **The forgiveness of trespasses...** The word for forgiveness (aphiemi)-would have been understood by the Ephesians very clearly and very thoroughly as simply to take away or remove. The word for trespasses (paraptoma) is from the word pipto, which means “to fall.” There are a great many terminologies used in the issue of sin and failure. All of them have to do, in one way or another, with falling short of God’s ultimate intention for His creation.
- v7 **According to the riches of His grace...** Since the riches of Christ are unfathomable, so the extent of His grace. Let us plunge into the river of the flow of God’s benevolence toward us and let us carry it through to glory.
- v8 **In all wisdom and understanding...** The Greek word translated “wisdom” is (sophia), refers to the meaning of life and the universe. Even though our knowledge in the flesh is quite minimal, the revelation which we possess within our spirits is adequate to identify us with the realities of the universe as God created it. The word for “understanding” is quite different. (Phronesis) has to do with a thought process which is based upon the function of the brain in producing patterns, ideas or tendencies. The coming of the Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to view life in a sound manner. That is, we see God as the Creator and ourselves as His special creation.
- v9 **Having made known to us the mystery of His will...** The word (musterion) denotes not something that cannot be known or is improbable of being known, but something that is known by the initiated. The Spirit within us knows things by the presence of Christ within that the brain doesn’t always pick up.

- v9 **According to His [God's] good purpose which He established beforehand in Him [Christ]...** (eudokia) has often been translated by “good pleasure” — a misleading concept in terms of modern day English usage, which gives it a lighter touch. It is more accurate to translate it by “what He deems or thinks best.” It does not always please God to do things that are nevertheless important for His people.
- v10 **Unto a dispensation of the fullness of times...** The word “dispensation” is a very familiar one in theological dialogue. Generally speaking, it is understood to mean specific time periods which conform to God’s clock for the earth. Actually the word so translated has a much deeper meaning. It is the word from which we get our word economy — (oikonomia). Literally it means “the law of the household.” And that has a much broader meaning than our modern day “household.” He is not going simply “according to a schedule,” but according to an intricate process of the evolving of an eternal family. It would be appropriate, to let our minds break free of the petty mold in which we normally confine God and His universe.
- v10 **To head up all things in Christ...** If God is the Eternal Source of all creation and the Spirit Force that energizes the universe, Christ is the Executor executing God’s purposes.
- v10 **Of things pertaining to heaven and things pertaining to earth...** Presently, the forces of good seem overwhelmed by the forces of evil. However, Satan’s apparent victories are shallow and short-lived and pertain only to the material world.
- v11 **In whom also we have received a share...** Paul tells the Romans we are joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). We share the universe with the “God of the universe.” Moreover, we share in the Spirit of the One who energizes the universe. The meager and often disheartening circumstances of this life on the earth will very quickly be over, and then our spirits will roam free to join with God throughout eternity.
- v11 **The One who energizes all things...** Our sharing in the universe with God is according to the pre-established purpose of the One who is the Source of all the energies of the universe. He is also the Source of our own energy. We were created originally to be vessels of the Spirit of God, but we lost that in the fall. The coming of Christ now makes possible the renewal of that inner Spirit.
- v12 **To the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory...** Since God is the source and sustenance and end of all creation, there can be no greater purpose than to reflect His glory. Paul tells the Philippians, *We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit and make our boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh* (Philippians 3:3). The expression, commonly translated—“make our boast in”—is the Greek word (kauchaomai), which is the Cretan form Of (chalkos) which meant “copper” or any shining surface. The idea of “boasting” in the Lord, does not make good sense, but to find the glory of Christ reflected by us is a great concept.
- v13 **Who had our expectations...** We who will ultimately fulfill this glorious purpose are those who have had our expectations beforehand in Christ. Paul tells the Colossians that God had made known to them the mysteries of His glory, *Which is Christ in you, the hope [expectation] of glory* (Colossians 1:27).
- v13 **You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...** The Holy Spirit has set His seal on us. Like the seal of the king, it marks us as His possession. The children of Israel were God’s possession in a certain sense but they did not have the mark of the Holy Spirit on them. Further, the seal of the Holy Spirit is the pledge that Christ will fulfill all of His purpose in us. The Greek word (arrabon) often translated by “earnest” is directly from the Hebrew word which meant “a pledge.” It would be like our own word “guarantee.” So the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is God’s guarantee to us that He is going to fulfill His purpose. It is therefore absurd to think that the Holy Spirit comes and goes in terms of our own human performance.
- v14 **A secured possession...** This word has the force of something that is very special. The Greek word (peripoiesis) means “to put something around,” so as to preserve it. As Paul said earlier in the chapter we are surrounded by His grace. Paul assures the Philippians of this preservation—*Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:6). The universe is God’s, the world is God’s, we are God’s and the energy is God’s to dwell within us and sustain us with Him forever.

[Verse 15-23 Paul’s prayer for enlightenment.](#)

- v17 **The Father of glory...** In his prayer, Paul addresses the One who is the Source of all the universe and therefore of the ineffable glory that is its very essence.
- v17 **The Spirit of wisdom and revelation...** Remember that (Sophia) refers to the mysteries of the universe and can only be revealed to us through the Holy Spirit; and, by the same token can only come to our spirits through revelation.
- v18 **The eyes of your heart being enlightened...** The Greek word here (kardia) was regarded as the entire inner being—perhaps the essence of the person. It would be used for the seat of the spirit, rather than in our modern usage which is more often an emotional factor.

- v18 **That you may know what is the expectation of His calling...** The word for expectation (elpis) carries with it far more certainty than our English word “hope” would suggest. The far better translation is “expectation.” Elpis is altogether a word of certainty rather than uncertainty. The word for calling (kaleo) is the basis of the word “church,” which is (ekkllesia). It means literally “the called out ones.” Paul is praying here that the believers may have a sense of the expectation of their calling and a certainty of the fact that God has chosen to redeem us.
- v18 **The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...** The riches of the glory of God are little comprehensible to the human mind. What we are talking about here is the glory of His inheritance in the saints. We have already understood that “saint” really means not some highly pious person, but anyone who has been separated from Satan and evil and brought into the family of God. The word inheritance (kleronomia) means a portion or share that is lawfully decreed or based upon a certain right.
- v19 **The surpassing majesty of His power in us...** To extol the surpassing majesty of God is reasonable; to grasp the wonder of that power in us is only possible through the Holy Spirit that is within us.
- v19 **According to the energy of the might of His strength...** We meet again the word “energy.” The Greek word (energeo) is directly brought over into English in our word “energy.” It is often or usually translated by the phrase “work in,” which obscures the real force of the word. Relative to the vastness of the universe, we humans are but ionized particles. However, given the limitless energy of God, His power in us gives us the energy needed to be partakers of His nature and to be one with Him for eternity.
- v20 **With which He energized Christ when He raised Him from the dead...** So the limitless energy of God which sent Christ to earth in the first place; empowered Him to fulfill His purpose; and finally raised Him from the dead, is the very energy with which the believer is empowered to partake of the Divine nature and to live with Him for eternity.
- v20 **Seated at His right hand...** It is an old Hebrew expression/idiom that means the one who is the administrator or executor of the wishes of the monarch. In this case the monarch is the Godhead in Spirit form and Christ is the One who carries out the actual plans.
- v22 **And He has given Him as a Head over all things to the Church.** The English word “church” is rather misleading and confusing. The Greek word is (ekkllesia) and means “the called out ones.” The essence of the ekkllesia is the Body of believers and refers to people, not things. Long after the “things” have disappeared, the ekkllesia will still remain.
- v23 **The fullness of the One who fulfills all things in all.** Once the process of redemption was begun, the only way that it could have been fulfilled was by the sending of Christ to the earth to be the Captain of salvation and the bringing together of the Body of those who desired to be united to God. Without the Body of believers, the process would have been irrelevant. So we have the Godhead with a creation that went astray; we have the extending of Himself to the earth in the form of Christ; we have a sacrifice to satisfy the requirements of redemption; we have a resurrection to guarantee eternal life and we have the Body of believers who complete the redemptive process and share eternity with God, as He had originally intended. Without the Body of believers the cycle would have been incomplete.

3rd Week:

Made Alive in Christ.

CHAPTER 2

Verse 1-10 The Spirit of Death and the Spirit of Life – Between the Power of Light and the Power of Darkness.

COMMENTARY:

We are born into the world with human spirits, but these spirits are devoid of the Spirit of God. It is therefore necessary for us to be “born again” in the Spirit. It is not a complex process—it is merely recognizing the need of having Christ in our spirits. Until we are old enough to understand this, we are apparently covered by the grace of Christ, who said, Permit the little children to come unto Me and do not forbid them for of such is the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:14). The grace of God is far more inclusive than exclusive, although many who wish to be “special,” like to limit His grace to an elite few. However that may be, the clear teaching of Jesus and the Epistles is that until Christ comes into our spirits, we have only natural, mortal life. When Christ does come in we pass from mortal life to eternal life and also become partakers of His Divine nature, which enables us to function in the realm of the Spirit which is the Kingdom of God.

According to Ephesians 2, Satan also occupies a spirit realm but it is the realm of darkness. It is therefore crucial to understand that not everything that is of “spirit” nature is of God. Satan has hosts of demons that are called “evil spirits.” So Satan also has power beyond the human capacity. According to Ephesians 2, those who are unbelievers are energized by the spirit of Satan, as believers are energized by the Spirit of God. That does not mean that unbelievers are necessarily “demon possessed” which is a special category of those who have been thoroughly taken over by Satan. It is also crucial to understand that we have no power over Satan, except by the Spirit of Christ. No amount of human piety or perseverance or religious exercise can avail against the evil one. Only Christ can prevail on the basis of His own strength and not ours. In the New Testament episodes, Satan was vanquished, not by extensive human efforts, but by a word. Only Christ has that power and that word. Our part is merely to engage Him. We engage Him by asking and not by begging. We engage Him by request and not by rhetoric or ritual. All of this is crucial to the understanding of Ephesians 2.

v1 **And you being dead in your trespasses and your sins...** Dead is dead. Even those who are “clinically dead” have no power whatsoever to restore themselves to full life. While we are dead, in the spiritual sense, we cannot lift one finger to bring ourselves to life. We can only say “help!” We have no strength to make promises or commitments as a precondition. It is senseless even to say “If you will save me-I will. . .” It is Christ who makes us alive and Christ who strengthens us to function in the Kingdom of God.

The words “trespasses” and “sins” sometimes seen as synonyms are both used in this passage in a definitive way. They are not redundant. As we pointed out in the last chapter, (paraptoma) means “stumbling and falling.” (hamartia) is a far more general term, including the entire process of sin as originating in the garden of Eden. Paraptoma has more to do with episodes of sin whereas hamartia has to do with the general principle of sin.

v2 **According to the course of this world...** The Greek word (aion) (from which we get our word eon or aeon) has to do with the ages. But the ages, in turn, have to do with the process of human existence on the earth. An age really refers to the process of human civilization during a given period of time. Prior to salvation, one’s whole life is given to the natural process of life in this world. Such a life inevitably has self fulfillment and self-interest, to say nothing of self gratification, as its essential meaning. Apart from Christ, even humanitarian efforts, since they cannot be motivated by the Holy Spirit (who is absent), has some basic self-orientation. Much charity is done to bolster ones feelings of self worth.

v2 **According to the ruler of the power of the air...** The word (archon) refers to a ruler and not “prince” as in the English sense which refers to merely “an heir apparent.” The ancient Greek city-states were ruled over by archons. The word for power here is (exousia) which means “power” in the sense of authority. In John 1:12 it says, To as many as received Him, He gave them power [authority] to become children of God... Satan has been given authority by God to exercise a certain amount of control over the world. Apparently it includes the atmosphere (though possibly not outer space).

v2 **The spirit who now energizes the children of unbelief...** Again, the word (energeo) is used to refer to the process of energy. The phrase “to work in” is not inaccurate, but simply lacks the force. The word is now used to refer to the work of Satan in the unbelievers. It is a similar motivating process to that which the Spirit of Christ does with the believers. The believers are constantly motivated by the Spirit in ways that are beyond their human capacities. By the same token, Satan often motivates the unbeliever in ways and actions that are not understood by the human mental process. Does the phrase “The Devil made me do it” ring a bell?

- v3 **In which we all also had our way of life...** Paul includes himself in this statement as having been one who was under the control of Satan's world. The word (anastrepho) was translated in the King James Version by the word "conversation." The word is an archaic English word and should be replaced by "way of life."
- v3 **In the desires of our flesh.** The translation "lust" is too strong. The Greek word, simply means "desire". The word "lust" focuses on a particular phase of evil and obscures the intent of the passage which is to indicate that all activities of earth which are engaged in by those not having the Spirit of Christ, are governed by fleshly self-orientation and therefore vain and futile.
- v3 **We were by nature children of wrath...** This does not imply that God's wrath is poured out on all earthly activity. It only means that if we are not part of God's Kingdom, we are de facto part of Satan's Kingdom, which is one day going to feel the vehemence of the wrath of God which is poured out, not upon particular evils, but upon the whole diabolical course of Satan's empire. Those who do not come into the Kingdom of God are inexorable victims along with Satan and his demonic forces.
- v4 **But God who is rich in mercy...** Who can really calculate or fathom the mercy of God? David says that, The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 103:17). It is infinite-it does not really calculate within the time/space continuum.
- v4 **On account of His great love...** How do we fathom the love of God? What is it really like? Can it be equated with human love? We must refer again to the Greek word agape. We discussed it earlier, but we must refresh ourselves for a moment to remember that it is a love of caring, consideration, and respect. While it may involve the emotions, feelings are not basic to the meaning of the word. The love of God goes quite beyond feelings-and that is a good thing. The reason it is a good thing is that human emotions are so vacillating. It is not only our love for God that would be vacillating, but our perception of His love for us.
- v5 **By grace you are saved...** Now Paul picks up his original statement, "While we were dead in our sins, Christ made us alive." To emphasize the point, Paul reminds us that we are saved by grace. The Greek text expressly states that we are saved while we are dead. A dead person can do nothing to raise himself from the dead. We have no possibility of salvation apart from the grace by which He touches us and lifts us from the dead. And Paul says that the very energy that raised Christ from the dead is the guarantee to us that He has the energy to raise us from the dead.
- But then no one can really come to Christ, unless the Spirit touches him. So if the Spirit does not touch him, how can he expect to come to salvation? Let's talk about this question. Turn to John 16:5-15.*
- v6 **And He has raised us together and seated us together in the "heavenlies" (epiouranous) in Christ Jesus...** Apart from salvation we are dead and need to be raised from the dead together with all of the family of God. Further, when we are raised from the dead (in the spiritual sense) we are immediately given a position with Christ in the spirit realm. We do not have to wait for physical death or the coming of Christ. Our spirits are already seated with Christ in the spirit realm. We are part of God's Kingdom and cannot, as far as our spirits are concerned, be touched by Satan. We are the "untouchables". To have us "see-sawing" back and forth between the realm of Satan and the realm of God, is absurd and totally unworthy of the power of God.
- v7 **In order that we may show in the coming ages...** Part of our reflecting of the glory of Christ is that, contrary to the Edenic tragedy, we are preserved by the Spirit of Christ through all of the earthly chaos and personal turmoil. God's family, saved by His grace and preserved by His Spirit is a constant witness to Satan of the power of God and the triumph of His redemption.
- v8 **By grace you are saved through faith. . .** It is essential here to examine again the word "faith." A significant clue to its meaning is found in Hebrews 11:1 Faith is the substance of things expected. The word substance (hupostasis) means "that which stands under" or "that which is the real essence of something." Our word "substance" comes from the Latin, which means the same thing. Salvation is a gift of God-based not upon human weakness and inadequacy or human efforts to acquire it, but upon the energy which comes from God as a gift. Thus in Galatians 5:22 we are told specifically that faith is a fruit of the Spirit. That does not mean that if we possess the Spirit, we ought to strive to have more faith, but rather that the faith is already there. What most people are thinking about in the human efforts to develop "faith" is really the emotion of "trust." They think that if they do not feel "victorious" in their affliction, they are not exhibiting faith. The reality of the matter is that what they are not exhibiting is the human feeling of trust, but if they did not have faith, they would not even be concerned about the feelings of it. Apart from the Holy Spirit, no one would ever care about faith in God.

- v8-9 **It is a gift of God, not of works...** We often think of the word “works” as denoting charities of some kind or good deeds. The Greek word (ergo), has to do with inner activity, not necessarily of outward services. For example, Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him who sent Me” (John 6:29). So belief is itself something of the nature of a work. What Paul is referring to here is humanly generated activity, even in terms of our beliefs. We are not saved by coming to rational beliefs about God.
- v9 **Lest anyone should boast...** It is inevitable to human nature that if one had anything to do with the generating of one’s own faith or salvation, one would be inclined to say to God at the final judgment seat—“But at least you’ll have to admit... that I was a good person;” “that I sought you diligently;” “that I was sincere.” Paul didn’t even try that one. He could have said, “At least I was doing my best to serve God, even if I was misguided.” He rather admitted to being nothing but “the chief of sinners.” It is the tendency to human pride that accounts for the attitude of many Christians towards sinners, and which makes them aloof. Jesus spent a good deal of time with sinners, to the disgust of the Pharisees.
- v10 **For we are His workmanship...** The Greek word for “workmanship” is (poiema), from which we get our word “poem.” We are God’s “work of art.” As members of His family, we are not only created by Him, but fitted harmoniously into His Body, so that we become a work of rhythm and harmony. That is one reason why we have difficulty identifying precisely just how we fit into the whole. There are refinements and nuances of our relationships which are known only to God. We do not even know, ourselves, just how and when we are being used by God in a given service.

[Verse 11-22 Members of the Household of God – Both Jew and Gentile.](#)

COMMENTARY:

There is one word in the Bible that summarizes its entire thrust—Immanuel. It was the name declared by the angel, to be given to Jesus. It is a Hebrew word (Im-anu-el) which means “with us is God.” Although God had created man in His own image, the humans which He created fell from their position with Him, through disobedience. Created in His own image, the humans whom He created were given a free will, like Himself. And therein was the problem. Having a free will, they were able to choose—to obey or to disobey. They chose the latter, which was their right, and therefore lost the place which they had with God as well as their eternal existence. Instead, they were put out of the garden and exchanged their immortality for mortality and were slated for death. God did not abandon them, but interacted with them on a “caretaker” basis. They had no oneness with Him, but He provided a way for their reconciliation.

And that, of course, is where Jesus came in. A projection of the Godhead, born of the Spirit, He took on human form and became the ultimate sacrifice, giving up His own life as an atonement for sin and through His resurrection, imparting to all who would receive it, the eternal life which they lost in “the fall.” Thus, the coming of Jesus brought about the restoration of God’s creatures to their place with Him. The impact of Jesus was the effecting of the mutual abode—God dwelling in us and we dwelling in Him (John 14).

- v11 **Gentiles in the flesh ... Circumcision in the flesh...** Now we come to a major division in humanity. In order to bring into human perspective the incomprehensible implications and applications of God’s redemptive process, He selected a family of people known by the name of their progenitor—Israel (formerly Jacob). What is today a nation, as well as an ethnic group throughout the world, actually started with one father—Jacob, who, in time, had his name changed to Israel (prince with God). To this group of people—singled out from the rest of the population of earth—God gave the revelation of redemption in symbolism and in such a way that even the simplest could appropriate it and apply it.

But in the nature of the case, that made a very strong division between the Israelites and the rest of the population which were called “Gentiles.” The Jews assumed then that they were very special and, generally speaking, that the Gentiles could never be saved. Even after the coming of Christ, there were large numbers of Jewish Christians who still held to the conviction that the Gentiles were forever excluded from God’s family. Paul and Peter were pioneers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in dispelling this notion. Peter had to elicit from the leaders in Jerusalem the declaration that “God has granted salvation to the Gentiles also.” Paul’s major task was to assure the Gentiles that they too were included. And that of course is the major message of the passage we are looking at.

Circumcision was the major symbol of the division. Circumcision was a practice, ordained of God, that involved the removal of the foreskin of all male babies. Whereas the practice is widely done today as a health measure, it was not common in those days, and was in fact treated with disrespect by the Gentile population. Paul makes a very strong point of the fact that such a practice was a physical one only, “in the flesh,” and had, under the New Covenant, no spiritual significance. One could be circumcised “in the flesh,” and still be out of touch with God, as the Pharisees had proven. That was what Paul referred to as the “circumcision made with hands.” On the other hand, as Paul points out to the Romans and the Galatians and the Colossians, circumcision, with the coming of Christ, was a matter of the Spirit and not the flesh. So the “uncircumcised” Gentiles were just as much a part of the family of God in salvation, as the “circumcised” Jews.

- v12 **Alienated from the citizenship of Israel...** In presenting the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul must first make it clear that they were not originally included in God's redemptive process. They were not part of God's family; they were not citizens of the nation of Israel; and they were without hope in their state of Godlessness. It was only the grace of God which included them. In a way, they had not earned their birthright. On the other hand in God's view, no one had earned it-it was an act of pure grace. Through Christ, the Gentiles were now free to belong to His family. It was theirs for the asking.
- v14 **For He Himself is our peace.** . . The original message of the angels on the holy night of Jesus' birth was a message of peace-Peace on earth, good will to men. Satan has continually sought to belie that message by throwing the world into wars and conflicts and confusion. Unfortunately, many Christians are caught up in this tragic chaos. Satan tries to rob them of their peace. And, unfortunately, many religious groups are agent in this process, since they put upon believers conditions of humanistic endeavor that keep the believers constantly in unrest as they strive to live up to man-made requirements and standards. The process of perfection enjoined upon them, puts them forever on a treadmill. The role of Christ in bringing about peace is replaced by the effort of humans to fashion their own kind of perfection and their own kind of peace. Who does not live in the continual struggle of striving and failing and guilt? A most important antidote to this problem is the verse that we are now looking at - *Christ is Himself our peace*. But what does that mean? It means that when we take Christ into our spirits, He comes with His attribute of peace.
- v14 **Who has made both one and destroyed the dividing barrier...** The wall that separated and distinguished the Jewish people from the rest of the world was also a barrier that excluded it from the special rituals and sacrifices that God had given to His people. That is not to say, of course, that God had excluded all Gentiles from ultimate redemption. There were indications that God had shown favor to certain Gentiles. A good example would be Abimelech-King of Gerar-who was about to defile the marriage of Abraham, by taking Sarah for a wife.
- v15 **By His flesh...** It was essential that God should interact with the people of earth through a projected reality of His person, both spiritually in Christ, and physically in Jesus. Christ, the Logos, became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory (John 1:14). Redemption could not have been accomplished apart from a physical appearance. The fall resulted in physical death-it took a physical death on the part of Jesus to accomplish redemption. However, in order for redemption to be complete, it took also a physical life in the flesh on the earth to identify with humanity and to become a viable substitute. The death on the cross as heinous as it was, was not the whole of the sacrifice. His life on earth, as a wretched human, suffering the outrages of humanity, was an equally devastating experience.
- v15 **Having nullified the Law of commandments in statutes...** The Law of God, which was given to Israel in statutes or ordinances, was replaced by the Law written on the hearts through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This was, of course, the message of the prophets. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh [as opposed to stone]. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My Statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do them* (Ezekiel 36:26, 27). This prophecy was also picked up by Joel (2:28) and became the basis of Peter's sermon at Pentecost. *And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh. . .* (Joel 2:28). It was not that God would do away with his moral precepts, but rather that they would be written on the heart instead of on tables of stone.
- In the Christian era-after the coming of the Holy Spirit-the "Law of love" became the basis of conduct. Jesus summarized it-*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets* (Matthew 9):37-40). In one stroke Jesus dismissed that cumbersome code and replaced it with the Law of love. The Law of love would only be functional with the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in the human spirits with the consequent gift of love.
- v15 **In order that the two may be created in Him unto one new man-making peace...** In the breaking down of the barriers between Jew and Gentile and establishing a new unity in Christ, we are dealing not with a new alignment, but a new creation. In Christ, the old distinction has been eliminated. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Galatians. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is not any Jew or Greek; there is not any slave or free, there is not any male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:27-29). Thus, the peace did not come through compromise or ideological harmony, but through a new creation.
- v16 **And having reconciled both in one body to God through the cross.** . . So the two have become one body through the cross. An energy has been applied to mankind by it, that has forever eliminated the enmity that existed between them.

- v17 **And having come, He proclaimed peace.** . . The word “Preach” (as in many translations) is not adequate. It is the Greek word (euangelidzo), which is usually translated “to preach the Gospel” or “evangelize” or “preach good tidings.” The noun form euangelion was used for a special proclamation. Our word “gospel” has had such a wide and careless usage that it means almost nothing. It is used for everything from slangy verifications to types of music. The alternate translation-”good news” is equally inadequate for the same reason. But the real meaning of the Greek word is very strong indeed. The word used for this victory proclamation was the Greek word (euangelion). Thus, the word must be translated in English accordingly and “proclamation” is probably the best. The enmity that had existed for over a thousand years between the Jews and the Gentiles was suddenly eradicated by the crucifixion and peace proclaimed both to the Jews who were near and the Gentiles who were afar.
- v18 **We both have access by One Spirit.** . . The key word is “access.” It is one of those pivotal words upon which rests the entire message of the Bible. The original pair were cut off in the Garden of Eden as a result of disobedience. The entire message of the Bible is the process of redemption and reconciliation, whereby God once again has granted access to His creatures. That these tiny particles in the universe should be energized by God is awesome. That these energized particles should also be given the capacity to interact with God is beyond awesome to an inexpressible glory. The evidence that this is true is the very fact of our entering into it. Apart from the Holy Spirit, who could imagine such a thing?
- v19 **You are no longer strangers and foreigners.** . . In the mind of Israel, all Gentiles were strangers and foreigners. They had no right to their blessings or to their God who gave them. They were the *Goyim*, who were outcasts from God. On the other hand, the Jews were, for other reasons, despised by the Gentiles. The history of the persecution of Israel by the Gentiles is tragic indeed-often written in bloodshed and atrocities. But now, we are all one in Christ.
- v20 **Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.** . . The Church (the Ekklesia) is at once both a body and a building. Both analogies are instructive and give a clear picture of the position of the Church. The building here discussed in Ephesians begins with the Apostles and Prophets, as far as the basis of the revelation is concerned. It was the Prophets and the Apostles through whom God revealed the meaning and purpose that God had in mind in the process of the reconciliation of His people.
- v20 **Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone...** In modern usage, a cornerstone is merely a commemorative plaque placed on the building after its completion. The cornerstone that Paul speaks of is a fundamental part of the buildings “keystone” that holds up the building. Christ was the Cornerstone or Keystone that supported the entire structure of the Church. That is a true “keystone.”
- v21 **In whom all the building fitted together by compact joints...** If Christ is the Cornerstone, the Holy Spirit is the Energizing Force that binds the Church together. The expression here (sunarmologeio) is akin to the process in which the pyramids were erected in Egypt, as well as many structures in other parts of the world. The giant stones were fitted together by friction. That is, the joints were ground by moving the stones back and forth until the fit was so perfect that a knife blade could not be inserted between them. In many ways the believers are put through such a grinding process, interacting with one another and working together with one another in a process that the Holy Spirit governs, beyond the capacity and understanding of the individual believers.
- v21 **Grows unto a sanctified temple in the Lord...** On the one hand we are dealing with the analogy of a building, and yet on the other hand it is a living entity which has the capacity of growth. Humans plan and program and manipulate in an effort to bring about the growth of the Church, but in the final analysis, it is God who is the Master Builder and who must fit each piece into the body as it pleases Him. Our task is to wait on Him to fulfill His purpose in each of us and fit us into the body properly.
- v22 **A dwelling place of God in the Spirit.** . . The great eternal moment toward which the whole of God’s purposes and planning is directed, is the preparing of an everlasting dwelling place for His people and a process of reconciliation whereby they will be fit for His holy habitation.

4th Week.

Paul's Stewardship.

CHAPTER 3

Verse 1-7 Paul's Assignment – To Proclaim Redemption to the Gentiles.

COMMENTARY:

Because God had broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, Paul was assigned the task of declaring the glad tidings to the Gentiles. For this he was thrown into prison. To the Jews he was a traitor and a blasphemer and deserved to die as had, in their minds, the Messiah whom he had proclaimed. His fellow countrymen had been in relentless pursuit of him for years. He was now writing from prison. The intense hatred of the Jews was matched only by the intense determination of the part of Paul to complete the assignment that had been given him by Jesus Christ, the Messiah whom they hated. And thus, he found himself a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles.

v2 **The stewardship of the grace of God...** The untranslatable Greek word (oikonomia) literally means "the regulation of the household." But it is so much more. It is more than "dispensation;" it is more than "stewardship." It has to do with the way one is fitted into the functioning of the entire household, which in those days might include vast holding or business activities. Such a position must be given by the lord of the household. It could not be something one would volunteer to do.

v3 **The mystery was made known to me by revelation...** Numberless claims to revelation have been made throughout the millennia of human history. In fact, by the very nature of the case, any religion which would claim some supernatural origin would have to also allege to have come by means of some revelation. So then how do we know that Paul's claims are any more valid than anyone else's – Mohammed's, for example, or a host of modern prophets? Actually, there is only one true test – the witness of the Holy Spirit.

But isn't that begging the question? Isn't that what all revelationists claim?

That is certainly true. But there are several very important differences. For one thing, there is the problem of validation. Anyone can make a claim to revelation. Most of such writings are by one person with some limited testimonials. In the case of the Bible, you have some forty authors writing over a period of fifteen hundred years who bring essentially the same message. Another factor in validation is the witness of history. Most religious writings are vague enough that there is no way to tell whether they are false or true – "We are the special chosen ones," for example; or "If you live a good life, you will have eternal bliss." The Bible, on the other hand, is rooted in history and makes definite claims about the origin of life and the universe; about the source of evil; about redemption; about the future of the people of God; about Christ as the Son of God. But the final judgment about the matter must be in the witness of the Spirit to the individual. Thus, if God is responsible for this Book, then He is also responsible to see to it that we humans are convinced by it. And the only way one can be convinced by it is to read it. Paul tells the Romans "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). If God does not have the power to convince us of His Word, then we have no reason to believe it. So Paul makes a claim to revelation from God. If that is true, then it should be convincing to us as we read his letters.

v4 **You are able in reading it, to grasp my understanding in the mystery of Christ...** In a way, Paul is saying the same thing. Read it and you will understand. The word which we have translated "grasp" is from (noeo), which basically refers to the mind as the effective instrument of communication. Paul's word - "understanding" - is (sunesin). It means literally to "put things together" We have a common idiom – "get it together." That is very much what is meant here. With the revelation of God, Paul has been able to put together the concepts that make up God's will for mankind. And, by the witness of the Holy Spirit, we are able to grasp it.

v5 **Which was not made known in other generations...** God's purposes for the Gentiles were not at all understood in the earlier history of His people, Israel. The Gentiles were summarily dismissed as not having any place at all in God's redemptive purpose. Now the time has come for God to reveal His purposes for the Gentiles to bring them into the fold and establish one family of Jew and Gentile. And Paul has the great privilege of declaring the details of God's purpose for the Gentiles - a purpose which Peter had introduced and had opened up the eyes of the leadership of Israel to this truth.

v6 **That the Gentiles should be heirs together and a body together and sharers together of the promise in Christ Jesus...** The original people of God were the Israelites. To them were the promises made and the prophecies. Theirs was the responsibility of declaring to the world the truth of God. And theirs was the failure which prefigured the failure of all mankind and the need of a Redeemer. The Old Testament records the turbulent odyssey of Israel, which ended in the tragic captivity of Babylon. In its erratic and vacillating efforts to keep the Law of Moses, Israel demonstrated over a period of fifteen hundred years the inability of human nature, bereft of the Spirit of God, ever to be righteous. This, of course, was the compelling reason for Christ to offer Himself as the ultimate sacrifice. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a temporary bridge over the quagmire of evil that threatened to swallow up the entire human race. But even so, as the Epistle to the Hebrews points out, these sacrifices could not purge the consciences of the offerers (9:13,14). Unfortunately even up to the coming of the Messiah, the religious leaders of Israel were stubbornly persisting in the idea that they could, by their own righteousness, keep the Law of God. The sacrifice of His own Son – Jesus Christ – was God’s final stroke in the recovery of His people. With the coming of Pentecost came the revelation of the new relationship – the very Spirit of Christ would dwell within, and the Law would be written on the hearts and not just on tables of stone. At this point came the grand proclamation to the Gentiles – they too are now included. The History of redemption was written in the history of Israel. But now, through Peter initially, and then expanded by revelation through the apostle Paul, the Gentiles are brought into the fold. In that respect, the Gentiles became part of Israel rather than vice versa. So now the Gentiles will share with Israel the inheritance which was originally theirs and the body and the promises. So they will now be “*heirs together and a body together and fellow sharers together of the promise in Christ Jesus*”

v7 **According to the free gift of the grace of God...** (*dorea*) is a form of *doran* (gift) which adds to it the idea of something given without cause. God does not owe us anything. He gives gifts to us “freely” out of His love and magnanimous purposes for His people. And so God’s gift to Paul – an expression of the benevolent flow of His grace.

The word minister (*diakonos*) is not to be at all confused with the modern day usage of the term. In today’s usage, the word conjures up an official position in the church, with designated activities, ranging from pastoral duties to the activities of the various divisions and departments for the institution. Our word “deacon” comes directly from this word, but has little connection with the original gift as Paul defines it to Timothy (I Timothy 3:8-13). Paul’s “ministry” was a stewardship and an assignment given by God and not simply chosen as a profession.

v7 **According to the energy of His power...** We are tiny “mites” on the earth. We are totally useless apart from the energy of the Holy Spirit within us. Jesus said, “*Without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). All efforts in the service of Christ which are motivated by human factors (challenges, promises of reward, pressures of guilt, etc.) are likely to be of the flesh, in which one strives to do a “job” in one’s own strength. When the gift comes from Christ and not from humans, it does not need a cause. There is simply the compelling to do it, as in the case of Paul – “*The love of Christ constrains [compels] us...*” (II Corinthians 5:14) It was the love of Christ and not love for Christ. Love for Christ is merely the response of gratitude – “After all He’s done for me.” The love of Christ is the very energy of Christ’s love within, reaching out to those that are without, apart from any human feelings of affection or gratitude. It is only the energy of the power of God working through us that can give us the assignment that God has for us and can effectively accomplish the assignment. Who really knows how to save the world?

[Verse 8-13 The Mystery of the Ages Revealed – The Unsearchable Riches of Christ.](#)

COMMENTARY:

Paul makes it quite clear here that he is not merely declaring another religious theory or system, but is God's appointed oracle for the revealing of the inscrutable majesty and magnitude of Jesus Christ. The glory of God had been a prevailing theme throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and Prophets. Nor were their concepts confined to finite deities of heaven and earth whose imagined province was to give or withhold goods and grain. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the prophets of the true God were able to reach out and grasp a universal Deity who “called the stars by their names.” The problem for them arose in the appearance of Jesus, whom they must identify as the Messiah and ascribe to Him the attributes, which in their minds, belonged to God alone. After all, their timeless watchword had been “The Lord our God is One.” Paul’s pedigree was incontrovertibly Jewish - Pharisee of the Pharisees; of the tribe of Benjamin; impeccably upholding the Law. On the other hand, he was a Roman citizen, and as such, incontrovertibly a Gentile. It was his unenviable assignment in the economy of God, to prove to his fellow Jews that the maverick young teacher from Capernaum (the center of much of His ministry) was indeed the Messiah; that as the Messiah He possessed also the attributes of God; and that God had granted to the Gentiles an equal place with the Jews in the redemptive process of God. On the other hand, he had to prove to the Gentiles that the Jewish Deity “Yahweh” was more than a provincial counterpart to the gods of the Pantheon. Furthermore, it was his province to line up the Gentiles with the Jews and establish their equality. Who, but the Spirit of God, could accomplish such a formidable task? This, Paul understood thoroughly, to the point of regarding himself only as a vessel-unworthy and totally incapable of declaring the glory of God.

v8 **The least of all the saints...** Was Paul not saintly? Has he not come down through the ages as “Saint Paul?” judging by his own evaluation of himself, as well as of the believers in general, I think he would be most unhappy with that designation. In the first place, of course, his use of the word translated “saint”, in keeping with the Greek word (hagios) had nothing to do with our concept of “saintly” in the English language. As we have explained before at length, to the Greeks the word meant simply “separated.” That, Paul would have accepted, because he was, in fact, separated unto God, as indeed are all believers. In the second place, he was very conscious of his weakness in the flesh- *“In me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing.”* Paul’s insistence that he was the “least of all the saints,” was not in any sense of the word, merely a religious pose. It is popular today to put on a self-effacing cloak of humility, but humility is not something one can “put on.” In the first place, humility is a virtue only to those who have reason to be proud. In the second place, the moment one attempts to be humble, the phony facade goes up. Genuine humility only comes in the recognition of one's complete inadequacy in the flesh and the total reliance on the Holy Spirit to fulfill His purpose within.

v8 **To proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ...** The word (euangelidzo) appears again. It is not adequate to say that Paul was merely “preaching” the unsearchable riches of Christ. He was proclaiming (as in “victory proclamation”) a divine revelation relative to the glory of the Son of God, which was incapable of being communicated through human capacities. The word (anexichniadzo) refers to something that cannot even be explored. So the riches of Christ could only be revealed and comprehended by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. It had to be a direct message from God. Did Paul actually have this direct revelation? Let the text speak for itself. If God is in it, it will affect one's spirit. In a certain sense, the glory of Christ can only be absorbed by the spirit. The mind does not have the capacity to appropriate it. But that is why there is the necessity of a communion between God and the Spirit of God within us. So Jesus tells the woman of Samaria *“They that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23,24).

v9 **And to enlighten all as to the stewardship [economy] of the mystery...** As in English, words have many different applications. The word (oikonomiu) on the one hand, refers to the assignment one has within the household; on the other hand, it may be used to refer to the entire domestic and commercial enterprise of the household. Our word “economy” may refer to an entire system by which a nation supplies the needs of its people, or it may refer to a method of frugality. In the first usage of the word in this passage, Paul refers to his own assignment or stewardship. In the second usage of the word, he is referring to the entire process of redemption with which God recovered His people. This process was a mystery which was not understood in previous ages, because God had not chosen to reveal it at that time. But now, according to Paul, it pleased God to disclose His universal purposes not only to those of the earth, but to those who occupied the spirit realm of the supra heavenlies. (Epiouranous) (*Third Heaven/Spirit realm*)

In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul declared that the whole meaning of the crucifixion of Christ was hidden from Satan's emissaries, because had they known what was going to be the ultimate effect of it, *“They would not have crucified the Lord of glory”* (2:8). So apparently Satan and his ambassadors of ill will did not know what was going to take place in the coming of Jesus to the earth. Herod, one of these agents, sought to kill the child Jesus. Other attempts were made on the life of Jesus during His sojourn on the earth (Capernaum, e. g.). So when Satan had Jesus on the cross, through his Jewish and Roman agents, he thought he had finally destroyed Him. Little did he realize that he had begun the process of his own destruction.

Let those who deal in extrasensory perception (ESP) and the occult take note that Satan did not, in fact, know the future events having to do with Jesus. Nor does he know the future events having to do with this world. Astrologers and fortune tellers and those who deal in ESP are able by clever carnival illusions, to persuade the gullible that they are actually telling the future. *Why aren't they picking the winning lotto numbers instead?* By the use of vagaries and self-fulfilling prophecies, they entrap those who desperately want to know the future and will grasp at any straw. The future belongs to God and not Satan.

v10 **To the rulers and to the authorities in the heavenly places...** (Epiouranous) (*Third Heaven/Spirit realm*). We are obviously not dealing here with earthly rulers. These are apparently agents of Satan who occupy a certain level of the spirit realm.

v10 **Through the church...** The body of believers on earth are the witnesses to redemption and to the grace of God which sustains His people in the midst of Satan's evil world. The believer may be battered and bruised in the fleshly “cocoon,” but the spirit, which is the fortress of faith, remains intact. This is the great witness to Satan of God's ultimate power to sustain His people and overthrow the enemy. Whatever troubles one may have in the flesh - whatever weaknesses; whatever failures the spirit is guarded by the power of God against the penetration of the enemy (I Peter 1:3-9).

- v10 **The multifaceted wisdom of God...** The word “wisdom” is (sophia). It has nothing to do with the petty processes of the earthly odyssey, but with the meaning of God and the universe. Who are we? Where do we come from? What is life? What is its end? And this indeed is the kind of wisdom that God gives to His people. The very presence of His Holy Spirit in our spirits makes us aware of the ultimate implications of the universe that He made. This was the kind of wisdom the Greeks sought, when they came to Jesus and were rebuffed - because they were not seeking redemption, but knowledge; as the Jews were not seeking salvation, but signs. The wisdom that God was revealing, both to the world at large as well as to the whole realm of the spirit-could only be described as “multifaceted.”
- v11 **According to the purpose of the ages...** God is Spirit. The essence of His eternal existence is limitless energy and timelessness. Into such an infinite realm He evolved a “moment” of space and time. This moment has been identified in Scripture as “the ages.” The earth is part of this process. In this moment of time, God fulfilled a segment of His eternal purposes. In this segment of time, God accomplished a particular purpose. This purpose was now being revealed through the church as a wondrous project of God to bring into being a host of creatures who would be very like Himself and reflect His glory throughout eternity. To be like Himself they must have free will, but at the same time a risk was involved. Aware of the risk, God provided a process by which free-will creatures would be able to voluntarily identify with Him and join Him for eternity. This process was called - “redemption.” The entire process, from the beginning of the space-time era, was accomplished through Jesus Christ.
- v12 **In whom we have boldness and access with confidence...** The word for “boldness” (parresian) is derived from two words which mean “freedom of speech” or “expression.” The Greeks prided themselves on their liberty to explore the realm of ideas freely, The idea of “boldness has to do not with rightful demands, but rather with the liberty to come openly before God. It goes hand in hand with access. The common translation - boldness is often interpreted as meaning that we are in a position to “boldly” make demands of God- “You said.” This is not the flavor of the word at all. It means that there is a steady flow between ourselves and God which gives us an immediate access and does not depend on human religious exercise. Through the Holy Spirit in our spirits there is a constant communion between ourselves and Christ, in spite of our own human weaknesses (Romans 8:26), The word “access” is another one of those pivotal words in the Bible on which rests the entire case of God's relationship to humans. Through Christ, the chasm of human sin has been bridged, providing an abundance of grace for our interaction with Him. And this is with confidence - a word which has to do with persuasion or conviction. We have in our spirits, the inexplicable conviction that God has opened His door to us.
- v12 **Through the faith of Him...** It is common among humans - in spite of numerous texts to the contrary - to think of faith as something that they must exercise as part of the conditions of having their prayers answered. Thus, if one does not receive the help one needs, it is assumed that it is because of a lack of faith (among other things). The vital question is - Where does faith come from? Is it something we bring forth out of a human reservoir of determination? Can we ever simply exercise a certain amount of mental control and will to have more faith? The truth of the matter is that faith is a gift of God and cannot be developed through religious exercise. The faith we have is actually the faith of Christ which has been ministered to us through the Holy Spirit. It has nothing to do with religious exercise per se. Christ resides in our spirits and with Him is His own faith. The fruit of the Spirit is faith (Galatians 5:22). When we have Christ, we have His faith. Paul states that he “lives by the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). He did not say faith in the Son of God, but the faith of the Son of God. (The Greek text uses the genitive case here which is normally used as the case of possession.) It is far better to rely on the faith of Christ than to rely on the human feelings of trust. In that way we avoid putting God to the test with *“if I only could have enough faith God will...”*.
- v13 **Not to become fainthearted at my afflictions...** The multitude of Paul’s afflictions might cause some to lose spirit and wonder why God treated His servant so. Paul encourages them to realize that his very afflictions were part of the price he paid in his constant war with the enemy on their behalf. As surely as he brought to them the message of redemption, which would yield their glorification, Satan would press the battle against him to prevent that message from being delivered.

Verse 14-21 The Impact of the Energy of God Working Within Us.

COMMENTARY:

Compared to the rest of the universe, we humans are only an ionized particle in the vastness of space. We are not admitted to the fraternity of believers, as to a club, on the basis of our capacity to fulfill the obligations of membership. Rather, we are imbued with the Spirit and energy of God, in which process we become partakers of His divine nature (II Peter 1:4). Only thus can we particles achieve the capacity to identify with God. Outside of this process, we could no more interact with the God of the universe than could an ant interact with a human – in fact, far less. To speak of humans coming to believe by way of human rationale and regulation is totally absurd. So now we come to the substance and realities of our relationship to Christ as revealed by Paul in Ephesians 3.

- v14 **For this cause...** For what cause? For the cause of God's energizing process in the building of the Body of Christ, which unites Jew and Gentile and grows into a "Holy Temple" and a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. As is typical of Paul, there is a considerable parenthesis between the first expression of cause and its repetition.
- v14 **I bow my knees...** An act both of humility and worship. There was none more humble than Paul. In numbers of references to his own inadequacy, he was quite certain that his own human capacities had little to do with the energy and revelation of God through His Spirit. He was certainly not putting on a pose when he regarded himself as the "least of the apostles;" to say nothing of his assumption that he was the "chief of sinners." As one who had led Christians to their executions, he was probably not unjustified in his assumption. He was most emphatic in his conviction that he could have "no confidence in the flesh."
- v15 **From whom every family [race] ... is named ...** The word (patria) is very broad and not too precise. It can refer to race or tribe or family. What Paul means here is not altogether clear, but certainly alludes to the fact that all human life, of whatever anthro-pological or sociological origin, is ultimately from Him.
- v16 **That He may grant to you, according to the riches of His glory ...** Whatever follows now, in respect to God's interaction with humans, is based upon His limitless glory and fullness. The word "riches" obviously does not have to do with material substance, per se. His is a fullness that goes quite beyond all finite corporeality and, of course, there is a limitless reservoir of power out of which God interacts with His people.
- v16 **To be in the grip of His power ...** There are different words for "strength" and "power." It is quite important that we distinguish between them. They are not used simply as synonyms. The first word (krataio) has to do with the grip of power. It is the basis of such words as "democracy" - "power to the people"; "aristocracy" - "power to the few," etc. These words all have to do with being in the grip of, or under the power of. When we possess Christ in our spirits, we are in His "grip." That is a very comforting thought, given the vastness of the universe and the frailty of our flesh. If you want to be in His power, you are. If you did not have His Spirit in you, you would not want to be.
- (Dunamis) is the power by which God prevails in the affairs of earth. Whereas the word (energeo) has to do with intrinsic power – "energizing" – (Dunamis) has to do with extrinsic power. It is the power by which God created and sustains the universe. The point is made in the Psalms (147:3-5) that He who had the power to create the universe and name the stars, has also the sensitivity to deal with human hearts. *"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power; His understanding is infinite."*
- v16 **In the inner man ...** The flesh is totally unreliable. Paul believed it to be so and expresses that in no uncertain terms. The human person is capable of great heights - in a sense, very like God. By the same token, it is capable of great depths. History is strewn with the wreckage of those who have achieved great things in their lifetime and have ultimately been shipwrecked on the treacherous shoals of some area of human weakness. The phrase - "power corrupts" - is all too familiar in our society. That is not to denigrate the achievement or to berate the fallen; it is merely an observation about the unreliability of the human nature. But, of course, the flesh is, after all, but a cocoon - transient and temporary. The true strength is in the inner man - the spirit - which, possessed by Christ, will prevail despite the weakness of the flesh. This is God's promise to us - *"Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy"* (Jude 24).
- v17 **That Christ may settle down in your hearts...** The Greek word (katoikeo) means more than simply "to dwell." It has a note of permanence and intimacy. In a figure of speech, He is not an "absentee landlord." Nor does He come and go like a "finicky visitor." (This is not an uncommon thought among those who think that Christ visits only as long as He is treated right.)
- v17 **Through faith ...** His own faith opens the door and sustains the relationship.

- v17 **Rooted in love and founded [in love]** ...The permanence of His relationship to us is established through a root system in one figure, and a foundation in another. The root system is already there in infinite depth. When we are grafted, as the branches to the vine, we become part of that root system. Moreover, the building in another figure, is already established, with Christ as the “Keystone,” and we are merely fitted into it in the place that He has assigned to us. His love, as His faith, is part of the flow of divine energy that establishes the connection.
- v18 **That you may be utterly able to [apprehend]** ... (ischuno) means “to be able” or “to have the strength to.” The addition of a preposition - (ek) (or in this case “ex”), enhances the verb and makes it much stronger. In Greek we call it the “perfectivizing” use of the preposition - a very common device. Here it means that one is not only able, but utterly able. In a similar sense, the word for “comprehend” - (katalambano) is made up from the word (lambano), which means “to receive” and (kata), which is more than receiving - but “comprehending” or “apprehending,” which means “to appropriate.” The Spirit of God within us gives us the capacity to take in the meaning of God’s love and make it a part of us.
- v18 **Breadth and length and height and depth** ... We are dealing here with dimensions beyond the human capacity. We talk about the “fourth dimension” and consider it mathematically, but it is still beyond the experience and the perception of three-dimensional creatures. If we were two-dimensional creatures we would not be able to perceive depth. Apparently the fourth-dimensional factor expressed in this text is the ability to conceive of the heights, which would bring us into touch with God. This can only be perceived with the touch of the Holy Spirit in our spirits.
- v19 **To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge** ... How can we know something that is beyond knowing? We experience it and apprehend it through the presence of Christ within our spirits. We cannot “learn to love others.” We cannot make it a religious exercise. We cannot develop it in sociological efforts to relate to others. It can only truly be expressed by the Spirit of Christ reaching out beyond our fleshly sense of love and touching others at a deeper level. Paul said, “The love of Christ constrains [compels] us” (II Corinthians 5:14). The love of Christ loves others through us. We cannot learn to love as Christ loved. His love reaches out in spite of our inadequate capacity for true love. Of course, this is the love of caring - really much deeper than the love of affection. We do not always like the people we care about “with the caring love of Christ.
- v19 **Filled with all the fullness of God** ... How can we human “mites” possess the fullness of God? Only by the energizing power of the Holy Spirit who lifts us from the realm of the finite to the realm of the infinite. It is like the computer chip - a mere bit of silicone, but touched with energy becomes a vital part of the computer program. Possessing Christ within us, we are de facto transformed into a particle of divine energy – “partakers of the divine nature.” No amount of religious exercise or fervent effort will ever accomplish this. This was the message Christ continually sought to bring to the Pharisees, who continued to assume that they had the capacity to satisfy God’s requirement. This does not mean that we will act like God, but rather, possessed of His nature, become part of His Spirit realm to dwell with Him forever. Actually, the Spirit of God within us makes us now eternal.
- v20 **The power to do exceedingly abundantly** ... The Greek word (perissos) by itself means “great abundance.” To this word is added a preposition - ek - which lifts the word beyond “great abundance” to “extraordinary abundance.” To this Paul adds still another preposition (huper) which carries the word even further to heights beyond human imagining. And so He says further that it is “*above all things which we ask or think.*” Unfortunately, this superlative promise, which according to the context focuses on the transforming of our human spirits into something of the nature of God, has been beggared by identifying it with the attaining of earthly benefits from God. It is like children comparing notes on what mom and dad have done for them today. It is important to note that Paul experienced very little of earthly or material benefits in his unstinting efforts to carry the message of the glory of God and the reflecting of that glory in His people. His catalog of afflictions leave little room for earthly bliss. Nor does he promise it to the people of God. His promise of the supply of earthly needs, like the promise of Jesus, extends to food and clothing. Paul echoes that thought to Timothy - “*Having food and raiment let us be therewith content*” (I Timothy 6:8). That is not to say that one cannot have earthly possessions, but that they should not become the focus of one’s life. Nor is it to say that one could not pray to God for material help. That seems to be a common practice in the Scripture. But, there are no guarantees as far as this world is concerned. It is completely unsound to make the answer to material requests a test either of God or of our own faith.
- v20 **According to the power which energizes us** ... This has not to do with our capacity to extract something from God, but rather His capacity to transform us and transfer us into His kingdom.
- v21 **To Him is the glory in the church** ... As surely as He is in us, and among us, we reflect His glory back to Him. “*We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of Christ*” (II Corinthians 3:18). What greater glory could there be than God’s own glory reflected back to Him? So also was God glorified in His Son Jesus Christ - the very image of His Person. In Jesus’ own words - “*Now has the Son of man been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him. If God has been glorified in Him, God also shall glorify Himself in Him ...*” (John 13:31,32). It follows then that the church is also glorified with Christ, since “*He is the Head of the body*” and the body is “*the fullness of the One who fulfills all things*” (Ephesians 1:23). The magnitude of this declaration is beyond the capacity of the mind to grasp, but our spirits appropriate it beyond the mind.

v21 **Unto all generations forever** ... (genea) has not to do with time, but progeny. When Jesus said to His Disciples - *"This generation will not pass away till all these things be fulfilled."* He was not speaking of time, but of His family - Israel. And so it has been. Perhaps no ethnic group on earth has been more threatened with genocide than Israel. But still they remain. And so they shall remain, in spite of all efforts of Middle Eastern hostility to eliminate them. And so also with the Church which has become a part of Israel entering into God's covenant and promises. One of the great testimonies to the veracity of the Scriptures is the fact that that nation, Israel, but a tiny dot on the face of the globe and surrounded by a billion of her avowed enemies stretching from the Caucasus Mountains south to Africa and from to the Atlantic in the west to the Pacific in the east, still exists today. And, as God promised to Abraham and to the prophets of the ages, his people will remain forever.

5th Week.

Unity of the Spirit.

CHAPTER 4:1-16

Verse 1-6 The Binding Cord of Peace.

Verse 7-10 The Measure of God's Immeasurable Gifts.

Verse 11-13 The Process of the Building of the Body.

Verse 14-16 The Fitting and Knitting of the Body of Christ

6th Week.

The Christian's Walk.

CHAPTER 4:17-32

Verse 17-24 The Emptiness and Deceptiveness of Godless Behavior.

COMMENTARY:

Ephesus was a commercial and cultural crossroads on the western edge of the Eastern world. When Paul spoke of Asia, he was referring to what we know today as Asia Minor, which now comprises Turkey. At the time of Paul, Ephesus was a port city on the Aegean Sea. At the present time, the location of the ruins of Ephesus is many miles from the sea, the harbor having been completely filled up with silt. The remnants of its former magnificence are clearly evident in its marble paved boulevards and fluted columns and arcades of mosaic tile. There the caravan trails met from the East and the North and the South while ships came from western seas. Like most port cities, it was the crossroads of culture. There the religions and philosophies of the world mingled and left their mark. The primary religion of the city was devotion to the goddess Diana or Artemis, for whom they erected a splendid temple at the northern edge of the city. In addition to the Gentile nations, the Jews were there, having been dispersed from the city of Rome, where they were no longer welcome. The word (ethne) was the Greek counterpart of the Hebrew Goyim. It referred to all who were non-Jews. In the Old Testament it was synonymous with "godless" or "pagan." There was a large community of Christians as well as of Jews. This has a good deal of bearing on the content of the book of Ephesians and, in a particular sense, in the book of Revelation, which is strongly focused on the Jews and the Middle East. In fact, much of the book focuses on events that take place after the believers are in heaven. Some epistles were written particularly to the "Diaspora" or the Jews of the Dispersion - Hebrews, James, I Peter and II Peter. These, like all of the books of the Bible, have some universal applications and some specific applications. It is well to keep this in mind, especially in view of cultural changes that have taken place in the world since the Bible was written. That is not to take away anything from the principles, but rather from the applications of the principles. Furthermore, it is well to recognize that, in principle, the New Testament speaks to the believers as having been liberated from the law and brought under the grace of Christ. The essential point of this is not that behavior does not matter, but rather that it is not the basis of salvation. Thus, we are members of the family of Christ and embraced by Him as His children, who, though sometimes out of order, are not *de facto* "thrown out of the house." There are a great many guideposts in the New Testament that are most important, if not essential, to a life of peace and harmony, but do not cause Christ to turn away from us. This is not to take away from the importance of these principles, but rather to put them in the New Testament perspective. In the Old Testament, failure to follow the law could bring penalties as severe as death.

v17 **No longer walk as the Gentiles walk...** It is obvious here that Paul is making a distinction between believers and nonbelievers in his reference to the Gentiles or the nations. Many of the believers were behaving in the same manner as the nonbelievers in some respects, but were, nevertheless, not classified with them. The characteristics of the behavior of the nonbelievers could hardly be true of believers, and yet Paul says only "Don't be like them." The believers, even when misbehaving, are hardly "alienated from the life of God." Similarly, being "delivered up unto the practicing of all uncleanness and greed" is different than the careless and sometimes greedy actions of the believers. This is not to soften the seriousness of behavior patterns in the believers, but rather to refrain from disowning them from the family of Christ.

v21 **As the truth [reality] is in Jesus.** The word "truth" has been used very carelessly. It has often been applied to the teachings of a given sect or denomination - "We have the truth." The Greek word used here is "reality." There is a vast difference between reality and truth. Truth is the verbalizing of reality and depends for its accuracy on the capacity of the one who is thus defining reality. Only God has absolute truth. We humans can only exercise relative truth. That is to say, that the perfect articulation of reality is beyond human capacity. The best we humans can do is to offer a certain degree of accuracy in the use of words, based upon careful scholarship. The idea that the Holy Spirit will give us the words in spite of our own lack of scholarship has led to a great deal of confusion and tragedy in the church. The claims to direct revelations from the Holy Spirit have been legend throughout the church as have been the misguided commitment to unsound teachings, such as the identifying of the time of the return of Christ. The tragedy is not so much the consequences for the individual leader, but for the large number of followers who are depending on the leader for responsible guidance. If one is going to lead the people of God one ought to be adequately equipped to do so. The word "truth" is crucial here. We must be careful how we use it. Remember that the English word "truth" is applied to the process of articulating reality. The reality of Christ within us is absolute. The capacity to define and describe that presence is relative.

v22 **[That] you put off ... the old man ... and put on the new man ...** The most fundamental question here is this - Is Paul addressing believers or unbelievers? The next question is - If he is addressing believers, what, in his mind, is their condition? If unbelievers, what are they doing in a letter to believers? We must examine the text very carefully and avoid the temptation to use it as leverage to "keep the believers in line."

To examine the text we must look at some very important definitions. First of all, to whom does the expression "Gentiles" refer? The Greek word is (ethne). It is actually the New Testament counterpart of *Goyim* which referred to everyone who was not a Jew. In that context it was assumed that all non-Jews were pagans. It was not necessarily true that there were no believers in God outside the Jews but that was the common usage of the term. The Greek word was far broader in application, especially outside the New Testament. But Paul apparently reverts to the Old Testament usage and is taking about all who were unbelievers. Here it is important to understand that a great many of those whom Paul was addressing in Ephesus were, as a matter of fact, part of the Diaspora - the Jews who had been exiled from Rome. Secondly, we must determine what is meant by "the old man" and "the new man." We must also determine how these terms can be applied to believers. First of all Paul's description of the (ethne) could not possibly apply to believers, since they are described as being alienated from the life of God. He concludes the description by saying to the believers, "but you have not so learned Christ." Furthermore, there would be no point in telling unbelievers to put off the old man and put on the new. What he is saying to the believers is that they were behaving like the unbelievers, in spite of the fact that they had received the life of Christ within them. Of course, the life of Christ is given to our spirits in the new birth experience and, while it inevitably has certain effects on the natural personality, there are no guarantees. The believers still have to struggle with the flesh, as Paul himself makes abundantly clear. It is in this area of the natural propensities of the flesh that Paul discusses the problems of the "old man."

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul makes a very definitive statement relative to the "old man." *"Now you also, put off all [these] things - anger, wrath, unsound behavior, blasphemy, shameful communication out of your mouths. Lie not one to another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge according to the image of the One who created him ..."* (Colossians 3:8-10). It is obvious here, that Paul sees unsound behavior patterns in the believers - in spite of their having put off the old man with his deeds. The assumption is that if one has been truly touched by the Holy Spirit, one will automatically undergo a change of behavior patterns. Some things do seem to change; many things do not. Apparently, in Paul's view, these behavior patterns do not constitute a test of whether or not one is in Christ or, for that matter, whether or not one has been filled with the Spirit. In connection with these admonitions, both in Colossians and in Ephesians, Paul does not classify the struggling believers in terms of "backsliding." The word is itself of human origin. The Bible does not use the expression anywhere. In fact, Paul himself, by his own admission, was often struggling with the flesh. What his problems were, he never indicates, but does admit to a continual struggle: "Without were fighting's within were fears" (II Corinthians 7:5). In the Colossians passage, Paul regards the believers as having already put off the old man and put on the new. It then becomes a matter of watching one's conduct in view of the position one occupies with Christ.

Paul does not deny the struggle, nor does he give the believers license to be careless. In the discussion of these issues throughout the New Testament, the crucial point is that whereas in the Old Testament the keeping of the law was the basis of redemption; in the New Testament, salvation has been purchased by Christ and conduct becomes a matter of propriety rather than a price of redemption. The believer is not disowned from the family, but must face the consequences of one's choices.

Personality has a great deal to do with one's conduct. Whether that personality has been based upon genetic factors or acquired habits and attitudes, behavior patterns are a fact of life with which we all must contend. It is patently true that the struggle varies considerably from person to person. Things that may be a continual problem to some people are readily handled by others. This does not excuse behavior, but only explains it. The consolation is that the Bible recognizes weakness in the individual and promises the strength of Christ in the midst of it. Such understanding is also the basis for a proper relationship between believers, taking into account the issue of weaknesses: *"We that are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves"* (Romans 15:1).

In what way then does God help us? What does it mean to put on the new man? When we are reborn or when the Holy Spirit comes into our spirits, we undergo a change of attitude. We have a new relationship to God and a new attitude toward Him. We also have a new attitude toward ourselves and toward others. We have a new attitude toward the world and the meaning of life. The new relationship to God gives us the privilege of asking for His strength in living our lives in the world. Our own weakness puts us in a position of making it necessary to stay close to Christ. The new perspective we have on life and the world gives us the motivation to live appropriately and to engage in the struggle. The Spirit of Christ within us reaches out to others through us. It is common for believers to have an attitude of caring toward others. The problems usually come from fleshly reactions. We do not always like the people we care about. Often their own attitude and conduct toward us fosters the dislike. The Bible never says that we have to like people. It does say that we care about them. The Spirit within us causes us to pray for people that we do not care to be involved with personally.

v24 **Having been created in tightness and benevolence of reality ...** The word "holiness" is not the same as "sanctifying." It is rather akin to the word for "mercies." It is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament Hebrew word *Chesed*, which meant "mercies," as extended to others. It is used by Isaiah to refer to the mercies extended by God to David - *"I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David"* (Isaiah 55:3). When we have come to Christ, our attitude has been changed toward God and others. We have come to a new sense of what is real. Jesus said, *"You shall know the truth [reality] and reality shall make you free"* (John 8:32). The freedom that we experience in Christ gives us the divine perspective on life, including the meaning of mercy.

[Verse 25-32 Further Concerns Regarding Appropriate Behavior.](#)

COMMENTARY:

To put this passage in proper perspective, it is essential to understand that these are very important considerations, but not in the nature of distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable believers. James said in regard to the keeping of the law, that to be guilty of one point is to be guilty of the whole law (2:10). The New Testament standard is that good behavior is important, but not the basis of salvation. Whatever may be the weaknesses of the flesh - and Paul makes a strong point of this - one may work with them in conjunction with the Spirit of Christ. Salvation does not bring a complete recovery of all human weakness, but puts one in a position to handle weakness within the context of a familial relationship. Parents work with their young people in terms of weaknesses, but do not throw them out of the family (normally).

We were born into the world with basic human weaknesses, which are the result of the Fall. We also have a whole slate of traits which are genetically oriented. This combination of things makes it very difficult for human beings to perform adequately. It is unrealistic to assume that we will get a handle on these traits prior to adulthood, if then. Many decisions are made during the early years which will affect us all of our lives. And yet, they must be made with a very limited self-knowledge. In a sound family relationship, these problems are understood and we try to give such help as will be accepted. By the same token we are members of the family of Christ and we can depend on Him to be understanding about the faulty nature of human personality traits. David, the psalmist (who ought to know) describes the attitude of God toward His people - *"Like as father pitieth [has mercy on] His children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust"* (Psalm 103:13,14). We must understand that Christ is not the "Headmaster of an orphanage," but the Father of His children. He wants us to succeed with our lives and is anxious to help us. The instructions He gives through His apostles, are not intended as tests of salvation or sanctification, but rather guideposts in a hostile world, where we have limited equipment.

v25 **Putting away falsehood ...** Given the nature of the word (aletheia), this could almost be translated - "Be real with one another because we are members of the same family."

v26 **Be angry and sin not ...** Anger is a common part of human emotions, but should stop short of wronging others in turn. Jesus was angry with the Pharisees even to the extent of a violent reaction, but he did not commit any sin. Anger has a way of festering, and Paul suggests letting go of it before it does.

- v28 **Let the one who steals, no longer steal ...** It is obvious here that Paul was regarding the indolent practices of the believers as a form of stealing. Some had given up their work because they expected the immediate return of Christ. He did not want any “freeloaders.”
- v29 **Let not any foul words go out of your mouths ...** Paul does not go into any specifics here, but every generation in every culture has its polluted language forms. He is not talking here about slang expressions, which may be somewhat uncouth, but language admittedly filthy or gross. Generally speaking, people know when they are engaging in such, but one must guard against getting into such a habit as to become insensitive to it.
- v30 **Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ...** The nature of the emotions which might be ascribed to the Holy Spirit is uncertain. However, the Greek word here means to “vex” or “distress.” What is certain is that the actions of believers are not always acceptable to Him. One can usually sense when this is so. On the other hand, such actions do not “break the seal” which secures our salvation. There are those in some quarters that feel that our salvation is a very fragile thing, which can be disrupted by human failure. This attitude is not in keeping with such a text as this one, as well as many others throughout the New Testament.
- v31 **Let them be taken away from you ...** Paul gives a catalogue of human practices and attitudes that he finds among the believers and warns against them. Apparently he is not saying that they will reflect a lack of salvation, but rather that they will bring one to grief. Each of the items represents a careless or dangerous emotional level which should be brought under control. It is interesting to note that the word (kakia) is a word which Paul uses concerning himself in Romans 7. It means “unsound behavior,” without specifying the nature of it. It was part of Paul's struggle with his own personality. He did not find it acceptable with himself any more than with other believers. Blasphemy was a very serious offense as expressed by Jesus, but apparently had a more moderate meaning in the context of believers. Paul suggests discipline for some “that they may learn not to blaspheme” (I Timothy 1:20). Such blasphemy was apparently forgivable.
- v32 **Gracious, compassionate, forgiving ...** These were the characteristics Paul urged upon the believers in contrast to the human frailties. Apparently such traits did not come automatically with salvation or the filling of the Spirit, but rather to be cultivated. (chrestoi) means “agreeable” or “obliging.” It has to do with the expression of kindness. (eusplangchnoi) has to do with the viscera, which were commonly used to express feelings of compassion. Paul suggests that the believers should “rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). (charidzomai) has its roots in the word for “grace” – “a flow of benevolence.” But remember that forgiveness requires both parties - the forgiver and the seeker of forgiveness. Apart from that interaction, one may overlook an offense, but cannot really forgive it without the other party. Jesus forgave the Roman soldiers because they were not involved in the family of God. When there is a genuine seeking of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit will give one the grace to forgive.

This is a difficult passage, because it is assumed, in the first place, that “putting off the old man” is an exercise that the believers ought to engage in. In Colossians 3, Paul assumes that there are personality problems among believers who are both “dead” and have “put off the old man” (Colossians 3:1-10). Apparently “putting on the new man” is what Paul is referring to in II Corinthians 5:17. The word “all” is not in the original text, but merely suggests that when we have come to Christ we have become new. Our spirits have been changed from “mortality” to “immortality.” The renewal takes place in our spirits, but does not automatically change our fleshly natures. This is the only practical explanation of the fact that throughout the history of Christendom - both in the New Testament era, as well as the succeeding generations of Christians, personality problems and behavioral problems have been constantly part of the struggle. But let it be well remembered that the struggle is itself an indication of the presence of Christ within us. Else we would not struggle. And we can expect Christ to help us in the struggle.

7th Week.

Be Imitators of God.

CHAPTER 5:1-20

Verse 1-5 Continued Thoughts On Appropriate Conduct.

COMMENTARY

Paul continues his penetrating examination of matters of conduct that were rampant among the nonbelievers, but unfortunately being practiced by some of the believers. They were acting like the pagan society, even though they were, in fact, believers. And this is the crucial consideration. Could they still be identified as children of God, even though they were being careless in their behavior patterns? It is easy to forget what is the true nature of the children of God. We are not His children because we are flawless in our actions. The Pharisees were never questioned by Christ as to their meticulous keeping of the law. In fact, he said that they even tithed the spices for cooking - "mint and anise and cumin." His quarrel with them was that they did not possess the love of God. They kept the letter of the law very well, but not the spirit of it. The essence of salvation is the new birth - the possessing of the life of Christ within.

But doesn't the coming of Christ to our spirits change us?

Can one be a Christian and still practice some of the things that Paul talks about here?

The answer to that question is apparent from the very text that we are considering. Paul never addressed the immoralities of the pagan society. He simply did not want the believers joining with them in their pagan practices. He encourages them to walk in love, which is not something that he would have urged upon the unbelievers. He does state later on that those whose practices the believers were engaged in were not themselves going to "have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." We will discuss that in more detail later. The whole issue is that the believers ought rather to behave in an appropriate manner as becomes those who are the followers of God. The word Paul uses for "followers" - (*mimetai*) - is the basis of our word "mimic" or "imitator." The common Greek usage was more "to resemble" or "use as an example" than actually to imitate - something not possible for humans to do in the case of God. Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount, to "be perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," uses a Greek word - (*teleo*) - which means to be fulfilled or consummated. It does not mean "flawless" (something He certainly would not have urged upon the Pharisees).

v2 **Walk in love** ... It is vital that we understand the meaning of the word "love" as it is used here. It is the word (*agape*) and not (*phile*). We have examined these words and explained that (*agape*) has to do with the caring that is born of the Spirit and reaches out to others apart from emotional involvement. In a sense it "bypasses" the mental process of the psyche or soul. (*Phile*) on the other hand, does involve the emotions and is the common word for family or friends. Thus Christ can urge us to "love our enemies," even though we do not like them or approve of them. Galatians 5:22 indicates that such love is a fruit of the Spirit. Paul is not telling the Galatians that if they have Christ in them, they should develop these virtues. He is rather saying that they are resident within our spirits, as the Holy Spirit is resident within. The problem comes in the effort to express these virtues in our human souls. Thus, we care about people that we may not like at all, and find ourselves praying for them. This is what Jesus meant when He said to pray for those that "despitefully" use us (Matthew 5:44). And this is the word used for the "love" of Christ. We can love as Christ loved because His Spirit in us reaches out to others through us. This is also the word used of Christ's love for the world. It was not an emotional thing, but a caring thing. People often mistake emotional reactions with the work of the Spirit. The Spirit does not Himself endow one with emotional reactions. That is a matter of the personality. People react differently to stimuli. Some are excitable and will react with exuberance to things that are basically human. Others do not react exuberantly in human situations, even where there is great stimulus. Those who feel comfortable in an atmosphere charged with emotional expression may assume that those who do not so react are not being touched by the Holy Spirit. This is a grave error and has caused considerable distress among those whose personalities are different. Groups of people that focus on outward expression are not more "spiritual" than groups that don't. The truth of the matter is that people are attracted to the situations that fit their own personalities. And so it is with (*agape*) love. Those whose personalities are extrovertive are more likely to include warmth of affection with their "caring consciousness," than those who are more introvertive. Salvation does not necessarily change this. Remember that salvation has to do with the coming of life; it does not govern the quality of that life in the fleshly sense.

The love of Christ is identified with the offering of Himself as a sacrifice. His care for the world brought Him to this. His emotional suffering was great as He faced the prospect of being charged with the sins of the world, though He was innocent and "spotless." Jesus said that there was no greater love than laying down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). This was a statement about human love (*phile*). Divine love lays down one's life for one's enemies. Such love is beyond the capacity of the natural flesh, but is a fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Fornication [sexual perversion] ... all foulness or greediness ... The word translated fornication - (porneia) - comes from the word (pornos), which means “harlot.” The word was always used by the Greeks, for sexual perversion or orgiastic behavior. It did not refer to the liaisons of lovers, however indiscreet or unacceptable such activity might be. Paul devoted a special section in his letter to the Corinthians (Ch. 6), on the subject of prostitution. He warned the believers not to “make their bodies, which belonged to Christ, members of the body of a harlot.” Corinth was notorious for its prostitution and had, on the hill behind the city, the temple of Apollo, which was a gathering place for prostitutes. Ephesus was no less such a place. As a port city, seamen were especially welcome in the “sin centers” and were even directed by arrows imprinted in the sidewalks to the houses of ill fame. This is not to say that extramarital affairs among believers were condoned, but were not necessarily regarded in the same light as the sexual perversion implied in (porneia).

(Akatharsia), by the same token, was a word that went beyond simple human misbehavior. Purity of thought, word and deed is, of course, a desirable objective of Christian behavior. This particular usage of the word, however, puts it in the category of things that are characteristic of unbelievers, who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul is not saying that these are things that keep unbelievers from inheriting the kingdom of God, but rather that they are practiced by those who do not inherit the kingdom of God. We have a clue to the usage of this word in the statement of Jesus in regard to the vine and branches of John 15. He uses the antonym of (akatharsia) - (katharos) - in connection with pruning. In an obvious reference to Israel, as the unfruitful vineyard of Isaiah 5, he says that because it did not bear fruit it will be destroyed. The meaning clearly is a reference to the apostasy of Israel in turning away from God, rather than misbehavior, which had been rather common among His people. On the other hand, there was a remnant that was faithful to God and therefore bearing fruit, but needing to be purified or “pruned” in terms of the ultimate purpose of God in the coming of the Messiah. Jesus uses the word (katharos) for this process and says that it had already had been done with the disciples. One of their number, Judas, however, had not been so pruned or purified. Jesus used a similar concept in the earlier “foot washing” incident. The impulsive Peter had declined to have Jesus wash his feet, but Jesus said, “If I do not wash you, you will have no part with me.” Peter immediately responded in his usual brashness - “Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” Jesus responded that those who had been purified needed only to have their feet washed, because they were already purified. Apparently the symbolism of the foot-washing was intended to convey that while the followers of Christ were indeed pure in God's sight, the “walk” in this life was likely to have its tarnishing effects.

Paul's usage of (akatharsia) comports with Jesus' usage of the antonym (katharos) as recorded in John 13 and 15. The unbelievers would be in the position of the apostate Israel, who, unless they would come to Christ, would be gathered up and burned. The believers, who like the disciples had come to Christ, would be in a state of purity before God, as regards their status. However, they had to be warned about impurities that they might pick up in their earthly sojourn. This duality to the usage of the word (akatharsia) clarifies the point that Paul could be warning against practices that were characteristic of those who were ultimately slated for destruction, and yet were still members of the body of Christ. It is nowhere indicated that the practices themselves were the things that were keeping the pagans from salvation, but rather, as with Israel, their complete rejection from God.

Greediness. Once again we are dealing with a characteristic of the pagan world malicious enough to bring down the wrath of God on those whose lives were immersed in it. They were not only given to the common problem of undue focus on material things, but were involved in extortion - a cynical disregard of the welfare of others in the drive for material gain. It is not uncommon for believers to want material things, even to the point of sacrificing other values. In many ways that is inappropriate for the children of God and may lead to problems, but it is forgivable and does not bring about a loss of salvation. Again, even though the kind of extortionism indicated by Paul is reprehensible, yet of itself, does not cause the loss of salvation. As with the children of Israel, God's wrath did not come down upon them for their misdeeds, which were many, but for their rejection of God. They, who had been the object of God's tender care and constant provision, not only rejected him, but turned instead to the heinous practices of other gods. Similarly, the wrath of God does not come upon the world for its immoralities, which, of course, He does not approve, but rather for their rejection of Him and their consequent immersion in the processes of Satan.

Nothing that has been said in this discussion has been intended to minimize the wretchedness of the practices of a godless world, but rather to clarify the implications of this passage for the believers, to give them hope to believe that even though they have often been caught in the maelstrom of human failure, they are not therefore expelled from the kingdom of God. Paul is warning the believers about their conduct and showing that they are “playing in the devil's arcade” and likely to suffer for it. On the other hand, the grace of God is limitless, even as illustrated in the life of Israel, which was a constant source of trouble to God.

In the same vein we must treat another trilogy of words that have to do with human absurdities - vileness, buffoonery, and persiflage (calculated misleading). None of these words have to do with your common “garden variety” of what we consider to be “witty repartee.” “Jesting” is not a good translation for (eutrapelia). In any social gathering of believers there are likely to be jokes and “puns” (a modern usage). That is not what Paul has in mind here. What he does have in mind is communication that arises out of the reservoir of human perversion or the misuse of the mind which God has created as a marvelous instrument. On the other hand, as in the case of the previous trilogy, Christians do get involved in the careless use of God's instrument. However it may be defined and described, Paul is referring to human expressions that are part of the godless milieu of the pagan society. He was well familiar with the debaucheries and the revelries of the Greeks and Romans, all of which were the hallmarks of those who had made a mockery of God's original purpose in His creation. This too, the believers were dabbling with and Paul is giving some strong warning. Like wayward children, they had not denied their heritage, but were treating it with a careless disregard. And yet, they were addressed by Paul as the “beloved of God.”

In conclusion, remember that you are the “beloved of God” and subject to His forgiving grace. The evidence that He is still with you, in spite of human failure, is the reality that you want Him to be with you.

[Verse 6-14 Light Versus Darkness.](#)

[Verse 15-20 The Song of the Spirit.](#)

8th Week.

Marriage Like Christ and the Church.

CHAPTER 5:21-33

Verse 21-33 The Earthly Marriage and the Heavenly One.

COMMENTARY

The Earthly Marriage and the Heavenly One This passage has given rise to much confusion and much mischief. In the first place, the idea of “submission” has been used as an instrument of male ego and exploitation. It would seem that men have been more the recipients of liberty than women. The chains of the Old Testament law have often been used to enslave the women of the New Testament. Paul, who was very sensitive to the issue of the place of the women in the body, said to the Galatians in his great discourse on liberty – *“For as many as were baptized in Christ have put on Christ. For there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:27,28).

So then what is the meaning of Paul's discussion of submission in Ephesians 5? The fundamental point is the meaning of the word translated “submission.” This word, from a word root (taxis), “order” - means “to be in an orderly relationship to.” It is the basis of our English word “taxonomy” which has to do with putting the species in a proper order. So Paul is telling the Christians to be in an orderly relationship to one another. So what does that mean? The basic nature of our relationship to one another is, of course, spirit. That is to say we are united to one another in the spirit. Such a unity supersedes all fleshly differences. It is universally and patently true that Christians everywhere are divided as to specific doctrines and practices and assemblies. There are some groups that insist on a fleshly unity as well as a spirit one. Such ones believe that we are all to have similar views and meet in mutually agreed upon locations. Those who are not in such a fleshly unity are regarded as out of order as far as Christ is concerned. If this is indeed what God intended, there would be very few in His favor. (But this, of course, is what such groups contend.) The reality of the spiritual unity allows for a very extensive number of differences in background, personality, circumstances and many other factors that tend to govern the ways people meet and think. The divisions that Paul spoke of in I Corinthians 3 were intended mostly to show that as long as we are on the earth, we are going to be plagued by many human inadequacies. This is certainly in keeping with Paul's further statements in Chapter 13, that as long as we are on the earth, we are children and behave as children. We will only come to maturity when we have come into our ultimate place with Him. At present it might be said that we humans are really denizens of a “cosmic sandbox.” If we understand this, we greatly reduce the harsh and judgmental attitudes both to ourselves and others.

The message of the great choir of angels at the nativity was that Christ came to bring peace on the earth, especially, as Jesus later indicated, in the spirit. In the push for perfection, we may expect far more of ourselves and of others than God expects. Perfectionism is actually a disease. The biblical use of the word “perfect” has to do with fulfillment of purpose and not with flawless conduct. The church, having taken up the chant of perfection has produced a society of malcontents - unhappy with themselves as well as others. It is not that one should not be diligent to fulfill one's life on the earth, but rather that there should be some measure of mercy, as God has Himself proclaimed. Jesus' message to the Jews, who were under the bondage of the Pharisees, was that they should take His yoke upon them, which was easy and light, and that He would give them rest (Matthew 11:28-30). His peace was not the kind that the world gives - fleshly and circumstantial - but rather peace in the spirit, which supersedes all fleshly and earthly considerations (John 14:27). In the cosmic sandbox, we often “squabble” like children, but Christ presides over this melee with His own mercy and grace. We are children of God, albeit children nevertheless.

These comments have an important bearing on the text before us. Our relationship to one another is indeed familial, as children of God, but, by the same token, subject to the frailties of the flesh. Thus, it must be remembered, while we are certainly fraught with divisions, we are nevertheless part of the family and must deal with one another charitably. In discussing the number of individual differences, in the body of Christ, Paul is very specific about not being judgmental and presses the point that if we are overbearing in our judgment of others, “we are not walking charitably [in love]” (Romans 14:15). It is unfortunate that the body of believers, founded in the matrix of love, should be awash in a flood tide of merciless judgment upon one another, belying the very love of Christ which they so avidly proclaim.

Far from teaching that believers should be under the authority of other believers, “willy - nilly,” it teaches specifically that the relationship between believers should be governed by the kind of love that Christ exhibited in His sacrifice. The instruction to believers, in general, is the same as the instruction to husbands and wives. As the believers are in an orderly relationship to one another, so ought wives should be in an orderly relationship to their husband. The husband is not thus charged with the right of tyranny - to make of his wife an obedient subject, but rather to function toward her as a representative of Christ, in a spirit of love and sacrifice. The husband is enjoined to be a spiritual guide - more of a shepherd than a ruler.

v28 **So ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies.** Thus, the husband who is not, himself, in communion with Christ and following His pattern of love, forfeits the right to be a shepherd and guide to his wife. These words come as a welcome relief to wives who are dominated by husbands who do not reflect the love of Christ. On the other hand it may not be welcome to men who enjoy their position of domination without regard to the terms and conditions that the Scripture places upon them.

v32 **I speak concerning Christ and the church ...** This passage, long used as crucial to the marital relationship, must also be seen specifically as indicating the relationship between Christ and His church. Husbands and wives are enjoined to be in an orderly relationship to one another, but so also are the members of the body - treating one another with the same sacrificial love and caring that Christ exhibited to the world when He laid down His life for us.

Paul is not saying here that believers must be subject to one another in guidance and criticism. Many believers have been thrown into confusion and despair over things that other believers have said to them. I have always recommended that one not listen to “amateurs.” An amateur is one who is not qualified to give instruction, whether in a position of self-styled leadership or merely a brother or sister. It is risky to follow the advice of any such ones, even when they come with the contention that “Christ has told them to say this.” That is perhaps the most dangerous of all. There are those in the body who have the gifts and technical qualifications to give instruction. But there are a great host of them who are either self-taught or inadequately prepared. It is impossible to really tell whether one has had “words from Christ” or not.

But what about those who have been elected or appointed to positions of leadership?

The problem is that leadership in the church today is largely a matter of organizational systems. A vote by a congregation or a board of directors is hardly equal to the casting of lots by the eleven disciples at Pentecost. In fact, the elders and leaders in the church today have very little in common with the deacons and elders of Paul's instructions to Timothy (1 Timothy 3). It is not that sound leaders are not to be found in the body, but that we must exercise great care in identifying those who are qualified to lead and those who are not. The point is, that being in an orderly relationship to one another in the body of Christ, does not dictate the terms of that relationship, except in the matter of love and openness as members of the family of Christ. Circumstances have changed quite radically over the hundreds of years since the New Testament was written. In the very next chapter, Paul deals with the issue of slavery, which at the present time is not relevant at least in the Western world. Families are in a certain functional flexibility. Many times it is necessary for a wife to work, for example, and then must have help with the household chores. Many husbands are not qualified to lead and have, in fact, been the perpetrators of abuse and domination. The key word is flexibility. Within the framework of the love and liberty of Christ, we must relate to one another in terms of our individual situations and differences. The rigid cultural distinctives of earlier eras have all but vanished. The home of a hundred years ago was vastly different than the home of today. It is totally unacceptable to sacrifice the liberty and love of Christ in these human relationships to the insistence upon rigid requirements that are at best only ambiguous in the scriptural statements. We become in the exact position of the Pharisees, who followed the minutest letter of the law, but ignored the principles of justice, and mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23).

Let the criteria of our relationships to one another in the body, as well as the criteria of the relationships in the home, be love and grace and flexibility, rather than judgment, and criticism, and rigidity. Every home is different, every assembly, as well as every individual. It is vital to understand this both in our connection with Christ as well as with one another. Remember that we are faultless and not flawless, so therefore we need to exercise charity, not only to others, but also to ourselves as well. So go in peace and in dependence upon the Lord for guidance in the exercise of these most difficult of relationships.

9th Week.

Family Relationships

CHAPTER 6:1-9

Verse 1-9 Of Parents and Children and Slaves.

COMMENTARY

Human relationships are very complex. There are so many factors to be taken into consideration. The principles governing these relationships cannot really be forced into rigid rules and regulations. In the case of husbands and wives, as well as relationships in general in the family of believers, the most basic consideration is being open to one another in the love and grace of Christ, realizing the complex factors involved in the development of each individual. Conversion does not wipe out all the personality traits and habit patterns of the mind. Paul says that our relationship with one another should be on the same sacrificial basis as the relationship of Christ to us. We have observed that the circumstances of life vary considerably from age to age and culture to culture. Patterns of behavior of a century ago in America, have undergone considerable changes. It is always in order for us to relate to one another in love and grace and in the sense of our familial relationship, but how we express those things may depend a good deal on the current cultural realities. In Paul's day, for example, women occupied a very secondary place and would have been considered out of order to have aspired to the roles that they have today as a matter of course. Those who insist today on maintaining the status of a society that is 2000 years old, have missed the main thrust and meaning of the suggestions that Paul has made to such a society.

An extremely important consideration in this matter is the issue of slavery. In Paul's day, there was no real onus on having slaves. It was accepted as a standard part of society. Two hundred years ago it nearly tore our country apart. Even where slaves were legally acceptable, the ethical questions were still crucial for the believers. Thus, the whole section on masters and slaves is not relevant in our society today. On the other hand, the need for the recognition of equality among all, is as important today as it was in the days of Paul. However, the principles expressed here between slaves and masters are not completely out of order in terms of the relationship between one's self and one's employer. The same principles are there in terms of doing one's work as a member of the family of Christ and giving full measure, rather than being merely out for one's self.

By the same token, there are many complex considerations in today's society with reference to the raising of children. There are some very difficult questions and problems that face today's parent. The pressures of society around us have constantly forced the re-evaluation of the roles of parent and child. That is not to say that there is any less need for the issues of respect and compliance on the part of children, but the ways in which these may be effected must often be re-evaluated. Nor can parents afford to ignore the impact of the social environments on their children.

In the bygone eras it was quite in order for parents to deal with their children as they saw fit, even to the point of meting out very harsh discipline. In today's society, for good or for ill, the methods of discipline are under very careful scrutiny. Nor is it all together unreasonable that one might have a better effect upon their children by using alternative methods of "child-training." It is patently true that children are individuals and that methods of dealing with them must take into consideration that fact. With some children, the harsher the discipline, the more rebellion is fostered. It is vital that parents be sensitive to this difference. It is universally true that children in any given household respond differently. It is also true that there is a genetic factor which is crucial to how children and parents react to each other. Those outside this genetic reality, however expert, do not always take this factor into consideration.

Paul urges parents not to "**provoke their children to anger.**" The same measures can bring forth change on the part of one child and rebellion on the part of another. The thing to remember is that the word "discipline" means "to teach." Any kind of discipline that does not accomplish meaningful instruction, is not sound. The main object of the parent is to make sure that the children know thoroughly their system of values. Parents cannot always guarantee that children will follow these patterns. In spite of everything, children will tend to experiment and to go their own way. One cannot make prisoners of them in the home. But what will hold them steadfast is a deep sense of what it is that the parents stand for, in terms of their allegiance to Christ, and their set of moral values. In the end this will prevail more than mere coercion. So raising children is really a matter of helping them come to terms with the meaning of life and providing such restrictions as will reinforce proper behavior patterns. It is not so much a question of "either/or" but "both/and." Remember, it is hard for children to learn in a context of emotional upheaval. The bottom line is probably a process of positive and negative reinforcement. That is to say that things that are wrong are always wrong, and things that are right are always right. It is a matter of consistent teaching and not radical penalties, that will prevail in the end.

And there is the issue of example. No amount of discipline will take the place of proper example. It is certainly not a question of "Do as I say and not as I do." Children are not charges in an orphanage, they are part of a family unit and, as in the body of Christ, will usually respond to a prevailing attitude of kindness and grace, as well as firmness and leadership.

Ultimately, it is vital that parents seek the counsel of Christ in their difficult responsibility of raising children. Expertise, no matter how advanced, will never take the place of prayer and guidance in the individual issues. Our data is always limited and we work from imperfect understanding. It is therefore essential to pray continually for guidance. Once one has consulted the Lord in these matters, it is vital that one remain firm and not vacillate in an attempt to compromise, and win the approval of the children. Children do not respect parents who try to compromise. Usually the young person knows that the parent is right, but seeks to gain as much leeway as possible.

We were never intended to be master psychologists, in order to bear and raise children. We were, however, enjoined and expected to be an example, and to instill the knowledge of Christ and allegiance to Him.

v1 **for this is right** (dikaion). In Colossians 3:20 it is (euareston) *well pleasing*.

v2 **Which** (hetis) “Which = for such is”. **the first commandment with a promise.** Exodus 20:12 - *HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER, THAT YOUR DAYS MAY BE LONG UPON THE LAND WHICH THE LORD YOUR GOD IS GIVING YOU.*

v4 **do not provoke your children to anger**... (me parorgizete). This is a rare compound. Both New Testament examples (here and in Romans 10:19) are quotations from the Septuagint. The tense here has a causative sense to it. Paul here touches the common sin of fathers.

v4 **in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** (en paideiai kai nouthesiai tou kuriou). (en) is the sphere in which it all takes place. There are only three examples in the New Testament of (paideia) which is an old Greek word for training a boy or girl for the general education and culture of the child. The idea here is that all discipline must teach. Discipline is not a platform for which parents can vent their own personal frustrations and issues in the direction of a child. Instead, it must result in a lesson learned. The manner and course of instruction will be as unique as the child. All must be delivered with love, remembering the grace and mercy that your Creator expresses towards you in your own shortcomings. You too, must reflect that love.

v5 **with fear and trembling**,... (phobou) Not being afraid of “consequences”, but a reverence of respect of who you are in the order of things. Respecting the position and order for which you find yourself in. Submitting with an understanding of God’s providence in your life. This could easily be applied to most work situations where you are the employed.

v6 **but as slaves of Christ**,... As Paul rejoiced to call himself – Philippians 1:1.

v6 **doing the will of God**... Even while under the compulsion of men. But Paul also tells us “*You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.*” 1 Corinthians 7:23. So how do we sort this seeming contradiction? The answer can be found in Acts. *But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”* Acts 5:29. Your submission to man ends when it comes into conflict with what God’s word clearly teaches us. Your understanding, that God has appointed the ones who rule over you, will go a long way to comfort you in knowing that your loving Creator is the One who is on the throne, sovereign and just. Look to understand the reason God has you in a place. It is not without purpose. *...until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.*” Daniel 4:31

v9 **and give up threatening**... (anientes ten apeilen) Present active participle of (aniemi). This is an old verb. It means to loosen up, to relax. “Letting up on threatening”. (apeile) is an old word for threat found here and in Acts 4:29 and 9:1. The present active tense of this statement is the idea of a master who is constantly threatening and creating angst among those under his/her care. The reality that God is the Master of all mankind and the sovereign appointer of those in charge should temper the one who is not mindful of this. King Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this lesson the hard way. Daniel 4.

10th Week.

The Armor of God.

CHAPTER 6:10-24

Verse 10-17 The Cosmic Warfare.

COMMENTARY

From the evolving of the magnificent creature called “Lucifer,” a titanic battle has been raging between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. How did this come about? How does it affect us? We must take the measure of the enemy and the parameters of the battle.

The common conceptions or misconceptions of Satan range all the way from the Aggravator, out to make life miserable for us, to the omnipotent and omnipresent evil spirit who shackles the believers with doubt and fear and discouragement and effectively hinders them from following Christ. It is important to understand, in the first place, that Satan is not interested in merely aggravating the believers - he wants to destroy them. The fact that he doesn't, is really the ultimate witness to the power of God to preserve us. As for his omnipotence and omniscience, he is highly overrated. He is probably more clever than the average human, but he is not in God's league at all. We make a mistake both in overrating Satan's power and in underrating it. Overrating him keeps believers in constant fear and turbulence, while underrating him keeps them from recognizing their own inadequacy in trying to fight him, and thus relying on Christ as the ultimate Defender.

So how did it all get started? How did God let the world get filled with satanic forces? In the first place we must recognize that Satan is, after all, God's creation. That Satan went astray is based upon the qualities that God created in him. Without free will, Satan would only have been a puppet, and would not have been in any way an expression of God's creative power. On the other hand, the very greatness of his being (see Ezekiel 28) also made him the potential “evil-genius” that he actually became. It was a calculated risk on the part of God, and yet it could not be otherwise, given His creative power. As well might a human produce an animal. That Adam and Eve succumbed to the cunning of Satan, was also a side of their “free will.” Had they not succumbed, possibly Satan would have been deterred from the start. This, of course, is only speculation. It is interesting to note the comparison between the humans and Satan in Genesis 3. We are accustomed to use the word “naked,” in translating the preceding verse on Adam and Eve – “The man and the women were naked” - but the Hebrew word *arum*, is what we call a *hapaxlegomena* which means it is used only once, and therefore very difficult to determine exactly what it means. However, in the very next verse (3:1) it says of the serpent that “he was more *arum* than any beast of the field.” It is not likely that it was a reference to his nakedness. The translators usually use the word “subtle,” but for some reason, do not use that in connection with the previous verse. So whatever the humans possessed, the serpent possessed more than any other beast. The spirit of Satan was apparently able to possess the beast, and Eve did not have the revulsion that is commonly felt today in the presence of serpents. She became an easy prey.

And so begins the battle - Satan beginning to exercise his obvious power, and, however it came to be, rose to the place of “the god of this world - the spirit that now energizes the children of disobedience [unbelief].” Although Satan is not omnipotent or omniscient, he does exercise a power that is far beyond humans, being able to occupy a spirit realm. He is a formidable foe. Ultimately he will be vanquished, but only by the power of God. In its ultimate reality, the battle is really between God and Satan. We humans have the fallout from it in our fleshly situation. The fallout includes a continual vulnerability to Satan's effect upon circumstances, but no believer possessing Christ within the spirit - can be possessed by Satan. Jude 24 says, “*Unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ...*” And of course, Jesus' own words recorded in John 10:29 – “*No man shall pluck them out of my Father's hand.*” The debate does continue over the degree to which Christians can be affected by Satan, but if our salvation rests upon the capacity of humans to cling to God, we are all in great trouble, indeed. Jesus promised to be with His disciples “to the end of the world” Hebrews 13:5 and (Deuteronomy 31:6) – “*I will never in any way leave you, nor forsake you.*” While it is obvious that we cannot base our theology on simple “proof texts,” such thoughts are completely in keeping with the ultimate power of God and the complete inadequacy of humans.

Somewhere in the primordial reaches of time and space, an evil force emerged whom we call Satan. Humans became his early victims and God took up the battle for their souls. The essential message of the Bible is the process of redemption. There is much that we do not understand about it, but this we know for sure - Satan does affect us in the external realities of our lives; He does not possess our spirits; we are not capable of fighting Him; He will ultimately be vanquished by God.

Meanwhile, how do we handle Satan on the earth?

First of all, it is very important to understand the nature of the battle as well as the measure of the enemy. For humans to try to fight Satan with religious rituals and regimens is like trying to battle air power with the cavalry. No amount of personal piety or perseverance or prayer vigils will avail. The only thing that will avail is the power of God. But if we think we can muster up the power of God by proving our own personal piety or perseverance, we are sadly mistaken. Everywhere in the Scripture, Jesus dealt with Satan

with a word. When He engaged his own servants, such as Paul, in the fight, they too merely had to utter a word which the Lord gave them. When Paul was troubled exceedingly by the demon possessed girl at Philippi, he merely said, “*I declare, in the name of Jesus, that you come out of her*” (Acts 16:18). Often, bad behavior is mistaken for demon possession and therefore does not yield to *bona fide* “exorcism.” The main point is that in dealing with Satan in our daily struggles, we must realize that we are no match for Satan. But Satan is no match for God. Sometimes we mistake victory for euphoria. That is to say, it is often assumed that unless we feel joyfulness in the midst of the victory that it is not a victory. It is essential to remember that the human emotions have nothing to do with the battle. Depression and distress in the flesh does not mean that the spirit is not victorious. The truth of the matter is that Satan's chief concern is to snatch us away from Christ and not merely to aggravate us. When we stay with Christ in the midst of our distress, we are victorious. Feelings in the flesh have so many different aspects to them that it is very difficult to sort them out and determine what particular feelings will be the signal of victory. Appearances are always deceptive. They may hinge on matters of genetics or hormones or even nutrition. The guarantee that Satan has been overcome is not that we feel good about things, but rather that we still care about Christ. The concept of the victorious Christian life as one in which one is always in a state of emotional elation is neither realistic nor necessary. The human psyche is affected by a great many things that have nothing to do with one's state of spirituality or “victory.” Leave to God the universal battle between Himself and Satan. He is well equipped to handle it. The protection of your own individual spirit is God's responsibility, so you can leave that to Him as well.

So what then is our responsibility?

Our responsibility is simply to function as His children in the world, and do whatever it is that He gives us to do.

So how do we know we are doing what He wants us to do?

If we are open to Him, He will see to it. We can't really outguess God, so we have to depend on Him to see to it that we do what we're supposed to do.

And how does He manage that?

That is, of course, up to Him, and it depends upon who we are. In other words, we are each motivated and guided by different means. Paul's Macedonian call came from a male figure when he was at Troy, but when he got to Philippi, the contact point turned out to be a woman. Arguably, if the vision had been of a woman instead of a man, it is possible that Paul might have regarded it as not being from God. God has His purposes and we have our motivational processes. It is up to God to get those two points together. If we are open to Him, He will do that, in spite of ourselves.

v12 **Our warfare is not against blood and flesh, but against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers ...** To think of our struggles in the flesh as the essence of the battle is to miss this fundamental point. To be sure, there is fallout in the effects of Satan upon our physical person, but that is only like laying siege to the external area of the castle. The spirit within is the citadel which God protects. The surrounding area of the flesh may be ravaged from time to time, but that is only the fallout of the battle. The Lord does give us help in these areas, but often believers are wounded in the battle and suffer loss. Nevertheless, the citadel of the spirit stands secure. The Lord does, of course, give help in the external battle, and does protect our fleshly circumstances, but does not always prevent Satan from ravaging them. Christians' houses burn alongside non-Christians' and the effects of cancer often engulf the believer. But through it all, the spirit stands secure, and that is what God is concerned with. When we use the external battle as a gauge of the internal one, we have failed to take either the measure of the enemy or the parameters of the battle. In II Corinthians 10:4, Paul makes very clear the issue of the spiritual battle when he says, “*The weapons of our warfare are not carnal [fleshly], but mighty in God to the pulling down of strong holds ...*” The warfare between Christ and Satan can only be waged by Him, while we must stand at the sidelines and trust Him to carry on successfully against the enemy.

v12 **Rulers ... authorities ... cosmic powers of this darkness ... spiritual forces of evil in the supraheavenlies.** This is the theatre of battle. The real identity is shown in the phrase “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies.” That does not refer to evil within the religious order. Often we feel that Satan has, in many different forms, invaded the church, but that is not what is in view here. (*archos*) refers to the old Greek ruler of the city-state - the *archon*. He was an ultimate ruler and not just a “main leader.” (*Exousias*) refers to authorities - “the powers that be.” While (*kosmokrataros*) means those in whose grip is the ultimate power of this dark sphere of evil. Christ alone is able to handle this dread arena.

So then what must we do?

Our job is simply “to stand.” The word “resist” connotes the idea of a “resistance movement” as in the war, but that is not what is in view here. What is in view is that we simply stand pat and let the Lord do His work. In a famed incident with Jehoshaphat (II Chronicles 20), Israel was surrounded by the enemy and Jehoshaphat realized that he was unable to resist - “*We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do but our eyes are upon thee.*” When he took it to God, God said “*You shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with*

you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord will be with you.” It happened continuously in the history of Israel. Israel was surrounded by powerful enemies and was never able to really stand up against them, except that God was constantly with them, and did battle through them. The word of God to His people everywhere is simply, “Stand!” We do not need to make progress; we do not need to feel anything; we do not need to exercise spirituality. “*So stand fast in the Lord, my beloved ...*” (Philippians 4:1).

- v14 **Loins gird about with truth [reality]** ... Jesus said, “I am the Truth [reality].” Once again, as we focus on truth, per se, we are focusing on our own perception of reality. But if we focus on Christ, we are focusing on the most essential reality in the universe. We have Christ within as our strength, in spite of the inadequacy of our human perceptions of Him. We can be trapped in the “truth.” That is to say, a great many groups claim to have the truth and miss the most essential element of truth. The only absolute truth is Christ. The human mind is not capable of such absolutes, and yet there is a constant effort to claim “truth” for a particular religious sect. When we take on Christ, our spirits become eternally real. Satan can easily confuse issues in the search for “truth,” but he cannot confuse the reality of Christ.
- v14 **The breastplate of righteousness [rightness]** ... Christ is our righteousness (I Corinthians 1:30). To the Philippians, Paul confessed that his own righteousness was not adequate (Philippians 3:4-9). The effort to “shape up our piety” in order to fight Satan, is absurd. Confronting Satan with our own goodness plays into his hands, because he has always been the master of accusation (Revelation 12:10).
- v15 **Feet shod ... with the gospel of peace** ... The gospel of peace prepares us for the arduous journey. Christ came to bring peace. That is the essence of the Gospel, more than “rules of the road.” If nothing else, our own fleshly guilt over human inadequacy will cut like stones on the bear feet. But, understanding that we are complete in Christ and that there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), will soften the rugged demands of the climb. The phrase “gospel of peace” is used in other connections, but here it does not refer to “spreading the Word.”
- v16 **The shield of faith** ... trying always to maintain the level of ones' confidence in Christ, would be a heavy shield indeed and subject to the “dropping of the guard.” Once again, this does not have anything to do with human capacities. The faith here, as everywhere, is the energy of Christ within us. It is not subject to our vacillating feelings of “trust.” Paul tells the Galatians, “*The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God ...*” (Galatians 2:20). The proper usage of the Greek grammar here is not - “faith in the Son of God” but “the faith of the Son of God.” It is His faith, not ours. If we were dependent on our own human capacity to trust, we would have vanquished long ago. But think of the shield of faith, rather as a flow of divine energy around us (like an electric eye) totally preserving our spirits from surprise attacks by Satan. Satan's “fiery arrows” will never be able to penetrate that shield.
- v17 **The helmet of salvation** ... The Spirit of Christ in us protects us against the absurd misconceptions of the godless. For Christians there is always a certain instinctive sense that many of the declarations of the sociologists and psychologists and scientists are to be taken with skepticism. One who eliminates God from the universe cannot help but be ridiculous.
- v17 **The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** This is not the (*logos*), but the (*rhema*). Most people think of the Word of God here as the biblical revelation. That would be primarily (*logos*). (*Rhema*) has to do with individual words or units of speech, and we are dealing now with a work of the Spirit in the various encounters that we would have with Satan. It is the Spirit's word to Satan on our behalf, in each given encounter. A classic example is when Jesus dealt with the demons on the shores of Galilee (Mark 5:1-20). They begged Him not to send them into the “abyss” but rather into a herd of swine. Jesus bid them, “Go!” That is the kind of word we are dealing with here. When Paul encountered the demon possessed girl in Philippi, he declared to her “in the Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” This again is what is meant by the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. It is not something we can do by memorizing more scriptures. It is something that Christ must do for us when we encounter the enemy. It is a weapon wielded by the Spirit and not by ourselves.

Thus, the entire section on the armor gives the power to Christ and not to ourselves. Nor do we have to make some special effort to “put the armor on.” It comes with Christ. We are equipped to handle Satan, not by our own piety or perseverance, but by the very power of Christ, who alone is equipped to deal with him. Our place is simply to turn it over to Christ and stand fast.

Verse 18-24 The Ultimate Recourse.

COMMENTARY

If one prevailing theme can be deduced from the Epistle to the Ephesians - a thread that runs through the entire letter - it is God's energizing action, through His Holy Spirit, in fulfilling His purpose with His earthly creation. It is a hard lesson to learn, but we humans are completely unable to fulfill His purposes and desires for us, apart from His Holy Spirit working in us. In his closing statement, Paul speaks of the absolute necessity of consistent and persistent prayer, not only for the believers in general, but for himself, that he may speak with authority.

v19 **That I may make known with authority, the mystery of the proclamation ...** Paul had already received extensive revelations from God, especially in Arabia, but was now asking for the special and particular words that God would use in His current ministry. More importantly he needed the authority that would accompany them. There are two parts to any revelation. There must be the revelation itself to the speaker, but there must also be the reception of that revelation in the hearers. The voice of authority comes with the power of the Holy Spirit. Even Paul, articulate orator that he was, and trained in the knowledge of his day, could not convince anyone of the truths of the revelation of God, apart from the Holy Spirit working through him. It must be remembered that Paul was coming to the Jews with an entirely new message from God, cutting across lines of the age old legal system. It would be natural for them to be skeptical, if not hostile. By the same token, the Greeks looked upon him as just another philosopher. How could his message possibly come through with authority? The only way, of course, was the dynamic of the Holy Spirit speaking through him. Before this, he requested the prayers of the believers, whom he obviously assumed would have God's ear. The countless books written on the subject of prayer tend to make it so special that one could only reach God on the stepladder of one's escalating faith and piety. In the minds of many, everything must be just right in one's life and fine tuned in one's sensitivities to God, before they will have His ear. As well would parents demand perfection from their children before they would give them an ear.

Chains, both figuratively and literally, were a common part of Paul's sojourn on the earth. Satan was allowed to hinder Paul from time to time to the Thessalonians he said, "I would have come unto you once and again, but Satan hindered me" (I Thessalonians 2:18). Why was Satan allowed to hinder Paul and to bring him into bondage? We would assume that given Paul's crucial place in the body, that God would have cleared a path for him so that he could get to all the believers. Did it reflect any lack on Paul's part? There is no such indication. It is a source of great encouragement to know that even Paul had his bruising encounters with Satan and, for God's own reasons, was not always readily delivered. It is not always easy to determine just why God allows these things. One thing is certain - the tragedy of Eden will never recur. The Spirit of Christ within, will keep the citadel of His people's hearts and they will hold fast in their spirits, whatever Satan may bring to bear on them. The chains will fall when God is ready for them to fall, and meanwhile He will supply His grace both to stand fast and to fulfill His purposes in the life.

v22 **That he may encourage your hearts ...** The Greek verb - (*parakaleo*) - is from the same root as the word used for the Holy Spirit - the Paraclete, Comforter. The English word "comfort," is from the Latin which means "to strengthen." Our present usage of "comfort" has drifted away from that specific idea. Probably the word "encourage" is closer to the actual meaning. "Encourage" comes directly from the French word *cour* - heart. Thus, the idea is "to enhearten" or "to encourage." While the Holy Spirit provides us with the energy to hold steadfast, He provides the strengthening of our hearts. The word is often translated by "exhort," which probably misses the main point.

v23 **Peace to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** While these words represent rather common greetings, they were not so in Paul's letters. All of these are gifts of Christ, and become a part of us when He becomes part of us. On a number of occasions Jesus offered peace to the disciples, even in the midst of turmoil (John 14:27; 16:33). Such peace is of the Spirit and not the flesh. The agape love of Christ is also the possession of every believer in His caring consciousness, though not always in human affection. Faith is also the gift of Christ and does not depend on human feelings of confidence. These ideas are prevalent throughout the letter to the Ephesians and should have been readily understood by them at that point, as they should now be understood by us at the conclusion of the letter. The grace of Christ is the flow of divine benevolence to all His people continuously, despite the failures and vacillations of our earthly odyssey.