

Notes on Ephesians

2023 Edition
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Introduction

WRITER

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

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

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

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

²Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:127. See also Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 480-86; Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospels to Glory*, pp. 252-57.

³Adolf Deissmann, *Paul*, p. 17, believed that Paul wrote these letters during an Ephesian imprisonment. See Appendix 1: Sequence of Paul's Activities at the end of my Notes on Acts.



DATE

For some interpreters the reference to Paul having recently sent Tychicus to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:12) seems to put the composition of Ephesians in the second imprisonment (cf. Eph. 6:21-22). However the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians have led most scholars to conclude that Paul wrote these two letters at nearly the same time.¹ The evidence for his having written Colossians and Philemon during the first imprisonment is strong.

¹See charts of comparisons of Ephesians and Colossians in Hoehner, p. 34; John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. xlvii; and William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians*, pp. 5-32.

"Ephesians bears much the same relation to Colossians that Romans does to Galatians, a fuller treatment of the same general theme in a more detached and impersonal manner."¹

Some scholars believe that Paul wrote Colossians before Ephesians.² A significant difference between these very similar epistles is that in Colossians Paul was combating a false doctrine concerning Christ. But in Ephesians he did not address a particular problem or situation that occasioned that epistle.³

Paul knew Ephesus and the church in that city very well. He had ministered in Asia Minor, the Roman province of which Ephesus was the capital, with Ephesus as his headquarters, for about three years: A.D. 53-56 (Acts 19:1—20:1). It appears that he sent this epistle to the Ephesian church so that the Christians there would subsequently circulate it among the other churches.⁴ At least two other New Testament books went first to Ephesus: 1 and 2 Timothy. John's Gospel, his three epistles, and the Book of Revelation probably did as well (cf. Rev. 2:1). Tychicus evidently delivered this epistle to the Ephesian church (Eph. 6:21-22).

PURPOSE

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

¹A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:514.

²E.g. Eadie, p. xlvi; Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1278; Robertson, 4:514.

³See Eadie, p. xlvi.

⁴See my comments on 1:1.

⁵See Hoehner, pp. 104-6.

"Possibly realizing that the Ephesians were starting to forsake their first love, Paul wrote this letter to encourage them to love both God and their fellow saints more deeply."¹

"The letter focuses on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and does through his Spirit today, in order to build his new society in the midst of the old."²

EMPHASES

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

Norman B. Harrison considered Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians as written to the spiritual man, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians as written to the carnal man, and Romans as written to the natural man.³

GENRE

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

"He [the writer] is meditating, and developing certain thoughts—and clothes them in the form of a letter."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 106. Cf. Rev. 2:4.

²John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 24.

³Norman B. Harrison, *His Very Own*, p. 9.

⁴Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 192.

OUTLINE

- I. Salutation 1:1-2
- II. The Christian's calling 1:3—3:21
 - A. Individual calling 1:3—2:10
 - 1. The purpose: glory 1:3-14
 - 2. The means: knowledge 1:15-23
 - 3. The motive: grace 2:1-10
 - B. Corporate calling 2:11-3:19
 - 1. Present unity 2:11-22
 - 2. Past ignorance 3:1-13
 - 3. Future comprehension 3:14-19
 - C. Doxology 3:20-21
- III. The Christian's conduct 4:1—6:20
 - A. Spiritual walk 4:1—6:9
 - 1. Walking in unity 4:1-16
 - 2. Walking in holiness 4:17-32
 - 3. Walking in love 5:1-6
 - 4. Walking in light 5:7-14
 - 5. Walking in wisdom 5:15—6:9
 - B. Spiritual warfare 6:10-20
- IV. Conclusion 6:21-24

MESSAGE

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

and importance in the panorama of God's program for humankind. The church is the subject of Ephesians. The church began on the Day of Pentecost, and it will end at the Rapture.

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

Ephesians is an exposition of one of the most important statements that Jesus ever uttered during His earthly ministry. That statement is in Matthew 16:18: "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."¹ Various epistles similarly expound other teachings that Jesus gave while He walked this earth. For example, the Epistle of James is an exposition of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. John's first epistle is an exposition of Jesus' Upper Room Discourse. Likewise, Ephesians explains Jesus' teaching concerning the church. All the New Testament epistles deal with the church, of course, but Ephesians lifts us above all the other revelation on this subject and puts the church in perspective within the plan of God. Paul developed both the building of the church and the conflict of the church, which are suggested in Jesus' statement, in Ephesians.

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

¹Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

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

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

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

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

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

of God's grace to all beings forever (2:7). It will also demonstrate the richness of God's wisdom to all beings forever (3:10).

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

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

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

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

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

To summarize, the church must maintain unity as it grows. It must sanctify every relationship as it makes its confession to the world. And it must stand

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

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

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

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

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

Third, we are to walk opposing God's unseen enemies. We need to balance the passive "be filled with the Spirit" (5:18) with the active "Stand firm" (6:14). Our enemies are not primarily other people but the unseen demonic

personalities behind them. In former years many people scoffed at the idea of demons and malignant spiritual forces. Today there is a more realistic awareness of their existence and powerful influence in the world. We must engage spiritual enemies with spiritual weapons: truthfulness, righteous conduct, the gospel, trust in God, the Word of God appropriate to the need, and prayer (6:14-18).

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

"The church of God can never help God when she ceases to be other-worldly. When she is other-worldly she helps the world; and cannot avoid doing so."¹

Conversely the measure of the church's other-worldliness is the measure of her influence in the world. If we really see God's intent for the church we can never remain unconcerned about or uninvolved with the physical problems of people. Was our Lord insensitive to suffering, unconcerned about injustice, or lacking in compassion toward the oppressed? Never. And He is the Head into whom we are to grow up.²

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

²Adapted from *ibid.*, 2:1:167-84.

Exposition

I. SALUTATION 1:1-2

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

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

1:1 Paul referred to himself by name twice as the writer of this book (cf. 3:1). The only other epistle to a church that Paul wrote as the sole writer—without reference to a fellow-writer or writers—was Romans. Even though some critics have denied the Pauline authorship of Ephesians—largely because of the vocabulary, style, and doctrine it contains—the early church accepted it without dispute.¹

"Ephesians, then, was unhesitatingly assigned to Paul from the time when the New Testament corpus began to be recognized as such in the mid-second century. Since Clement of Rome reflected its language when he wrote to Corinth in A.D. 95, it is likely that this attestation runs back to the first century."²

The New Testament writers used the word apostle (lit. sent one) in either a general or in a particular sense. Sometimes it refers generally to anyone sent out as a representative of Jesus Christ (Acts 14:4, 14 [Barnabas]; 2 Cor. 8:23 [Titus]; Phil. 2:25 [Epaphroditus]). A modern equivalent would be a

¹W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 357.

²A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in *Ephesians-Philemon*, vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 4.

missionary. Usually it refers to one of the 12 apostles or Paul who saw the risen Christ, as it does here. The Lord Jesus commissioned and sent Paul out with the gospel message. Paul received his apostleship on the Damascus Road because of God's will or decision, not his own choosing (Acts 26:16-18). He referred to his apostleship here in order to underline the truthfulness and claims of the following chapters.¹

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

The words "at Ephesus" or "in Ephesus" do not appear in three early Alexandrian (Egyptian) manuscripts. This omission has led some scholars to conclude that Paul originally sent this epistle to several undesignated local churches, probably in the province of Asia, for the recipients to circulate among them.

Advocates of this view have pointed to the absence of any reference to individuals as evidence that Paul meant it to go to several churches rather than just to the Ephesian church. However it seems best to regard the Ephesian church as the original audience for the following reasons: Most ancient manuscripts do contain the words "at Ephesus" or "in Ephesus." Moreover, no manuscript contains the name of any other city or even the Greek words translated "at" or "in." Furthermore, all of Paul's other inspired epistles mention the recipients.²

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

¹Eadie, p. 1.

²See Hanna, pp. 257-58, for further discussion.

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

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

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

"Thus our being in Christ means that the Lord Jesus surrounds and embraces the believer in His own life, and separates him at the same time from all outside and hostile influences. He protects the believer from all perils and foes, and supplies him with all that is necessary. In Ephesians the meaning of this being 'in Christ' reaches its highest thought. The peculiar truth in Ephesians is the heavenly nature and divine fullness of this sphere of our new life."¹

¹August Van Ryn, *Ephesians: The Glory of His Grace*, p. 17. See also A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Some Observations on Paul's Use of the Phrases 'In Christ' and 'With Christ'," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (October 1985):83-97.

"That phrase *in Christ* strikes the keynote of the entire Epistle; from that prolific germ ramifies the branching oak of the forest."¹

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

"So if we want a concise summary of the good news which the whole letter announces, we could not find a better one than the three monosyllables 'peace through grace'."²

"To the receivers of grace and peace God is in the relation of *Father*; to the same subjects Christ is in the relation of *Lord*. God is *Father*, having made them His children by adoption. Christ is *Lord*, being constituted Head of the Church and having won the right to their loving obedience and honour ..."³

"The words 'to the Saints and to the faithful in Christ Jesus' correspond to the two divisions of the epistle. In the first three chapters we learn that God has made us His Saints in Christ; in the last three chapters we are exhorted to walk in obedience and be faithful."⁴

¹E. K. Simpson, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, p. 24.

²Stott, p. 28.

³S. D. F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 3:244.

⁴Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Annotated Bible*, 3:2:238.

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING 1:3—3:21

"... the first three chapters are *one long prayer*, culminating in the great doxology at the end of chapter 3. There is in fact nothing like this in all Paul's letters. This is the language of lyrical prayer, not the language of argument, and controversy, and rebuke."¹

A. INDIVIDUAL CALLING 1:3—2:10

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

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

1. The purpose: glory 1:3-14

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

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

¹William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 76.

²Stott, p. 31.

up praise that the Holy Spirit has sealed us in our personal past, at the point of conversion."¹

"Normally, after the greeting Paul gives an introductory thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter. In this epistle he changes the order, for before he gives his thanksgiving in verses 15-23, he has in verses 3-14 a paean [song] of praise for what God has done for the believer."²

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

The believer's position in Christ 1:3

"This verse marks not only the introduction but also the main sentence of the eulogy. It is in essence a summary of the whole eulogy."⁴

God is "blessed" (praised) because He "has blessed" believers. However, Christians should also bless or praise (Gr. *eulogetos*, speak well of) God the Father for bestowing these blessings.

"He makes us blessed, we pronounce Him blessed."⁵

"When we bless God, we praise Him, speak well of Him. When He blesses us, it is not that He speaks us good but He does us good. Our blessing is in word. His is in deed. He confers benefits upon us."⁶

Paul was thinking of God as both the Father of believers ("our Father," v. 2), and the Father of His Son ("Father of the Lord Jesus Christ," v. 3). God has already blessed believers in the ways that the apostle proceeded to

¹ *The NET2 Bible* note on 1:3. *The NET2 Bible* is *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed.

²Hoehner, p. 153.

³Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Paul's Prison Epistles," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 309. Cf. Luke 1:46-55 and 1:67-79.

⁴Hoehner, p. 162. A eulogy is a speech or piece of writing that praises someone or something highly.

⁵Eadie, p. 12.

⁶Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 1:4:26.

identify. This blessing happened before creation, as will become clear in the following verses.

"Somebody says to me, 'Have you had the second blessing?' Second blessing! My friend, I'm working way up in the hundreds—in fact, up in the thousands. I've not only had a second blessing; I've had a thousand blessings."¹

"Spiritual" blessings are benefits that relate to our spiritual life in contrast to our physical life. In Israel God's promised blessings were mainly physical, but in the church they are mainly spiritual. Furthermore, spiritual blessings are those conferred by the Holy Spirit.² Since God has already given us these things we do not need to ask Him for them but should believe that we have them by faith and give thanks for them.

"When you were born again into God's family, you were born rich."³

"There is no promise here of material blessings. The Christian has no right to expect such; for this is no part of God's covenant with him."⁴

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

"The heavenly sphere, then, is the sphere of spiritual activities: that immaterial region, the 'unseen universe', which lies behind the world of sense. In it great forces are at work: forces which are conceived of as having an order and constitution of their

¹J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:211.

²Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 3:2:70; Wuest, 1:4:27.

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:9.

⁴J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 312.

own; as having in part transgressed against that order, and so having become disordered: forces which in part are opposed to us and wrestle against us: forces, again, which take an intelligent interest in the purpose of God with His world, and for which the story of man is an object-lesson in the many-sided wisdom of God: forces, over all of which, be they evil or be they good, Christ is enthroned, and we in Him."¹

We are "in Christ." As mentioned previously, the expression "in Christ" and its parallels occur 36 times in Ephesians.²

"... the conception which the phrase '*in Christ*' implies belongs to the same supra-sensual region of ideas to which the two preceding phrases [i.e., "with every spiritual blessing" and "in the heavenly places"] testify."³

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

"*En tois epouraniois* [in the heavens or heavenlies] is the location of the current conflict in which believers participate through their presence there 'in' Christ. But *hoi epouranioi* [the heavens or heavenlies] in Ephesians is primarily viewed as the location of the exalted Christ, the place where He now is and from which He exercises His universal sovereignty in the present age."⁴

"The key thought of *Ephesians* is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ."⁵

The phrase "in Christ" means "by virtue of our incorporation in Christ," or "in view of our union with Christ."⁶

¹J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 21.

²For a chart of its occurrences, see Hoehner, pp. 173-74.

³Robinson, p. 24.

⁴W. Hall Harris, "'The Heavenlies' Reconsidered: *Ouranos* and *Epouranios* in Ephesians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):89.

⁵Barclay, p. 77.

⁶Lightfoot, p. 312.

"Ephesians 1:3 tells much about God's blessings on believers: (a) *when*: eternity past; (b): *with what*: every spiritual blessing; (c): *where*: in the heavenly realms; (d): *how*: in Christ."¹

"Ephesus was considered the bank of Asia. One of the seven wonders of the world, the great temple of Diana, was in Ephesus, and was not only a center for idolatrous worship, but also a depository for wealth. ... Paul's letter to the Ephesians is as carefully structured as that great temple of Diana, and it contains greater beauty and wealth!"²

The selection of the Father 1:4-6

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

1:4 The first blessing is election. God has sovereignly chosen some people for salvation (cf. v. 11; Rom. 8:30; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 1:1). Salvation is ultimately God's doing, not mankind's (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation comes to the elect when they trust in Jesus Christ (v. 13; 2 Thess. 2:13).

Belief in divine election is probably the most fundamental tenet of Calvinistic theology. Someone who denies it is not a Calvinist.

"Among Calvinists there has been some difference of opinion as to the order of events in the divine plan. The question here is, Were the objects of the divine decree contemplated as fallen creatures? Or were they contemplated merely as men whom God would create, all being equal? Infralapsarians say that those chosen to salvation were contemplated as members of a fallen race. ... According to this plan, election follows the fall. According to the supralapsarian view the order of events is [the opposite] ... According to this plan

¹Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 616.

²Wiersbe, 2:10. Paragraph division omitted.

election precedes the fall. The infralapsarian order of events seems to be the more scriptural and logical."¹

"Now everybody finds the doctrine of election difficult. 'Didn't I choose God?' somebody asks indignantly; to which we must answer 'Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first chosen you.' 'Didn't I decide for Christ?' asks somebody else; to which we must reply 'Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first decided for you.'"²

"Of a prevision of faith as the basis or motive of the election there is no indication here. On the contrary, the character or distinguishing inward quality of the subjects of the election is presented in the next clause as the *object* of the election, the end it had in view."³

"If God had not chosen them, they would never have chosen God."⁴

"It [election] involves a paradox that the New Testament does not seek to resolve, and that our finite minds cannot fathom. Paul emphasizes both the sovereign purpose of God and man's free will."⁵

"Election is a term which suggests at once so much of controversy, that it may be well to lay emphasis on its primary sense by substituting, for the moment, a word of the same meaning, but

¹*Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Predestination," by Loraine Boettner, p. 417. Paragraph divisions omitted. See also Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 206, for a chart explaining six views on the order of the divine decrees.

²Stott, p. 37.

³Salmond, 3:249.

⁴Eadie, p. 19.

⁵Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 46.

less trammled by associations—the word 'selection'.¹

God chose us "in Him" (Christ, v. 3) in the sense that He is our representative.

"And the idea is that that election has its ground in Christ, in the sense that apart from Christ and without respect to His special relation to us, and His foreseen work, there would be no election of us."²

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

"Though it is true that Christ is God's Elect One (Isa 42:1, 6f.; cf. Matt 12:18) and that apart from His election there could be no realization of the election of unbelievers, His election is of a different nature. Christ was elected to be the redeemer in contrast to sinners being elected for redemption. Thus Christ's election does not truly parallel that of Christians, and so theirs cannot be contained in His."⁴

"Here is a vast host of people hurrying down the broad road with their minds fixed upon their sins, and one stands calling attention to yonder door, the entrance into the narrow way that leads to life eternal. On it is plainly depicted the text,

¹Robinson, p. 25. See also Alford, 3:2:70.

²Salmund, 3:248.

³E.g., Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, pp. 46-47.

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

'Whosoever will, let him come.' Every man is invited, no one need hesitate. Some may say, 'Well, I may not be of the elect, and so it would be useless for me to endeavor to come, for the door will not open for me.' But God's invitation is absolutely sincere; it is addressed to every man, 'Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely' (Rev. 22:17). If men refuse to come, if they pursue their own godless way down to the pit, whom can they blame but themselves for their eternal judgment? The messenger addressed himself to all, the call came to all, the door could be entered by all, but many refused to come and perished in their sins. Such men can never blame God for their eternal destruction. The door was open, the invitation was given, they refused, and He says to them sorrowfully, 'Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.' But see, as the invitation goes forth, every minute or two some one stops and says, 'What is that?' 'The way to life,' is the reply. 'Ah, that I might find the way to life! I have found no satisfaction in this poor world.' We read, 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' 'I should like to know how to be free from my sin, how to be made fit for the presence of God.' And such an one draws near and listens, and the Spirit of God impresses the message upon his heart and conscience and he says, 'I am going inside: I will accept the invitation; I will enter that door,' and he presses his way in and it shuts behind him. As he turns about he finds written on the inside of the door the words, 'Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.' 'What!' he says, 'had God His heart fixed on me before ever the world came into being?' Yes, but he could not find it out until he got inside. You see, you can pass the door if you will, you can trample the love of God beneath your feet, you can spurn His grace if you are determined to do it,

but you will go down to the pit and you will be responsible for your own doom."¹

"D. L. Moody stated the truth of election in his own inimitable way: 'The whosoever-wills are the elect, and the whosoever-won'ts are the non-elect.'"²

"The doctrine of election is never presented in Scripture as something to be afraid of, but always as something for believers to rejoice in."³

The time of our individual election was before God created the world. The purpose for which God chose us was two-fold: First, it was that we should be holy (Gr. *hagious*; cf. *hagiois*, saints, v. 1), which means different and set apart to God.⁴ Second, it was that we should be blameless (Gr. *amomous*), which means without blemish or fault (cf. 5:27; Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:22; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 14:5). This word elsewhere describes the Passover lamb and Jesus Christ (Heb., 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19). Trench insisted that *amomous* does not mean without blame or unblameable.⁵ Christians are blameworthy, but Christ has taken the blame for our sins on Himself.

"He did not choose us because we were good or because we would do some good, but He did choose us so that we *could* do some good."⁶

Probably our justification, sanctification, and glorification are all in view here.⁷ That is, God chose us to be declared holy and blameless before Him as our Judge (justification) and in our

¹H. A. Ironside, *In the Heavens*, pp. 27-29.

²Ruth Paxton, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian*, p. 31.

³Alfred Martin, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1303.

⁴See Barclay, p. 89.

⁵Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 354.

⁶McGee, 5:213.

⁷Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, p. 358.

present conduct (sanctification) and in our final condition (glorification).

"In love" probably modifies "to be holy and blameless in His sight" rather than "He chose us" (v. 4) or "He predestined us" (v. 5). Normally the modifying phrases follow the action words in this context (cf. vv. 3, 6, 8-10). Also the other occurrences of the phrase "in love" in Ephesians refer to human rather than divine love (cf. 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2). Furthermore, love is appropriate to connect with holiness and blamelessness since it provides a balance with these two conditions. Our duty is to love as well as to be pure.

"Holding this position, love is emphasized as the fulfilment [*sic*] of the law, the totality of Christian duty."¹

"The point, then, is that holiness of life is only made perfect in and through love (cf. I Thes. iii. 12f.)."²

"... the freer the Lord's paramount choice, the deeper the debt of the chosen to live divine."³

In the ancient Greek manuscripts there are no verse divisions or punctuation marks, so the modern translator has to decide where one sentence ends and another begins.

1:5 Predestination is the means by which God chose us (cf. Rom 8:30). God chose us by marking us out beforehand, which is the meaning of *proorisas*, translated predestined. Predestination looks more at the how than at the who of election. Election emphasizes the people and predestination the means (cf. v. 11; Acts 4:25-28; Rom. 8:29-30). God predetermined the final destiny of the elect, namely, that we would be His full-fledged sons (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:4-7). Jesus Christ was the Agent who made that adoption possible by His death. Sons adopted in Roman culture received the

¹Lightfoot, p. 313.

²Foulkes, p. 47.

³Simpson, p. 26.

same rights and privileges as children born into the family. Likewise our adoption does not imply an inferior status in relation to God. God predestined us to adoption because He delighted to bless us in this way.

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

"The final object of God's foreordination of us to the standing of sons is to bring us to Himself, into perfect fellowship with Him, into adoring, loving relation to Himself as the true End and Object of our being."²

"... throughout the letter Paul emphasizes God's (or Christ's) great love for his people, and the love they owe him and one another in return (1:5; 2:4; 3:19; 4:1, 2; 5:1, 2ff.; 6:23, 24). There is not a single chapter in which this theme is not stressed."³

Some Calvinistic interpreters have concluded that, since God predetermined the final destiny of those He chose for salvation, it is only logical that he also predetermined the damnation of the non-elect.⁴ Some of them say that it is therefore unnecessary for us to concern ourselves with the salvation of individuals, since God has predetermined this. This view, called "double predestination," goes beyond the explicit teaching of Scripture. The Scriptures never state that God has predetermined the fate of the non-elect. The emphasis of Scripture, on the other hand, is on the possibility, from the

¹Wiersbe, 2:11.

²Salmond, 3:252.

³Hendriksen, p. 102.

⁴See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:21:5-7; 3:23:1; et al. See his refutations of arguments against his view in 3:22-25.

human viewpoint, of anyone trusting in Jesus Christ and receiving salvation (John 3:16, et al.).¹

The decree of election does not imply a decree of reprobation (damnation). Whereas God has positively decreed the salvation of some, He permissively leaves the non-elect to their self-chosen rebellion and its natural consequence of punishment.²

"We should not see predestination as a grim process whereby God condemns great numbers of people to eternal loss. Rather, it is the outworking of a loving purpose whereby he delivers great numbers of people for salvation."³

"... men are not lost because they have not been elected. They are lost because they are sinners and that is the way they want it and that is the way they have chosen."⁴

1:6 The ultimate goal of predestination and election is that believers will contribute to the praise of the magnificence of God's undeserved favor ("the glory of His grace") that He has shown toward humankind (cf. vv. 12, 14).⁵ God has favored believers with this grace in the sense that the elect need do nothing in order to merit it. It comes to us through Jesus Christ, described here as "the Beloved" of the Father (cf. Matt. 3:17; Col. 1:13). Since God loves His Son, believers who are in Christ can rejoice that we too are the objects of God's love.

¹For four views of two Calvinists (John Feinberg and Norman Geisler) and two Arminians (Bruce Reichenbach and Clark Pinnock) on the problem of harmonizing Scriptural revelation on the subject of divine sovereignty and human freedom, see David and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will*.

²See Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:177.

³Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, pp. 17-18.

⁴McGee, 5:216.

⁵See A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pp. 100-103, for discussion of God's attribute of grace.

"As 'thanksgiving' is the crowning duty and privilege of man ... so 'praise' is the ultimate right of God."¹

"The word sweetest to the sinner in the entire Scripture is 'grace.'"²

The sacrifice of the Son 1:7-12

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

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

NEW TESTAMENT WORDS FOR REDEMPTION³

Greek Words	Meanings	References
<i>agorazo</i> (verb)	To buy, to purchase in the market (or slave market)	1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4
<i>exagorazo</i> (verb)	To buy out, to purchase out of the market (or slave market)	Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5

¹Lightfoot, p. 314.

²Lenski, p. 363.

³Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 153.

<i>lytron</i> (noun)	Ransom, the price of release	Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45
<i>lytroomai</i> (verb)	To ransom, to free by paying a ransom price	Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18
<i>lytroisis</i> (noun)	The act of freeing by paying a ransom price	Luke 1:68; 2:38; Heb. 9:12
<i>apolytroisis</i> (noun)	A buying back, a setting free by paying a ransom price	Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 11:35

The immediate result of our redemption is that God has forgiven our wrong-doings (Gr. *paraptoma*, false steps, transgressions).

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

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

"That our redemption cost so great a price, the blood of Christ, is the supreme evidence of the riches of the Divine grace. And the measure of what God does for us is nothing less than the limitless wealth of His loving favour."²

¹Lewis S. Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter*, p. 48.

²Salmond, 3:256.

1:8 God has given abundant grace to us ("He lavished on us"), not just the bare essential amount needed. This reference hints at many other benefits of Christ's death that Paul did not enumerate here. Chafer discussed 33 riches of divine grace that become ours when we trust Christ as our Savior.¹ I taught a Life Connection class in my church and found 43.

Wisdom (Gr. *sophia*) is what is highest and noblest in understanding, and insight (Gr. *phronesei*) is the means by which wisdom is perceived.² Once again we have to decide whether the last part of this verse modifies the first part of verse 8 or the first part of verse 9 (cf. v. 4). As I pointed out above, normally the modifying phrases follow the action words in this passage. Paul's idea, therefore, seems to have been that God lavished His grace on us in His infinite wisdom having insight in advance about how we would respond to it. The wisdom and insight are God's, not ours, though some interpreters argue for their being attributes of the Christian.³

1:9 This verse probably begins a new thought, as the HCSB translators suggested by putting a period at the end of verse 8.⁴ The New Testament uses the word mystery to refer to a truth that was previously hidden but has now been made known by divine revelation (cf. Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25-26; et al.). Mystery (Gr. *mysterion*) in the New Testament refers to "'a truth which was once hidden but now is revealed,' 'a truth which without special revelation would have been unknown.'"⁵ It does not mean something incomprehensible or something spooky.⁶

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

¹Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:234-65.

²Trench, pp. 263-67.

³E.g., Lightfoot, p. 317.

⁴HCSB refers to *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*.

⁵J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 166.

⁶See my note on 3:3.

what is revealed by God (e.g. Dn. ii. 19), and also of the secret that a tale-bearer tells (e.g. Eccus. xxii. 22). Thus its Christian use is not of necessity derived from its use in the heathen mystery cults so common in New Testament days."¹

The mystery (secret) revealed here is God's purpose to bring everything into submission to Jesus Christ in the future (v. 10). "In Him" means "in Christ" (NIV).²

"It is not the mystery itself, so much as the revelation of the mystery after God's long reserve, which fills the Apostle's mind with awe [here] ..."³

1:10 The Greek word translated plan (*oikonomia*) means dispensation, arrangement, or administration. The main idea in this word is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household.⁴ The Greek word translated times is *kairos*, which means particular times (periods, eras, ages) rather than the passage of time (*chronos*).

The dispensation in view is the millennial reign of Christ on earth during which everything will be under His rule (1 Cor. 15:27; Col. 1:20). Even though in one sense everything is under Christ's authority now, Jesus Christ will be the openly recognized head of all things in a more direct and obvious way in the messianic kingdom. Everyone and everything will acknowledge and respond to His authority then (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 11:1-10).

"... this 'summing up' is not the recovery of a broken pristine unity, but the gathering together

¹Foulkes, p. 51. LXX refers to the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament that was made in the third century B.C. See Robinson, pp. 234-40, for his study of the meaning of *mysterion* (mystery) in the New Testament.

²NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

³Lightfoot, p. 318.

⁴See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 22-47; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 23-43.

of objects now apart and unrelated into a final, perfect unity."¹

Robinson believed that Paul used *oikonomia* here with a focus on a process rather than on a period of time:

"'*Dispensation*' is here used in its wider sense, not of household management, which is its primary meaning, but of carrying into effect a design. The word must be taken with the foregoing phrase 'the mystery of His will'; and we may paraphrase, 'to carry it out in the fullness of the times'. The thought is not of 'a Dispensation', as though one of several Dispensations: but simply of the 'carrying out' of the secret Purpose of God."²

"A dispensation *may* fit into a certain period of time, but it actually means the way God runs something at a particular time: it is the way God does things."³

"This verse has been used as the keystone of the doctrine of 'Universalism', that all men shall be saved in the end. It does imply that in the end everything and every being in existence will be under His authority, but it is dangerous to press a doctrine from a verse without regard for the balance of the evidence of Scripture as a whole, and, in this case, without respect for the solemn presentation from one end of Scripture to the other of the alternatives of life and death dependent on the acceptance or rejection of God's salvation."⁴

¹Salmond, 3:261.

²Robinson, p. 32.

³McGee, 5:223.

⁴Foulkes, p. 53.

1:11 "In Him" (v. 10) probably begins the thought continued in this verse rather than ending verse 10, as some English translations have rendered it.

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

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

This verse contains one of the strongest statements in Scripture that God is sovereign (cf. Ps. 115:3; Prov. 16:9, 33; Dan. 4:34-35). God is sovereign over "all things in accordance with the plan of His will." This includes the election of some people to salvation. "Purpose" (Gr. *prothesin*) refers to the goal that God intends to accomplish. "Plan" (Gr. *boule*) refers to God's wise and purposeful planning or deliberation. "Will" (Gr. *thelema*) denotes willingness. The idea contained in this verse is that God chose a plan after deliberating on the wisest course of action that would accomplish his purpose.²

How does God carry out His plan? He accomplishes some things directly and exclusively Himself, without using other agents, like when He performs miracles. He accomplishes other

¹See Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1849.

²B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 15; T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, p. 20.

things through the agency of others, secondary causes, which include angels and humans. He also accomplished some things through providence, which is His working through the natural course of events that He guides. Unquestionably God is absolutely sovereign, namely, the ultimate authority over all things. How He carries out His plans—working with secondary causes, giving people freedom to choose, and then justly holding them responsible for their choices—is difficult to understand and explain.¹ I believe the solution to this puzzle lies beyond the ability of human beings to understand and explain fully. However Scripture clearly teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.²

"When discussing God's sovereignty and human freedom, it is important to recognize three different aspects of God's will. God's *sovereign* will is what God decrees to come to pass. It includes all things (Eph. 1:11) and is irresistible and immutable. God's *preceptive* will is what He prescribes or prefers. This aspect of the will of God includes His moral desires as revealed in His Word (Exod. 20:1-17). Third, God's *permissive* will refers to what the Lord permits even when it is not in conformity with His revealed or prescribed will. God may permit sin, though it is not in keeping with what He prefers."³

1:12 God chose Jews to be believers "to the praise of His glory" (cf. v. 6). This verse shows that the Jews are the "we" in view in verse 11. The Jews were the first to put their hope in Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 1:8; 13:46; 28:25; Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10).⁴

¹See Basinger and Basinger for four explanations.

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

³J. Carl Laney, *God*, p. 136.

⁴Eadie, p. 62.

"... it appears simplest ... to regard Paul as speaking in this clause specially of those who like himself had once been Jews, who had the Messianic prophecies and looked for the Messiah, and by God's grace had been led to see that in Christ they had found the Messiah."¹

To summarize verses 7-12: the work of the Son in salvation was setting the sinner free from his or her sin and revealing God's plan to head up all things in Christ at the end of the ages. This includes the salvation of Jewish believers.

The seal of the Spirit 1:13-14

"God's spiritual blessings for believers are based not only on the sovereign election of the Father (vv. 3-6) and the redemptive work of the Son (vv. 7-12), but also on the seal of the Holy Spirit."²

1:13 In contrast to the Jews, who were the first to hope in Christ (v. 12), Gentiles also had come to salvation when Paul wrote this epistle. The vehicle that God uses to bring His elect to faith is "the message of truth," namely, the gospel message: the good news of salvation. When Gentiles in Ephesus heard it they listened to it and believed it. This resulted in their salvation and their sealing by the Holy Spirit. There are about 59 references to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians, one-fourth of the total references to Him in the New Testament. The AV translation implies that the sequence is hearing, believing, and then sealing.³ However the sealing takes place at the same time as believing (cf. Acts 19:2). It is not a second or later work of grace.

When the Gentiles in view believed, God sealed them in Christ. This provided a guarantee of their eternal security.⁴ Seals, at

¹Salmond, 3:266.

²Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 619.

³AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*.

⁴See Eldon Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):139-63; Robert G. Gromacki, *Salvation is Forever*; Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*.

the time Paul wrote, indicated security (Matt. 27:66; Eph. 4:30; Rev. 5:1), authentication and approval (John 6:27), genuineness (Esth. 3:12; John 3:33; 1 Cor. 9:2), and ownership (Song of Sol. 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:22; Rev. 7:2; 9:4). God seals the believer by giving him or her the indwelling Holy Spirit who keeps the Christian securely in Christ. The Jews incorrectly regarded circumcision as a seal (guarantee) of their salvation (Rom. 4:11). The Lord Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would permanently indwell believers (Luke 24:49; John 14:16; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 1:5). That is evidently why Paul referred to Him as "the Holy Spirit of the promise."

Pentecostal scholar Stanley M. Horton wrote:

"Most Pentecostals recognize the word *seal* has nothing to do with security. Rather, it is an outward mark indicating that we are His workmanship."¹

"The *arrabon* [pledge, deposit, earnest, guarantee] was a regular feature of the Greek business world. The *arrabon* was a part of the purchase price of anything paid in advance as a guarantee that the rest of the price should in due time be paid."²

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

1:14 The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is the first installment of all that God will give us as His children ("our inheritance"). This gift is not just a promise but the first part of our inheritance—the down payment so to speak (cf. Gen. 38:17-20 LXX).³ The fact that we possess Him now (the "already" aspect of our salvation) assures us that the rest of our salvation (the "not

¹Stanley M. Horton, "Response to Walvoord," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, p. 235.

²Barclay, p. 101.

³See Eadie, p. 67.

yet" portion) will inevitably follow.¹ An engagement ring is this kind of pledge.

"To give believers a foretasting, and then withhold the full enjoyment, would be a fearful torture."²

"The content of the inheritance here is life in heaven with God."³

The redemption (Gr. *apolytrosis*) in view here is a different aspect of our salvation than the redemption mentioned in verse 7. Here it is not release from sin's guilt, power, and penalty (v. 7) but release from sin's presence (cf. Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20-21). In verse 7 justification is in view, but here glorification is, glorification being the final aspect of our redemption. We experience redemption in three stages: we have been redeemed in Christ (1:7), we are being redeemed as the Spirit makes us more like Christ (Rom. 8:1-4), and we shall be redeemed when Christ returns and we become sinless, like He is.

"God's own possession" is the believer, whom He has chosen (vv. 3-6), redeemed (vv. 7-12), and sealed (vv. 13-14) to the praise of His glory (cf. vv. 6, 12, 18). Another view is that the inheritance in verse 11, as well as the possession of the Spirit in verse 14, is the church.⁴ This interpretation views believers collectively.

"We value highly that which we pay a high price for; so God, His Church (ch. 5:15, 26; I Pet. 1:18; 2:9; Mal. 3:17, *Margin*, 'my *special* treasure')."⁵

¹See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):449-50.

²Eadie, p. 68.

³Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 90.

⁴E.g., Stott, p. 47.

⁵Jamieson, et al., p. 1281.

However, the context seems to be describing blessings that every individual Christian enjoys, rather than blessings that God enjoys.

"This beautiful phrase ["to the praise of His glory"] needs to be unpacked. The glory of God is the revelation of God, and the glory of his grace is his self-disclosure as a gracious God. To live to the praise of the glory of his grace is both to worship him ourselves by our words and deeds as the gracious God he is, and to cause others to see and to praise him too."¹

The nine spiritual blessings that Paul identified in verses 3-14 are election, predestination, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, knowledge, sealing, and inheritance. Stott summarized them as three: past election, present adoption, and future unification.² The recurrence of the phrase "in Christ" and equivalent expressions emphasizes that all these blessings come with our union with our Savior (vv. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 [twice]).

"... 'in Christ' (or some derivative) occurs a dozen times. It is indeed the most characteristic phrase in the apostle's terminology."³

Likewise the repetition of the phrase "His will" and its equivalents emphasizes that the sovereign God is responsible for all these blessings (vv. 5, 9, 11). These verses (3-14) contain a compact statement of every believer's spiritual riches. The passage is similar to a bank statement because it lists every Christian's spiritual assets.

"We have been listening to an overture of the hallelujahs of the blest, and it closes, as it began, on the note of the praise of God's glory, the highest of all themes. ... False and true theology may be discriminated by a simple criterion. Do they magnify God or man?"⁴

¹Stott, p. 50.

²Ibid., p. 36.

³James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, p. 155. He meant that it is the most characteristic phrase in Paul's entire New Testament terminology.

⁴Simpson, p. 36.

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

As has been stated, all of the blessings mentioned in these verses are the property of all Christians. Elsewhere in the New Testament we read of additional benefits that come to Christians who faithfully trust and obey the Lord. Unfaithful Christians will not inherit these blessings.

2. The means: knowledge 1:15-23

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

"For a healthy Christian life today it is of the utmost importance to follow Paul's example and keep Christian praise and Christian prayer together. Yet many do not manage to preserve this balance. Some Christians seem to do little but pray for new spiritual blessings, apparently oblivious of the fact that God has already blessed them in Christ with every spiritual blessing. Others lay such emphasis on the undoubted truth that everything is already theirs in Christ, that they become

complacent and appear to have no appetite to know or experience their Christian privileges more deeply."¹

Commendation 1:15-16

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

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

The apostle had personally witnessed the faith and love of the Ephesians five or six years earlier, but he had evidently received fresh reports of their recent condition. His statement also suggests that "you" may include other churches besides the one or ones located in Ephesus.

Faith is the expression of the believer's trust in God, our vertical relationship. Love is the evidence of his or her proper relationship with other people, our horizontal relationship (cf. 6:23; Col. 1:14; 2 Thess. 1:3).

*"Faith, if it be genuine, and love go together, for the Magnet that draws sinners to himself draws them together also."*²

1:16 These qualities in his readers stimulated Paul to give thanks to God for their present condition and to petition Him for their present and future needs. He said he prayed for them repeatedly.³

Supplication 1:17-23

1:17 Paul returned to his concept of God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 3; cf. Matt. 6:9). He combined with this the

¹Stott, p. 52.

²Hendriksen, p. 96.

³See W. B. Pope, *The Prayers of St. Paul*.

idea that all glory belongs to the Father (vv. 6, 12, 14; cf. Acts 7:2; 1 Cor. 2:8).¹

Paul asked God to give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and of revelation. The spirit in view probably refers to an attitude, rather than to the Holy Spirit, wisdom and revelation being the description of that attitude (cf. 1 Cor. 4:21).² They had already received the Holy Spirit. These attitudes become ours through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us however (cf. Isa. 11:2).

"The Ephesians had possessed the Spirit as an earnest and seal [vv. 13, 14], and now the apostle implores His influence in other modes of it to descend upon them."³

Wisdom (Gr. *sophia*, v. 8; 3:10) enables one to perceive reality accurately. Revelation is the unveiling of a subject that is contemplated, in this case God Himself. Wisdom by revelation is the idea (a hendiadys).⁴ Paul was evidently praying for a specific enablement by the Spirit so that his readers would understand God's mysteries.⁵

"William Chillingworth said: 'The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.' That is true; but so often we would not think so. The exposition of scripture from the pulpit is a first necessity of religious waking. We are interested, not in what a preacher thinks, but in what God says."⁶

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

¹Wuest, 1:4:52.

²See Robinson, p. 38, for the other view.

³Eadie, p. 82.

⁴A hendiadys is the expression of a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than using an adjective and a substantive.

⁵Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 256.

⁶Barclay, p. 105.

not just abstract knowledge of God or even facts about Him.¹ Paul wanted his readers to get to know God more intimately as their own personal heavenly Father, to become closer friends with Him (cf. John 15:14).

"Growth in knowledge is indispensable to growth in holiness."²

"The Christian life could be described as getting to know God better every day. A friendship which does not grow closer with the years tends to vanish with the years. And it is so with us and God."³

"To know God personally is salvation (John 17:3). To know Him increasingly is sanctification (Phil 3:10). To know Him perfectly is glorification (1 Cor. 13:9-12)."⁴

1:18 Paul's readers would gain this greater knowledge as God enlightened their understanding. The "heart" refers to the center of personality in the Bible, the whole inward self, comprising mind and emotions. The "eyes of the heart" is a vivid mixed metaphor that suggests not just intellectual understanding but total comprehension of God. In Hebrew thinking, which Paul employed, mixed metaphors enriched a thought rather than confusing it, as it does in English.⁵

"Christians should not think it enough to have warm affections, but they should labour to have clear understandings; they should be ambitious of being knowing Christians, and judicious Christians."⁶

¹Trench, pp. 268-69. See Robinson, pp. 248-54, for his study of the meaning of *epignosis*.

²Stott, p. 54.

³Barclay, p. 105.

⁴Wiersbe, 2:15.

⁵See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1—72*, p. 151.

⁶Henry, p. 1849.

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

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

1:19 Third, Paul wanted the Ephesians to know the great power of God that affects the Christian.

"If God's 'call' looks back to the beginning, and God's 'inheritance' looks on to the end, then surely God's 'power' spans the interim period in between."¹

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

"By making us His inheritance, God has shown His love. By promising us a wonderful future, He has encouraged our hope. Paul offered something to challenge our faith: 'the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe' (Eph. 1:19)."²

¹Stott, p. 57.

²Wiersbe, 2:16.

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

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

"There is given to the Church, and for the Church's benefit, a Head who is also Head over all things. The church has authority and power to overcome

¹See Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):81-82.

²Robinson, p. 41; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 279.

³See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 45.

all opposition because her Leader and Head is Lord of all."¹

Morris, however, took "the head" here, and in 4:15, as the beginning.²

1:23 The church is both the body of Christ (all true believers) and the fullness of Him who fills everything in every possible way³ ("all in all"), namely, Jesus Christ Himself. The church is the fullness of Christ probably in the sense that He fills for Himself (middle voice in Greek) the church with blessings (cf. 4:10-11). Other views are that the church completes Christ,⁴ or that Christ fills the church with Himself.⁵ Jesus Christ, who fills all things with all things (i.e., with blessings), is filling the church with blessings. The church could not come into existence until Jesus Christ had ascended into heaven to become its Head.⁶

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

3. The motive: grace 2:1-10

Paul proceeded to conclude his revelation of the Christian's individual calling in Christ (1:3—2:10). He began this section of the epistle by explaining the

¹Foulkes, p. 65. See also Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* [head] in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS5 (1954):211-15.

²Morris, p. 36.

³Lenski, p. 404.

⁴Robinson, pp. 42-44. See also this writer's study of the meaning of *pleroma* (fullness), pp. 255-59.

⁵See Stott, pp. 61-64, or Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 294-301, for discussions of the views.

⁶See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 117.

purpose of our calling (i.e., the glory of God, 1:3-14). He then expounded the means whereby we appreciate our calling (i.e., knowledge given by the Holy Spirit through God's revelation, 1:15-23). Finally He enunciated the motive for our calling (i.e., the unmerited grace of God, 2:1-10).

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

"... what Paul does in this passage is to paint a vivid contrast between what man is by nature and what he can become by grace."¹

"Having described our spiritual *possessions* in Christ, Paul turns to a complementary truth: our spiritual *position* in Christ. First he explains what God has done for all sinners in general; then he explains what God did for the Gentiles in particular."²

Once dead to God 2:1-3

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

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

"There are three outstanding schools of moral pathology traceable throughout the centuries.

¹Stott, p. 69.

²Wiersbe, 2:17.

Pelagianism asserts the convalescence of human nature. Man merely needs teaching. Semi-pelagianism admits his ill-health, but affirms that the symptoms will yield to proper treatment, to a course of tonic drugs and a scrupulous regimen. But Biblical Christianity probes the patient to the quick. Its searching diagnosis pronounces that mortification has set in and that nothing less than infusion of fresh lifeblood can work a cure. Nostrums [medicines] and palliatives [sedatives] aggravate rather than allay the disease. Sin is an organic epidemical malady, a slow devitalizing poison issuing in moral necrosis [death]; not a stage of arrested or incomplete development, but a seed-plot of impending ruin."¹

"The unbeliever is not sick; he is dead! He does not need resuscitation; he needs resurrection. All lost sinners are dead, and the only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay."²

"The only place where all men meet on a common level and share the same position is in their natural birth in sin."³

2:2 The apostle further described the sphere in which unbelievers live in three ways: First, it is a lifestyle in which people follow the ways of the world. The philosophy that seeks to eliminate God from every aspect of life dominates this lifestyle (cf. John 15:18, 23). This is the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience, not an angelic or demonic spirit, but the ruling principle by which unbelievers live.⁴ This is the sphere in which Paul's readers formerly lived ("walked").

¹Simpson, p. 46.

²Wiersbe, 2:18.

³Paxton, p. 52.

⁴Jamieson, et al., p. 1283.

"The Jews called their laws of conduct *Halachah*, which means 'Walking' (cf. Mk. vii. 5; Acts xxi. 21; Heb. xiii. 9, RV mg.)."¹

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

"... by speaking of the devil's authority as 'in the air', Paul was not necessarily accepting the current notion of the air being the abode and realm of evil spirits. Basically his thought was of an evil power with control in the world (see on vi. 12), but whose existence was not material but spiritual."²

"... the cults are as busy as termites, and with the same results. False religionists put us to shame in their zeal. Satan is energizing them."³

The phrase "sons of disobedience" is a way of referring to people characterized by disobedience—like a son bears the traits of his parent. Unbelievers resemble Satan in their rebellion.

2:3 Third, not only does the philosophy of the world guide unbelievers, and Satan control them, but they also indulge the flesh. The term flesh (Gr. *sarkos*), when used metaphorically as here, refers to the sinful nature that everyone possesses. It is our human nature that is sinful.

Where did we get this sinful nature? There are three main theories as to the origin of the human soul (i.e., the immaterial part of mankind): The theory of preexistence, held by Mormons

¹Foulkes, p. 69.

²Ibid. See also Eadie, p. 129.

³McGee, 5:231.

and others, is that God created all souls in time past and that when people are born their souls become activated.¹ The theory of traducianism is that each person receives his or her soul from his or her parents, along with their bodies.² The theory of creationism is that God creates each person's soul at the moment of their conception.³

The theory of reincarnation, held by Hindus, Theosophists, and some others, is that each person born receives the soul of someone who has previously died.⁴ This theory focuses on the transmission of the soul and not on the origin of the soul, though adherents usually believe in the preexistence theory.

Not many Christians subscribe to the preexistence theory since there does not seem to be much, if any, support for it in Scripture. Those who hold traducianism believe that it best explains how people inherit Adam's sinful nature: They inherit it from Adam through their parents. However, the weakness of this theory is that, if it is true, it seems that Jesus would have been born with a sinful nature since He was fully human, having both a human body and a human soul. Perhaps since the Holy Spirit was Jesus' "father" and the virgin Mary was His mother, He was not born with a sinful human nature. Those who hold creationism believe that it explains best Jesus' sinless nature, and it accounts for human depravity. They do not believe that God creates a sinful soul in each person, but that the soul becomes sinful because of its immediate contact with the parents' sinfulness.⁵

Since none of these theories is without its weaknesses, and since the Scriptures do not address this issue directly, the

¹See Enns, pp. 305-6; Jan Karel Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, p. 159; John H. Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects*, p. 44..

²Advocates include William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:19-94, 210; A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 493-97, 622; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:160, 285; J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, p. 252; Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 194; Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 18; Enns, p. 306.

³Advocates include Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:70-72, 192-204; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 201, 242.

⁴See Van Baalen, p. 55; Gerstner, p. 185.

⁵*Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Creationism," by John H. Gerstner, p. 147.

whole question of the origin of the soul, and how every human is born with a sinful nature, remains mysterious. My preference is traducianism.

In addition to being born with a sinful nature, every person also has the sin of Adam imputed to him or her at birth (Rom. 5:12-13).

"Here is the essential meaning of the doctrine of *original sin*."¹

Augustine and Calvin also believed that the Bible teaches original sin.

"Hence, as Augustine says, whether a man is a guilty unbeliever or an innocent believer, he begets not innocent but guilty children, for he begets them from a corrupted nature."²

"Original sin, therefore seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls 'works of the flesh' [Gal. 5:19]."³

The unbeliever characteristically gives in to his or her fleshly desires and thoughts, whereas the believer should not and need not do so (cf. Rom. 7—8).

"The Greek word for 'nature' [*phusis*] is a neutral word. It simply means the natural constitution of a thing, or the thing in itself apart from anything that may come to it from outside. As a rule it has a good meaning rather than a bad: thus 'according

¹Salmond, 3:287.

²Calvin, 2:1:7. His reference is from Augustine's *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin*, 2:40:45. See *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first edition, 5:253.

³Calvin, 2:1:8.

to nature' is good, 'contrary to nature' is bad;
compare Rom. xi 21 ff., and Rom. i 26."¹

"Children of wrath" and "sons of disobedience" (v. 2) are both phrases that describe unbelievers. The word children (Gr. *tekna*) highlights the close relationship between a child and his or her parents. It also indicates that we were sinners by generation, not just by adoption, as the word sons might suggest.² The word sons (Gr. *huioi*) stresses the distinctive characteristics of the parents that the child displays. Unbelievers have a close relationship to God's wrath because of their rebellion against Him (cf. Rom. 1:18—2:29; John 3:36).

"... '*children of wrath*' is a Hebraism for 'objects of wrath' ..."³

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

THE CHRISTIAN'S THREE-FOLD ENEMY	
The Problem	The Solution
The World	Flee
(1 John 2:15-17)	(1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22)
Lust of the flesh	
Lust of the eyes	
Pride of life	

¹Robinson, p. 50.

²Jamieson, p. 1283.

³Robinson, p. 51.

The flesh (Rom. 7:18-24)	Deny (Rom. 6:12-13; 8:13)
The devil (1 Peter 5:8)	Resist (1 Peter 5:9)

Now alive in God 2:4-10

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

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

"If *mercy* is God's attitude to sinful men, *love* is His motive in all that He does with them; and as the mercy is 'rich' so the love is 'great'."²

2:5 Unbelievers are spiritually dead in their wrongdoings, offenses, and sins (cf. v. 1). However God has given new life to believers. The only way that a dead person can have any fellowship with the living God is for God to give him or her new life (cf. Rom. 4:17). Regeneration (getting "saved") is an act of God in grace. Regeneration results in the commencement and continuation of new spiritual life.³ "Have been saved" is in the

¹See V. Raymond Edman, *But God!* for devotional thoughts on 34 passages that begin: "But God."

²Salmond, 3:287.

³See R. Bruce Compton, "The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: The Case for Faith Preceding Regeneration, Part 3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:699 (July-September 2018):284-88.

perfect tense in Greek, indicating an ongoing permanent condition.

"Being saved by grace is the opposite of being saved by merit, the merit that supposedly accrues from inherent goodness or from strenuous effort."¹

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

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

"Of the immediate spiritual blessings which are wrought for the individual at the moment he believes, some are to be classified as *possessions*, and some as *positions*. Likewise some are wrought *in* him, and some are wrought *for* him. These distinctions occur in verses 5 and 6 ..."²

"Christian life does not begin with walking [4:1]; it begins with sitting."³

"Christianity begins not with a big DO, but with a big DONE."⁴

2:7 God's ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself. The ages to come include all future ages. God will use the regeneration of

¹Hendriksen, p. 117.

²Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, p. 73.

³Watchman Nee, *Sit. Walk. Stand*, p. 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 2.

believers to demonstrate the boundless riches of His grace (cf. 1:7). Specifically, His kindness toward believers, as displayed in all that we have in Christ, is in view. We especially see God's kindness in His giving life to those who were dead in sin.

"The kindness of God in Christ Jesus is a phrase expressive of the *manner* in which grace operates."¹

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

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

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

"Grace springs from His [God's] sovereign will, not from His essential nature. It is not an attribute which must always manifest itself, but a prerogative that may either be exercised or held in abeyance."³

"It is the uniform doctrine of the New Testament, that no man is saved against his will; and his desire

¹Eadie, p. 148.

²See Morris, p. 104; and René A. López, "Is Faith a Gift from God or a Human Exercise?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July-September 2007):259-76.

³Eadie, p. 149.

to be saved is proved by his belief of the Divine testimony."¹

To what does "this" refer? Since it is a neuter pronoun it evidently does not refer to grace or faith, both of which are feminine in gender in the Greek text. Probably it refers to the whole preceding clause that describes salvation (cf. 1:15; 3:1).² Salvation is "the gift of God."³ Eadie described "this" as "this condition of safety."⁴

"If we breathe, it is because life has been breathed into us; if we exercise the hearing of faith it is because our ears have been unstopped. We are born from above. Spiritual life is not of the nature of a subsidy supplementing dogged exertion or ruthless self-flagellation, but a largess from the overflowing well-spring of divine compassion, lavished on a set of spiritual incapables."⁵

"Look at salvation in its origin—it is 'by grace.' Look at it in its reception—it is 'through faith.' Look at it in its manner of conferment—it is a 'gift.'"⁶

2:9 Salvation is by grace, so it is not of us. It is through faith, so it is not by works. And it is God's gift, so it is not of man's origination.⁷ No one will be able to boast that he or she has done something that earned him or her salvation. All the glory will go to God for accomplishing salvation.

¹Ibid., p. 150.

²See Henry, p. 1850; Alford, 3:2:94.

³See Roy L. Aldrich, "The Gift of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:487 (July-September 1965):248-53; and Gary L. Nebeker, "Is Faith a Gift of God? Ephesians 2:8 Reconsidered," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 4:7 (July 1989):1, 4.

⁴Eadie, p. 152.

⁵Simpson, p. 55.

⁶Eadie, p. 153.

⁷Ibid., p. 154.

"Since we have not been saved by our good works, we cannot be lost by our bad works."¹

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

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

"... God has prepared a path of good works for believers which He will perform in and through them as they walk by faith. This does not mean doing a work for God; instead, it is God's performing His work in and through believers ..."³

This verse does not say that Christians will inevitably walk in the good works that God has freed us from sin's penalty and power to do. God has saved us so that we can do works that are good in His sight, but this is obviously only part of His

¹Wiersbe, 2:19.

²Alford, 3:2:94.

³Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 624.

purpose in saving us. He has also saved us to take us to heaven, for example (John 14:1-3). He has guaranteed that all who trust in His Son will reach heaven (our glorification, John 10:28-29). He has not guaranteed that all who trust in Jesus Christ will persevere in good works (our progressive sanctification). That depends on our obedience (4:1; Titus 3:8).¹

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

"One could legitimately characterize the whole lordship controversy as a dispute over efficacious grace. All points in the discussion ultimately come back to this: Does God's saving grace inevitably obtain its desired effects? If all sides could come to consensus on that one question, the debate would be settled."²

God's saving grace inevitably attains all that God has said it will inevitably attain, including the believer's justification, positional sanctification, and glorification. However it does not inevitably attain what God has said depends on the choices of His people. We must be careful to distinguish what God wants to happen from what He has said He will make happen. His desires are not the same as His decrees.³

"The most important aspect of the Divine decree is, that it brings all things that come to pass in space and time into a *plan*."⁴

¹See Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, pp. 28-33.

²John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p. 61.

³See Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* pp. 73-74.

⁴Shedd, 1:398.

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

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

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

B. CORPORATE CALLING 2:11—3:19

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

"... a major focus of this letter and of the Prison Epistles in general is the corporate nature of those who are in the body of Christ. Believers do not have a private faith; they have corporate relationship and responsibility to each other."¹

1. Present ministry 2:11-22

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

¹Bock, p. 308.

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

2:11 In view of what God has done for us in changing us, Gentile believers need to remember certain things.

"Converted sinners ought frequently to reflect upon the sinfulness and misery of the state they were in by nature."¹

Paul used the word flesh here in the literal sense (i.e., the body), rather than in one of its metaphorical senses (i.e., the sinful human nature, or all that we are in Adam). Great differences existed between Jewish and Gentile believers before the Cross.

"The one word that best describes the Gentiles is *without*. They were 'outside' in several respects."²

2:12 Paul listed five privileges that Gentile believers did not enjoy but which Jewish believers did enjoy before the Cross:

First, Gentile believers were separate from Christ, the Messiah. They had no corporate national hope centered in a Messiah as the Jews did.

Second, God excluded them as a people from citizenship in the commonwealth of Israel. Individual Gentiles could become members of the nation of Israel, but as a whole, the Gentiles had no part in what God planned to do in and through Israel. The Gentiles were aliens from Israel in this sense.

Third, they had no direct part in the promises of God to Israel contained in the biblical covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic). Morris, an amillennialist, believed the singular "promise" refers to God's promise to send His Messiah.³ Probably the singular "promise" simply stresses the promise element that is foundational to all the biblical covenants.

¹Henry, p. 1850.

²Wiersbe, 2:22.

³Morris, p. 62.

Fourth, as a race of people, the Gentiles had no corporate future promised by God to which they could look and in which they could hope as Israel did.

Fifth, they were without God. They were godless and without God's special help.¹ In contrast, God had reached out to Israel and drawn her to Himself.

"This is the only place in the New Testament where the word *atheos* ["without God"] occurs. It is in no contemptuous sense that the Apostle speaks of them as having been 'atheists', or 'godless'. It was the simple and sad description of their actual state, not indeed from their own, but from the only true point of view."²

"The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made. The best of the serpents crush, they said, the best of the Gentiles kill. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death."³

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

¹Eadie, p. 167.

²Robinson, p. 57.

³Barclay, p. 125. Cf. Jonah.

2:13 "But" points to another great contrast (cf. v. 4). Because of Jesus Christ's death ("blood") God has brought Gentiles near to Himself and to the Jews in a sense never before true. The rabbis spoke of Gentiles, who were far from the privileges of the Mosaic Covenant, as being brought near by becoming proselytes.¹ Sin results in death and separation. However, Christ's obedience resulted in life and reconciliation with other people, as well as with God, for Gentiles. Perhaps Paul referred to the blood of Christ, in part, to correct the Gnostic denial of Christ's real humanity.²

There is obvious continuity between the redeemed people of God in the Old Testament and the redeemed people of God in the New Testament. However here Paul stressed the differences between these two groups.³ Covenant theology stresses the continuity between the two groups, whereas dispensational theology stresses the differences between them. Many covenant theologians minimize these differences.

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

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

2:14 In order to understand this verse we must discover what barrier (lit. dividing wall) Paul had in mind. Perhaps it was the low wall in Herod's Temple courtyard that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Jews.⁴ This seems improbable since that wall still stood and divided Jews and Gentiles when Paul wrote this epistle. Perhaps he had in mind the veil between the holy and most holy places in that temple (cf. vv. 16, 18).⁵ However that veil—it was not a wall—did not separate Jews from Gentiles but all people from God. It seems most probable that Paul had in mind the spiritual, rather than

¹For the original sources, see Abbott, p. 60.

²Robertson, 4:526.

³See Carl B. Hoch Jr., "The New Man in Ephesians 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 98-126.

⁴Morris, p. 65. Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15:11:5; *ibid.*, *The Wars of the Jews*, 5:5:2.

⁵Alford, 3:2:97.

a physical barrier, that had separated Jews and Gentiles since Abraham's time. This is in harmony with Paul's emphasis on spiritual realities that marks Ephesians.

"This new institution [the church] does not dissolve ethnic distinctions, but displays reconciliation, with every believer equally qualified to share in the benefits of salvation and peace that emerge from the uniting of Jews and Gentiles into a new living community."¹

"Jew and Gentile are not changed in race, nor amalgamated in blood, but they are 'one' in point of privilege and position toward God."²

Eadie quoted Chrysostom's illustration of the two becoming one:

"Let us imagine that there are two statues, one of silver and the other of lead, and then that both shall be melted down, and the two shall come out gold. So thus He has made the two one."³

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

"When verse 14 says Christ is our peace, it means that Jesus is the source of restored relationships, not only between an individual and God but also between individuals. Now people form a new community, the household of God, which itself is

¹Bock, p. 314.

²Eadie, p. 171.

³Ibid.

compared to a holy temple, a sacred work of God (2:18-22)."¹

2:15 The body of Jesus ("His flesh") sacrificed on the cross terminated the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. It did so in the sense that when Jesus Christ died He fulfilled all the demands of the Mosaic Law. When He did that God ended the Mosaic Law as His rule of life for the Jews. The word abolished (Gr. *kataresas*) means rendered inoperative. The Mosaic Law ceased to be God's standard for regulating the life of His people when Christ died (Rom. 10:4; et al.).

The Mosaic Law had been the cause of the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Its dietary distinctions and laws requiring separation in particular created hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The NASB translation implies that the Law was the barrier. Actually the Law was the cause of the spiritual barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus Christ broke down the spiritual barrier and the hostility that resulted from it by terminating the Mosaic Law.²

"The Law is now introduced, and the term *ho nomos* ["the Law"] is to be taken in its full sense, not the *ceremonial* law only, but the Mosaic Law as a whole, according to the stated use of the phrase."³

Jesus Christ had two purposes in ending the hostility. First, He wanted to create one new entity, the church, out of the members of the two former groups: Jews and Gentiles (v. 11). Here the "new person" is not the individual believer but the church, the body of Christ (cf. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 3:10-11; Heb. 12:23). In the church God does not deal with Gentiles as He did with Jews, nor does He deal with Jews as He did Gentiles. Jews do not become Gentiles, nor do Gentiles become Jews in the church. Rather God has created a whole

¹Bock, "'The New Man' as Community in Colossians and Ephesians," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 161.

²See Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

³Salmond, 3:295.

new (Gr. *kainon*, fresh) entity: the church. In the church believing Jews are Christians and believing Gentiles are Christians. God now deals with both believing Jews and believing Gentiles equally: as Christians.¹

"... Jew and Gentile together are both raised to a higher platform than the circumcision ever enjoyed."²

2:16 Jesus Christ's second purpose for ending Jewish-Gentile hostility was to reconcile Jewish and Gentile believers to Himself in one body: the church. Ironically the Cross in one sense terminated Jesus, but Jesus terminated the enmity between Jews and Gentiles through the Cross. Not only have Jews and Gentiles experienced reconciliation with one another (vv. 14-15), but they have also experienced reconciliation with God by the Cross (v. 16).³ The Cross satisfied God's justice; it propitiated Him (cf. 1 John 2:2).

"The most unexpected and unprepared-for revelation, from the Jewish point of view, was that of the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, the taking away of the enmity of the law, and the nailing it to His Cross. There was nothing analogous to it; not a hint of it to be found, either in the teaching or the spirit of the times."⁴

"The reason why there is so much strife in this world, between individuals, families, social or political groups, whether small or large, is that the contending parties, through the fault of either or both, have not found each other at Calvary. Only then when sinners have been reconciled to God

¹See Fruchtenbaum, p. 118.

²Eadie, p. 178.

³Alford, 3:2:98.

⁴Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 29.

through the cross will they be truly reconciled to each other."¹

2:17 Not only is Jesus Christ our peace (v. 14), but He also preached peace. He kept preaching the message of peace, the gospel, in person and through His Spirit-empowered apostles following His ascension (cf. John 14:18; Acts 1:1-2, 8; 26:23) to both Gentiles and Jews (vv. 12-13). Some interpreters limit Jesus' preaching to His post-ascension ministry.²

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

"People ask me why I didn't have a select few pray for me when I had my bout with cancer. Why did I ask everybody to pray? I did it because I believe in the priesthood of believers, that is, all believers have access to Him."³

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

¹Hendriksen, p. 136.

²E.g., Robinson, p. 66.

³McGee, 5:240.

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

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

2:19 Because of this union Gentile believers are no longer strangers and foreigners in relation to Jewish believers, as they once were.

"They were 'strangers'—they had been so while the old theocracy stood, the Jews being the children, but they [as Gentiles were] miserable outcasts. Once, too, they were *paroikoi* ["foreigners"], literally 'by-dwellers,' men who sojourn in a house without the rights of the resident family."¹

Christians are now fellow citizens with the saints. In other words, Gentile believers are now citizens of the same heavenly homeland as Jewish believers. To change the figure, Gentile believers are now members of the same household as Jewish believers. The key to their union is their common faith in Christ. Elsewhere Paul spoke of the local church as a household (1 Tim. 3:15), but here the "household" in view is all believers of all ages.²

2:20 This household rests on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. New Testament prophets may be in view, since the word prophets follows apostles (cf. 3:5; 4:11).³ If so Paul meant that they did the foundational work in establishing the church. On the other hand Paul may have meant the New Testament apostles and the Old Testament prophets, or perhaps all the prophets. In this case Paul meant that they did the foundational work in preparing for the church.

¹Eadie, p. 189.

²See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 395-96.

³See Eadie, pp. 193-95; Salmond, 3:299.

"If the teaching of the prophets and apostles is the foundation, this must have had authority before the church began to exist."¹

Taking the first view Stott wrote:

"In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures."²

At the time Paul wrote the cornerstone was the crucial part of the foundation of a building. It was the stone with which the builder squared up every other stone, including the other foundation stones.³ This stone is Christ (cf. Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:6-8).

"In the East it was considered to be even more important than the foundation."⁴

2:21 In addition to describing the church as a household (vv. 19-20), Paul also pictured it as a building under construction with God adding new believers, like stones, constantly (cf. 4:15-16; Matt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 2:5). The Greek word *oikos* can be translated house or household, but Paul's use of this word in these verses shows the he meant a household in verse 19 and a house in verse 21.

"As Solomon's temple was built without the sound of hammer, so the Holy spirit silently places each dead sinner into the living temple through regeneration and [Spirit] baptism [cf. 1 Cor. 12:13]."⁵

The individual stones represent believers, both Jewish and Gentile. Today God does not inhabit a physical temple somewhere on earth, as He did in Old Testament times. He

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

²Stott, p. 107.

³Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 627.

⁴Wood, p. 42.

⁵McGee, 5:241.

indwells His church, which is a spiritual and holy temple spread out over all the earth. It began on the day of Pentecost and it will continue until the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). As physical temples glorified the gods that they represented in ancient times, so the church glorifies the one true God today.

Paul may very well have used the illustration of a temple because the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was the city's most outstanding claim to fame. It was four times as big as the Parthenon, which still stands in Athens. One hundred twenty-seven white columns rose 60 feet high and surrounded an image of the goddess Artemis (Diana).¹ Authorities still regard the temple of Artemis as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (cf. Acts 19:23-41).

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

"Israel *had* a building in which God was pleased to dwell: the Church *is* a building in which God is pleased to dwell."²

"Now His presence is dispersed, not localized. Now His presence is incarnated, instead of confined behind a veil."³

"What a fellowship rivets our gaze in the communion of saints! Where shall we find its like? Gathered from east and west ... from the courts of kings and the cabins of beggars, from babes-in-arms and centenarians, right honourables and ragamuffins, from the ranks of the learned and the

¹Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 36.21 §96.

²Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, p. 93.

³Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 314.

ignorant, the pharisee and the publican, the sharp-witted and the feeble-minded, the respectable and the criminal classes—what a divine power must be put forth to mould all these incongruous elements into one consentient [united in opinion] whole, stamped with one regenerate likeness for evermore, the radiant image of the 'Alpha and Omega,' God's Yokefellow and theirs, coequally David's Son and David's Lord!"¹

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

"I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honour of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is—a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as Peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due to his name."²

2. Past ignorance 3:1-13

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

¹Simpson, p. 68.

²Stott, pp. 111-12.

"Chapter 2 has shown what God has done. Chapter 3, therefore, is going to indicate what the church, mentioned distinctly in verse 10, now must do."¹

"The whole of chapter 3 is a parenthesis unfolding the mystery ..."²

"As the first chapter treated of the Father's office; and the second, the Son's, so this, that of the Spirit."³

3:1 "For this reason" refers to what Paul had said in the first two chapters about God's blessings that are now the possession of both Gentile and Jewish believers.⁴ Since God has blessed Christians so greatly, Paul prayed that his readers would comprehend fully the extent of God's love for them (vv. 14-21).

His reference to himself as Christ's prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles led him to digress and explain why he was such. When Paul wrote this epistle he was under house arrest in Rome. This imprisonment had resulted from his service for Christ, specifically his ministry among Gentiles, for which the Jews had mobbed him in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:21, 28; 2 Tim. 1:11-12). Paul regarded his imprisonment as God's will for him.

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

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

¹Hendriksen, p. 150.

²J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 4:431.

³Jamieson, p. 1286.

⁴Eadie, pp. 208-9.

"God's principles do not change, but His methods of dealing with mankind do change over the course of history. 'Distinguish the ages,' wrote St. Augustine, 'and the Scriptures harmonize.'"¹

3:3 Paul's ministry involved receiving revelation from God that He had not previously given, which Paul called "the mystery." This mystery was specifically that Gentiles and Jews were equal partners in the church (2:16; 3:6). Paul had written of this mystery before in this epistle (1:9-10; 2:11-22). He did not mean that he was the only apostle who received knowledge of this mystery, as verse 5 shows.

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO "MYSTERIES"

(THINGS PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN BUT NOW REVEALED)²

Matt. 13:11	The secrets of the kingdom of heaven
Luke 8:10	The secrets of the kingdom of God
Rom. 11:25	Israel experiencing a hardening of heart
Rom. 16:25-26	The plan of salvation through Jesus Christ
1 Cor. 4:1	New Testament revelation
1 Cor. 15:51	The Rapture
Eph. 1:9	God's will
Eph. 3:2-3	The administration of God's grace
Eph. 3:4; Col. 2:2; 4:3	Christ
Eph. 3:9	The church
Eph. 5:32	Christ and the church

¹Wiersbe, 2:27.

²Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 48. See also the excursus in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 428-34.

Col. 1:26	Christ in us, the hope of glory
Col. 1:27	Christ in us
2 Thess. 2:7	The secret power of lawlessness already at work
1 Tim. 3:9	The deep truths of the faith
1 Tim. 3:16	Godliness
Rev. 1:20	The seven stars (angels)
Rev. 10:7	The details of the Tribulation
Rev. 17:5	Babylon the great

3:4 What Paul had already written about this mystery revealed his insight into it. The mystery of Christ refers to the mystery that Christ had revealed about the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church.

3:5 There are two questions that this verse raises: What exactly is the mystery? And was the mystery revealed in the Old Testament?

What exactly is the mystery? It seems clear to most interpreters that the mystery in view is the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church (v. 6). Some interpreters deduce from this that the church was not revealed in the Old Testament, because one of the distinctive features of the church is the equality of Jews and Gentiles within it. These interpreters equate the church with the mystery that Paul was referring to.

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

new program and a new line of revelation in this present age."¹

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

Other interpreters believe that it is only the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church that is the mystery, not the church.³ Dispensationalists see the church as a new entity that God brought into existence that is distinct from Israel.⁴ Covenant theologians see the church as the continuation of the people of God (the "saved") that was Israel in the Old Testament but is the church in the New Testament.⁵ I favor the view that the mystery is the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church, which is a distinct body of believers compared with Israel.⁶

The second question is: Was the mystery revealed in the Old Testament? Both covenant theologians and dispensationalists

¹J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 137. See also Charles C. Ryrie, "The Mystery in Ephesians 3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:489 (January-March 1966):25.

²Fruchtenbaum, pp. 117-18.

³E.g., Morris, pp. 87-89, 93; Eadie, p. 214.

⁴See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 133-34; idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 124-25; John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 232-37; and James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 254. See also Craig A. Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 49.

⁵For refutation, see Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, pp. 100-102.

⁶E.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 98-100; Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 133-34; Gary W. Derickson, "The New Testament Church as a Mystery," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:664 (October-December 2009):436-45.

agree that the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church is the mystery. Most covenant theologians believe that the mystery was revealed in the Old Testament.¹ And some dispensationalists believe that it was at least foreshadowed in the Old Testament.² Other dispensationalists believe that it was not revealed in the Old Testament, and they deduce from this that the church was not revealed in the Old Testament. "As" does not mean that God had revealed this mystery previously but now revealed it more fully in Paul's day. The context (v. 9; cf. 2:16) and Colossians 1:26 make this clear.

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

Paul wrote that God revealed the mystery to His holy apostles and prophets (plural) by the Spirit. He did not reveal it only to Paul. Ultradispensationalists claim that the church could not have begun before Paul appeared on the scene, because he was the apostle through whom revelation concerning this mystery came.⁴

¹See Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 97; W. Harold Mare, "Paul's Mystery in Ephesians 3," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 8:2 (Spring 1965):83; J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*, p. 126; Lenski, p. 469.

²Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, p. 97; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 150. See his ch. 6, "The Church and the Revelation of the Mysteries," for a fuller explanation of his interpretation of the mysteries.

³Cf. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 432, 501.

⁴Cornelius R. Stam, *Acts Dispensationally Considered*, 2:17-19. For a brief discussion of ultradispensationalism, see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 192-205; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 197-207.

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

"That Gentiles were to be saved was no mystery (Rom. 9:24-33; 10:19-21). The mystery 'hidden in God' was the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing—'the Church, which is his [Christ's] body,' formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13) and in which the earthly distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears (Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 3:10-11). The revelation of this 'mystery' of the Church was foretold but not explained by Christ (Mt. 16:18). The details concerning the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the Church were committed to Paul and his fellow 'apostles and prophets by the Spirit' (Eph. 3:5)."²

"The mystery of verse 6 may thus be summed up as the coequal participation of the Gentiles with Israel in the full messianic salvation that is realized in the crucified and risen Christ and made effective to both through the apostolic proclamation of the gospel. This truth of the unity of Gentiles and Israel in the church, which has already been introduced in connection with the 'mystery of his will' (1:9-14, esp. vv. 12-13) and

¹See Martin, p. 1308.

²*The New Scofield ...*, p. 1275. See also Ironside, p. 149.

elaborated in 2:11-22, stands behind all of the teachings of the epistle as the central theme."¹

3:7 God graciously gave Paul the opportunity to serve Him by proclaiming the gospel, aided by God's supernatural enablement. The word minister (Gr. *diakonos*, deacon) emphasizes service, not servitude (cf. Gr. *doulos*, slave).

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

"Perhaps he was deliberately playing on the meaning of his name. For his Roman surname 'Paulus' is Latin for 'little' or 'small', and tradition says he was a little man. 'I am little,' he may be saying, 'little by name, little in stature, and morally and spiritually littler than the littlest of all Christians.'"³

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

3:9 The second part of Paul's ministry, besides preaching to everyone, was explaining the mystery of Jewish-Gentile equality in the church to everyone.

"The mystery referred to in the 'dispensation ["plan"] of the mystery' (Eph. 3:9) is the relationship of Jews and Gentiles to Christ and to one another. This relationship is the distinguishing characteristic of the church."⁴

¹Robert L. Saucy, "The Church as the Mystery of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 136-37.

²Martin, p. 1308.

³Stott, p. 119.

⁴Craig A. Blasing, "Dispensations in Biblical Theology," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 121.

Even though God had not revealed this earlier, it was in His plan from the beginning (1 Cor. 2:7; Rom. 16:25-26).

"This designation of God as the Creator of all that exists is intended rather to express the *greatness* of the 'mystery' that is now disclosed and of which Paul is to be a preacher."¹

3:10 Paul ministered in these two ways so that the multifaceted wisdom of God might appear clearly on the widest possible scale, even to the angelic hosts (cf. 1:21; 6:12). Multifaceted (Gr. *polypoikilos*) means variegated or made up of many different kinds. William Hendriksen preferred the translation "iridescent."² Individual redemption is not in view here, but the church—composed of people of many different types, all within two main groups, Jews and Gentiles—is.

"The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique."³

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

"... the church is to be an audio-visual display of God's reconciling work. In this primary way she testifies to God's grace and wisdom. So Paul encouraged living life in Christ in such a way that reconciliation is the dominant feature of church life."⁴

3:11 This plan was part of God's eternal purpose (cf. 1:11). God brought this part of His plan to fruition through our Lord's

¹Salmond, 3:307-8.

²Hendriksen, p. 159.

³Stott, p. 123.

⁴Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 315.

earthly ministry. Specifically, the Jews' rejection of their Messiah resulted in the postponement (from the human viewpoint) of the earthly messianic kingdom and the beginning of the church.

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

3:12 Jesus Christ's past work has an abiding present effect for believers today. Because of His work we boldly and confidently enter God's presence knowing that our Savior's work has made us acceptable to God (cf. Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:2). We have boldness and confidence now as we pray to Him, and we can face meeting Him one day feeling bold and confident.

"Forgiven sinners do not come to God hesitantly, wondering about their likely reception. They rest not on their own achievement but on what Christ has done for them, and for that reason they come full of confidence."²

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

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

¹Wiersbe, 2:29.

²Morris, p. 97.

only after the coming of Christ by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets including Paul but not excluding others."¹

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

3. Future comprehension 3:14-19

Paul had explained that Jewish and Gentile believers need no longer be at enmity with each other (2:15). Therefore he prayed that they might experience the unity that was theirs spiritually in their relations with one another. He turned from exposition to intercession (cf. ch. 1; John 13—17). Verses 14-19 are also one sentence in the Greek text.

"In the first prayer [1:15-23], the emphasis is on *enlightenment*; but in this prayer, the emphasis is on *enablement*. It is not so much a matter of *knowing as being*—laying our hands on what God has for us and by faith making it a vital part of our lives."²

"Whereas the first prayer centers in knowledge, this prayer has its focal point in love."³

3:14 "For this reason" goes back to verse 1 from which Paul departed in verses 2-13 to give more information about the mystery. Bending the knees and kneeling in prayer was a posture that reflected an attitude of submission to God. Kneeling was not the most common posture for prayer in Paul's culture. Usually people stood when they prayed (cf. Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13). Praying on one's knees signified especially fervent praying (cf. Luke 22:41; Acts 7:40, 60; 20:36; 21:5).⁴ Kneeling before God suggests intimate face-to-face contact with the heavenly Father (cf. Matt. 6:9).

¹Ryrie, "The Mystery ...," p. 31. This article contains an excellent explanation of the mystery from the dispensational viewpoint as well as refutation of the amillennial, covenant premillennial, and ultradispensational views.

²Wiersbe, 2:30-31.

³Martin, p. 1309.

⁴Foulkes, p. 101; Morris, pp. 100-101.

"Posture affects the mind, and is not therefore unimportant."¹

3:15 Paul made a word play from the word "father" (v. 14, Gr. *patera*). A father is the head of the typical family (Gr. *patria*). God is not only the Father of the family in which Gentile and Jewish believers are one (i.e., the church), but He is the first, original, and typical father. He is the ultimate Father over all families that have a father. Every human family exists as a family, with a father, because of God's relationship as the Father of all human beings. Perhaps Paul viewed the Trinity as a heavenly family.

3:16 In this prayer Paul requested one thing: that God would strengthen his readers in their inner self. He asked that God would provide this "power" (Gr. *dynamis*) according to His vast resources (cf. 1:18). This power comes to us through the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Phil. 1:19) who strengthens our inner self, namely, our innermost being.

3:17 The result of this request is that Christ may be at home in the personality of the believer. He indwells every Christian (1 Cor. 12:13), but He is especially at home in the lives of those believers who let Him be first in their attitudes and activities (John 15:14). As the believer keeps trusting and obeying, Jesus Christ can continue to occupy this place in his or her life. Paul was praying that his readers would enjoy intimate fellowship with their Lord (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

"When believers pray for a gift in general terms, they emphatically supplicate an enlargement of what [portion] of it is already in their possession."²

The believer can grasp Christ's love because God has rooted the Christian like a plant, and grounded him or her like a building, in love.³ Jesus Christ's Lordship over one's life produces the love in view here. Being rooted and grounded in

¹Jamieson, p. 1287.

²Eadie, p. 246.

³Alford, 3:2:110.

love is the result of Christ being at home in one's hearts by faith. It is not a result of just being a believer.¹

Here is another reference to the Trinity, in verses 14-17: Father (v. 14), Spirit (v. 16), and Son (v. 17; cf. 1:13-14, 17; 2:18, 22).

3:18 When believers learn about Jesus Christ's revelation of the mystery of the church they are able to comprehend that God's love is broad enough to embrace both Jews and Gentiles equally in the church (2:11-22). They can appreciate that it is long enough to reach the far off Gentiles as well as the near Jews, and to stretch from eternity to eternity (1:4; 2:7). They can see that it is high enough to raise both Jews and Gentiles into the heavenly places (1:21; 2:4-6). They can understand that it is deep enough to rescue both kinds of people from sin's degradation and from Satan's grip (2:1-3).²

Some commentators held that these dimensions of God's love should not be connected with specific referents, as I have done above, but that they should be understood simply as expressing the limitless extent of God's love.³ Whereas this is indeed the result of the statement, I believe it is legitimate to attach a contextual referent to each dimension by way of application.

"Paul prays that the saints might apprehend, not merely comprehend. One might be able to understand something without having a grasp of the full implications of that thing. Paul is talking about the latter here."⁴

3:19 Paul desired that his readers would apprehend the love of Christ fully. Yet he acknowledged that full comprehension of

¹Eadie, p. 249.

²See Barclay, p. 155; Eadie, pp. 251-55; Charles B. Williams, *A Commentary on the Pauline Epistles*, p. 378; Gaebelien, 3:2:257-58; and McGee, 5:248, for several different interpretations of the meaning of these dimensions.

³E.g., Alford, 3:2:111; Hendriksen, p. 173.

⁴Wuest, 1:4:90.

that love is impossible because it is greater than mortals can imagine.

"It is an *ideal*, essentially the same as that contained in the injunction to be *perfect* as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. v. 48)."¹

"The four words [width, length, height, and depth] seem intended to indicate, not so much the thoroughness of the comprehension as the vastness of the thing to be comprehended."²

"No matter how much we know of the love of Christ, there is always more to know."³

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

"These four requests are more like four parts to a telescope. One request leads into the next one, and so on."⁴

"I like to think of the apostle's petition as a staircase by which he climbs higher and higher in his aspiration for his readers. His prayer-staircase has four steps, whose key words are 'strength', 'love', 'knowledge' and 'fullness'. "⁵

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

¹Salmond, 3:317.

²Abbott, p. 99.

³Morris, p. 107.

⁴Wiersbe, 2:31.

⁵Stott, p. 134.

sound such depths of spiritual emotion or rise to such heights of spiritual passion as here."¹

"There could be no doubt but that the Apostle Paul believed in the divine sovereignty, yet he prayed that God would grant three [?] important blessings to these saints, and he prayed with evident confidence that *prayer does change things*."²

C. DOXOLOGY 3:20-21

"The doxology is plainly the climax of the first half of Ephesians; it may be regarded as the climax of the whole letter, which rises to a spiritual peak at this point and then concentrates on practical outworkings."³

"Paul is at his very best in his prayers. The full majesty of the Apostle's magnificent mind is revealed to us nowhere as in his prayers."⁴

"... doctrine leads to doxology as well as to duty."⁵

"... Paul says that God is able to do super-abundantly above and beyond what we ask or think, and then some on top of that."⁶

The basis for Paul's confidence that God is able to do "far more abundantly beyond" (v. 20) what he had prayed for or could even imagine was the fact that God had brought Jewish and Gentile believers together in one body. With God's provision of love, both groups could function harmoniously together in the church. Glory would come to God in the church for uniting these two previously irreconcilable ethnic groups and for enabling them to love and work together as fellow members of the church. This praise will continue forever (lit. to all the courses of the age of the ages).⁷

¹Robertson, 4:532.

²Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, pp. 108-9.

³Wood, pp. 52-53.

⁴Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 2:235.

⁵Stott, p. 45.

⁶Wuest, 1:4:91.

⁷Martin, p. 1309.

The Book of Acts records many instances of Jewish-Gentile conflict both in that culture and in the church. Paul's revelation of the mystery in this epistle would have done much to unite the church. This is still an important revelation because Christians still tend to split up rather than unite.

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S CONDUCT 4:1—6:20

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

"Now the apostle moves on from the new society to the new standards which are expected of it. So he turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done (in the indicative), to what we must be and do (in the imperative), from doctrine to duty ... from mind-stretching theology to its down-to-earth, concrete implications in everyday living."¹

"Up until now the epistle has been glorious declarations, but now there will be commands."²

"Ephesians I—III tells us how God sees us in Christ in the heavenlies; IV—VI, how men should see Christ in us on earth."³

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

A. SPIRITUAL WALK 4:1—6:9

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

¹Stott, p. 146.

²McGee, 5:249.

³Paxton, p. 85.

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

1. Walking in unity 4:1-16

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

"Instruction, intercession and exhortation constitute a formidable trio of weapons in any Christian teacher's armoury."²

Charity, unity, diversity, growth, and maturity are the key concepts in this section of Paul's letter.

The basis of unity 4:1-6

4:1 "Therefore" refers to what Paul had said in chapters 1—3. To walk in a worthy manner means to bring one's conduct into harmony with one's calling. Calling here refers to God's calling to live in unity (2:13-16). To walk worthily then would involve living in unity with Jewish brethren if one is a Gentile, or living in unity with Gentile brethren if one is a Jew. Paul used the word walk seven times in this epistle (2:10; 4:1, 17 [twice]; 5:2, 8, 15).

"This is not a worldly walk, but it is an earthly walk."³

By referring to himself as the Lord's prisoner again (3:1), Paul reminded his readers of his apostolic authority to urge them to live this way. Though seated in the heavenly places in Christ, he was also seated in a prison because of his witness for Christ.

¹Wiersbe, 2:34.

²Stott, p. 146.

³McGee, 5:248.

He was in prison because he had followed God's will for him as an apostle faithfully.

4:2 Three virtues contribute to unity in the church: Humility is a proper assessment of oneself.

"... it would be natural for the flesh to be lifted up with pride because of the exalted position obtained [in Christ]."¹

"To face oneself is the most humiliating thing in the world."²

"To the Greek mind humility was little else than a vice of nature. It was weak and mean-spirited; it was the temper of the slave; it was inconsistent with that self-respect which every true man owed to himself. The fullness of life, as it was then conceived, left no room for humility."³

"The first step towards unity is humility."⁴

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

Gentleness is the opposite of self-assertion. A gentle person is one whose emotions are under control. Whereas humility may have one's relationship to God and His blessings in view, gentleness may have the believer's relationship to other people in view.⁵

"... meekness is a virtue of the strong, those who could exert force to get their own way but choose not to."⁶

¹Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, p. 118.

²Barclay, p. 159.

³Robinson, p. 91.

⁴Henry, p. 1853.

⁵Chafer, *The Ephesian...*, p. 119.

⁶Morris, p. 114.

Meekness is "the absence of the disposition to assert personal rights, either in the presence of God or of men."¹

Patience is endurance even under affliction. When wronged either verbally or physically the patient person does not retaliate (cf. Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:11; 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:2). Patience with fellow believers may be especially in view.²

"*Makrothumia*, patience, long-suffering is the spirit which bears insult and injury without bitterness and without complaint. It is the spirit which bears the sheer foolishness of men without irritation. It is the spirit which can suffer unpleasant people with graciousness and fools without complaint."³

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

4:3 Christians must diligently seek to preserve the unity between believers that God has established in the church. Paul viewed peace as what binds potential factions together. He had in mind peace between all kinds of diverse people in the church, the most diverse in his day being Jews and Gentiles.

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

"Paul now gives the basis [for unity] by explaining in more detail how elements of the Christian faith revolve around the three persons of the Trinity. Unity is stressed by the sevenfold use of 'one' (*eis, mia, en*)."⁴

¹G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 265.

²Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, p. 120.

³Barclay, p. 163-64.

⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 513.

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

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

The one baptism may be the baptism that unites all believers in the body of Christ.² This is Spirit baptism, which water baptism symbolizes. Both kinds of baptism, Spirit baptism and water baptism, were probably in Paul's mind.³ However, baptism falls in the second triad of elements that relate to Christ, rather than to the first triad that relate to the Spirit, in this verse. Therefore it may refer to water rather than to Spirit baptism.⁴ Another possibility is that it refers metaphorically to the believer's baptism into Christ's death. In this case the one baptism would refer to the internal reality of having been baptized into (identified with) the one Lord by means of the one faith.⁵

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

¹Eadie, p. 275; Salmond, 3:322; Wuest, 1:4:96.

²G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 490.

³Morris, p. 119.

⁴Alford, 3:2:114; Van Ryn, p. 107.

⁵Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 518.

all" implies God's sovereign purpose, "through all" His pervasive power, and "in all" His indwelling presence.¹

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

"The unity of the church is due to *charis* [grace], God's grace having reconciled us to himself; but the diversity of the church is due to *charismata* [gifts], God's gifts distributed to church members."²

The preservation of unity 4:7-16

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

"A spiritual gift is a skill or ability that enables a Christian to perform a function in the body of Christ with ease and effectiveness."³

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

¹Paxton, p. 92.

²Stott, pp. 155-56.

³Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 1477.

⁴For defense of the view that spiritual gifts are ministries rather than abilities, see Kenneth Berding, "Confusing Word and Concept in 'Spiritual Gifts': Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):37-51.

"It is so in the material creation—the little is as essential to symmetry as the great—the star as well as the sun—the rain-drop equally with the ocean, and the hyssop no less than the cedar. The pebble has its place as fittingly as the mountain, and colossal forms of life are surrounded by the tiny insect whose term of existence is limited to a summer's twilight."¹

"Gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools to build with. And if they are not used in love, they become weapons to fight with ... (1 Cor. 12—14)."²

4:8 Paul's paraphrase of Psalm 68:18 confirms his statement that God gives gifts to people. A military victor has the right to give as gifts those whom he has conquered. Christ, the Victor over sinful people, has the right to give them to the church as gifts.³ In Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Paul spoke of gifts given to people (cf. v. 7), but here he spoke of people given to the church as gifts.

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

¹Eadie, p. 280.

²Wiersbe, 2:37.

³Who the captives were seems to have been of less interest to Paul than the fact that Christ won a great victory (Morris, pp. 123-24).

⁴Richard A. Taylor, "The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 in Light of the Ancient Versions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):336. For other explanations of this verse, see Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 843.; and Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 404.

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

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

Christ not only ascended into heaven, but He first descended into the lower parts of the earth. This is probably a reference to Jesus' grave (Gr. genitive of possession),¹ rather than to the earth (from heaven, Gr. genitive of apposition)² or to Hades (Gr. genitive of comparison),³ in view of the context. By His death Jesus Christ gained the victory over sin, and He redeemed those whom He would give as gifts to the church.

4:10 Paul identified the descended Christ as the same Person as the ascended Christ, who now is in position to rule over all (cf. 1:22). He fills all things with His fullness: "the whole universe ... with His presence"⁴ (cf. Col. 1:18-19; 2:9; Prov. 30:4).

4:11 This verse explains "gave" (v. 8) and begins a sentence that runs through verse 16 in the Greek text.

After Jesus Christ ascended, He gave, as Victor over death, gifts to the church that enabled it to function. This order of

¹Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 634; Simpson, p. 92; Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, p. 129.

²Eadie, pp. 293-95; Abbott, pp. 115-16; Van Ryn, p. 113-14; A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 242-48; W. Hall Harris III, "The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):198-214; Robertson, 4:536; Martin, p. 1310; *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1987; William J. McRae, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, p. 28.

³Lenski, pp. 521-22.

⁴Alford, 3:2:117.

events is in harmony with the revelation that the church is a new entity that came into existence after Jesus' ascension.¹

Christ gave gifted people to the church as gifts to the church. He gave some individuals to be apostles in the church. The word apostle means someone sent as an authoritative delegate. Twelve men plus Paul were the official apostles. They had seen the risen Christ and had received personal appointment from Him (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 15:8-9; Gal. 1:1; 2:6-9).

However, there were other men who, while not apostles in this limited sense, functioned as apostles. The New Testament writers called them apostles too (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:6; Rom. 16:7; cf. 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:7; 1 Cor. 4:6, 9). The duty of the apostles was to establish the church and the churches (2:20; 3:5).

The Greek word *apostolos* also describes any servant who is sent by his master on any mission (John 13:16). Missionary is a modern equivalent term.² It is probably according to their spiritual gifts, rather than their offices, that Paul was thinking of these individuals.³

New Testament prophets (Gr. *prophetes*, one who speaks forth) provided edification, exhortation, and comfort to the church (1 Cor. 14:3). Some of them conveyed new authoritative revelation to the church (2:20; 3:5; Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). Much of this is the revelation that we have in our New Testament books. Most of the prophets, however, simply spoke forth truth that God had previously revealed (cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26-33).⁴ Prophets also led in the worship of God, including leading in public prayer (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1; 1 Cor. 11:5). This aspect of prophesying was regarded as a less authoritative function in the church than teaching, since a

¹See Fruchtenbaum, p. 117.

²Robinson, p. 98.

³Foulkes, p. 117.

⁴See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

teacher interpreted the written Word of God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Tim. 2:12).

"Christians today do not get their spiritual knowledge *immediately* from the Holy Spirit, but *mediately* through the spirit teaching the Word."¹

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

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

"... because the nouns [pastor and teacher] are plural, it is extremely unlikely that they refer to the same group, but only that the apostle Paul is linking them closely together. It is better to regard the pastors as a subset of teachers. In other words, all pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors."³

¹Wiersbe, 2:37.

²Eadie, p. 304.

³*The NET2 Bible* note on 4:11.

Evangelists can be compared to spiritual obstetricians, whereas pastor-teachers are spiritual pediatricians.

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

"... bishops, presbyters [elders] and deacons were primarily local officers, and St Paul is here concerned with the Church as a whole. Apostles, prophets and evangelists are divinely-gifted men who serve the Church at large; and if a local ministry is alluded to at all it is only under the vaguer designation of 'pastors and teachers'."²

Calvin believed that apostles, prophets, and evangelists were given as temporary gifts to the church, during the Apostolic Age, and that only pastors and teachers are given today. He did concede, however, that occasionally God does raise up the first three to meet some special need in the church.³

4:12 The purpose of all these gifted leaders is to equip the rest of the saints to minister and so to build up the body of Christ, the church. Equipping (Gr. *katartismos*) means preparing and restoring people to their proper use (Gal. 6:1; cf. Matt. 4:21; 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 13:21). The role of these leaders is to minister the Word of God to the saints in the church so that the saints can minister the Word in the world (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). All the saints should participate in service, not just the

¹ *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1276.

² Robinson, p. 97.

³ Calvin, 4:3:4.

leaders.¹ One writer cautioned against viewing only the leaders as doing equipping ministry.² Every Christian has a gift, or gifts, with which he or she can and should serve the Lord (4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).³

"At one time Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer led his own singing and also did the preaching when he started out as an evangelist. A dear lady came to him one night and said, 'Dr. Chafer, you're doing too much. You ought not to lead the singing and do the preaching both. Why don't you get someone else to do the preaching?'"⁴

Some Christians try to do too much. We should share ministry with other gifted people in the church so that they too can serve the Lord and be a blessing to others.

4:13 The end in view is completeness (maturity) in Christ. As each believer exercises the gifts that God has given him or her three things happen: First, the body experiences unity (vv. 3-6). Second, it becomes more spiritually mature (v. 15). Third, it becomes more Christ-like (cf. 1:23; 3:19). Unity of the faith (cf. v. 5), full knowledge (cf. 1:17), and maturity constitute the three-fold goal in view. This equals the "fullness of Christ."

"God is not trying to produce successful Christian business people who can impress the world with their money and influence. He is not trying to fashion successful church leaders who can influence people with their organizational and administrative skills. Nor is He trying to fashion great orators who can move people with persuasive words. He wants to reproduce in His followers the character of His son—His love, His

¹See Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, ch. 3: "The Vocation of Witness," pp. 45-67.

²T. David Gordon, "'Equipping' Ministry in Ephesians 4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):69-78. See also McGee, 5:255.

³For a free personalized spiritual gifts questionnaire and analysis, go to www.churchgrowth.org.

⁴McGee, 5:255.

kindness, His compassion, His holiness, His humility, His unselfishness, His servant attitude, His willingness to suffer wrongfully, His ability to forgive, and so much more that characterized His life on earth."¹

"Many folks say, 'Dr. McGee, we do not speak in tongues in the church. We do it for our private devotions.' I can say to them categorically from the Word of God that they are wrong. Gifts are given to profit the church. No gift is to be used selfishly for personal profit. In fact, it is not a gift if it is being used that way. A gift is given to every member of the body to enable him to function for a very definite reason in his position in the body."²

4:14 One result of gifted people equipping the saints to serve the Lord and others is that believers will become stable in their faith. Children are easily swayed and confused, like waves blown by the wind. False teachers create such winds (of doctrinal confusion), sometimes with hurricane or tornado force, by their teaching, and they seek to trick people into following them.

4:15 Another result of this equipping is that believers can maintain truth in love, in both speech and conduct. Paul contrasted the deception of heresy with the integrity of the gospel.

"In this epistle St Paul is not controversial. He attacks no form of false doctrine, but only gives a general warning against the mischievous refinements of over-subtle teachers."³

"This fundamental concern for the truth is the secret of maturity in the church."⁴

¹Richard L. Strauss, "Like Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:571 (July-September 1986):264.

²McGee, 5:253.

³Robinson, p. 102.

⁴Wood, p. 59.

"There are two great enemies of a successful ministry, whether carried on among believers or among unbelievers. One is departure from the truth, compromise with the lie, whether in words or deeds. The other is chilling indifference with respect to the hearts and lives, the troubles and trials, of the people whom one is ostensibly trying to persuade."¹

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

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

"Our growth should be ever advancing—spiritual dwarfhood is a misshapen and shameful state. Besides, as believers grow, their spiritual power develops, and their spiritual senses are exercised, so that they are more able to repel the seductions of false and crafty teachers."²

4:16 Jesus Christ is both the One into whom we grow individually (v. 15) and the One out of whom we grow as a whole church. The whole body grows as each individual part carries out its proper function. All the parts of the body alluded to in this verse are Christians, except for the Head, Jesus Christ.³

The church therefore is a diverse body composed of many different people who must give attention to preserving their unity (vv. 7-16). As noted above, Paul's emphasis was more on body growth than on individual growth in this passage. Each believer contributes to body growth as he or she

¹Hendriksen, p. 202.

²Eadie, p. 319.

³See Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):139-44.

exercises his or her particular gifts (God-given abilities) in the service of Christ.

2. Walking in holiness 4:17-32

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

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

The old person 4:17-19

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

"We have had too much on the power of positive thinking today. We need a little of the power of negative thinking. Have you ever thought that in the Garden of Eden the primary command was a negative command? 'But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die' (Gen. 2:17). Then you come to the Ten Commandments. They are very negative but also very good. Now here in Ephesians we see some negative thinking, some prohibitions for the child of God. We are not to walk 'as other Gentiles walk.' This is the negative side."²

4:17 "So" in this verse is coordinate with the "Therefore" in verse 1. Here we have more instruction concerning walking worthily. Paul's exhortation that follows repeats Jesus' teaching on the importance of holiness. Christians should not conduct themselves ("walk") like the pagan Gentiles who do not know the Lord. Those unbelievers do not typically have a worthy aim

¹Wiersbe, 2:39.

²McGee, 5:256-57.

or goal in life, which is the idea behind "the futility of their minds [thinking]."

"What is immediately noteworthy is the apostle's emphasis on the intellectual factor in everybody's way of life [cf. Rom. 12:2]. ... Scripture bears an unwavering testimony to the power of ignorance and error to corrupt, and the power of truth to liberate, ennoble and refine."¹

4:18 Here Paul traced the attitude of typical unsaved Gentiles to its source: Lack of worthy purpose rests on unclear ('darkened') understanding (cf. Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4). This in turn results from separation (exclusion) from the life that comes from God (cf. 2:12). Separation from God arises from natural ignorance of God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14). That in turn rests on their insensitivity ("hardness of their heart") to God and His ways (cf. Rom. 1).

4:19 As a result of this condition unsaved Gentiles typically have given themselves over to indecent behavior, namely, to live lives of sensual self-indulgence (cf. Rom. 1:24-28). The Greek word *aselgeia*, translated "indecent behavior," contains the idea of wanton violence.² Greediness (*pleonexia*) refers to an increasing desire for more.

Ruth Paxton pointed out that being darkened in their understanding (v. 18a) refers to mental darkness, excluded from the life of God (v. 18b) expresses spiritual death, having become callous, and having given themselves over to indecent behavior (v. 19a) reflects moral degeneracy, and for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (v. 19b) describes physical depravity.³

"Self-abandonment to deeper sin is the Divine judicial penalty of sin [cf. Rom. 1:24-32]."⁴

¹Stott, p. 175.

²Morris, p. 137.

³Paxton, p. 105.

⁴Eadie, p. 332.

The new person 4:20-32

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

4:20 In contrast to unsaved Gentiles Christians' minds are no longer dark, they are no longer aliens (excluded) from God, and their hearts are no longer hard and impure. They did not learn to follow Christ by the natural mental processes that customarily have led to the degradation of unsaved Gentiles. They had not learned Christ in such a way as to feel free to walk like unsaved pagans. They learned to follow Him as His disciples from the Word of God

"Usually we learn subjects, not persons; but the Christian's choicest lesson-book is his lovable Lord."¹

4:21 "If indeed" means surely (NIV, cf. 3:2). The Ephesian believers had received teaching about Christ and had learned to live in the sphere of His will. This is the truth in Jesus that is in view. Whenever Paul used the name of Jesus in Ephesians, as he did here, he drew attention to the death and resurrection of the Savior. He did so here in order to remind his readers of the essence of the gospel message as an incentive to live for Christ.

4:22 Here is what the Ephesian Christians had heard (v. 21): Christians should put their former unsaved manner of life aside. The old self is the person that the Christian was before his or her regeneration. That person was experiencing continually worsening corruption because of desires that appeal to the physical senses. Lusts are deceitful because they promise real joy but fail to deliver it.

4:23 This verse is not primarily a command. The verb is not an imperative but an infinitive in the Greek text. The verse is a description of what has already happened in the life of every believer (cf. Col. 3:9-10). However the verse does make an

¹Simpson, p. 104.

appeal to the reader, even though its main point is revelation. The infinitive has the force of an imperative.¹

Rather than being futile, darkened, and ignorant (vv. 17-18), the Christian has taken on a new attitude and been renewed in the spirit of his or her mind (cf. Rom. 6:2-10; 2 Cor. 5:17). This renewing is an ongoing process in the life of the Christian. It is part of his or her progressive sanctification. The verb is passive ("be renewed"), which emphasizes that God is at work in us and is ultimately responsible for the change (cf. Rom. 12:2).

4:24 Paul identified our responsibility in this verse. We are to put on the new self, like we put on a garment. The new self is the person the Christian is after he or she experiences regeneration. We put on the new self as we pursue the things of Christ rather than the desires of the flesh. God has created the new self at regeneration "in the likeness of" our spiritual parent: God Himself. Righteousness and holiness mark our new self, rather than indecent behavior, impurity, and greed (v. 19). Moreover it is a life based on the truth rather than on ignorance (v. 18).²

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

The first exhortation is to stop deceiving others with falsehood. Deception is a mask that false teachers (v. 14) and the old self (v. 22) wear. Instead the Christian should speak truth, namely, what is in harmony with reality (cf. Col. 3:8-9; Zech. 8:16). One reason is that the Christian belongs to, and must function honestly in, a group: the church. Truthful speech

¹Bock, "The New ...," pp. 162-63; idem, "A Theology ...," p. 316, footnote 10.

²See Don Matzat, *Christ-Esteem*.

is essential to unity in the body. Obviously speaking truthfully is important for other reasons also.

"Lying may be an accepted weapon in the warfare waged by the worldly, but it has no place in the life of the Christian."¹

"A lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ."²

4:26 The second exhortation is to avoid sinning when angry (or exasperated³), and to deal with sin quickly if it does accompany anger (cf. Ps. 4:4). The emotion of anger is not sinful in itself (cf. John 2:13-16). There is such a thing as righteous indignation (cf. 5:6; Mark 3:5).⁴

"A righteous wrath is acknowledged in Scripture as something that not only *may* be but *ought* to be, and is seen in Christ Himself (Mark. iii. 5)."⁵

"If we would be angry and not sin (says one), we must be angry at nothing but sin."⁶

It is easy to lose control of our anger, to let it control us instead of controlling it. Anger becomes sinful when it is inappropriate.⁷

"It is to be but a brief emotion, slowly excited and very soon dismissed."⁸

The way to deal with sinful anger is to confess it as sin (1 John 1:9). If apologies to other people are necessary, we should

¹Morris, p. 142.

²John A. Mackay, *God's Order: The Ephesian Letter and this Present Time*, p. 213.

³Lenski, p. 577,

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

⁵Salmond, 3:346.

⁶Henry, p. 1854.

⁷See Charles R. Swindoll, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, ch. 11: "Anger: Burning Fuse of Hostility," pp. 149-67.

⁸Eadie, p. 349.

offer them quickly as well. Letting the sun go down on one's wrath is a figure of speech that emphasizes the need to deal with sin quickly (cf. Deut. 24:13-15). That we need not take it literally should be clear since the sun does not literally set on one's anger, since anger is not a physical object.

4:27 It is important to deal with anger appropriately because, if we do not do so, Satan will have an opportunity to lead us into further sin.

"The phrase to 'give place to the devil' means to give him room or scope for action."¹

"Horace was right when he said, 'Anger is momentary insanity.'"²

"'Anyone can become angry,' wrote Aristotle. 'But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.'"³

4:28 The third exhortation is to refrain from stealing but to work instead, so that we will have something to share with the needy. Paul did not mention other benefits of work here, such as providing for one's own needs and doing something useful. He emphasized the most noble of motives. Stealing (Gr. *klepton*) covers all forms of taking what we should not take. This verse is a reaffirmation of the teaching of the seventh commandment (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19).

4:29 The fourth exhortation is to speak good things as well as to do good things (v. 28). Anything that injures others or causes dissension in the body is unwholesome (Gr. *sapros*, rotten, defiling). Christians should use words to build up people ("for edification") rather than to tear them down. Words can give grace (help) in the sense that they can communicate

¹Robinson, p. 112.

²Wiersbe, 2:41.

³Ibid.

encouragement and direction and thus enable the hearer to do right (cf. Col. 4:6).

"... the 'corrupt' speech here condemned is foul talk, and not merely idle talk [cf. Col. 4:6]."¹

"It is said that a man once came to Mohammed and asked how he could make amends for falsely accusing a friend. Mohammed told him to put a feather on every doorstep in the village. Next day he told the man to collect them. 'But that is impossible,' said the man, 'the wind has scattered them beyond recall!' The prophet replied, 'So is it with your reckless words.'"²

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

"That which grieves the Holy Spirit is sin."⁴

"The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of: (1) *Truth* (John 14:17); so anything false, deceitful or hypocritical grieves Him. (2) *Faith* (2 Cor 4:13); so doubt, distrust, anxiety, worry, grieve Him. (3) *Grace* (Heb. 10:29); so whatever in us is hard, bitter, malicious, ungracious, unforgiving, or unloving grieves Him. (4) *Holiness* (Rom. 1:4); so anything unclean, defiling or degrading grieves Him."⁵

¹Robinson, p. 112.

²Morris, p. 146.

³See Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 82-104.

⁴Martin, p. 1312.

⁵Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 158-59.

"There are two ways in which we grieve the Holy Spirit; positively, by going on in these various sins Paul has just enumerated, and others named in 31; negatively, by failing to follow His leading into all truth and into active service to God, His Church and kingdom ..."¹

"The Spirit is here regarded as capable of feeling, and so as personal."²

Some commentators have distinguished between grieving and quenching the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19).³ I tend to think both of these figures (grieving a person and quenching a fire) describe the same thing: doing anything that displeases the Spirit and hinders His work in and through the believer.

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

"Every Christian might well pray that God would teach him how to forget."⁴

Wrath or rage flows from bitterness and refers to outbursts of uncontrolled passionate frustration. Anger is inappropriate rage (cf. v. 26). Clamor describes shouting, yelling, screaming. Slander refers to words that hurt another person, particularly character assassination. Malice is ill will toward another person or people, and is the source of the other five vices.⁵ McGee defined malice as "congealed hatred."⁶

¹Williams, p. 386.

²Salmond, 3:348.

³E.g., Van Ryn, p. 127.

⁴Barclay, p. 188.

⁵See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

⁶McGee, 5:260.

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

4:32 We are kind when we say or do what is suitable or fitting to a need with a sweet and generous disposition. We are compassionate when we feel sympathetic toward someone else. We are forgiving when we let offenses and grievances go freely and graciously.¹

"Let us put this plainly since even pastors misunderstand it. The moment a man wrongs me I must forgive him."²

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

"It cost God the death of His Son, as man, to forgive us. It costs us nothing to forgive our fellow man."³

After attending a Family Life conference, my wife and I came away with the following notes: Demonstrating an attitude of constant forgiveness will greatly enrich a marriage. It enables a spouse to develop transparency and oneness with his or her mate. In order to resolve conflict there must be a willingness

¹See David W. Augsburger, *Seventy Times Seven: The Freedom of Forgiveness*, pp. 18-24.

²Lenski, p. 588.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 1293.

to forgive. We need to seek forgiveness when we wrong our mate, and we need to communicate understanding to that person. Try restating or verbalizing to your mate how he or she feels and then ask for forgiveness. Say, "I was wrong; I'm sorry; will you forgive me?" It is important to be specific in this process.

"The Epistle to the Hebrews is characterized by contrasts which are drawn between the features of the Mosaic order and those of Christianity, while the Epistle to the Ephesians is characterized by its contrasts between the estate of the lost and the estate of the saved."¹

3. Walking in love 5:1-6

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

- 5:1 "Therefore" in this verse does not introduce a conclusion to what has preceded, but it gives a reason for what follows. It is only normal and natural for children to imitate their parents. So too should the children of God be imitators of their heavenly Father (cf. Matt. 5:48; Luke 6:36). We are to imitate God's gracious attitude and generous actions toward others.
- 5:2 This verse explains how we are to imitate God, namely, by loving. The measure and model of our love should be Christ's love for us. He loved us to the extent of dying for us. His self-sacrifice was pleasing and acceptable to God, like a fragrant aroma. Jesus' death was both an offering of worship to God, like the burnt and meal offerings in Judaism, and a sacrifice of expiation (to remove sin), like the sin and trespass offerings. Henry Alford believed that Paul was alluding here to Noah's sacrifice following the Flood (Gen. 8:20-21).² We express our love most when we lay down our lives for those we love, particularly for God (1 John 3:16).

¹Chafer, *The Ephesian ...*, p. 143.

²Alford, 3:2:128.

"*Huper* is the great preposition of substitutionary atonement in the N.T., and means, 'instead of, in behalf of.' It does not merely mean that Christ died for us, for our benefit, but He died instead of us, in our place. He substituted for us, receiving the full impact of the divine wrath against sin."¹

"... there is not a single place in Paul's writings, nor in the New Testament generally, where the death of Christ can be spoken of as only an example to be followed, without the further expression of its atoning significance."²

5:3 The self-centered practices introduced here are the opposite of love. Self-indulgence is the opposite of self-sacrifice. There should be no hint of these perversions of love in the believer's life, even in our speech (cf. Exod. 23:13; Deut. 12:30; Ps. 16:4).

Sexual immorality was common among unsaved Gentiles, but it is totally inappropriate for saints. Impurity is a broader term that includes all types of uncleanness (cf. 4:19). Greed is the sinful desire for more, and it is essentially idolatry (v. 5). Here the greed in view is probably the coveting of someone else's body for selfish gratification.

"'Immorality' (RSV) and sexual perversion of almost every kind might be included under the [Greek] word *porneia*, translated *fornication* in AV; it involves all that works against the life-long union of one man and one woman within the sanctity of the marriage bond."³

"The view that Christians are not to discuss them with pleasure and avidity in conversation does not lie in the text. Paul means that such vices are to be so far removed from us that even an intimation

¹Wuest, 1:4:119.

²Foulkes, p. 139.

³Ibid., p. 141. RSV refers to *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*.

or a suspicion of their presences among us should not occur."¹

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

I once attended a wedding at which all the guests were decked out in their best suits and dresses. I introduced myself to a very attractive couple that I had not met before. We discussed how beautiful the wedding had been. The wife then explained that her claim to fame was that she was the first person who had gotten the groom drunk—on a previous occasion. That disgusting bit of information threw a cloud over the whole occasion for me. I mention it as an example of how inappropriate speech can ruin something beautiful. Such speech should never characterize a Christian.

"All God's gifts, including sex, are subjects for thanksgiving, rather than for joking. To joke about them is bound to degrade them; to thank God for them is the way to preserve their worth as the blessings of a loving Creator."²

"The Christian life is one of continuous reception, which should prompt to continuous praise."³

5:5 Paul warned his readers against improper conduct by reminding them that people who practice such things sacrifice an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. This is probably a reference to the the millennial kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21). Several English translations have "any inheritance"

¹Lenski, p. 596.

²Stott, p. 193.

³Eadie, p. 374.

and others have "an inheritance," but the Greek text omits the article and can be translated literally: "does not have inheritance." Since Paul had already said that all believers have an inheritance in Christ (1:3-14) he was evidently contrasting unbelievers with believers (cf. v. 6; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:21; Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). His point seems to have been that this type of behavior, which typifies unbelievers, should not characterize believers.

Interpreters who take this verse as evidence that a truly saved person cannot and will not practice these vices overlook the fact that some genuine believers live carnal lives (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4).¹ Some interpreters believe that not inheriting the kingdom means not ruling in the kingdom.²

5:6 This verse further stresses the urgency of living lives of love rather than selfishness. The empty words in view would be words teaching that living a moral Christian life is unimportant. They are empty because they are devoid of truth. If the wrath of God is presently coming on the sons of disobedience (cf. 2:2), certainly His own sons can expect His discipline when they practice the same things. Since God is holy He deals with sin wherever He finds it: in unbelievers and believers alike.

4. Walking in light 5:7-14

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

5:7 It is inconsistent for the objects of God's love (v. 2) to become partakers (3:6) with the objects of God's wrath (v. 6) by

¹For further study, see Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 109-20; idem, *Grace in Eclipse*, pp. 76-77; Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, pp. 59-65; and René A. López, "Paul's Vice List in Ephesians 5:3-5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:674 (April-June 2012):203-18.

²E.g., J. B. Bond, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 2:882.

joining them in selfish, immoral, impure conduct. This verse contains the first command: Do not become partakers with them.

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

"The gravest disservice that any man can do to a fellow man is to make him think lightly of sin."¹

5:9 The fruit of the light is those qualities that characterize God's life (i.e., the fruit that the Spirit produces; cf. Gal. 5:22-23). The three qualities mentioned here are the opposite of the fruit of darkness (4:18-19). If the child of light does not walk in the light he or she will not bear much of the fruit of the light (cf. John 15:1-6). He might even be outwardly indistinguishable from a child of darkness (cf. Matt. 13:24-30).

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

5:11 Children of light should also abstain from joining the sons of disobedience in their deeds but should instead expose them, because these deeds are unfruitful (cf. v. 9).² This is Paul's third command in this section. It is the deeds of unbelievers that Christians must shun, not the unbelievers who do them. We reprove the deeds of unbelievers who practice such evil deeds when we bring the light (v. 9) next to them. This exposes them for what they are.

¹Barclay, p. 194.

²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 679.

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

"A good man is ashamed to speak that which many wicked people are not ashamed to act."¹

5:13 On the other hand when light shines on evil deeds other people see them for what they are, namely, evil. This verse is not contradicting the previous one. Paul was assuring his readers that God will bring evil to the light one day and show it to be what it is. He Himself will bring all evil things to the light eventually. "Everything that becomes visible is light" may mean that light transforms what is dark.

"This may mean that Christians who lead a righteous life thereby restrain and reform evildoers, yes, and even convert them."²

"... by the action of light darkness itself can be turned into light."³

"Turn on the light. Often the preacher is the only man brave enough to turn the light on the private sins of men and women or even those of a community."⁴

5:14 Since God will bring all things into the light (v. 13) it is important that believers wake up and rise from the deadness that characterized their former unsaved lifestyles. If they do Christ will shine on them in blessing, like the sun warms what its rays touch. The source from which Paul quoted seems to

¹Henry, p. 1856.

²Stott, p. 200. See also Foulkes, p. 148.

³Robinson, p. 118.

⁴Robertson, 4:543.

have been an early Christian poem or hymn based on Isaiah 60:1.¹

5. Walking in wisdom 5:15—6:9

Paul introduced a new thought with "So then," but the continuity of his general emphasis is clear from his use of the word "walk" (cf. 4:1, 25; 5:1-2, 7-8). Christians can walk (live) wisely by letting the Holy Spirit control our lives.

"For Paul, the Christian faith was not an abstract exercise in theological discourse. Instead it called for a different way to relate to others."²

The basic admonition 5:15-21

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

5:15 Careful living is essential to being wise and pleasing to the Lord (v. 10). The wise person is one who views and sees things the way God does.

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

5:16 We live wisely when we use every opportunity to please and glorify the Lord. Every day and every hour provide opportunities, and we should seize them for these purposes.

¹Wood, p. 71. Cf. 1 Tim. 3:16; et al.

²Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 317.

This is important because we live in days that evil influences and evil individuals dominate.

"Someone has truly said, 'You can utilize almost any kind of waste except waste of time.'"¹

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

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

5:18 Specifically we should not let "wine" control us but God's Holy Spirit. Both forces are internal. "Be filled" is a passive command. It amounts to letting the Holy Spirit, who indwells us, control us completely. We do this by trusting and obeying the Lord as His Word directs. The wine that fills a person controls every area of his or her life to some extent. Drunkenness results in incorrigible behavior. Likewise the believer who allows the Spirit to influence and direct his thinking and behavior will experience His control as long as he maintains that relationship with the Spirit (cf. Luke 1:15; Acts 2:12-21). Chafer's translation of the command was: "Be being kept filled by the Spirit."² Wuest interpreted it: "Be constantly,

¹Paxton, p. 138.

²See Chafer, *He That ...*, pp. 39-81.

moment by moment, being controlled by the Spirit."¹ This is our ongoing responsibility (present tense), and it is obligatory for every Christian, not optional.

"The baptism of the Spirit means that I belong to Christ's body. The filling of the Spirit means that my body belongs to Christ."²

"Get your joy from God, not from a bottle."³

In Paul's day wine was the most common intoxicant. In our day any substance that controls our bodies should be avoided.⁴

5:19 In this verse Paul referred to four of the many results of Spirit filling. He set them forth as participles in the Greek text, but they virtually amount to imperatives in their force. All four deal with praise, and all are public rather than private activities. Psalms refers to the Old Testament psalms that the Christians as well as the Jews used in their worship. Hymns were songs that eulogized some person or god in Greek culture and the true God in Christian worship (v. 14). Spiritual songs probably refer to all other kinds of vocal praise. When God controls us we are joyful.⁵ Of course we Christians, being human, have our highs and lows emotionally, but our general attitude will be joyful rather than negative if the Spirit controls us.

In addition to communicating with one another using the means already described, Christians should also use these means to communicate with the Lord. Praise should spring

¹Wuest, 1:4:128. See also Randall Gleason, "B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):241-56; Andreas J. Köstenberger, "What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):229-40; and Eldon Woodcock, "The Filling of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:625 (January-March 2000):68-87.

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

³McGee, 4:245.

⁴See J. Kirby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas*, ch. 8: "Drug Abuse."

⁵See Steven R. Guthrie, "Singing, in the Body and in the Spirit," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46:4 (December 2003):633-46.

from the heart, not just the lips. Singing refers to vocal praise, and making melody with the heart implies inaudible praise.

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

5:21 The fourth result of fullness with (control by) the Spirit is willingness to be subject to other believers. The opposite would be to be in control, to dominate others, and to exalt oneself over them. This attitude of submission is only reasonable and carries over from reverence for ("fear of") Christ. When God controls us we have submissive spirits.

Having explained the basic admonition to be filled with the Spirit (vv. 15-21) Paul next applied the implication of this exhortation to various groups of Christians.¹

"What is beyond question is that the three paragraphs which follow are given as examples of Christian submission, and that the emphasis throughout is on submission."²

Paul addressed six groups: wives and husbands (5:22-33), children and parents (6:1-4), and slaves and masters (6:5-9). In each of the three pairings the first partner is responsible to be submissive or obedient (5:22; 6:1, 5). However the second partner is also to show a submissive spirit. All are to relate to one another as unto the Lord.

¹See Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Start of Instruction to Wives and Husbands—Ephesians 5:21 or 5:22?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:694 (April-June 2017):179-92, for support for understanding the beginning of this instruction with verse 22.

²Stott, p. 215.

"Those who obey must obey as though they were obeying Christ: those who are obeyed must find the pattern of their conduct in the love and care of Christ, and must remember that they themselves owe obedience in their turn to Christ."¹

This is one of several "house-rule" lists in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 5:22—6:9; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 2:18—3:7). The writings of some Apostolic Fathers also contain such lists. Luther referred to these sections as *haustafel*, and some scholars still use this German word when referring to these lists.²

"Too much so-called 'holiness teaching' emphasizes a personal relationship to Jesus Christ without any attempt to indicate its consequences in terms of relationships with the people we live and work with. In contrast to such holiness-in-a-vacuum, which magnifies experiences and minimizes ethics, the apostles spelled out Christian duty in the concrete situations of everyday life and work."³

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

The duty of wives 5:22-24

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

¹Robinson, p. 124.

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

³Stott, p. 214.

then free to marry whomever she wanted). The wife had no such right."¹

5:22 Paul addressed wives first. Christian wives, he wrote, are to be subject (v. 21) to their own husbands as an expression of their submission to the Lord Jesus. Paul did not say that they were to be subject to their own husbands in proportion as they are submissive to the Lord. In submitting to her husband the wife is obeying the Lord who has commanded her to do so. In this section Paul was speaking of relationships in marriage, as the context clarifies (vv. 22-33). He was not saying that all women are to be subject to all men, nor was he saying that women are inferior to men (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7).

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

"The Greek term for *submission* has military origins, emphasizing being under the authority of another. The word does not connote a forced submission; instead it is a voluntary submission to a proper authority. Thus Paul seems to be saying that wives should voluntarily place themselves under the authority of their husbands."²

"Equality of worth is not identity of role."³

We live in an ordered universe in which there is authority and submission to authority everywhere (cf. Rom. 13:1). Authority and submission relationships are therefore natural and necessary in order to maintain order. God has authority over man (James 4:5). Man has authority over nature (Gen. 1:28). Husbands have authority over their wives (Eph. 5:22). Parents have authority over their children (Eph. 6:1). Governors have

¹Morris, pp. 180-81.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 1990.

³J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 177, footnote 23.

authority over those they govern (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Employers have authority over their employees (1 Pet. 2:18). Spiritual leaders have authority over those they lead spiritually (1 Pet. 5:2).

Submission means organizing oneself voluntarily in order to fill out a pattern that constitutes a complete whole. The word support is a good synonym for the biblical concept of submit. A wife submits to her husband when she voluntarily organizes herself so that she can complete her husband. A good example of this is illustrated by her cooperating with him when they run a three-legged race. They have to work together to succeed. Submission is essential for achieving oneness in marriage.¹

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

5:23 The reason for the wife's willing submission is that God has placed wives in a position under their husbands' authority (cf. 1 Cor. 11:12). Likewise He has chosen to place Jesus Christ in authority over (as "the head of") the church. Also Jesus Christ is the Savior of the church, like the husband is the savior (deliverer, protector) of his wife. The husband's headship additionally involves loving, serving, caring for, and leading his wife.³ These are all things that Jesus Christ does for the church.

¹See *Family Life Conference*, pp. 104-6.

²See Stott, pp. 218-19.

³See Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, pp. 56-57.

"To speak in terms of functional equality for husband and wife erroneously removes the complementary quality of the relationship and invalidates the comparison to Christ and the church, who are not functionally equal."¹

Leadership should involve a recognition that God has placed the husband in a position of responsibility. The husband occupies his role by divine placement. Taking on this role does not mean that the husband must execute all of his responsibilities perfectly, since that would be impossible. It does mean that he is accountable to God for his wife and children. Even though Eve ate the fruit first, God approached Adam first to question him about what he and Eve had done (Gen. 3:9).

The husband's leadership makes the wife's submission reasonable. It requires taking the initiative, integrity, and serving the wife (i.e., lightening the load of those who follow; cf. Matt. 11:28-30; Mark 10:42-45). Leadership also involves managing the home, not dominating it. A good manager creates an environment in which each person can achieve his or her maximum potential. A responsible father also keeps his children under control (1 Tim. 3:4). Leading is one of the husband's primary responsibilities in marriage.²

"Those who are busy undermining the chastity of wedlock to-day are the worst enemies of the commonweal [public good]. Its inviolability is not a question to be settled on grounds of expediency. The corner-stone of society is at stake in the matter."³

5:24 This verse continues the comparison between the church and the wife. Submission is the proper response to sovereignly designated authority both in the church-Christ relationship and

¹Bock, "A Theology ...," pp. 317-18.

²*Family Life ...*, pp. 118-19.

³Simpson, p. 128.

in the wife-husband relationship.¹ "In everything" means in everything within the wife-husband relationship, the context within which the apostle was speaking. Paul probably did not mean in absolutely everything since the wife has a higher responsibility to obey the Lord. When she encounters conflicting authorities—the Lord, through His Word, telling her to do one thing, and her husband telling her to do a contradictory thing—she should obey the Lord.²

"The Scripture is the guide for faith and life in the Christian home. A husband's authority in the home is derivative: as a servant of God, his authority comes from God. He is, therefore, subject to Scripture in all that he does, and has no freedom to guide his family in ways which contradict it. Should he clearly do so, individual members must follow God before man. The example of Sapphira's willing sin and personal accountability makes this clear (Acts 5:9)."³

What about a Christian wife whose unsaved husband beats or otherwise abuses her? Is she to be submissive to him in everything? Peter addressed such a situation in 1 Peter 3:1-3 and commanded wives in those situations to be submissive. He did not add "in everything." I would counsel such a woman to maintain a submissive attitude but to take measures in order to protect herself from danger.

In commanding submission neither Paul nor Peter was saying that wives must submit to situations in which they are in danger. Neither should they submit when the husband orders them to do something contrary to God's will (cf. Acts 5:29). Paul and Peter wanted them to submit to their husbands as God's appointed heads over them. The apostles dealt with the

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

²See Eadie, p. 413.

³James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, pp. 150-51.

basic principles that believers should observe, not all the possible situations that might arise.

"The final addition *in every thing* might seem more than can be accepted as God's purpose by this present generation with its stress on emancipation of womanhood, and the place of woman outside the home in every sphere of life that man occupies. Has not a woman equal rights with a man to self-determination? May not a married woman make herself a career as well as her husband? The answer that the New Testament would give is that she may do so, provided that it does not mean the sacrifice of the divine pattern for home life, for family relationships and for the whole Christian community. She may fulfill any function and any responsibility in society, but if she has accepted before God the responsibility of marriage and of a family these must be her first concern, and this is expressed here in terms of her relationship to her husband as head of the home."¹

The duty of husbands 5:25-33

I have already made many comments on the duty of husbands above.

5:25 In the Greco-Roman world in which Paul lived people recognized that wives had certain responsibilities to their husbands, but they denied that husbands had certain responsibilities to their wives.² Paul summarized the wife's duty as submission and the husband's duty as love. The word he used for love (*agapate*) means much more than sexual passion (*eros*) or even family affection (*philia*). It means seeking the highest good for another person (cf. 2:4). Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church. The extent to which He went for her welfare was giving Himself up in death to provide salvation for her (cf. v. 2; Phil. 2:5-11). He gave up

¹Foulkes, pp. 156-57.

²Wood, p. 76.

His rights, but He maintained His responsibilities. The biblical concept of authority emphasizes responsibility, not tyranny.

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

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

Different people feel loved as a result of receiving different expressions of love. Giving words of affirmation effectively communicates love to some people, giving quality time does to others, giving gifts, giving acts of service, and or giving physical touches communicates love to others.¹ The husband who wishes to make his wife feel loved should discover which of these expressions of love best communicate his love to his wife. But he should not limit his expressions of love to only one kind.

"Within traditional Reformed theology the doctrine of limited atonement has been deduced from a doctrine of election. The doctrine is often presented more as a matter of logic than of direct scriptural testimony. Serious appeal is made to two central passages only, Jn. 10:15 and Eph. 5:25. Scriptural testimony, on the other hand,

¹Gary D. Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*.

points in the direction of objective universal atonement."¹

It is clear that Christ gave Himself up for the church, but the church is only a segment of those for whom Christ died. This verse does not say that Christ died only for the church (i.e., the elect), as Reformed interpreters claim.²

5:26 The purpose Jesus Christ had in mind when He sacrificed Himself for His bride, the church, was to set her apart (sanctify her, make her holy) for Himself as His own forever (cf. Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12).³ Logically cleansing comes before setting apart, but in reality these things occur simultaneously. The cleansing here is spiritual ("with the Word") rather than physical. The Word of God cleanses Christians in the sense that, when we believe the gospel, it washes our sins away like water washes dirt away (cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11). Thus washing is a good metaphor for redemption.⁴ The Word is also the tool that the Holy Spirit uses to cleanse the Christian day by day.⁵

5:27 What was Jesus Christ's ultimate purpose in giving Himself for the church (v. 25)? It was to present her to Himself in all her glory, namely, holy and blameless—without any sin ("spot") or even any effect of sin ("wrinkle") or anything else that would diminish her glory. This will happen at the Rapture, when all Christians will experience full sanctification (i.e., glorification) and will join our Lord forever (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).⁶

"Spots are caused by defilement on the outside, while wrinkles are caused by decay on the inside."⁷

¹Eaton, p. 40.

²E.g., Shedd, 2:476; Berkhof, p. 394.

³See Richard D. Patterson, "Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):689-702.

⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 753.

⁵Eadie, p. 420.

⁶See Hendriksen, pp. 252-53, for marriage customs in biblical times.

⁷Wiersbe, 2:51.

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

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

"As he does not think about loving himself because it is natural, so also, should the husband's love of his wife be something that is as natural as loving himself."³

Some commentators have translated the Greek word *hos* "being," rather than "as," both here and in the second part of verse 33.⁴

"The husband, the head, therefore, is to love the wife as being his body, even as Christ loved the Church as forming His body."⁵

5:29-30 The truth that no normal person ever hated his own body (flesh) is clear because everyone who is of sound mind maintains his physical body. Paul was not thinking of people who harm themselves or commit suicide. Similarly it is normal behavior for men to love themselves (v. 28).

¹ *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1277.

²For refutation of the view that marriage is a sacrament, see Calvin, 4:19:35.

³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 765.

⁴E.g., Eadie, pp. 424, 435; et al.

⁵Salmond, 3:371.

The idea that we all need to learn to love ourselves, which some psychologists stress, is foreign to the apostle's thought here. Christ likewise feeds and cares for His own body, the church. The obvious implication is that husbands should, like Christ, care for their wives since the wife is a member of his own body. Perhaps Paul had in mind here the fact that Eve was taken from Adam's side and was in this sense a part of his own body.

Nourishing involves providing what one needs to sustain life including security. Cherishing involves lovingly protecting by watching out for and caring for someone or something. Here are some other basic needs that most wives feel: They need to feel wanted, to have their husbands acknowledge their equality, to feel secure, and to feel fulfilled. They also need to enjoy sex without feeling like an object, to bear and love children with their husbands, and to enjoy companionship with their husbands.¹

"No admonition to husbands could have been more countercultural to the Roman, Greek or Jewish man. Instead of being the ruler of the household, he is to be its servant. The husband's obligation goes far beyond being sexually faithful to his wife. And in no teaching anywhere in Roman, Greek, or Jewish writings is such a solution to the problem of disunity within marriage put forth. Rather than focusing on the rights of the husbands and wives, rather than providing financial incentives for the promotion of marriage, Paul drove right to the heart of marital unity by presenting the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as the model for the relationship of the husband to the wife."²

5:31 Adam acknowledged that Eve was part of himself (Gen. 2:23).
When a man and a woman unite in marriage they become part

¹See Willard F. Harley Jr., *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-proof Marriage*.

²Jack J. Gibson, "Ephesians 5:21-33 and the Lack of Marital Unity in the Roman Empire," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:670 (April-June 2011):176-77.

of one another ("one flesh"). This is as close a unity as the one that existed before God physically separated Eve when He formed her from Adam. The Scriptures regard this tie as more fundamental, more binding, and more permanent, than any other tie that unites any other two human beings, including parent and child.¹ It is partially because of this high view of marriage that Christianity has traditionally taken a strong stand, not only for the indissolubility of the marriage bond, but also against polygamy, adultery, and divorce.

"This statement from the creation story is the most profound and fundamental statement in the whole of Scripture concerning God's plan for marriage."²

5:32 The mystery in view in this verse is another truth previously hidden but now brought to light by divine revelation. The relationship that exists between a husband and his wife is the same as the one that exists between Christ and His church. The church has as close a tie to Christ spiritually as a wife has to her husband spiritually. Paul revealed that Genesis 2:24 contains a more profound truth than people previously realized. The mystery is great because it has far-reaching implications. Perhaps Paul also meant that it is great because the blessedness of this mystery is known only to believers: those who enjoy union with Christ.³

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

5:33 Even if Paul's original readers did not fully grasp the significance of Christ's intimate relationship to the church, each individual Christian husband, one by one, (*Gr. humeis hoi*

¹Hoehner, "Ephesians," p. 641.

²Foulkes, p. 161.

³Eadie, p. 434.

kath' hena) was responsible to love his own wife as himself. Likewise every Christian wife should, one by one, (the same Greek phrase) respect (*phobetai*, fear, reverence) her husband (vv. 21-22). If the husband loves his wife the way Christ demonstrated His love for the church, the wife will naturally respect and consequently love her husband.

Respecting means voluntarily lifting up another person for special consideration, treatment, and obedience. It involves having consideration for that person's responsibilities and needs, and praying for him. Words of encouragement that have a positive focus and build up show respect for a husband, as does doing things that please him. One writer estimated that most men have a poor self-image.¹ A man must have the respect of his wife in order to feel successful as a man.²

The duty of children 6:1-3

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

6:1 Children express their submission by obeying their parents (plural; cf. Prov. 30:17). One of the characteristics of the last days is that children will not obey their parents (cf. Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2). "In the Lord" modifies "obey," not "parents." Children should not obey their parents if their parents tell them to disobey the Lord.³

"Hence, if they spur us to transgress the law, we have a perfect right to regard them not as parents, but as strangers who are trying to lead us away from obedience to our true Father. So should we act toward princes, lords, and every kind of superiors."⁴

¹See Walter Trobisch, *All a Man Can Be & What a Woman Should Know*.

²See Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect*.

³Morris, p. 190.

⁴Calvin, 2:8:38.

Children's primary responsibility is to the Lord, as is also true of wives. Obedience is right (proper, righteous) in the sense that it is in harmony with God's will for children (cf. Col. 3:20).

"... it [obedience to parents] has its foundation in the very essence of the relation which subsists between parents and children. Nature claims it, while Scripture enjoins it, and the Son of God exemplified it."¹

Children should obey their parents as long as they are still children living under their parents' authority. When a child becomes an adult he or she no longer has to obey his or her parents but should continue to honor them.²

"So long as they are regarded in their culture as children or minors, they should continue to obey their parents."³

6:2 Even though as Christians we are no longer under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 7:6; 10:4; et. al.) Paul quoted the fifth commandment (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) in order to stress the importance of children obeying their parents. He restated this command as now being part of the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). Honoring (v. 2) is a larger concept than obeying (v. 1). It involves a proper attitude as well as appropriate behavior.⁴

"Honour comprehends in it all that respect, reverence, love, and obedience, which the filial relation so fully implies."⁵

"To honor someone therefore, is to evaluate that person accurately and honestly, and treat him with the deference, respect, reverence, kindness,

¹Eadie, p. 438.

²Morris, p. 190.

³Stott, p. 243.

⁴See Mollie Ann Frye, "How to Honor Your Parents When They've Hurt You," *Psychology for Living* 28:6 (June 1986):12-14.

⁵Eadie, p. 438.

courtesy, and obedience which his station in life or his character demands."¹

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

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

The duty of fathers 6:4

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

"This idea would have been revolutionary in its day; in the first-century Roman Empire, fathers could do pretty much what they liked in their families. They could even sentence family members to death ..."²

Christianity stressed consideration for the feelings of the children as part of parental responsibility.

Essentially this command forbids making unreasonable demands on children in the everyday course of family life. Provoke (Gr. *parorgizete*) means to exasperate (cf. Rom. 10:19; Col. 3:21). Exasperating provocation can enflame the child's anger unnecessarily (cf. 4:31). Studies indicate that the

¹Wuest, 1:4:136.

²Morris, p. 191. Cf. Gen. 22:1-14; 38:24; Deut. 21:18-21. See also Barclay, p. 208.

factor that causes rage in teenagers more than any other is having to face life without adequate direction from their parents.

"... do not irritate or exasperate or discourage by unreasonable demands, by unnecessary interference, by irritable nagging, by perpetual faultfinding, by harsh criticism, by unceasing 'don'ts,' by a dictatorial manner, by unjust commands."¹

Hendriksen listed some additional ways in which parents may become guilty of exasperating their children: (1) by over-protection, (2) by favoritism, (3) by discouragement, (4) by failure to make allowance for the fact that the child is growing up, has a right to have ideas of his own, and need not be an exact copy of his father to be a success, (5) by neglect, and (6) by bitter words and outright physical cruelty.²

Instead of being uninvolved in child-raising fathers should be there to bring them up and provide for the material and non-material needs of their children (cf. 5:29). Discipline refers to directing and correcting the child (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 12:8). Instruction denotes correction by word of mouth, including advice and encouragement (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Titus 3:10). Fathers are to do all this with the Lord at the center of the relationship and training.

"Responsible authority does not wield power; it serves with it."³

"... too many parents nowadays foster the latent mischief by a policy of *laissez faire* [nonintervention], pampering their pert urchins like pet monkeys whose escapades furnish a fund of amusement as irresponsible freaks of no serious import. Such unbridled young scamps, for lack of correction, develop too often into headstrong, peevish, self-seeking characters, menaces to the community where they dwell, and the blame rests with their supine [weak] and duty-shirking seniors."⁴

¹Paxton, p. 153.

²Hendriksen, pp. 261-62.

³Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 318.

⁴Simpson, p. 136. See also Wiersbe, 2:54-55.

"There is a 'discipline of the Lord' which is the responsibility of the parent, just as obedience 'in the Lord' is the duty of the child."¹

The duty of slaves 6:5-8

The third social set in the church that Paul addressed was slaves and masters (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24). Most slaves served in the home in Paul's day, so this section fits in well with what precedes about other household relationships. Some students of Roman history have estimated that about one-third of the population in the Roman Empire in Paul's time were slaves: approximately 60 million individuals.² Many of these people were Christians. Most ancient Greeks and Romans regarded slaves as little more than living tools.³

"Aristotle lays it down that there can never be friendship between master and slave, for master and slave have nothing in common; 'for a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.' A slave was nothing better, and had no more rights, than a tool. Varro, writing on agriculture, divided agricultural instruments into three classes—the articulate, the inarticulate and the mute. The articulate comprises the slaves; the inarticulate the cattle; and the mute the vehicles. The slave is no better than a beast who happens to be able to talk. Cato gives advice to a man taking over a farm. He must go over it and throw out everything that is past its work; and old slaves too must be thrown out on the scrap heap to starve. When a slave is ill it is sheer extravagance to issue him with normal rations. The old and sick slave is only a broken and inefficient tool."⁴

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

¹Robinson, p. 128.

²Wood, p. 83.

³See the excursus on slavery in Paul's time in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 800—04.

⁴Barclay, p. 213.

"When a man feels himself doomed, degraded, and little else than a chattel, driven to work, and liable at any moment to be sent to the market-place and sold as an ox or a horse, what spring of exertion or motive to obedience can really exist within him?"¹

"Christianity does not offer us escape from circumstances; it offers us conquest of circumstances."²

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

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

6:7 Seventh, the slave should have an attitude of goodwill toward his or her master. He should serve for the master's welfare. Such good will "does not wait to be compelled."³ This kind of service is to be done as to the Lord, not as if to the Lord. The Lord is the One whom the Christian slave really serves, not merely the earthly master.

"Here, as elsewhere in the N.T., slavery is accepted as an existing institution, which is neither formally condemned nor formally approved. There is nothing to prompt

¹Eadie, p. 448.

²Barclay, p. 214.

³Robinson, p. 211.

revolutionary action, or to encourage repudiation of the position."¹

6:8 Paul reminded faithful slaves that they would receive a reward from Jesus Christ in the future whether their masters on earth acknowledged their good service or not. This reward will come at the judgment seat of Christ, and perhaps earlier.

"Like Jesus himself, Paul does not shrink from referring to rewards."²

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

"... although the numerous slaves who had come into the Christian fold were in the apostle's mind as he wrote these words, the principles of the whole section apply to employees and employers in every age, whether in the home, in business, or in the state."³

The duty of masters 6:9

Masters should seek to please the Lord in their dealings with their slaves even as slaves should try to please Christ as they serve their masters. They should not threaten their slaves, because our heavenly Master does not threaten us. Threatening means harsh intimidation with the promise of inevitable, imminent, and severe or violent punishment (cf. Acts 4:17, 29; 9:1); it goes beyond simply warning. The opposite of threatening is gracious, just, and fair treatment (cf. Col. 4:1; James 5:4). Masters should also remember that their Master in heaven will not show favoritism to them because of their social or economic status. He will evaluate them by the same standard that they have used to judge others (Matt. 7:1-5).

"This is a gentle reminder that earthly rank has no relevance in heaven."⁴

¹Wuest, 1:4:137-38.

²Wood, p. 84.

³Foulkes, p. 167.

⁴Morris, p. 198.

Stott identified and discussed three major reasons that he believed the apostles did not urge the abolition of slavery: First, Christians were an insignificant group in the Roman Empire during the first century and were politically powerless. Second, it was fairly easy to make the transition from slavery to freedom, and there was a growing tendency for Romans to free their slaves and even establish them in a trade or profession. Third, by this time, the legal status of slaves was beginning to be eased, and it showed signs of further improvement.¹

"The application of this passage to contemporary times must be done with caution. Paul was writing specifically for a society where slavery was a legal institution. However, there are certainly some principles from the passage that can be applied to employee/employer relationships in the present time. Primarily, Christian employees should serve their employers with fear, diligence, integrity, and good will and Christian employers should deal with their employees with integrity and goodwill, without threats. Both Christian employees and Christian employers need also to realize that they have a heavenly master to whom they are accountable for their attitudes and conduct. Furthermore, the behavior of both parties should be a testimony to the unbelievers with whom they work."²

William Webb did not believe that these exhortations apply to employer/employee relationships.³ Wayne Grudem rejected Webb's "redemptive-movement hermeneutic," because he believed that it nullifies in principle the moral authority of the entire New Testament.⁴ I agree with Grudem's analysis.

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

¹Stott, pp. 254-59. See also Robinson, pp. 129-30.

²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 816.

³William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*.

⁴Wayne Grudem, "Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:2 (June 2004):299-346.

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

B. SPIRITUAL WARFARE 6:10-20

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

"These two responsibilities (home and work on the one hand, and spiritual combat on the other) are quite different from each other. Husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants are visible, tangible human beings, while the 'principalities and powers' arrayed against us are invisible, intangible demonic beings."¹

"Sooner or later every believer discovers that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground, and that he faces an enemy who is much stronger than he is—apart from the Lord."²

"In Christ we inherit not only all the love of God but all the hate of the devil."³

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

According to the Book of Acts and other sources there was an unusual amount of demonic activity in Ephesus, and Paul encountered it when he ministered there (cf. Acts 19:13-20).⁵ It was, therefore, appropriate that he would address this subject at some length in this letter to the Ephesians.

¹Stott, p. 213.

²Wiersbe, 2:56.

³Paxton, p. 181.

⁴Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 318.

⁵See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Ephesus," by E. M. B. Green, pp. 380-82.

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

"'The strength of his power' is a striking use of two words for might. There is probably no great difference in meaning here, but the combination puts emphasis on the importance of the divine power at work in believers."¹

This may be a figure of speech (hendiadys) meaning powerful strength (cf. 1:17).

6:11 In order to be strong in the Lord (v. 10) the Christian must put on (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8) the full armor of God. God supplies it for the believer (cf. Isa. 11:5; 59:17).

"Both commands [put on and stand firm] are conspicuous examples of the balanced teaching of Scripture. Some Christians are so self-confident that they think they can manage by themselves without the Lord's strength and armour. Others are so self-distrustful that they imagine they have nothing to contribute to their victory in spiritual warfare. Both are mistaken. Paul expresses the proper combination of divine enabling [*sic*] and human co-operation."²

¹Morris, p. 201.

²Stott, p. 266.

The purpose of accepting the full armor that God provides for waging spiritual warfare is, essentially, in order to equip one to firmly withstand all of Satan's attacks.

"... no Christian can hope to enter the warfare of the ages [and to stand firm] without learning first to rest in Christ and in what He has done, and then, through the strength of the Holy Spirit within, to follow Him in a practical, holy life here on earth."¹

"The 'standing' of which Paul speaks (verses 11, 14) is not that of a brick wall that is waiting passively, as it were, for the assault of the battering ram. The soldiers referred to here are drawn up in battle array and rushing into the fight. They are both defending themselves and attacking. Only when they make full use of God's armor will they be able to 'stand their ground,' that is, to withstand the foe, stand up against him, repulse his onrush and even gain ground ..."²

"The difference between defensive and offensive warfare is this, that in the former I have got the ground and only seek to keep it, whereas in the latter I have not got the ground and am fighting in order to get it. And that is precisely the difference between the warfare waged by the Lord Jesus and the warfare waged by us. His was offensive; ours is, in essence, defensive. The Lord warred against Satan in order to gain the victory. ... To-day we war against Satan only to maintain and consolidate the victory which He has already gained."³

In the context of this epistle the aim of Satan in view primarily has been the disunity of the body of Christ. However what Paul

¹Nee, p. 38.

²Hendriksen, p. 273.

³Nee, p. 40.

said here doubtless applies to all of Satan's aims and attacks. His "schemes" come upon us from a very intelligent and experienced strategist, and they are frequently deceptive (cf. 4:14).

"Some of these clever ruses and vicious stratagems are the following: mixing error with just enough truth to make it appear plausible (Gen. 3:4, 5, 22), quoting (really misquoting!) Scripture (Matt. 4:6), masquerading as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14) and causing his 'ministers' to do likewise so that they 'fashion themselves as apostles of Christ' (II Cor. 11:15), aping God (II Thess. 2:1-4, 9), strengthening people in their belief that he does not even exist (Acts 20:22 [*sic*]), entering places where he is not expected to enter (Matt. 24:15; II Thess. 2:4), and above everything else promising people that good can be attained through wrongdoing (Luke 4:6, 7)."¹

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

Satan has consistently aimed his personal attacks at getting people to doubt, to deny, to disregard, and to disobey the revealed will of God (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4). The world system seeks to get people to believe that they do not need God but can get along very well without Him (1 John 2). The flesh tempts us to think that we can find satisfaction, joy, and

¹Ibid., p. 272.

fulfillment on the physical, material level of life alone (Rom. 7).¹

"A thorough knowledge of the enemy and a healthy respect for his prowess are a necessary preliminary to victory in war. Similarly, if we underestimate our spiritual enemy, we shall see no need for God's armour, we shall go out to the battle unarmed, with no weapons but our own puny strength, and we shall be quickly and ignominiously defeated."²

"Forewarned is forearmed."³

"I do not think the Devil is concentrating in the nightclubs or on skid row or in the underworld or in the Mafia. [He already has these under his control.] I think he is concentrating on the church on Sunday morning. He is working on the spiritual front, and too many sleepy Christians seem to be totally unaware of that. Too many Christians are concerned about closing up the cocktail parlors when they need to be closing their mouths from gossiping and criticizing. The Devil is working in an area where we least expect to find him. He is not out on the town on Saturday night. He has gone to bed early so he can get up and go to church on Sunday morning. The spiritual battle is being fought wherever a man is giving out the Word of God, where a church is standing for the Word of God. That is the place the Devil wants to destroy, and that is the place of the spiritual battle."⁴

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

¹See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Your Adversary the Devil*, and C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, for further insight into the devil's strategies.

²Stott, p. 263.

³The motto of the British Royal Observer Corps.

⁴McGee, 5:277.

2 Pet. 1:5-7). This is part of our human responsibility in progressive sanctification.

This struggle does not take place on the physical level primarily—in contrast with Israel's struggles with the Canaanites—though saying no to certain temptations may involve certain physical behavior. It is essentially warfare on the spiritual level with an enemy that we cannot see. This enemy is Satan and his hosts, as well as the philosophies and feelings that he promotes and that people implement.¹ Stott refuted the view that the "rulers" and "powers" are only structures of thought especially embodied in the state and its institutions.²

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

The idea that certain demons have special authority over specific geo-political territories comes from Daniel 10:13. There we read that the prince (Heb. *sar*, head, official, captain) of Persia withstood Michael, who is one of the chief princes (same Hebrew word). It is impossible to know whether all demons have territorial authority or whether all territories have demonic princes. We do not have sufficient revelation. Clearly some demons have territorial assignments, but it seems unwarranted to conclude that all of them do.

¹See Kurt E. Koch, *Between Christ and Satan*.

²See Stott, pp. 267-75.

"Nowhere in the NT do we find a territorial view of demons. Jesus never casts out a territorial demon or attributes the resistance of Nazareth or Jerusalem to such entities. Paul never refers to territorial spirits, nor does he attribute power to them—despite the paganism of cities where he established churches."¹

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

"In the face of growing citizen militia groups, committed to arming themselves in order to defend personal freedoms, it seems ironic that the church has forgotten that she is spiritually armed for an entirely different battle. As the church, in response to various culture wars, increasingly turns to numerous battles 'with flesh and blood' rather than to the primary battle with 'the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12), one must wonder if we have forgotten the teaching of the New Testament itself."²

6:13 This verse summarizes what has just preceded. It does not describe the Christian standing in victory after his or her conflict as is clear from verses 14-18. Probably Paul repeated himself here because of the urgency of taking up God's provisions in view of the serious struggle ahead that believers face.

The evil day in view probably describes any day during which the evil forces are attacking. A less likely possibility is that it is some day yet future that is more evil than the rest, such as

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

²John H. Armstrong, "How Shall We Wage Our Warfare?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 227.

the day of the LORD. Every day of temptation is an evil day for the Christian. It is a day of battle.

"When you fight *to get* the victory, then you have lost the battle at the very outset. Suppose Satan sets out to assault you in your home or in your business. He creates a situation with which you cannot possibly deal. What do you do? Your first instinct is to prepare yourself for a big battle and then to pray to God to give you the victory in it. But if you do so, defeat is sure, for you have given up the ground that is yours. The starting-point of your defeat as a Christian is the moment when you begin to reckon that *you* must win. When you say, 'I *hope* I shall overcome', you relinquish to the enemy, by those very words, the ground that is yours in Christ. What then should you do when he attacks? You should simply look up and praise the Lord. 'Lord, I am faced with a situation that I cannot possibly meet. Thine enemy the devil has brought it about to compass my downfall, but I praise Thee that Thy victory is an all-inclusive victory. It covers this situation too. I praise Thee that I have *already* full victory in this matter *in Thee*.'"¹

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

"The spiritual warrior who has kept his position victorious and stood above his conquered foe in one 'evil day,' is to take his stand again ready to face another such critical day, should it come."²

¹Nee, p. 41. Cf. 2 Chron. 20:5-12.

²Salmond, 3:385.

Isaiah described God as a Soldier (called by some Bible scholars the "Divine Warrior"; cf. Isa. 11:5; 49:2; 52:7; 59:17). Paul may have had these descriptions in mind, but he probably used this figure in order to describe God's protection, because armored Roman infantrymen were commonplace throughout the empire. One may have even been guarding Paul when he wrote this epistle (cf. Act 28:16). Everyone knew what they looked like.

Paul described the items that the Roman infantryman wore in the order in which he would have put them on. He first put on, over his tunic (a loose sleeveless shirt that reached to his knees), a belt that would hold both the breastplate and scabbard (sheathe) in place.

"A great battle in the past, we are told, was won by a clever general who told his men to cut the belts of their enemy while they were sleeping. The next morning the enemy troops were so busy holding up their trousers that they weren't able to shoot their guns and, therefore, they lost the battle."¹

"The loins are the place of strength when duly girt, but represent the intimate affections and movements of the heart. If we allow our hearts to wander where they will, instead of abiding in communion with God, Satan has easy hold upon us. This piece of armour is then the application of the truth to the most intimate movements, the first movements of the heart."²

The "truth" could refer to both God's revealed truth, that the Christian has believed, and the Christian's own truthfulness, specifically, a lifestyle that reflects the truth. The full truth of God (i.e., His powerful Word), combined with the Christian's

¹McGee, 5:281.

²Darby, 4:478-79.

spiritual integrity, are together the only adequate basis for a defense against Satan (cf. 4:25).

"... this plain grace of *openness, truthfulness, reality*, the mind that will practice no deceits and attempt no disguises in our intercourse with God, is indeed vital to Christian safety and essential to the due operation of all the other qualities of character."¹

"A man of integrity, with a clear conscience, can face the enemy without fear. The girdle also held the sword. Unless we practice the truth, we cannot use the Word of truth. Once a lie gets into the life of a believer, everything begins to fall apart. For over a year, King David lied about his sin with Bathsheba, and nothing went right."²

"People of that time did not normally wear a belt in the house, but when they faced some vigorous action such as running, or when a soldier was preparing for battle, they raised their loose robes above the knees and fastened them in place with a belt ... Thus the 'girding' of the loins meant preparation for physical activity or, as here, for engaging in conflict."³

Similarly, righteous conduct (personal righteousness) seems to be in view here as well as the righteousness of Christ that becomes ours at regeneration. Both forms of righteousness are probably represented by the "breastplate of righteousness." The breastplate covered the soldier's body from his neck to his thighs. It was usually made of bronze or chain mail.⁴ It had a back piece, but it was the front part that gave it its name.

¹Salmond, 3:386.

²Wiersbe, 2:58.

³Morris, p. 205.

⁴Wood, p. 87.

6:15 Roman infantrymen wore tough sandals studded with sharp, thick nails on the bottoms to increase traction.¹ The gospel, which has brought peace to the Christian, enables him or her to stand firmly on the defense against temptation. Likewise, the gospel is what enables us to move forward on the offense against our enemies (cf. Isa. 52:7).

The "preparation of the gospel of peace" probably refers to the powerful gospel of salvation and peace that the Christian soldier has believed that enables him to stand his ground when attacked. We need to become so familiar with the gospel that we can share it with others (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). That grip on the gospel will enable us to hold our ground, and even advance against the enemy, when tempted. The "gospel of peace" in view is the whole Christian message viewed as good news.

"... the possession of peace with God creates blessed serenity of heart, and confers upon the mind peculiar and continuous preparedness of action and movement."²

"... protection comes from reflecting the unity that the gospel provides within the community ('shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel,' 6:16 [sic, 6:15], looks back to 2:11-22; it is not a reference to evangelism)."³

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

"Before a battle in which flaming arrows might be shot at them, the soldiers wet the leather covering with water to extinguish the arrows. The Roman legionaries could close ranks with these shields, the first row holding theirs edge to edge

¹Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 6:1:8.

²Eadie, p. 469.

³Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 318.

in front, and the rows behind holding the shields above their heads. In this formation they were practically invulnerable to arrows, rocks, and even spears."¹

"The flaming arrows of the evil one" represent whatever Satan uses to assault the believer.

"These darts were sometimes ablaze in order to set fire to the enemies' clothing or camp or homes just as the American Indians used to shoot poisoned arrows."²

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

The first three participles that explain how to stand fast are: "having belted" (v. 14), "having put on" (v. 14), and "having strapped on" (v. 15). The fourth participle is "taking up" (v. 16).

6:17

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

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

¹ *The NET2 Bible* note on 6:18.

²Robertson, 4:551.

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

"He who knows that he is safe, who feels that he is pardoned and sanctified, possesses this 'helme of helthe,' as Wyckliffe renders it, and has his 'head covered in the day of battle ...'"¹

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

"Do not make a mistake here; the sword of the Spirit is not the Bible. This Bible is not the sword of the Spirit, it is the armory. There are thousands of swords in here and every one of them is powerful and two-edged."²

"As Jesus used the words of Scripture to repulse the tempter [Matt. 4:4, 7, 10], so must the Christian the words the Spirit has inspired to drive away Satan."³

¹Eadie, p. 472.

²Ironside, p. 325.

³John A. Allen, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 138.

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

6:18 Prayer and alertness (two participles in the Greek text) describe how we should receive our present deliverance and use the word appropriate to our trial. We should be in constant prayer, both in preparation for our spiritual battles and as we engage our enemy (cf. Mark 14:34-38; Col. 4:2). The Spirit prays for us (Rom. 8:26) and enables us to pray, as He enables us to do everything else. Praying in the Spirit involves praying confident of God's help as we pray in harmony with the Spirit's desires, with the Spirit's enablement, and because of His grace (cf. Rom. 8:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 4:6; Jude 20). To use the clause "We pray in the power of the Holy Spirit" as a kind of magic password at the end of one's prayers, with the hope that adding these words will guarantee their power and effectiveness, is not what praying in the Spirit involves.

"Man very easily takes his difficulties to his fellows instead of to God."¹

"The Lord never asks us to do anything we *can* do. He asks us to live a life which we can never live and to do a work which we can never do."²

In addition to praying for our own needs we should also, as good soldiers, keep alert to the needs of our fellow soldiers, namely, all the saints. We must not fail them but pray for them persistently. The great need for prayer that exists is obvious in Paul's frequent use of the words every and all in this verse (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1).

"Prayer is an engine wieldable by every believer, mightier than all the embattled artillery of hell."³

¹Foulkes, p. 178.

²Nee, p. 55.

³Simpson, p. 153.

"... nuclear wars cannot be won with rifles. Likewise, satanic wars cannot be won by human energy."¹

Donna Reinhard reminded us that in the flow of Paul's argument in Ephesians we should understand spiritual warfare as influencing body life within the church, not just as a personal matter.²

"Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees."³

"The Christian life consists of sitting with Christ, walking by Him and standing in Him. We begin our spiritual life by resting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus. That rest is the source of our strength for a consistent and unfaltering walk in the world. And at the end of a gruelling [*sic*] warfare with the hosts of darkness we are found standing with Him at last in triumphant possession of the field."⁴

"We have here in this last chapter the whole set-up of an army. The Commanding General—the Lord Jesus. Power to operate—the Holy Spirit of God. Equipment—the whole armor. The supreme weapon—the Word of God. The signal corps—all prayer, which keeps us in constant touch with the base of supplies."⁵

6:19-20 Paul sensed his own great need for the prayer support of his readers. It must have seemed wrong to the Ephesians that an ambassador of Christ should be in chains. This is one of those verses that helps us see how Paul viewed himself. He was in heavenly places, but he was also in earthly confinement. An

¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 859.

²Donna B. Reinhard, "Ephesians 6:10-18: A Call to Personal Piety or Another Way of Describing Union with Christ?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:3 (September 2005):521-32.

³Anonymous.

⁴Nee, p. 64.

⁵Van Ryn, p. 163.

encounter with spiritual enemies awaited him when he would make his defense before Emperor Nero. Paul wanted the right words and boldness to characterize his witness. "Speech" probably refers to clarity of communication, and "boldness" to courage. He needed these things in all of his ministry opportunities but especially in the defense that he anticipated giving in the imperial court (cf. Acts 28:30-31). There are nine references in Acts alone to various people witnessing boldly (Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-29; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 20:46) plus others elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor. 3:12).

"The word for 'boldness' is made up of two words meaning 'all' and 'speech.' It signifies the attitude when one is completely at home and the words flow freely. Thus it may mean 'outspokenness,' or 'frankness.' When a person is speaking in this way, he or she is not in the least afraid, and thus the expression comes to signify 'boldly.'"¹

"Note that Paul did not ask them to pray for his comfort or safety, but for the effectiveness of his witness and ministry."²

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

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

¹Morris, p. 211.

²Wiersbe, 2:60.

not appear effective at times, but sometimes the seed sown just needs time to germinate.¹

IV. CONCLUSION 6:21-24

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

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

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

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

¹See the Appendix "Spiritual Warfare Involving Demons" at the end of these notes.

"Ephesians is ultimately about how God has powerfully equipped the church to experience blessing in Christ, by creating a new community that is able to honor God and resist the forces of evil. No longer does one's Jewish or Gentile identity dominate. They are part of a new, reconciled community, a reconciliation that involves not only God but also one another. All enablement in this new sacred community is rooted in what the exalted Christ has provided for His people. That is why believers can have hope, since they have begun participation in a wealth of benefits distributed from heaven. The church's members are citizens raised and seated with Jesus in a heavenly citizenship, though they represent Him now as light on the earth, fully enabled for the task. In all of this, God is taking steps toward the ultimate summation of all things in Christ."¹

¹Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 319.

Appendix

Spiritual Warfare Involving Demons

Here are some suggestions for ministering in situations involving demons.

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

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

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

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

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

It seems that some people have greater sensitivity to the spirit world than others do. Likewise some people seem to be the targets of Satanic attack more than others are, or at least they are more aware of it. For example,

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said that he felt unusual opposition when he was writing his section on demons in his *Systematic Theology*. A former pastor of mine said the same thing when he was preaching a series of messages on spiritual warfare. But I have never felt this type of opposition myself.

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

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

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

Ray Stedman, *Spiritual Warfare* (Multnomah)

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

Tim Warner, *Spiritual Warfare*

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

Mark Bubeck, (3 books)

Ed Murphy, a 16-tape series on spiritual warfare

Frances Frangapane, *The Three Battlegrounds*

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