



Ephesians Masterclass

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3.1 Something Has Happened!

We start our journey with a burst of praise from the author, Paul, which may leave us breathless as one glorious statement spills into the next. Paul is both praising and announcing something fantastic that has happened – the most important event in human history. The ultimate battle has been fought out only years before and there has emerged an indisputable victor, Christ Jesus the Son of God. And from this battle he has not emerged alone, but has brought us with him into Heavenly places.

3.1.1 It Started in the Heavens

Although Ephesians is a practical letter, we must grasp one vital fact, which is that we must always start with *as it is in heaven*. Scripture never teaches us anything practical without first taking us into the Heavens to see things as God sees them. Then and only then can we start to *get practical* as God would have us do. It is the mistake of many to rush headlong into the practical before seeing what God sees; for without the divine perspective the valley walls seem so steep, whereas when we set off the path ahead seemed so much easier! So it is in the Heavens that we start our journey into Ephesians.

3.1.2 It Began in the Heart of the Father

Interestingly Paul starts with thanks to God the Father rather than Jesus himself. Why? Because the whole plan of salvation came from the Father and was executed through the agency of the Son, via the power of the Holy Spirit - just as the world itself began.

Jesus taught us to pray to our Father, not himself. It is not that we do not address the Son, but we bring our praise to the Father through the agency of the Son - he is at all times the intermediary through whom we experience and relate to the Father. Through him our adoption was secured and only through him can we know our new Father: -

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

John 14:6

3.1.3 Every Spiritual Blessing

The heart-confession of every true child of God is “*Blessed am I!*”, as the WORD of God tells us repeatedly. Here we have one of the most powerful and perhaps mysterious statements in all of the WORD of God: -

“... who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Ephesians 1:3

Paul is saying that every spiritual blessing available has been poured out upon us *in Christ*, i.e., as a result of our union with Christ. The Greek word used here for spiritual is *pneumatikos*, which is not contrasting the spiritual with the physical in a Gnostic sense, but instead implies the working of the Holy Spirit. The blessings we have come through from the Holy Spirit. As we have said, the heart of the Father, through the agency of the Son, via the power of the Holy Spirit.

An important factor to note in our receipt of these blessings - they come through the Holy Spirit, which means they need to be taken hold not *naturally* but *spiritually*. As we shall see in our progress through the epistle, although the blessings have already been secured, similarly to our initial salvation, we are required to appropriate it. This *appropriation* requires two things from us - faith and confession.

Paul tells us that *every* blessing is ours, not just some now and some later. There is no blessing for us which was not secured on the Cross of Christ. Everything we need is provided for in that act of God. This is simply enormous! It means that no matter what we are seeking, whatever we may face, we will always find the provision for that need in the Cross of Christ.

3.1.4 In the Heavenly Realms

In this phrase, literally “... *in the Heavens*”¹, we have the key to understanding the blessings we have received in Christ. To start to help us understand this term it would be helpful to look at where we find the phrase elsewhere in the letter, four times in all ...

- A Place of Blessing (1³) - as we have seen.
- A Place of Establishment (1²⁰ & 3¹⁰) - We find that Christ was seated at the right hand of Father God in the heavenly realms. He also confirms that the powers operating in the heavenly realms were aware of what

¹ The word *realms* or *places* is supplied by the translators, as it is implied but not in the original Greek.

God established, because it happened in their realm and affected them directly.

- A Place of Rest - (2⁶) It is a place of rest in Him, not of human effort. Later on Paul confirms that we were seated there with him. We shall return to this later in our study.
- A Place of Battle - (6¹²) Whilst being a place of rest, it is not a place of complacency for the battle continues. Again we shall return to this theme later in the epistle.

So how do these other references of Paul help us understand this great phrase *in the Heavens*? What are the implications?

- Something has happened in the Heavens, a spiritual realm.
- It has been established by God himself and resulted in our being blessed in every way in this spiritual realm.
- Whatever happens in the spiritual realm can and does impact the physical world, as Paul points out with Christ himself. The impact of what has been established, the Lordship of Christ Jesus, impacts the physical world over time, for the sake of mankind.
- Although this can impact the physical realm, it still happened in the spiritual realm, which as we said means that we appropriate these blessings by spiritual means (faith and confession).

This appropriation depends upon how well exercised our sixth sense is ... our faith muscle. Which is more real to us, the spiritual or the physical realm? Of which are we more aware? Vincent concludes on Paul's use of this word *Heavens*,

*"It is not merely that the blessings with which we have been blessed are blessings which have their origin in heaven ..., but that they are blessings which have their seat where God himself is and where Christ reigns."*²

3.1.5 Is Already Ours!

The first thing is that Paul tells us we *have been blessed* – it **has happened**. This is why Jesus cried out before he died: -

²Endnotes

Word Studies in the New Testament: Vincent, Martin R,

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”

John 19:30

The Greek word here is *tetelestai*³, which could be more fully translated as *it was finished and as a result it is forever done*. As we have said we have every blessing in Christ, but we need to recognise that everything we need in Christ comes from the historical fact of the Cross.

Martin Lloyd Jones, one of the greatest Christian servants of his generation reminded the church time and again that we do not follow a philosophy, which can change and bend with the times but instead our faith is based on physical facts – either they happened or they did not!

Tragically many in the church have looked only forward to eternal life in heaven not realising that eternal life begins when we are born again – at this point Jesus has already provided everything we shall ever need through the Cross. Our only future hope is the completion of our adoption, the resurrection and transformation of our glorified bodies⁴ – everything else has already been done for us! Observe H A Ironside’s brilliant exposition of this verse: -

“... I obtained every blessing that God has for a redeemed sinner when I put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not just give us a little now and a little later, but gives us everything in Christ. It is all yours. Enter into it and enjoy it.

It is one thing to have the blessings and another thing to make them yours. I read about a man in Montanna for whom authorities had been searching for a long time. Some years ago a British nobleman died, leaving an estate which, as he had no children, would go to the next nearest relative. This man away out west was the nearest heir, living in poverty, and just eking out a struggling existence when they found him and gave him the news that the estate was his. It was his all the time, but he did not know it. What did he do when he found it out? Did he say, ‘Well, it is a good thing to know that I have something to fall back on and some day I will go and look at it?’ No, he went downtown, and on the strength of the good news bought himself a new suit and a ticket, and left for Great Britain. I read an interview that the reporters had with him. They asked, ‘Where are you going?’ He answered, ‘To take possession of my estate.’ You and I are richer by far than he was, but do we really take possession by faith of the things that are ours in Christ?”⁵

Does this mean that God has finished pouring out his blessings upon us? No, far from it, our adoption as *sons of God* has made us rightful heirs of every blessing

³ This comes from the Greek word *teleo* meaning to end, i.e. complete, execute, conclude, discharge (a debt).

⁴ Romans 8²³, 1 Corinthians 15²⁶

⁵ *Ephesians*: Ironside, H A © 2000, revised edition by Loizeaux Brothers, Inc.

and partakers in the victory. However the source of this blessing and pouring out is that great event that has happened, Christ's victory on the Cross.

3.1.6 Why and How it Happened

Verse 4, starts with the Greek word, *kathos*, which means *even as, in conformity with the fact that*. Paul tells us in the next verses, the grounds on which these blessings were divinely delivered to us. Between **verses 4 and 14** we find some interesting parallels. Paul really communicates the same message twice, bringing fresh detail the second time: -

Verse 4-10		Theme	Verse 11-14	
Chosen and Adopted..	⁴ <i>For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.</i>	Our adoption is firstly toward the outworking of God's plan. In other words it is not about us. Our salvation is not primarily about us, but about his plan. We are simply caught up in the great Covenant Wave of his purpose.	^{11a} <i>In him we were also chosen,</i>	...To be conformed
	<i>In love</i> ⁵ <i>he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will</i>		^{11b} <i>having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,</i>	
Lavish Grace...	⁶ <i>to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.</i> ⁷ <i>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace</i> ⁸ <i>that he lavished on us with all wisdom</i>	Christ is God's means. He is the centre of the plan and the sole HOPE for all life. If he fails, then so do we - if he is victorious so are we! The purpose of this grace? Simply for the praise of his glory	¹² <i>in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.</i>	<i>For glorious Praise...</i>



	<i>and understanding.</i>			
Included..	<i>⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, ...</i>	We've been let in on the mystery (verse 9) of the good news (verse 13) ⁶ . As stewards of the mystery and part of the plan we were set apart and sealed, until our adoption is complete.	<i>¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,</i>	...And sealed
In Christ...	<i>which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.</i>	Echoing the cry of Colossians Paul declares the end game of God – the Lordship of Christ over all. WE are the harvest of this Lordship. WE are his inheritance, so although we are not the centre and focus of the plan we ARE the prize!!	<i>¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.</i>	...we are guaranteed

Now that we have picked out the main parts of Paul's initial description of **What has Happened**, we shall now go back and pick some of the main themes Paul touches upon ...

⁶ NB: - Although Paul is referring, in verse 13, to his Gentile audience now being included in the gospel which went to the Jew first (Romans 1¹⁶), what he is saying equally applies to all believers.

3.1.7 Chosen or Choosers? (vv. 4 & 11a)

Many Theologians have debated this question over the last two millennia. Like many other things in the WORD of God, we do not always understand fully the mysterious things of God:

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

1 Corinthians 13:12–13

We often find truths held in tension with each other, such as this – we chose him and could not have been saved unless we responded with the faith and confession by which we were born again and yet even before the foundation of the earth he handpicked each one of us saints of God. As Augustine put it: -

“If there is no [sovereign] grace of God, how does He save the world? and if there is no free will, how does He judge the world?”

3.1.8 Adoption (vv. 5 & 11b)

What have we been predestined for? Adoption as sons of God. So what does adoption mean? In modern western society our thoughts on adoption may be different to those of Paul and his audience. Today there remains perhaps a stigma attached to adoption, the idea that someone was not wanted in the first place. When we think of adoption we think of broken homes and abused children etc.

Adoption was an entirely different thing under Roman Law, adoption into a family meant becoming a child in every sense of the word, a first class son with all the rights and privileges of a natural son. We find this word used four other times in the New Testament and it has two aspects for the believer: -

- **Personal**

Our sonship comes through God’s son by nature, Jesus. So Paul picks up on this in his letter to the church in Rome: -

“... you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Romans 8:15b–16

Our redemption and infilling by the Holy Spirit is part of our adoption. It is also by the Spirit that we are able to live as sons of God, because as Paul says in the same passage, those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.

- **Legal**

As we have said, adoption in the Roman world, which was quite an involved and serious process, conferred legal rights. We are co-heirs with Christ and will share everything he has for eternity. However we must remember one key fact, we forfeited our rights as natural children because of our sin; we are instead children of grace. Why grace? Francis Foulkes explains: -

“Adoption’ is the best way to describe this because adopted children have the their position by grace and not by right, and yet are brought into the family on the same footing as children by birth”⁷

What we must remember here however is that our adoption is not direct – no, it is *in Christ*. It is only through him that we have been adopted, so although we have the rights of the natural Son, it is only through him that we have those rights. Why is this significant? Because everything we have through our adoption hinges upon us being *in Christ*. In other words we must abide in him: -

“See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.”

1 John 2:24

Indeed adoption involves being conformed to the image of the Son of God. This process, Paul tells us will only be complete when we become fully like him, at last, when our physical bodies are transformed like his: -

“... we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Romans 8:23

3.1.9 Lavish & Glorious Grace (vv.6-8 & 12)

In these verses we have some fantastically descriptive Greek words, which Paul uses to describe what has happened. Let’s focus on **verses 7 and 8** in particular:

⁷ *Ephesians -Tyndale New Testament Commentaries:* Foulkes, Frances © 1989 Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK.



- "... we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he ...

... *lavished*

- Gk. *Perisseuo*, which means to exceed a fixed number or measure.

His grace was more than enough to save every sinner on this earth. Jesus died for all men, not just the elect. Paul uses this word when telling the Romans about how grace exceeded sin. He uses the prefix *huper* (Gk. Meaning 'above'): -

*"But where sin abounded, grace abounded (Huperperisseuo) much more, ..."*⁸

... *on us*

- This is not the Greek word *Pros* ("to") as the title of this letter "*To the Ephesians*". Instead it is the Greek word *eis*, meaning "into". God's grace super-abounded *into us*. Paul uses the same concept in his letter to the Philippians where he talks about *working in* them as they *work out* their salvation.

In Philippians Paul uses the Greek word *energeo*, which means to energize to work effectively. So God not only infuses us with his grace at the point of salvation but he also continues to infuse us as we then work out our salvation and calling!

... with all wisdom

- Paul uses the Greek word *Sophia*, which means '*insight into the true nature of things, the deep things of God*'. It is a theoretical and conceptual wisdom.

...*and understanding.*"⁹

- The next word Paul uses however is the Greek word *Phronesis*, which means '*the ability to discern modes of action with a view to their results*'. This is a practical type of wisdom.

So we have a statement from Paul, which is almost oxymoronic. We are told that God lavished grace on us with careful and prudent wisdom!! God was care-free with his carefulness!

⁸ Romans 5²⁰

⁹ Ephesians 1⁷⁻⁸

God's wisdom has never been understood by man. And so we have many things in the kingdom of God that seem oxymoronic and contradictory: sowing in times of need¹⁰; being diligent to enter the rest of God¹¹ to name just a couple. Paul summed man's lack of understanding up in his letter to the Corinthians¹²: -

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
...”

1 Corinthians 1:18

3.1.10 In Christ (vv. 3, 5, and 9)

We find the phrase *in Christ* repeatedly within this epistle. All things are destined to find their fulfilment and purpose in Christ. We shall come back to this again and again because it is the key to understanding exactly what has happened to us and what we should do about it. Indeed Paul begins the second half of the epistle telling us that what has happened demands a response from us¹³.

Why is this the key? Because much is now expected of us and if we don't have a revelation of how God expects us to meet his demands then we shall spend our lives in a frustrating striving cycle of failure and disappointment. We need do nothing by ourselves – but everything in Christ. If we do anything on our own it becomes flesh. We shall see Paul pick this up again in chapter two.

3.1.11 Inclusion (vv.12–13)

In **verses 12 and 13** we have a key concept permeating much of the New Testament writings, that of inclusion. Paul goes on in Ephesians to talk about how the Jew and Gentile have been made one in Christ. This idea of inclusion in what God is doing is a key element in understanding what has happened to us.

God's Covenant purpose we know is that in all things Christ might have the supremacy. This was the case before the world was made and will continue to be the case when it is ended. This Covenant purpose is like an ocean wave sweeping from eternity past into our time/space world and out again into eternity future.

Where do we fit into that wave? We are riding on the crest of it! Consider the picture of the wave just for a moment. A wave is something that transmits energy from one place to another without taking the matter (e.g., the water) disturbed with it: -

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 8¹⁻³

¹¹ Hebrews 4¹¹

¹² 1 Corinthians 1¹⁸⁻²⁵

¹³ Ephesians 4^{1b}



“A progressive disturbance propagated from point to point in a medium or space without progress or advance by the points themselves, as in the transmission of sound or light.”¹⁴

A wave can therefore be identified if: -

- Energy moves from one place to another and
- Matter doesn't move from one place to another, for the most part.

For example, ocean waves ceaselessly arrive at the shore without piling up infinite amounts of water. The wave arrives, but the water doesn't. It's the same with us – our ancestors in the faith were carried along by the Covenant Wave of God, moved ceaselessly onward by the Holy Spirit. If we can truly see this then we shall find our connection with the ancestors past then we see our own place in Covenant history and run the race with a greater sense of purpose: -

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Hebrews 12:1

3.1.12 Sealed & Guaranteed (vv.13-14)

Paul has introduced this great truth to us that we are *sealed* in the Holy Spirit. Throughout the WORD of God *seals* carry with them the following connotations¹⁵:

-

- A Finished Transaction¹⁶
- Ownership¹⁷
- Security¹⁸

We have many papyri from the ancient world evidencing the common usage of this Greek word, *spragizō*. This word was used to describe goods which were packed and ready to go, which would, as the last thing, receive the seal upon them to prevent undetected tampering during transit. The seal also indicated

¹⁴ The Random House Dictionary

¹⁵ Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹⁶ Jeremiah 32⁹⁻¹⁰, John 17⁴ and John 19³⁰

¹⁷ Jeremiah 32¹¹⁻¹² and 2 Timothy 2¹⁹

¹⁸ Esther 8⁸, Daniel 6¹⁷ and Ephesians 4³⁰

from where goods had come and to where they were headed. We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit to denote God's ownership of us.

Paul then uses another commercial term *deposit*, a Greek word *arrabōn*, meaning a part purchase for anything to guarantee that full payment will follow. As we saw our adoption is not yet complete – it will only be so when we receive our glorified bodies, as Paul tells the Romans: -

“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Romans 8:23

Later in this chapter Paul tells us that we have been foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified. That last part *glorified* is not yet fully come to pass, but Paul uses the past tense because it is a done deal – why? The Holy Spirit himself seals us ready for the day of liberation of our bodies and he is the deposit on all that we shall experience in the age to come. If we enjoy the power of the Holy Spirit working through us now then we have only experienced but a foretaste!

3.1.13 Centrality of Christ (vv.9-10)

The theme of the centrality of Christ is evident from the very beginning of Ephesians. It is an essential litmus test for us when approaching the WORD of God¹⁹. This is because we can look at anything in the WORD of God and if our emphasis or approach detracts from the centrality of Christ in any way, we should question it.

We shall come back to this litmus test later on in our studies as it is an essential tool for the discerning Christian. We can also apply this to our lives as well – what we spend our time doing – does it add to or detract from the supremacy of Christ? Although this does not mean that we have to stop doing things like work or eating etc, it does mean that we can prioritise:

“... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33

The New Living Translation captures this so succinctly in translating **verse 9**: -

¹⁹ See Appendix Two



“God’s secret plan has now been revealed to us; **it is a plan centred on Christ,**”

Ephesians 1:10

We shall come back to this litmus test when we look at **verse 22** later in this chapter and also the references to Israel in chapter Two.



| Group Activity

Paul draws upon some of the main doctrines of the New Testament in this opening chapter. In small groups (or four or five) see if you can come up with some other parts of the Word of God touching on these themes. To help you, here are some of those themes: -

- Predestination and Calling
- Adoption
- Conformed to his Image
- Grace
- Inclusion (Jew and Gentile)
- Supremacy and Lordship of Christ

3.2 In Light of This (1¹⁵⁻²³)

In light of this amazing thing that has happened Paul now starts to lay out his heart for the saints to whom he writes. He lays out his prayer for the Saints as well as his hope for them as well. Each part of this is important, because Paul is here saying, in light of what has happened, which I have been laying out for you, this is how I am praying for you and this is my hope for you!

3.2.1 Paul's Prayer ...

- **Fulfilling the Law**

Paul now focuses on his heart and prayer to all the church. He starts this with what Jesus said was the sum of the law, the two greatest commandments, loving God and fellow man, especially those from the household of faith: -

Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:37-40

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Galatians 6:10

In all that Paul taught the saints he could boil it down in much the same way that Jesus did, to these two basic things. So here Paul tells them that it is **because** he has heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints.

Now here the observant may notice that he has referred to their *faith* and not love for the Lord. The preposition Paul uses here is *kata* meaning down. Here it is used in the accusative case and so means *down along* in a

distributive sense. So Paul is not referring to their initial faith in the Lord Jesus, but instead to their daily faith (trust) in him - a faith which was reputed to be among them.

Here we need to observe something important that permeates much of the Apostles' writings: faith is linked to loving God in two ways, firstly in being faithful *to* him: -

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

John 14:21

... and having faith *in him*, which is expounded upon by the writer to the Hebrews, where in **chapters 3 and 4**, we are shown how Israel's lack of trust in him was taken to be rebellion by God which caused him to refuse their immediate entry into the promised land. Our love is evidenced in our continual trust in him in all circumstances.

- **A Done Deal**

Have you ever wondered how Paul managed to pray with thanks for every church he wrote to (except for the Galatians!)? Surely when you pray for others it cannot always be with thanks; there must be times of frustration and times of doubt?!

Paul was able to pray with thanks because of something fundamental to the way he prayed - ***Paul always prayed in expectation of God answering his prayer!*** We find that when Paul wrote to the church in Philippi he told them that his confidence in the work being completed in them was based on God and his faithfulness!

When we seek God, when we look to the future we can either expect blessing or curse - it's up to us. One of the things Jesus teaches his disciples is how blessed they are (**Matthew 5**). The cry of the beatitudes is “blessed am I!”.

3.2.2 Paul's Persistence ...

Paul prayed with persistence for the Ephesians: -

“I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

Ephesians 1:16

Paul sets an example to his writers in how he prays for them. He never gives up, always prays in hope, confident of everything he prays. It is to the Galatians that he writes: -

“..., for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Galatians 6:9

3.2.3 ... Know HIM (v.18)

The goal of all that Paul prays for the Ephesians is that they may *know* Jesus. It is true that the motivation for the plan is the glory of God, as we have seen, but inextricably tied up with that goal is that man may know God – the man in the garden having a real and intimate relationship with his Father Creator God.

The Greek word Paul uses here is *epignosis*, an experiential – not theoretical – knowledge. In the footnotes of most Bibles we find the option of inserting the definite article in front of the word spirit. It is the same word Spirit or spirit in the Greek. It is clear that the recipients of Paul’s letter already have the Holy Spirit within them, so Paul is here talking about having things which come via the Holy Spirit. The New Living Translation puts it best: -

“... asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.”

Ephesians 1:18 (New Living Translation)

Just as the blessings we have received (**verse 3**) are *spiritual* blessings and come only through our interaction with the Holy Spirit. We can only *know* him by experience of him and that can only come through revelation – God revealing himself to us.

3.2.4 ... Know the HOPE (v.18)

Next Paul turns to the hope to which we have been called. It is essential that we not only know him who has called us, but also the very hope to which He has called us as well. For this to happen the eyes of our heart must be enlightened. In other words we need to use our sixth sense – the eye of faith. The writer to the Hebrews defines faith for us: -

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Hebrews 11:1

For there to be faith it is essential that hope is present. We find throughout Paul’s writings the two linked together: -

“... the **faith** and love that spring from the **hope** that is stored up for you in heaven.”

Colossians 1:4

“... if you continue in your **faith**, established and firm, not moved from the **hope** held out in the gospel.”

Colossians 1:23

“a **faith** and knowledge resting on the **hope** of eternal life.”

Titus 12

And the writer to the Hebrews links our hope to God’s own faithfulness: -

“Let us hold unswervingly to the **hope** we profess, for he who promised is **faithful**.”

Hebrews 10:23

It is vital therefore that we know the hope to which we have been called! Hope might be described as a destination point for which we have set sail like a ship.

Faith is the fuel but hope is the destination – without either we are lost! Eugene Peterson, when paraphrasing another of Paul’s letters, draws on similar language concerning the pull of eternity upon us: -

“The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut by hope.”

Colossians 1:5A (The Message)

This is a wonderful section of paraphrase; beautifully crafted! Paul is saying that the believers are anchored into eternity. It’s almost as if Jesus threw a rope down from Eternity and lassoed us! He is now pulling us heavenward and it is our hope which keeps that line taught etc. There will be times when we feel weak and that rope will keep pulling us heavenward!

In contrast we find Paul talking about those living in this world, being darkened (as opposed to being enlightened) in their thinking. He says something very telling about them: -

“Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality.”

Ephesians 4:19

Sensuality is, in essence, everything connected with the physical senses. The sensitivity Paul is talking about here is sensitivity to *what we do not see*. When the unseen realm, which we have seen earlier Paul refer to as *the heavenlies*, becomes more real to us than that which we perceive with the five physical senses, we shall start to understand the hope to which we have been called, because then we shall start to see things as God himself does.

Paul sums this up in his letter to the church in Rome when he says that *the righteous live by faith*²⁰ – not based on what they see around them and not at the dictate of their circumstances and adversities. He goes on to say later in the same letter: -

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was

²⁰ Romans 1¹⁷

as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,”

Romans 4:18–20

3.2.5 ... Know the RICHES (v.18)

This verse is often taken two different ways: -

- **A Ransomed People**

The more literal translations have *in the Saints*. Some have said that this is out of context as a meaning and that it is instead *among the Saints* (i.e., an inheritance he shares with us)²¹. However there is so much imagery in the WORD of God concerning the people of God. Israel’s unfaithfulness was always pictured by marital unfaithfulness (cf. Hosea) and we will find later on in Ephesians among the pictures of the church that of Bride!

Later in Ephesians Paul explains how everything Jesus went through was: -

“... to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Ephesians 5:26–27

Again, here we have one of those seemingly contradictory truths within the WORD of God, which are not actually contradictory but simply beyond our understanding: we learned earlier in Paul’s letter that the chief reason and goal of God’s great plan of salvation was for Jesus to have supremacy over all things to the glory of God. However we also find that we are were the prize – a people devoted to him despite the fact they have tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God always wanted willing worshippers and not automatons.

- **Heavenly Resources**

We also have a glorious inheritance because we are co-heirs with him: -

²¹ *Ephesians - Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*: Foulkes, Frances © 1989 Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK.

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Romans 8:17

We have to remember that we share in all aspects of Christ’s life – his suffering (for the sake of the gospel) as well as the riches of heaven which are ours as co-heirs with him. We do not yet know all that this means but it is wonderful and awesome nonetheless! In terms of riches we have many promises from God, just two of which are here below: -

“Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

Proverbs 3:9–10

Why does God fill our barns to overflowing? This is because he wants it to overflow to those around us. We are a nation of sowers, like God himself. And for sowers there is a promise: -

“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.”

2 Corinthians 9:10

God supplies us with seed from his heavenly resources, not only to feed us but also in order that we sow it out!

3.2.6 ... Know the POWER (v.19)

As well as knowing the riches of heaven, we also need to know the power of God. Peter says something interesting about the power of God in his second letter: -

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

2 Peter 1:3

This means that in every area, Jesus is our source – emotionally, physically, mentally etc. The Cross of Christ was, as we saw in [verse 3](#), God’s means of blessing us in every way. Every aspect of the curse we find is reversed in the Cross and so now we have the power of God within us. Paul significantly reminds of the very power of God that resides within us: -

“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

Romans 8:11

Apart from the wonderful fact that the Spirit of God can bring life to our bodies there is also something key here in Paul’s statement: the same Spirit of God that resides within us that resided within Jesus himself! After his ordeal in the desert Jesus came back in the Power of the Spirit²². Remember that Matthew tells us that Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit following his baptism. It was from hereon that Jesus’ ministry began – in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Before we start to think that the power of God is all about moving in the dynamic gifts in ministry let us look at something interesting Paul says about the power of God: -

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians 3:10-11

Here is the key – the word **and** above (Greek *Kai*) should actually be translated, *namely* or *that is*²³. In other words Paul is here saying, “*I want to know Christ, namely/that is ...*”

- The power of his resurrection.
- The fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

So Paul was saying that coming to know Christ in a deep, thorough and non-superficial way happens by the above two things. Although we don’t have time here to go into both these things now, we can say that living life through the Resurrection power of Christ – that comes only through the indwelling and close fellowship of the Holy Spirit – is how we really learn to know Christ, personally.

²² Luke 4¹⁴

²³ Philippians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries): - Martin, Dr. R P © 1987, Reprinted 2000 IVP, UK.

3.2.7 The Now And Not Yet (vv. 22)

We finish this chapter with an extraordinary statement, which is once again one of those seeming contradictions in the WORD of God: -

“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church”

Ephesians 1:22

How do we square this with Paul’s statement to the Corinthians?

“For he [Christ] must reign until he [Father God] has put all his enemies under his feet.”

1 Corinthians 15:25

We do not yet see all things in submission to Christ and yet Christ has been placed in authority over everything. The decree has gone out from the throne of God, yet not all the enemies of God, during this period of God’s Grace, before the coming judgement of God upon all things, have yet submitted fully to this. The devil has been robbed of his power over men. The only power he now has is the power that men give him by serving him, either consciously or subconsciously! This is a positional truth, established in the Heavenly Realms (cf. 3.1.3 the unseen realm) and in the process of impacting the fabric of our reality – the seen realm.

This has often been called the *Now And Not Yet* by theologians and teachers over the years. Jesus said that we would do greater things than he did²⁴ - this is amazing, it is certain to happen, but is it yet our experience?!

Now here we have to be careful! Christians will often choose to live on one side or the other of the *Now And Not Yet*. What does this mean? Some Christians believe they should be living in the “*Now*” and that everything will immediately line up with the WORD of God. If it does not they can become unsettled or even worried, immediately looking for a problem with themselves. Now, although it is true our sin can cause us problems, but even where there is no sin trials and opposition will come against us and sometimes even seem to persist – this does not mean the promises of God are any less than true: -

²⁴ John 14¹²

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.”

Psalm 34:19 (New King James Version)

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33

Firstly, the Scripture above from **Psalm 34** confirms that God’s promise is that he will deliver us *out of* troubles and afflictions, rather than letting us avoid them *every time*! The second Scripture above is Jesus’ confirmation of this – trouble *will* come our way – but we are not to lose our peace about this or lose heart – on the contrary Jesus has already overcome the world and in his power (“In Christ”) we can also²⁵. So, the *Now And Not Yet* involves battle (cf. 3.1.3 – “Heavenly Realms” ... **Ephesians 6**¹²) because without battle there can be no victory! Indeed Peter gives us another promise of God, in terms of what God will do through the process of battle: -

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ”

1 Peter 1:6-7

The second group of Christians choose to live in the “Not Yet” – they are always putting off tomorrow’s blessing, victory, healing or *whatever* God promises because they let their experience and circumstances dictate their theology. In other words they take their theology from below rather than above – if it doesn’t fit the picture of reality around them they find a way around it!

We need to be those who take hold of the promises of God by faith and confession²⁶; determined to move on in our experience of the manifestation of those very same promises. Paul reminded the Galatians that those who do not give up will reap the harvest for which they are sowing²⁷. It is in the perseverance that God does a work in us, to mature and extend our faith as Peter showed us

²⁵ Romans 8³⁷

²⁶ Romans 10⁹⁻¹⁰

²⁷ Galatians 6⁹

(above), but faith will not be deferred forever²⁸ because God's Word will not return without fulfilment²⁹.

The problem with the "Not Yet" Christians is that they can always fall back on the sovereignty of God and tell themselves it was *not meant to be*, by order of divine providence. However, like Jesus himself – God and Man combined – we are called into a partnership with our Saviour ... **his** promise & power with **our** faith!

One of our prophets puts it very well ...

"One of the phrases that I often encounter in the teaching and ministry I hear is "now and not yet". In fact I have used it a lot in teaching and always thought it a useful phrase to explain the place we are at as the people of God in his divine purpose. But reading [John 4](#) recently I was challenged to reconsider my position. Look at this verse:

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

John 4:23

Did you spot it? Jesus wasn't speaking the language of "now and not yet" but rather of "not yet and now" - he said, "is coming and now is here." I do think there is something here for us:

There is a temptation to become overly accepting of the present situation of things if we continually transpose our hope into the future: "it doesn't matter how bad things are now because one-day they will be better." But Jesus is the God not of "one-day" but "Today" [[Hebrews 3:13](#)].

If we realise that that which "is coming" "now is here" then by faith we lay hold of the things of the age to come and bring them into Today. So are we wrong to talk of "now and not yet"? No, I don't think so; but we must have an expectation and a faith that lays hold of and brings into Today all that is ours in Christ [[Ephesians 1:3](#)]."³⁰

So **let us not** fall back on the promise of tomorrow. For if we do then it will be the next generation in the *Covenant Wave*³¹, and **not us**, who will see the Kingdom in all its fullness and bring back the King!

²⁸ Proverbs 13¹²

²⁹ Isaiah 55¹⁰⁻¹¹

³⁰ © Matthew Ling 2005

³¹ cf 3.1.11

3.3 From Death to Life (2¹⁻¹⁰)

As we begin the second chapter of this amazing letter from Paul, it will be helpful for us to remember that in the first half of the letter we have a focus on the Heavens. It would be easy for us to lose this focus when the subject matter seems not to be directly focussed heavenward. On first reading the emphasis at the start of chapter two shifts in just such a way. The first half of Ephesians, as we have said, *tarries much in the Heavens*. In other words, it is getting us to see things from God's perspective. As we start chapter two therefore, let us understand that everything contained therein is laid out from a heavenly perspective. So rather than approaching this first passage from the perspective of redeemed sinners looking at our past, instead let us put ourselves in God's shoes to see what he sees – for Paul is always letting us in on the divine view of things.

First we must see from what he has saved us ...

3.3.1 Separated by Death (v.1)

The first thing Paul tells us is that God regarded us as dead. In other words, as far as he was concerned we were as good as dead. Is this not overly morbid, we might say? Well, as we shall see from the following verses, from God's perspective this is simply the truth of the matter. God does not put a nice sheen on things – he sees them as they really are.

The word Paul uses here is *nekros*, which metaphorically means spiritually dead. There was no spiritual life in us whatsoever. Why? We were separated from God by two aspects of our character and life: -

Transgressions
(Gk. *Paraptoma*)

- This literally means “fall” and is used when someone slips off a path upon which they are travelling. Man has deviated from the path God laid down for him with the divine mandate given to Adam³².

Transgressions
(Gk. *Harmartano*)

- This literally means “miss the mark” and is often used to describe an archer missing the target as he releases the arrow toward a bullseye. Having deviated from the path God had for him, man could

³² Genesis 1²⁶⁻²⁸ and Genesis 2¹⁵⁻¹⁷

not help but fail to please God. The picture of the archer and his target adds new significance to Paul's statement concerning our pre-salvation state: -

"..., for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"³³

3.3.2 Seduced By The "spirit" Of The Age (v.2)

Now here we have something very interesting laid out by Paul, which is very easy to overlook. The NIV translates this verse as *followed the ways of this world*, whereas the word translated *ways* is the Greek word *Aion*, referring to either an age (singular) or a series of ages (plural). We last saw it in chapter one, where Paul told us that Christ's coronation impacts the *present age*. It can be defined thus: -

"All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral atmosphere which at every moment in our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale."³⁴

The Greek word translated here as *world* is *kosmos*, from which we derive our word *Cosmos*. It refers to all created things that are perishable and will cease one day, as opposed to the imperishable which is eternal. So what's the difference between *aion* and *kosmos*?

*"To distinguish the words one could say *kosmos* gives us the overall picture of mankind alienated from God during all history, and *aion* represents any distinct age or period in human history as marked out from another by particular characteristics."³⁵*

From deep in the midst of our early days expelled from Eden man has tried to build Babel in opposition to God. Each age of man has its own influences and men are not only swept along in the main tide but subject to the eddies and currents of each age into which they are born. But what of the saints? What of those born again into the kingdom of God? Paul tells the Corinthians, using these very same words: -

³³ Romans 3²³

³⁴Endnotes

Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

³⁵ Ibid.

“We have not received the spirit [aion] of the world [kosmos] but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

1 Corinthians 2:12

The Germans have a phrase for this, *zeitgeist* meaning spirit of the age. It actually works within unsaved mankind, for later in this verse the word (NIV) translated as spirit, is by virtue of the Greek construction, referring back not to satan (see 3.3.3) but this *spirit of the age*. John uses the same phrase when he talks about the spirit of antichrist, that is an pervasive influence upon men that set itself up in opposition to God – Babel: -

“... but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”

1 John 4:3

Why is this so important? Because as Christians we have to be astute to the spirit of the age in which we live. It has a defining influence on much of what people do. Paul urges the Christians in Rome about this very thing: -

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world [aion], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:2

3.3.3 Subject To The Ruler Of The Air (v.2)

The Greek word Paul uses here is *archon*, which refers to the first in an order of things. Looking at the context of these verses and what we have discovered concerning the spirit of the age being at work in men, we should ask where does the ruler of the kingdom of the air fit in?

This ruler is undoubtedly satan and Paul is showing us how he uses the pervasive influence of the spirit of the age to his own ends, the deception of mankind. satan also rules the fallen angels (demons) and the Pharisees use this same word *archon* in referring to him as prince of the devils³⁶.

³⁶ Matthew 12²⁴

Another interesting thing we find here is Paul's use of the word *air*, Greek *aer* which actually refers to the air, particularly the lower and denser air as distinguished from the higher and rarer air in the mountains. This is an astonishing thing for Paul to say, for it actually tells us where the devil's realm is. It also confirms what we have seen concerning the spirit of the age – it is at work where men are. The devil is not interested in ruling a lonely mountain top – no, he and his demons spend their time instead where men are, where they can oppose the plans of God by capitalising upon the pervasive influence of the spirit of the age.

In an age of grace he is still free to roam the planet but now the Kingdom of God has arrived³⁷ and with it freedom from the spirit of the age (cf. [Romans 12²](#)); Satan's only power now comes from men who follow the spirit of the age. This is absolutely fundamental to our understanding of Satan himself – he is not our biggest enemy; he is simply opportunistic and has been ever since the days of Eden.

Satan simply uses the spirit of the age for his own ends. In turn the spirit of the age relies upon our true enemy for its power – that enemy is called “self”, which is where Paul turns next ...

3.3.4 Slaves To Sin (v.3)

Now we come to the driving force behind the spirit of the age: the sinful nature. It dictates the needs of “self” within man and ultimately is responsible for the spirit of the age, which will serve mankind in the moment they find themselves. As we have said this is where Satan derives any influence.

Where the Kingdom of God is not present in an area of the earth, the spirit of the age will prevail in the interests of self. Harsh as it may sound there is hardly ever such a thing as true altruism. Most of the time fallen mankind is simply driven by the needs of the sinful nature.

Even where motives can seem to be fairly unselfish, if you follow the train of thought far back enough it is often “self” that is in some way served by the course of action changed. Self is very good at deceiving the sinner's heart as well, even in the small things. One may decide to undertake something charitable and feel good for doing so – why? Because we feel we have justified ourselves by something we have done.; we are not all that bad, after all – we may say.

³⁷ [Matthew 12²⁸](#)

3.3.5 Singled Out For Destruction (v.3)

Here is the bottom line: by our very make-up God regarded us as worthy of destruction. This does not mean he did not love us, but he still regards fallen man as worthy only of utter destruction.

This can be hard to stomach as a thought, but as those called to see everything from the divine perspective we shall never really understand our former fallen position until we see sin with the utter disgust, contempt and anger that it inspires within the heart of God himself. When we see it as he does, then it will truly change us. It will also heighten even further our desire to see this world redeemed from its death sentence.

Now Paul expands again on what has happened³⁸ to us ...

3.3.6 Reunited in Life (vv.4-5)

We have been made alive!! We were dead and now we are alive. As far as God is concerned the difference between the condition we were in and the condition we are now in is as dramatic as between death and life!!

This may sound like we are stating the obvious here but do we truly regard the difference so great ourselves? Do we really regard the change as dramatic? It can be easy to miss the significance of what has happened to us, but you see part of sanctification is a revelation of exactly what has happened: this is one of the reasons why Paul said work out your salvation – it takes a lifetime to work out and understand what has happened – the miracle of the union of the believer with Christ Jesus the Saviour – death to life! Now we can come with boldness into the awesome presence of God himself: -

“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”

Ephesians 3:12

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,”

Hebrews 10:19

³⁸ Cf. Section 3.1

3.3.7 Raised Above the World (v.6)

Going back to our aim, to *tarry in the Heavens*, it is a place of revelation and understanding. As Paul prayed for the Ephesians, the eyes of our heart have to be enlightened to see the difference between life and death in terms of our salvation.

Once we see it more clearly we start to realise just what we are capable of. We stop listening to the lies of the enemy, who is desperately seeking to con us into thinking we are in some ways still subject to him. He is a defeated enemy, unworthy of our attention which instead should be focussed heavenward in praise and adoration.

We have been raised with Christ and are therefore above the spirit of the age and free from the dictate of the sinful nature. Now you may read that sentence and feel that your experience does seem to match this. We often feel subject to the cares of this world, subject to its pressures and often hindered by what we call *our old nature*. Here we are back to positional truths.

We need to believe what God has told us in his word and not what our feelings, situation and experiences tell us. This is a conscious choice, but as we make it time and time again we shall realise that we truly are raised above all those things and we are truly seated with him! In other words we are as removed from them as Jesus is, positionally, so long as we are In Christ (see 3.3.9 below)

3.3.8 Restored to Rule (v.6-7)

Not only are we raised with Christ above the cares of this world. We are also enthroned with him! This is truly amazing – not only has he redeemed us, who were good as dead, but he has enthroned us with him, as Paul tells Timothy: -

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.”

2 Timothy 2:11-12

Later John confirms the same: -

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Revelation 5:10

As Paul told the Romans, we are more than conquerors. We called to rule with him. This means when we speak, we can do so with authority and see the power that our words can have to break open situations and circumstances both in our own lives and the lives of others around us. This was always God's will for his people, even back in the days of Sinai: -

“The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.”

Deuteronomy 28:12-14

This is still God's promise to us, his people. So often God's people have allowed circumstances to dictate the outcome of their situation instead of taking control with the word of faith overflowing from the hearts through their mouths. It is because we are under the Lordship of Christ that we in turn carry his authority – this is how Jesus himself operated. He said that he only did what he saw his Father doing³⁹. He never stepped outside of the remit his Father laid down for him, always moving in the power of the Holy Spirit to the Father's agenda. If we do the same we shall move as he moved, but in greater power in fulfilment of his promise: -

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

John 14:12

3.3.9 Reliant Upon Faith (vv.8-9)

As we have seen, we were raised and seated with Christ, but did you notice something unusual about the way Paul described this? It looks on the face of it to be an overuse of the word Christ – maybe Paul likes mentioning his Saviour? No – everything in the WORD of God is there for a reason.

The particular phrase we are talking about here is in **verse 6**: -

³⁹ John 5¹⁹

“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,”

Ephesians 2:6

Have you noticed the extra use of the word Christ, at the end of the sentence? The context of this verse is the grace of God. In [verse 5](#) Paul says that it is by grace we have been saved. And in [verse 7](#) Paul talks about God showing us the incomparable riches of his grace. So the fact that this statement in [verse 6](#) is sandwiched between the others on grace gives us a clue as to why Paul mentions Christ twice.

The first time Paul says *with Christ*, whereas the second time he says *in Christ Jesus*. Can you see the difference? Christ Jesus himself is sitting at the right hand of the Father – he went there to be enthroned and to enable the Holy Spirit to come⁴⁰. However, you and I are not sitting at the right hand of the Father. We are not seated in the Heavens but we are seated here right now reading this paragraph!

Is this not just semantics we might say? Well, yes and no. The fact that we are seated with Christ is a literal thing as well as figurative. We really are seated up there, or at least we are by proxy. Christ is in us and we are *in Christ*. It is only because we are *in Christ* that we are seated in the Heavens. It is because of the union between the believer and his Lord that he is seated with Christ and able to rule and reign with him.

Now surely this is pure semantics we might say? No, not really – it is important and essential to our understanding of *what has happened*⁴¹ to us. Being *in Christ* means being reliant upon him for our position before the Father and our new position of authority, the rank we have as believers. We are able to move in his authority on the earth and he in turn is sitting on our behalf in the Heavens!

Being ‘in Christ’ is therefore the key to our restoration. Our revelation of what being ‘in Christ’ means is fundamental to our maturity as believers and our mobility in the realm of faith in the Heavens – the spiritual realm. When we choose to do anything outside of Christ we move in our own strength and in our own authority. Not only is it destined to end in striving but it will bring no glory to him.

The more we do everything ‘in Christ’ and as the revelation grows in our hearts of all the resources of Christ at our disposal, direct from the throne room of God, the greater will be the impact upon our environment around us – we shall see the great promise of “every blessing”⁴² becoming increasingly manifest in our midst.

⁴⁰ John 15-16

⁴¹ Cf. Section 3.1

⁴² Ephesians 1³

3.3.10 Reserved for Glory (v.10)

Paul finishes this great statement by telling us that instead of being by very nature objects of wrath we are by our new nature⁴³ reserved for the glorification of God. Now hang on a minute we might say, this verse is about us doing good works!?

It is about that, but when we do good works *in Christ* then he gets the glory! We become his workmanship. We are all called for a purpose, with a “to do” list written by God himself. The best way to bring God glory is to find out what’s on that list and get on with it. Now, some things are on everyone’s list – e.g., go and preach the gospel – so we can get on with those whilst God tells us the specific things that he has called us as individuals to do.

Eugene Peterson, once again, paraphrases the purpose of God in making us *his* workmanship: -

“Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish! don’t play the major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’d done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.”

Ephesians 2:8-10 (The Message)

One last thought to consider here is this word *workmanship*. It is a Greek word, *Poiema* which we find in only one other place in the New Testament: -

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

Romans 1:20

In Romans it is translated *what has been made*, which is what the Greek means. The interesting thing is that it is from this same Greek word that we derive our English word, *poem*. This is because in its barest form a poem is a composition (something that is made). Webster’s definition demonstrates: -

⁴³ 2 Corinthians 5¹⁷



“Any composition characterised by intensity and beauty of language or thought”
44

So, just as creation itself is an expression of God’s heart, so are we. We are God’s poem, created in Christ Jesus, expressing his heart through good works – Hallelujah!

⁴⁴ The New International Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language, © 1999 Trident Press International.

| Group Activity

Below are detailed some of the common passages from Colossians and Ephesians and make comment on the difference in emphasis between the letters: -

Ephesians

1:1-2

1:7

1:9

1:10

5:19

5:22-6:4

6:5-9

Colossians

1:1-2

1:14

1:26

1:20, 25

3:16

3:18-21

3:22-4:1

3.4 A New Man Arises (2¹¹⁻²²)

Once again we need to remember where we are maintaining our focus – in the Heavens. So we are looking for the divine perspective. We start this section with *‘therefore’* and we should ask *what is it there for?* Paul is now drawing together all of the preceding sections as he talks about the state we were in and what God did about that. We were as good as dead and now we are raised and seated *with Christ - in Christ*. But what has come out of all of this? As far as God is concerned, the power of sin was defeated on the Cross and out of that fight walked one man – a new man!

3.4.1 Insiders and Outsiders (vv.11-13)

Paul returns to the theme of separation and here explains to us the reason for much of the ethnic distinctions made throughout the whole of the WORD of God, Old and New Testaments alike. If you watch carefully you will notice how Paul uses the same pattern as we saw him use in chapter one. He is telling us more of *what* happened to us and then he goes on to tell us *how* it happened (i.e., the mechanics of it).

- **Why Jews and Gentiles?**

What may seem strange to us is that Paul is emphasising a distinction between Jew and Gentile and then telling his readers that such a distinction is no longer relevant after all. So why mention it in the first place?

It goes back to the original promise to Abraham, which was also to his descendants. God did not include followers of Abraham, but instead blood descendants. God deliberately set out to distinguish an ethnic group through this promise. The reason for this is that God wanted a single nation through whom he could show the blessings of his Covenant with them, the lessons of the law and ultimately what was required of the people of God. Regardless of Israel’s success or failure in this calling the greater purpose was to demonstrate all of this and show us our position as sinners and the need for his grace: -

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.”

1 Corinthians 10:11

God's ultimate goal was always to have a people called out from all of fallen mankind. If this were not so, then God would not have chosen us before the foundation of the earth – before the Jews were ever a race: -

“I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

Genesis 22:17-18

So it is important that we do not regard the current age of grace as a sideline in history, whilst we wait for the Jewish nation to be restored to some former state of glory. As we shall see below, Israel was never to be the centre of God's plan for mankind. As we saw in chapter one, the centre of the plan is the church because at her centre is Christ himself – the two are inextricably linked (as we shall see in chapter 5 as one flesh like man and wife): -

“He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the centre of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.”

Ephesians 1:22-23

- **What Separates The Outsider?**

Jews and Gentiles symbolise Insiders and Outsiders. Here Paul lists how this distinction shows us the state we were in before we came to Christ: -

Old Testament Pattern of the Outsider	New Testament Reality of the Insider
Uncircumcised (v.11)	Set Apart and Holy for God (Circumcised Hearts ⁴⁵)

⁴⁵ Romans 2²⁹

Separate from Christ (v.12)	“In Christ “– Union of believer and Jesus. Without Faith it was impossible for us to please God.
Excluded from Citizenship (v.12)	A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God ⁴⁶
Foreigners to the Covenants of the Promise (v.12)	Every promise is Yes and Amen in Christ ⁴⁷ - covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises ⁴⁸ .
Without Hope (v.12)	As we saw in section 3.2.4 we now have eternal hope in Christ.
Without God (v.12)	Now God has made his home within us. ⁴⁹

Conclusion: - Citizenship of the Kingdom of God was before based on our natural birthright together with compliance with the law. Not only were we unholy and unable to be part of God’s people but we had no way of sustaining our membership due to our fallen state. Now it is based on our second birth into the Spirit of God together with sanctifying grace!⁵⁰

3.4.2 Two Become One (vv.14-18)

Once again Paul moves on to the mechanics – how did God do it?! The answer is of course through Jesus, but more specifically Paul tell us it was: -

“..., by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ...”

Firstly, Jesus is the joining agent (he is our peace – [verse.14](#)) but Jesus has abolished the law in his flesh. What does this mean? After all we can recall Jesus’ own words regarding the law: -

⁴⁶ 1 Peter 2⁹

⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 1²⁰

⁴⁸ Hebrews 8⁶

⁴⁹ John 14²³

⁵⁰ Cf. Section 3.3.9

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

Matthew 5:17

Here Jesus uses a different Greek word for abolish, from Paul ...

- (Paul) *Katargeo* - to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative; to cause a person or thing to have no further efficiency
- (Jesus) *Kataluo* - to dissolve, disunite; to subvert, overthrow.

Jesus was talking about the requirements of the law and showing his disciples how the requirements of righteousness are even greater than the requirements of the law, which is why they needed him. Obviously Paul is not saying that the law has been done away, in respect of its moral content. For example it is still wrong to murder or to lie etc. Instead you will note that Paul refers to the regulations of the law, as he is saying that the death of Christ forged a way of being righteous before God which went way beyond what the law was ever able to offer and in this sense rendered the regulation-keeping aspect of the law "unemployed".

In other words there is no point observing the ceremonial requirements of the law to attain righteousness, because of the way that Jesus has made into the Holy of Holies: -

"And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,"

Hebrews 10:18-20

The law, as Paul tells the Romans was able only to point us to Jesus, for it never really dealt with sin once and for all, like he did. Eugene Peterson sums it up well: -

“God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn’t deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that. The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it.”

Romans 8:3 (The Message)

Why does Paul say ‘*abolishing in his flesh the law...*’? Is he referring simply to the fact of Jesus’ physical death? No, we find throughout the New Testament greater significance than that in Jesus’ body. Jesus himself told the disciples at their last supper together that his flesh would provide for them in two ways: -

- **Jesus’ Body**

They were called to partake of his body. Essentially Jesus was saying that, later, by dying with Christ they would be raised with him and would be one with him. They would also be one with each other (just as Jesus had prayed in the garden⁵¹). Through this union with Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike become one.

- **Jesus’ Blood**

As Paul told us in chapter one, through his blood we have forgiveness for sins. It is only through this blood that Jews were finally able to experience lasting righteousness and freedom from legalistic righteousness. Gentiles could now become part of the people of God and remain so.

3.4.3 One New Man Arises (vv.19–22)

Now at this point we could be forgiven for thinking that Gentiles were simply brought into the “Commonwealth of Israel”. After all, we have the analogy of the Olive Tree in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

God grafted in unnatural branches (i.e., *excluded* Gentiles) and stripped away natural ones (i.e., Jews unwilling to attain righteousness before God by Jesus’ blood). So if this is the case, then the church is a kind of pruned Israel. From this we have had all sorts of labels and titles which are accused of spiritualising Israel’s significance away.

⁵¹ John 17²²

In these verses we have three significant words: -

- Create - This is Greek *kitzo*, meaning to create something new rather than make something new out of existing material (Gk. *Poieo*)
- New - This is the Greek *kainon*, which means new in point of quality; i.e., it brings into the world a new quality of thing which did not exist before. The other Greek word for new (*neos*) refers to something new, the like of which has existed before.
- Man - This is the Greek *anthropos*, which is a generic, racial term speaking of an individual, rather than *aner*, which is simply a male individual. In other words this new man is an entirely new species of man that has never existed before.

What does all this tell us? The church, a holy mystery, was a new man formed from the body of Christ himself. It is not the continuation of a nation, which is now in some kind of exile. God chose men and women from all nations and tribes to be part of this new man. This new man is at the centre of history and is itself centred on Christ, who as Paul says to the Colossians, must have the supremacy in all things.

Many often read [verse 12](#) and in their minds marry it up with [verse 19](#): -

“remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel.”

Ephesians 2:12

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household,”

Ephesians 2:19

In so doing they read Paul to be saying that the exclusion of the Gentiles (aside from proselytes who were circumcised) has been remedied by the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood so that now Gentile Christians have become part of the

Commonwealth of Israel (made up of Jewish believers and non-believers). In fact as we can see Paul does not say this. He does say that Gentiles *were* excluded from Israel under the Old Covenant, but he says that now they have become part of *God's people* (made up of Jewish and Gentile Christians) – he does not say Israel.

This is an important distinction. There are some who teach the “Commonwealth of Israel” view, using examples such as the United Kingdom. The argument goes that just as there are natural born subjects and citizens in the UK who reject the authority of the Queen, they are still citizens because they were born in the UK. Likewise, it is understood that unbelieving Jews are in this position – still somehow part of God’s people, in a temporary rebellion against their own sovereign. The reason behind this perhaps lies in over-extending the analogy of the Olive Tree which Paul uses in teaching the Romans. He says that Israel’s rejection of Christ is temporary and that one day there will be a return, that the natural branches will be one day be grafted back into the olive tree, when their rebellion has ended – but we need to remember that those who do return (i) shall come through the New not the Old Covenant and (ii) they will be a different generation from those who initially rejected Christ and have done for the last two millennia.

The Old Testament national exclusions were to demonstrate the problem of fallen man and such natural distinctions were only ever to all of us to our Saviour. This is because first comes the natural, then the spiritual. The natural (Israel) was a foreshadow of the greater spiritual reality (the Church). God’s plan had always been to purchase a people for himself – from Jews and Gentiles who were willing to die and be reborn to arise as a new species of man ... the second Adam.

“The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”

1 Corinthians 15:46–49

If our focus falls upon natural Israel, its relative position to the New Covenant and the arguments for and against etc, then we have failed our litmus test! Christ must be the sole focus and he is at the centre of the church. Jesus and his bride are one and together they are bigger than any of these side issues of national boundaries and heritage.

3.5 Called for Purpose (3¹⁻¹³)

As we start chapter three, we see a classic part of Paul's style in this letter – the tangent! Paul does not seem to be able to make a point without going off on a tangent! This aspect of Scripture expresses such humanity! The WORD of God, like Christ Jesus himself, is 100% human and 100% divine. The amazing thing is that Paul's enthusiasm is actually God's means to provide us with this great theological exposition of divine truth.

Paul starts this section and goes off on a tangent filled with theological gems! Here it is: -

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

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

7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. **8** Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9** and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. **10** His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, **11** according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. **12** In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Ephesians 3:1-13

So why the parenthesis? Paul is saying at this juncture [verse 1] that *for this reason (i.e., the building of the body he describes in verses 20-22)* he is in prison for the sake of the calling upon his life (ministry to the Gentiles) but [verse 13] that they should not worry about this as it is all working toward God's plan⁵². In the middle of saying this to them Paul takes time aside to explain the nature of his, and by his example, our calling.

3.5.1 Prisoners of Christ (v. 1)

Paul refers to his sufferings (at the hands of the Romans) but did you notice he did not describe himself as their prisoner, but instead as the prisoner of Christ Jesus. Paul recognised that his true master was never man at any time, no matter how much man may seem to have stood in his way – and Paul faced more opposition than many of us have ever faced for the sake of the gospel. Despite this he maintained the divine perspective – he was a prisoner only because Christ allowed it for the sake of the gospel. This echoes Jesus' statement to Pilate: -

“Do you refuse to speak to me?’ Pilate said. ‘Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?’ Jesus answered, ‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.’”

John 19:10-11a

It is the divine perspective that makes all the difference. Paul draws on this truth later on when he tells us how we should respond to delegated authority.

There are two aspects of this truth like the two sides of a coin: the WORD of God tells us that we are not our own: -

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

We belong to him as though we were prisoners – the difference is that we are willing prisoners. God only accepts servitude from free-will and eventually when every knee does bow to him⁵³, those who have done so unwillingly will be sent from the presence of God forever. So why does Paul describe himself as a

⁵² Romans 8²⁸

⁵³ Philippians 2¹⁰⁻¹¹

prisoner of Christ? Perhaps because he could do nothing but serve the one who had captured his heart. Perhaps because of our new nature, which has made us ...

“You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

Romans 6:18

Righteousness *is* our natural bent and in this sense we are slaves to it. So, the other side of the coin is that if we are prisoners of Christ and the righteousness that comes from him, then we cannot be prisoners of anyone or anything else. We can tolerate no force, power, personality, or habit to imprison us, unless (as here with Paul) our Master, Jesus, deems it necessary for the extension of his own government. This is another litmus test for us to apply to anything that comes against us.

3.5.2 Stewards of Divine Grace (vv. 2–6)

Here we have a fantastic insight to our calling. From the divine perspective, God had been preparing a great plan of salvation and now it had been unveiled. He has chosen all of us to play a part in the administration of this great plan of grace. *Administration* is the translation of the NIV. Let’s take a closer look at this word and its connotations: -

(Gk.) *Oikonomia* - *The management of a household or of household affairs, specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of other’s property; the office of a manager or overseer, stewardship*

From this we can draw some vital points: -

- **Household**

Paul now introduces the language of family⁵⁴. *Oikonomia* comes from two Greek words (*nomos* meaning laws or rules and *oikos* meaning house) and literally means the “Rule of the House” - like a family with responsibilities for each member, God has delegated a portion of his grace to administer - a task to be undertaken - this is what Paul was talking earlier: -

⁵⁴ Paul returns once again to this theme in verse 14.

“good works which God prepared in advance for us to do”

Ephesians 2:10

- **Living Stones**

The language of the household actually draws back upon Paul’s earlier statement at the end of chapter two, regarding the church being a house or building which is founded upon the Apostles and Prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone⁵⁵. From the divine perspective the building is to be raised with living stones: -

“... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 2:5

This is why Paul says in ²² that the church is *being built together*: one stone next to another.

- **Not Our Own**

So exactly who does the building? God himself of course! This is why Abraham was looking for a city whose architect and builder is God⁵⁶. The building rises by God’s grace. Paul reminds us that we are administering *God’s grace*, not ours. It is his plan, grace and it was entirely his sacrifice. Paul had been giving a specific part in that work. Like Paul, we also have our part to play in that administration and we have to remember that in all that we do, we are always representatives and ambassadors of God. We do not own anything on this earth but are stewards of innumerable heavenly resources. As soon as this truth starts to bed down in our hearts then three things start to happen ...

- We take our hands off God’s work (“... so that no man can boast”⁵⁷).
- We lose fear of failure and rejection for it is all down to God, not us.

⁵⁵ Ephesians 2²⁰⁻²²

⁵⁶ Hebrews 11¹⁰

⁵⁷ Ephesians 2⁹

- We start to see the true extent of our heavenly resources now that we are co-heirs (“... *blessed us with every spiritual blessing*”⁵⁸).

- **Not For Us**

Did you notice that Paul said the grace to which God had called him to administer was *for* the Ephesians. It was not for Paul, but for the Ephesians! Now at this point you may say, *well of course he was the Apostle to them*. However this may be a little short-sighted and dismissive of a deeper lesson here. Remember that Paul is not telling them this to look good in any way – at all times Paul acted as an example, just as he told Timothy to do⁵⁹, because this was his leadership style, just as it had been Christ’s before him.

So Paul is saying to all of us here, that the stewardship of grace that we have is not for us but for the body of Christ. How do we know this? Why do we not assume he is talking about the super-ministry of the Apostle and that it does not refer to “less important saints”? ...

“... God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

1 Corinthians 12:18-25

Paul goes straight on to say to the Corinthians (above) that God has appointed different ministries to play their part in the body of Christ. Each is called to administer God’s Grace to the body of Christ – equal heirs and equal stewards.

⁵⁸ Ephesians 1³

⁵⁹ 2 Timothy 4¹²

3.5.3 Servants of His Gospel (vv. 7-8)

After telling us about our responsibility as stewards of God's grace, Paul next turns to our position as servants. In this one simple phrase Paul sums up his calling ... *servant of this gospel*. This is what it boils down to. The only reason we are here on this earth and why God has not yet wound up this fallen world, is that the gospel is to go forth. The gospel is the one thing that is holding back the coming judgement of God. Why? :-

“He [God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

2 Peter 3:9

So the gospel, as well as being God's announcement of good news, is like a plug in a dyke, holding back the building waters of God's wrath on a world in which offensive atrocities occur with greater frequency. As servants of the gospels we are those sent out before it is too late, as ambassadors with the message of reconciliation of God to the world⁶⁰.

This train of thought in Paul's mind now inspires one of his most extraordinary and telling statements, which shows us his heart at this point close to the end of his life: -

“Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me ...”

Ephesians 3:8a

To understand the significance of this statement (as if we need any help seeing Paul's humility) we need to go to two others he made in a similar vein. The first he made whilst writing to the Corinthians before he wrote this letter to the Ephesians:

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

1 Corinthians 15:9

⁶⁰ 2 Corinthians 5^{19b-20}

Paul was writing Ephesians between AD 62 and 64, by which time he describes himself as the least of all God’s people ([verse 8](#)), not just the Apostles. Just before Paul died he made a further statement about himself: -

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

[1 Timothy 1:15b](#)

By this time Paul described himself as the worst of all sinners! Why is that? Did Paul get worse? No, he became more Christ-like, but as his vision of Holy God became clearer, as he looked further into the Heavens and observed the truth from God’s perspective, the more humble he became. Does this mean we look down upon ourselves as we mature? No, it simply means that we observe all the more the grace of God working through us.

None of this means that Paul did not recognise that he had changed, or that he had achieved much. His statements show that instead he saw how it was Christ working through him that the gospel had been taken to Europe and Asia. Paul saw ever more clearly as he matured just where he had come from. As we saw earlier (section 3.3.6) – from death to life.

3.5.4 Proclaimers of Divine Wisdom ([vv. 9-11](#))

Now in these two verses we come back to that word, *Heavens*. Paul says something incredible about us, the church. We are called to be the means by which the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the rulers in the Heavens. There are two key things here for us: -

- **The Church is the Means of Proclamation**

Take note of the context here: in the preceding verses Paul has told us that the mystery is the unfolding of the great plan of salvation now made manifest through the creation of a new man, through Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul uses two telling phrases,

“not made known to men in other generations”

[Ephesians 3:5](#)

“which for ages past was kept hidden in God”

[Ephesians 3:9](#)

The latter part here of verse nine contains the word *ages*, which is the Greek word, *aion*, which we came across in chapter 2 (cf. section 3.3.2), which actually refers to a particular generation of men and women. So Paul is saying in this verse that it is through the church that God always intended to make this mystery manifest to all. It was never through natural Israel – the church was never a back up plan or a makeshift, but as we have seen a completely *new species* of man, born from above. As Paul said to the Galatians, the child of promise not slavery.

- **The Voice of God**

The second key thing is that through the church God has chosen to declare all of this to the Heavens and not just on the earth. We have a hint here of the earlier comment Paul made in chapter 2 where he said: -

“... in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:7

We are a prophetic people by our very existence and that means that we declare the grace of God not only to this world but also to the Heavens, not only in this age but also the age to come. What a privilege!

“..., when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”

1 Peter 1:12

3.5.5 Accepted into the Divine Presence (v. 12)

Now here we come back to the divine perspective, Paul reminds us that we have freedom, as children of God to come into his presence. It is from the divine presence that we view things as God does.

How does the church declare the mystery of God? It does so from the throne room, from its place of grace before God. Why is this? Paul uses a Greek word pregnant with meaning when describing the wisdom of God: -



Manifold (Polupoikilos) - much variegated, marked with a great variety of colours of cloth or a painting

What we have here is a description of God's wisdom, the manifestation of his grace, which is saying that it is multi-faceted and meets the human situation at its point of need. God's great plan did the job perfectly and (apart from God) no one knows this better than redeemed men for it is they who have been the recipients of grace and not the angels or anyone else!

3.5.6 Conclusion

Let's put together all these aspects of calling which Paul has laid out for us. Remember *Calling* is both corporate and personal as we have seen above: -

- Paul is saying that we are willing prisoners of Christ
- Who, whilst sharing in the divine mystery of God's purpose, are entrusted with our very own portion of God's grace to administer.
- Although we have been made sons, we consider ourselves servants (like Jesus did himself did⁶¹), not because we do not feel exalted to sonship, but because his grace humbles our hearts.
- We declare the wisdom of God, because we are raised to life, seated in the Heavens and share the divine perspective, but also because we are the most qualified to do so, we have benefited more than anyone else from God's grace! Angels can and never will know the depths of grace, because those who have fallen (demons) will never be redeemed and those who have not will never know the feeling of the prodigal returning home!

⁶¹ Matthew 20²⁸ and Mark 10⁴⁵

3.6 Equipped for the Task (3¹⁴⁻²¹)

In light of the eminence of our calling therefore, Paul launches once again into prayer for the Ephesians, to remind them of the fact that God has specifically equipped them for this great calling – they have no need to be overwhelmed for just as the calling is inconceivably great so are the immeasurable resources with which he has blessed us to do it all! Now here we have a list in which one thing follows on to another.

3.6.1 Inner Strength (vv. 16-17a)

The first thing that Paul prays for the Ephesians is divine inner strength. This is the Holy Spirit within us. It is he that holds us together through everything we face in life. Have you ever wondered how some people face the greatest challenges in life and seem to come through the other side ... without Christ!

We may be forgiven for wondering why some people can do this. Why don't they fall apart? Now to an extent the answer lies in the fact that God has chosen the foolish to shame the wise⁶², however there are plenty of saints who have that inner steely strength that unbelievers can show in times of crisis.

Here Paul shows us the key to understanding this aspect of life. Notice he says that they need this inner strength so that ...

“... Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”

Ephesians 3:17

Does this mean that unless we know this inner strength, Christ cannot dwell in our hearts? YES! This is the key. Remember earlier in chapter two we looked at being *in Christ*, we are only seated *With Christ* when we are *In Christ*. So when men and women get through things without God, which they often do, they are none the richer for they have drawn upon their own resources, which is the endless cycle of self and sin. This is not to condemn heroic acts but remember that we are looking at everything from the divine perspective – this means that when man deals with anything outside of God, then he is effectively turning to himself and not to the Creator upon whom he was designed to depend.

⁶² 1 Corinthians 1

3.6.2 Rooted in Love (v.17b)

The next thing Paul prays is that they be rooted in love. God is LOVE, Paul told the Corinthians, which means that love characterises everything God does. This does not mean God is a softie but that love is the best word that describes his motivation in all he does. We have to be rooted in this love of God or we shall become cold of heart. Paul was praying prophetically for within 30 or 40 years, Jesus' damning verdict came upon the church in Ephesus:-

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.”

Revelation 2:4

When we stop becoming rooted in love then everything we do is simply going through the motions. Paul told the Philippians that it was with the very heart of Christ (and not his own) that he longed for them⁶³. When writing to the Colossians Paul underlines this vital truth: -

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Colossians 3:12-14

We can think of Love therefore as a large overcoat which we put over all the other clothes we put on (compassion, kindness, humility ...). It protects them and it is the first thing people see when they meet us. In Ephesians Paul gives us another picture of the Love of God, one of being planted. We could say that Paul is going further here than in Colossians – love not only binds together other virtues, but is the soil in which they grow and flourish. There is no point in trying to be humble or gentle or kind etc when this is sourced from within. It must come from the Love of God: -

⁶³ Philippians 1⁸

3.6.3 Laying Hold (v.18)

Here we have a play on words, for Paul wants them to grasp the true extent of this love of God in which they are rooted. The word he uses here means both to lay hold of something with the mind but also to physically take possession of something as well. Remember that we have already seen that although every blessing is ours we have to take hold of it in faith and that although Jesus is Lord, every enemy has to be subdued. This is the walk of faith, laying hold of things.

So, in order that we may walk out our calling, we need to lay hold of the extent of God's love. Now this is not a mental thing, but is almost a physical thing. How do we know Paul is not talking about mental understanding of God's love? Two main reasons: -

- **Mystery Made Known By Revelation**

Earlier at the beginning of this chapter Paul said that the mystery was made known to him by Revelation. This means God "unveiled something previously covered up" directly into Paul's heart. It has to come to the heart and not the mind.

- **Rooted through the heart**

Look at the context. Paul has said that Christ dwells in our hearts and not our minds. We are rooted in Christ through the heart and from that rooting within our hearts comes the revelation of the width, length, height and depth of God's love. Paul then goes on to say that this love surpasses knowledge, i.e., it is beyond the mind!

3.6.4 Intimacy (v.19)

Now here Paul uses one of those oxymoronic statements: -

“... know this love that surpasses knowledge”

Ephesians 3:19

How can we know something that surpasses knowledge?! It can only mean we are talking about two types of knowing here: -

Ginosko - *to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of, perceive, feel by experience.*

It is also a Jewish idiom for sexual intercourse, originally first found (in the Septuagint⁶⁴), where Adam and Eve first became one flesh, through sexual union⁶⁵. Obviously Paul is not here using that idiom, but the word indicates the most intimate knowledge of another person. It carries with it the sense of a deep experiential knowledge rather than a mental ascent of certain facts.

Gnosis - *knowledge which signifies general intelligence and understanding*

So we can see that Paul is saying that this love surpasses what can be understood and can only be grasped and laid hold through experience, intimate experience of God’s love. As we said earlier **this is why it is the church through whom God has chosen to reveal his manifold wisdom.**

⁶⁴ Septuagint (sometimes abbreviated LXX) is the name given to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures. The Septuagint has its origin in Alexandria, Egypt and was translated between 300-200 BC. Widely used among Hellenistic Jews, this Greek translation was produced because many Jews spread throughout the empire were beginning to lose their Hebrew language. The process of translating the Hebrew to Greek also gave many non-Jews a glimpse into Judaism. According to an ancient document called the *Letter of Aristeas*, it is believed that 70 to 72 Jewish scholars were commissioned during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus to carry out the task of translation. The term “Septuagint” means seventy in Latin, and the text is so named to the credit of these 70 scholars.

⁶⁵ Genesis 4²⁵

3.6.5 Filled with Fulness (v.19)

What an amazing thought – we can be filled with the fulness of God! This may remind us of a similar statement about Christ himself when Paul wrote to the Colossians: -

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”

Colossians 2:9

As we are part of his body then in us the fulness of God can also dwell: -

“...the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Ephesians 1:22–23

In the WORD of God fulness is often marking quality. For example the New Testament writers often talked about Jesus’ return this way. It will not be on a set day (like the millennium!) but instead when certain things have taken place and the world is ripe for his return. It is the same with us, both as individuals and as a body we are being filled with the fulness of God – it is the process of maturity. In this sense it is interesting to note the everyday usage of this word in Paul’s day: -

Fulness (Greek – *pleroma*) - *A ship inasmuch as it is filled (i.e. manned) with sailors, rowers and soldiers*

Here we have the sense of being fully equipped for the journey, the calling upon our lives.

3.6.6 His Power at Work IN US! (v.20)

Right at the end of this prayer, Paul drops a bombshell into the sentence. There are two elements to this: -

- **Immeasurable Resources**

It is *his* power. A world managed by fallen men has reached the point where technology is unprecedented yet resources are more limited than ever – not because of a lack of provision, but instead due to fallen man’s ruler – “self”. In contrast as believers we are sourced from heaven above. Recall the quote we saw earlier⁶⁶ regarding every blessing being available to us: -

“It is not merely that the blessings with which we have been blessed are blessings which have their origin in heaven ..., but that they are blessings which have their seat where God himself is and where Christ reigns.”⁶⁷

- **At Work In Us**

God wishes to work through us. As we mature we shall know this in greater and greater measure. We have to move in accordance with our measure of faith: -

“... think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.”

Romans 12:3b-6

So where does our faith come into this we might ask!? The gospel writers recorded an event for us, which demonstrated this so well. In Matthew’s gospel we see Jesus walking across the stormy lake to the disciples in the boat⁶⁸. He calls Peter to him and for a while Peter is walking on water – the only man other than Jesus himself who has ever done so, as far as we know. What a great feat!

⁶⁶ Section 3.1.4

⁶⁷ Word Studies in the New Testament: - Vincent, Martin R. DD

⁶⁸ Matthew 14²²⁻³⁶



Now Peter, as we all know, also sank! He did so, not because he lost faith in Jesus, for straight away he called out to Jesus for help. What Peter lost faith in was *his ability* to walk across that water – in that instant he no longer believed that he could do all that he was called to do!

It is the same with us – sometimes we are victorious and sometimes we sink. This is par for the course as we mature in our faith. Jesus is always there to reach out his hand to catch us and not condemn us.

The two key things for us here are firstly to see (with the eyes of our heart) the heavenly resources and for us to have faith that God will work through us!
