

New Testament Studies

Ephesians *(RVS Notes)*

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Ephesians: Christ and the Church

Introduction: Ephesians is often referred to as the "queen of the epistles". The letter describes the richness of the believer's position in Christ in the first three chapters of the book before exhorting us to live up to our privileges in the last three chapters. The book gives us a birds-eye view of key themes in Christian reflection and living—God, the world, Jesus, the church, salvation, Christian behavior, marriage and family, and spiritual warfare. Theology and worship intersect here as the doctrine and practice of the Church is examined against the backdrop of God's purposes. Some of the most sublime and precious truths are eloquently expounded in this book.

Ephesus was the largest city in Asia Minor (a Roman province located in modern-day Turkey) in the first century and one of the three largest commercial centers in the eastern Mediterranean (Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria were the other two). Ephesus was a haven for philosophers, poets, artists, and orators. It was also the center for the cult of the Greek goddess Artemis (see Acts 19:21-41).

Paul stopped at Ephesus briefly during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21) before returning and staying for three years during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:8-10; 20:31). Paul's stay coincided with the evangelization of Asia Minor (Acts 19:10) and was marked by three noteworthy events in the city of Ephesus:

- The disciples of John episode (Acts 19:1-12) in which the Spirit was poured out upon the former disciples of John the Baptist;
- The sons of Sceva episode (Acts 19:13-20) in which the divination practiced by Sceva's sons resulted in their humiliation and a widespread revival and the repudiation of occult practices in the city;
- A riot led by Demetrius and the silversmiths of Artemis (Acts 19:21-41) protesting their loss of business because of the inroads the Gospel had made into the pagan worship of the goddess.

Paul later visited the Ephesian elders during a layover at Miletus while in route to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-38). The warmth of their fellowship and the wisdom of Paul's counsel are noteworthy. The Ephesian church had notable preachers like Paul, Apollos (Acts 18:24-28), and likely the apostle John and Timothy. Revelation 2:1-7 addresses the Ephesian church, commending it for its work and its purity of doctrine but reproving it for the loss of its first love for the Lord.

Author and Occasion—Paul wrote Ephesians from a Roman prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20) during the early 60s. Chronologically, Ephesians is the last of the Prison Epistles. Tychicus, Paul's trusted lieutenant, bore both this epistle and the one to the Colossians (6:21-22; Col 4:7-8).

Attacks on Paul's authorship of this epistle follow several lines of argument:

- Impersonal tone—The epistle is strangely impersonal and indirect given the amount of time Paul spent in Ephesus. This is best understood by viewing Ephesians as a circular letter, see below.
- Literary usage—The choice of words and style are supposedly unique in Pauline literature.

True, Ephesians uses unique terms and abstract nouns as well as long, ponderous sentences with involved relative clauses, but the language used expresses the unique peons of praise which are Ephesians' distinct contributions to the Scripture. Literary usage arguments can be flak jackets for the critic's own subjective bias.

- **Marks of early Catholicism**—It is argued that certain marks of an emerging Catholicism place the time of the writing of the book beyond the lifespan of the Apostle Paul. The argument is that the situation addressed could only have arisen in a post-Pauline period. This allegedly second century milieu is supposedly seen in particular phenomena: the apostles are looked upon as a closed group (2:20; 3:5; 4:11), church unity is a matter of concern (2:11-18; 4:1-16), and the expectation of Christ's imminent return is fading as the church settled down in the world (4:11-16).

One important concern in any introduction of Ephesians is the destination of the letter. The oldest manuscripts do not have "at Ephesus" in 1:1. The best explanation for this omission is that the letter was intended as a circular epistle that was originally sent to the churches in Asia Minor and was eventually kept at Ephesus as the primary church of that region. The phrase "at Ephesus" in 1:1 was a later editorial addition when Paul's various letters were collected at Ephesus late in the first century. The circular nature of the letter explains its impersonal tone. The letter really is a treatise for the churches of Asia Minor, not a personal note to people that Paul had ministered to for better than three years.

Purposes

- To reflect upon the Church as a divine institution and to develop its implications.
- To emphasize that salvation is only in Christ and solely by the grace of God.
- To remind both Jew and Gentile that they are fellow-heirs of the riches in Christ and fellow-members of His Body.
- To emphasize the believers' responsibilities to live up to our privileges and live in accordance with our heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.

Guiding Concepts

Church—The theme of the Church runs throughout this epistle. The sovereign purpose of God in establishing the church permeates the first half of the letter (1:4, 5, 9, 11, 13, 20; 2:4, 6, 10; 3:11) in which God's plan of redemption is elaborated. The second half of the book emphasizes the believers' conduct as we are instructed to live in a worthy manner (4:1), not to live as the Gentiles do (4:17), to live a life of love (5:2), to live as children of light (5:8), and to live wisely (5:15). In this letter, the Church is likened to a body (1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16), a temple (2:19-22), a mystery (3:3-6), a new man (2:15, 4:24), a bride (5:32), and a soldier (6:10-17).

Holy Spirit—As Ephesians discusses the believer's position and practice, the ministry of the Holy Spirit has wide play. The Spirit seals us (1:13; 4:30), supplies wisdom (1:17) and access to the Father (2:18). The Holy Spirit builds up the body of Christ (2:21), reveals God's purposes for the Church to God's people (3:5), and strengthens us in our inner beings (3:16) to live as we should. The third person

of the Trinity is the bond that unifies the Church (4:3-4), fills individual believers with His power (5:18), and empowers believers amid spiritual conflict through the Word (6:17) and prayer (6:18).

Believer's position in Christ—The phrase “in Christ” or its equivalent appears approximately thirty-five times in Ephesians. Believers are in Christ (1:1), in heavenly places in Christ (1:3), chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (1:4), adopted through Christ (1:5), are in the Beloved (1:6), redeemed in Him (1:7), given an inheritance in Him (1:11), given hope in Him (1:12), sealed in Him (1:13), made alive together with Christ (2:10), brought near to God by His blood (2:13), growing in Christ (2:21), sharers of the promise of God in Christ (3:6), and given freedom and confidence of approach to God in Christ (3:12). Ephesians 1-3 is a treasury of the believer's spiritual inheritance.

Relationship Between Ephesians and Colossians—These two books share a common theme of Christ and His Church. Ephesians emphasizes the Church as Christ's body and Colossians emphasizes Christ as the Church's head. The two letters share a similarity in texts but are different in dynamics and tone. Ephesians has a general and universal tone addressed to the Church at large, whereas Colossians radiates the concerns of a particular local church and the dynamics of a spiritual battle raging within its midst.

<i>Eph.</i>	<i>Col.</i>	<i>Eph.</i>	<i>Col.</i>
1:1-2	1:1-2	4:22-24	3:9-10
1:4	1:22	4:25-26	3:8-9
1:7	1:14	4:29	3:8; 4:6
1:10	1:20	4:31	3:8
1:15-16	1:3-4	4:32	3:12-13
1:21-23	1:16, 18-19	5:3-6	3:5-8
2:1-2	1:21	5:15	4:5
2:15	2:14	5:19-22	3:16-18
2:16	1:20	5:25	3:19
3:1-3	1:25-26	6:1-4	3:20-21
3:7-9	1:23, 25, 27-28	6:5-9	3:22-4:1
4:1	1:10	6:19-20	4:3-4
4:16	2:19	6:21-22	4:7-8

Summary Outline—Ephesians—Christ and the Church

- I. Spiritual Blessings: We in Christ (1:1-3:21)**
 - A. Introductory Greetings, Blessing, and Prayer (1:1-23)
 - 1. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - 2. Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ (1:3-14)
 - 3. Prayer for Spiritual Enlightenment (1:15-23)
 - B. Remembering What Christ Has Done (2:1-22)
 - 1. Made Alive in Christ (2:1-10)
 - 2. Made One in Christ (2:11-22)
 - C. Strengthening Through the Holy Spirit (3:1-21)

1. Not Discouraged by Suffering (3:1-13)
2. Prayer for Strengthening of Inner Person (3:14-19)
3. Doxology: God's Power in Us (3:20-21)

II. Worthy Walk: Christ in Us (4:1-6:24)

- A. Maintaining Unity While Reaching Maturity (4:1-16)
 1. Maintaining the Unity of the Spirit (4:1-6)
 2. Gifting for Unity in the Faith (4:7-16)
- B. Putting on the New Self (4:17-24)
 1. Putting Off: No Longer Live Like Gentiles (4:17-19)
 2. Putting on the New Self (4:20-24)
- C. Separation From Sinful Practices (4:25-5:2)
- D. Separation From Sinful People (5:3-14)
 1. Necessity of Purity (5:3-6)
 2. Necessity of Separation (5:7-14)
- E. Living Wisely (5:15-6:9)
 1. By Being Filled With the Holy Spirit (5:15-21)
 2. As Husbands and Wives (5:22-33)
 3. As Parents and Children (6:1-4)
 4. As Masters and Slaves (6:5-9)
- F. Standing Firm (6:10-20)
 1. Armor of God Delineated (6:10-17)
 2. Prayer to God Enjoined (6:18-20)
- G. Final Greetings and Benediction (6:21-24)

Ephesians: Christ and the Church

I. Spiritual Blessings: We in Christ (1:1-3:21)

A. Introductory Greetings, Blessing, and Prayer (1:1-23)

1. Salutation (1:1-2)—Paul's commission as an apostle was of divine origin (1:1; Acts 9:15-16), his writing was authoritative. Apostle (*apostolos*) means “a sent one”, one who bears the message of Christ. It applied to the twelve apostles and other missionaries, including Paul. Paul claimed that, like the original twelve, his commission came directly from the Lord himself (see Acts 26:16-18; 1 Cor. 9:1). In writing this and his other letters, Paul was exercising his God-given authority within the life of the churches.

Believers are called saints (*hagioi*), dedicated to God and serving His purpose. They are referred to as “followers of Christ Jesus.” They were known for their loyalty and devotion to God. “In Christ” is a key term in this segment indicating that the believers were in vital union with the Savior.

The phrase “at Ephesus” does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. The best explanation of this omission is that the letter is a circular letter originally sent to the churches in Asia Minor and eventually kept at Ephesus as the major church of that region. “At Ephesus” was a later editorial addition when various of Paul's letters were gathered at Ephesus late in the first century of our era.

2. Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ (1:3-14)—This passage centers on spiritual blessings given in Christ in three thematic pulses signaled by the phrase “to the praise of His glory” (1:6, 12, 14). This doxology delineates the parts played in salvation by members of the Trinity. In 1:6, the Father is praised for selecting us by His mercy. In 1:12, the Son is praised for securing us by His mediation. In 1:14, the Spirit is praised for His sealing ministry. Thus, the Father chooses believers (1:4), the Son redeems them (1:7), and the Spirit seals them (1:13).

Illustration—When I was a child, occasionally my father would take me with him when he went to inspect the chemical facility of which he was in charge. On these visits, I was treated as one very special little guy by the plant personnel. But what if I showed up without my dad? Dad was the difference between preferential treatment and not getting into the place at all. So too with our heavenly Father. The spiritual blessings God purpose, purchased, and preserved for us are available to us only in Christ. In him, we have a dignity, worth, and blessing beyond our wildest imaginings. Outside of Him, we are lost in the cosmos—purposeless, aimless, defenseless—awaiting a richly deserved judgment. What a stark contrast!

a. Purposed by the Father (1:3-6)—The first segment focuses on the purpose of the Father in blessing us. Our standing is His choice before it is ours. Our election, our predestination, and our adoption as His children were born in the sovereign will of a loving Father.

1:3—God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Paul will delineate some of these blessings in the verses that follow. In heavenly places (*en tois epouraniois*) appears only in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). It refers to that realm of spiritual realities in which the great forces

of good and evil wage their warfare and where Jesus sits supreme and we representatively with Him. It is the place of God's dwelling and of Christ's exaltation. It is interesting to note that the “heavenlies” move from out there to down here in 6:12.

1:4—The Father has chosen us in Him. Chose (*exellexato*) implies taking a smaller number out of a larger one. This aligns with the idea that human freedom means people act according to their desires. Indeed, God must choose or none of us would come since the spiritual want-to in us is absent apart from God stirring us (see 2:1-3).

This segment makes extensive use of elective terminology (1:4, 5, 11). Election is proclaimed not as a conundrum to tease our minds but as a wonder to evoke our praise; not as an element of God's character to be minimized but as an assurance that our lives are in His powerful hands; never as an excuse for carelessness in spiritual matters, but always as a reminder that Christians have a responsibility “to confirm your call and election” (2 Pt. 1:10). Divine foreordination and human responsibility are held in dynamic tension in the Scripture. They are like two parallel lines that meet in infinity; they have their resolution in God.

This choice was from the foundation of the world. God's plan is timeless. The fall was no surprise to God and redemption was no afterthought. In addition, election has a moral aim—that we should be holy and blameless (*amomos* = without blemish).

1:5—We are predestined for adoption as sons. Predestined (*proorisas*) is literally “marked out beforehand”. It reiterates that God's plan for His people is from eternity. What is the difference between God's elective foreknowing and His predestining? It is when God's elective foreknowing is mentioned in Scripture, it has special reference to the person chosen by God, while the term “predestination” has reference to that to which the subjects of God's favor are destined.

Illustration—The parents of an adopted child decided that it was time to inform him of His adoption. He took it very well and spoke of the matter freely with his friends. However, his friends made fun of him, suggesting that adoption was inferior to their natural born state. The young boy was quite downtrodden until his parents pointed out that they had chosen him from a host of babies. As for the boy's natural born friends, well, their parents had to take whatever they got!

1:6—His grace is freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (1:6b). Bestowed freely (*echaritosen*) could be translated “begraced,” emphasizing God's acceptance of us in Christ. The ground for all of God's blessings is our position in Christ. Christ dwells forever in the infinite love of the Father and, as we are in Christ, the love of the Father for the Son is in a wonderful manner ours.

b. Purchased by the Son (1:7-12)—The second segment underlines the basis of God's favor, the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Redemption, forgiveness, lavish spiritual provision, and inheritance are ours in Christ. We are unworthy subjects of superabounding favor born of the blood of Christ.

1:7—This redemption is accomplished by the Son through His self-sacrifice on the Cross. Redemption means deliverance from bondage by means of a price paid in blood. God makes everything of the blood of Christ. It justifies us (Rom. 5:9), redeems us to God (1:7; 1 Pt. 18-19), brings forgiveness (1:7; Col. 1:14), cleanses the conscience (Heb. 9:14), sanctifies us (Heb. 13:12), provides us victory over Satan

(Rev. 12:11), provides access to God's throne (Heb. 10:19), and issues forth peace (Col. 1:20).

Forgiveness of our sins is the immediate blessing of redemption. Forgiveness (*aphesis*) is loosing someone from what binds them. Forgiveness in Christ relates to both our sinful condition (*hamartia* in Col. 1:14) and to our sins or deviations from the right path (*paratoma* used here in 1:7). There is a glorious “divine forgetfulness” in God's redemptive grace. Forgiveness has many biblical pictures—God blots out our trespasses (Isa. 43:25; 44:22), removes them (Ps. 103:12), casts them behind His back (Isa. 38:17), casts them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19), and remembers them no more (Heb. 8:12). What a wonderful release for us forgiven sinners.

1:8—God lavishes His redemptive grace on us in all wisdom and insight. Wisdom (*sophia*) is knowledge that sees into the heart of things. Insight (*phronesis*) is understanding and discernment that leads to wise action. God both knows what He is about and is fully able to bring things about.

1:9-10—He made known to us the mystery of His will in Christ. Mystery (*mysterion*) conveys the thought of something uncovered and revealed rather than something secretive and hidden. The great objective here is the summing up of all things in Christ. History is linear and moving toward a climax when everything will be under God's rule. Summing up (*anakephalaioo*) is derived from *kephalaion*, meaning a sum total. In antiquity, when adding a column of figures, it was customary to place the sum at the top. Likewise, at the end of the age, everything will add up to Christ. In Christ, the universe finds its full explanation and rationale. He is not only the source and sustainer of all that is (Col. 1:15ff; Jn. 1:3-4; Heb. 1:2-3) but the goal toward which the whole creation is moving.

The prominent terms of 1:9-10 are wisdom, insight, and made known. False teachers in Asia Minor against whom Colossians was written may have used these terms. The secret to the divine purpose in Christ is accessible to all who believe in Him.

1:11-12—In Him we have obtained an inheritance. The NIV translates the operative verb *eklerothēnem* with “we were chosen” and drops a footnote that the word could be translated “we were made heirs.” The idea is that we are destined for rich provision because of our position in Christ. We have become His heritage and share in His riches.

“For the praise of His glory” ends the second pulse of praise to God for the redemptive activity of the Son and introduces the final segment of this passage praising God for the sealing ministry of the Spirit.

c. Preserved by the Spirit (1:13-14)—The preserving work of the Spirit involves His sealing of believers (1:13), the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (1:14). The seal (*sphragis*) had various uses:

- it was affixed to a document to guarantee its genuineness;
- it was attached to goods in transit to indicate ownership and insure protection;
- it represented a designation of office in state service.

The seal implies ownership (1 Cor. 6:19-20), security (4:30), and a complete transaction (Jer. 32:9-10). The Holy Spirit Himself is God's seal on us guaranteeing the full completion of God's redemptive work. Believing on the Lord Jesus and the sealing of the believer by the Spirit are simultaneous occurrences (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 4:30).

Illustration—Revelation 5 illustrates the function of the seal in antiquity. In the great heavenly throne room scene, the operative question is who is worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll, the title deed to the earth. The seven-sealed scroll was an imperial document in the first century of our era. Only the person designated as the proper recipient could open it and see its contents. In Revelation 5, the scroll's rightful recipient is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.

The reality of our sealing by the Spirit ought to give us great assurance and confidence before God. While we are to be reverently in awe of God, we are not to be cowering or fearful. We are not to be insecure in our standing before him. His work is complete; His mercy great; His love abounding.

Deposit (*arabon* in 1:14) was used of—

- a down payment of earnest money on a purchase;
- a pledge used to guarantee full payment of an article;
- an engagement ring to indicate one's intentions.

It was partial down payment in the first installment of a promise guaranteeing a complete transaction and payment of the whole obligation. The Holy Spirit is a foretaste and a pledge of a God-given inheritance. Christians receive this guarantee at conversion and await the final consummation of God's purposes.

3. Prayer for Spiritual Enlightenment (1:15-23)—Paul prays for the spiritual enlightenment of the Ephesian believers. He is showing two things: the believers' inheritance in all its glory and the power of God to bring this about.

He is earnestly interceding for them that they might know God in the depth of their experience and the locus point of their hearts. Knowing God is more than merely knowing about Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word, but it is not less than that. Paul is focusing on the believers' subjective appropriation of a rich relationship with God through Christ based on God's objective revelation to them. The prayer moves from Paul's thanksgiving and the reality of His intercession for them (1:15-16) to the particulars of that intercession (1:17-23).

a. Paul's Thanksgiving and Unceasing Intercession (1:15-16)—Thanksgiving was a typical part of a first century letter. In antiquity, letters typically had a salutation, identifying the writer and the recipients of the correspondence, a blessing and thanksgiving for the recipients, followed by the body of the letter and a farewell or final greeting. Thanksgiving is the proper human acknowledgment of our indebtedness to God's grace and our passing that grace along to Him and others. The terms for thanksgiving are often "to give grace" and the term *eucharisteo* (which is the root of the word Eucharist) based on the Greek word for grace.

Why is God so concerned that Christians be thankful (see 1 Thess. 5:18)? Because thanksgiving is the proper human response to grace. It is the fertile soil in which other Christian virtues (all dependent on God's grace) grow. It is God's antidote to our "toxic flesh"—grumbling, complaining, backbiting, pouting because of real or imagined wrongs. Even the pagan philosopher/author/politician Cicero recognized this. He once remarked "A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues."

Illustration—In the *Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom's prison barracks were extremely overcrowded and flea-infested. Reading 1 Thessalonians 5 one morning, Corrie's sister Betsy insisted that they pray and thank God for everything, even the fleas. Corrie did so only after Betsy's pleading. Over time, the inmates were surprised by the freedom they had to hold Bible studies and pray without interference from the Nazis once inside the barracks. Eventually, they discovered their freedom was due to the fleas. The guards wanted nothing to do with those flea-infested pits, thus allowing the barracks to become sanctuaries of rest to the praise and honor of God.

b. Petition for Enlightened Hearts (1:17-23)—Paul prays for these believers that, at the core of their individual personalities, they might know the full reach of an expectant hope in God, the riches of their inheritance as saints, and the full power available to them in Christ. Just in case they didn't realize the incredible dynamic that is the reality of “Christ in them, the hope of glory” (see Col. 1:27), Paul piledrive power terms in pointing them to the divine energy that raised Christ from the dead, seated Him at the Father's right hand, and subjugated all things under His feet (see 1:19-21).

Illustration—Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, often shared a story about a poor farmer in the Southwest who lived for years just scraping by before discovering that beneath his property were rich oil reserves. He was a rich man overnight by simply realizing what he had. This is a picture of believers. We must embrace God's provision to live as children of the King.

1:17-19a—Paul prays for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. Revelation (*apocalypsis*) is insight and discernment the Spirit brings to the mysteries of divine truth. Knowledge (*epignosis*) is the fullness of knowledge acquired through personal acquaintance or experience. It includes greater participation of the knower in the object known, that the knowledge would more powerfully influence him. The Spirit provides revelation (see Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27).

In the Bible, the term “revelation” refers to both the whole of God's self-disclosure, which includes particular revelation, inspiration, and illumination, and individual parts of that disclosure. In the particular sense, it refers to God communicating his truth to the mind of a particular Biblical author. Inspiration refers to God superintending the writing process in such a way that what the biblical author wrote, while fully and freely reflecting their own unique, individual personalities, was transmitted in a way that God was pleased to call His Word. Illumination refers to that work of God by His Spirit, takes the written revelation and makes its meaning apparent to His people.

“Eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (*pephotismenos* = illumined) in 1:18 makes clear that God's illumining work is in view, D.L. Moody once remarked: “The Bible without the Holy Spirit is a sundial at moonlight.” On commentator elaborates: “The mind alone cannot grasp the truth of God; the heart of people, their affections and especially their wills, must be bent to the task. Otherwise, the essential part of divine revelation will escape the student, leaving only an unsatisfying and incomprehensible framework within their grasp. In this lies the explanation of much barren and intellectual study of the Scripture.”

Paul's prayer for spiritual enlightenment involves knowing God's calling, inheritance, and power. The first result of receiving a spirit of wisdom and understanding is that they know the hope of His calling. God's call is His summons to salvation (see Phil. 3:14). 1 Thessalonians 5:24 states the sure fulfillment of this calling. “Faithful is He who calls you, and He will bring it to pass.” This blessed hope is vital to

an ongoing, faithful endurance, for hope is nothing less than the constancy of faith that fixes its gaze on eternal, unseen realities. One of the prospects of this blessed hope is the believer's conformity to the very image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 3:18).

A second result is that they would know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (1:18b). Christians are God's inheritance, the trophies of His grace. The wonder of God's grace is its transforming power.

Illustration—In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis pictures four children, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, magically transported from mid-20th century Britain to the enchanted world of Narnia. During this fascinating story, the children are transformed from very typical adolescents or pre-adolescents to the regal personalities of the kings and queens of Narnia. God works so less an amazing change in us, making us the saints He declares us to be by His grace and unmerited favor.

A third result is that they might know the exceeding (*hyperballo*) greatness of His power (1:19a). The term *hyperballo* is literally “to throw beyond” (see 2 Cor 3:10; 9:4; Eph. 1:19; 2:7; 3:19), a word Paul coined to express the incredible and overwhelming power of God. Note the terms of power used in 1:19. Power (*dynamis*) and working (*energeia*) focus on the sheer might of God. Mighty (*ischys*) has His ability in view, while power again (*kratos* = dominion) looks to the arena of His power's exercise or its proper jurisdiction.

When believers begin to process what is available to them in the power of the Holy Spirit, our plane of spiritual living begins to look shabby indeed. Paul is urging us to appropriate the power available in a close, vital union with Christ and His Spirit, the source of all true spiritual vitality. Little power is indisputable evidence of little fellowship with Jesus Christ.

1:19b-23—Paul's requests are “in accordance with” God's strength to bring about these things. The phrase “in accordance with” is the apostle's measuring rod. God's elevation of Christ in His resurrection (1:19b, 20a) and His subsequent enthronement (1:20b, 21) are in view. Paul's measuring phrase is worked out in a fourfold way:

- *Raised Him from the dead (1:20a)*—The resurrection of Christ is the attestation of God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and the pattern and pledge of the believer's resurrection. The resurrection exposes the inability of death to hold Him and reveals the totality of His victory. The same resurrection power is available to us as outlined in Romans 6.
 - First, we must know that we were crucified with Him, are no longer slaves to sin, and that we were raised with Him. Sin and death are no longer our masters. Our new identity is “in Christ.”
 - Second, we must count or reckon that we are dead to sin and alive to God. We must do business with God's truth and of His estimate of who we are “in Christ.”
 - Finally, we must offer, or yield, or present ourselves to God. An abandonment to God and His purposes ought to characterize our lives. We ourselves are the offering.
- *Seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places (1:20c; Ps. 110:1)*—Christ's Ascension and Present Session are in view (see Lk.24:50-51; Acts 1:6-11). He has left behind the conditions of His humiliation (see Phil. 2:5-11) and now intercedes on our behalf as our great high priest at the right hand of the Father (see Heb. 7:26-28). God's right hand is the place of honor, privilege, and power. Christ ascended to prepare a place or an abode for His people (see Jn. 14:2-3). He

left in order for the Holy Spirit to come in power on His People (see Jn. 16:7).

- *Placed all things in subjection under His feet (1:21-22a)*—His primacy is seen in His exaltation and the recognition of His mastery of both the visible and invisible realms. Note that Christ is master not only of nature and people but also has command of all those spirits affecting the destiny of people (1:21). The ancients believed that there were powers that directed earthly rulers and events. The powers are described in four ways.
 - Rule (*archon*) describes a ruler, prince, or magistrate and authority (*exousia*) details the power of an installed authority. The terms focus on de facto sovereignties and spiritual potentates in this old world.
 - Power (*dynamis*) comes from the same root as the English word “dynamite”. It highlights the raw power of the heavenly beings subordinate to Christ.
 - Dominion (*kuriotetos*) describes overlordship and seems to suggest grades in angelic orders.
 - “Every title (*honomazo*) that is given” refers to the name by which a thing is known. In antiquity, to name the name of a thing was to imply the right to exercise control or authority over that thing. The upshot of all this is that Christ is Lord of the cosmic hosts because He is their creator (Col. 3:16) and rightful rule (Phil. 2:9-11).
- *Appointed Him as Head over everything for the church (1:22-23)*—The church in Ephesians usually does not refer to a particular local body of believers but to the invisible body of Christ irrespective of locality or time. Note the phrase “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (1:23). Fullness (*pleroma*) refers to that which is completed. It is Christ who fills the church, not vice-versa. The body of Christ is the receptacle of the full power of the risen Lord. One commentator says it this way: “The church has nothing to give Christ of herself, by which what is lacking in Him could be filled up. Instead, the church is filled with Him (3:19), becoming a partaker of all that He owns and is, for the purpose of continuing His work.”

B. Remembering What Christ Has Done (2:1-22)—The focus now shifts from the heavenlies to what Christ has done for believers here and now. Believers are made alive in Christ by God's grace (2:4-10) after experiencing the tyrannical grip of sin (2:1-3). They are one body in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike (2:13-18), after experiencing the deep division of natural human cleavages, biases, and discrimination (2:11-12). The apostle gives us ample things to consider and an opportunity to marvel at the grace of God in Christ and the wondrous deliverance He has worked, both individually and corporately (2:19-22).

1. Made Alive in Christ (2:1-10)—Who you are with matters! The Christian has a big brother, and our elder brother is our atoning sacrifice and great high priest. In this passage, Paul underlines our total dependence on our elder brother's person and work for our standing before God. To help his audience appreciate the immensity of God's grace, Paul contrasts their domination by sin before conversion (2:1-3) and their freedom from that tyrant after conversion (2:4-10). He also emphasizes that salvation is unearned; it comes by God's grace, through faith, and apart from meritorious works (2:8-10). God's gracious action does foster good works by the renewed believer, but they are the consequence rather than the means of salvation (2:10).

a. Past: Objects of Wrath (2:1-3)—Paul describes the state and practice of humanity outside of Christ. We were dead, under the influence of the world and the oppressive sway of the evil one, goaded on by our own sinful longings. This was true of the Ephesians and all people outside of Christ. Unregenerate humanity is dead in trespasses (*paraptoma* conveys a sense of willfulness, overstepping a

forbidden line) and sins (*hamartia* conveys a sense of inability, to miss the mark of life's true aim) (2:1). People are dead in the sense of being “cut off from the life of God” because of human alienation from God (see Col. 2:13; Rom. 6:13; 1 Tim. 5:6).

This state of deadness influences human lifestyle. The Ephesians, as unregenerate people, used to live (*peripateo* is literally “to walk about”) according to an authority outside of God. This authority is expressed in three ways:

- The course of this world (2:2, the age of this world order). The focus is the power of this authority in the world order of this age. evil influences pervade the world system. This suggests that life is under the malign influence of celestial powers which hold people in their tyrannical grip (Gal. 1:4; 4:3; Col. 2:8).
- The prince of the power of the air (2:2). This authority is the devil, who as ruler of the demonic agencies in the heavenly places, controls human action by goading people into sin. He is the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience. Disobedience was Satan's downfall (Isa. 14:12ff) and his rebellious spirit is still active in people who pit themselves against God (Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn.3:8) in their blindness (1 Cor. 4:4).
- The lusts of their flesh indicates the activity of this authority in people's lives (2:3a). These are the longings and impulses of a self-centered life (see Rom. 8:4-9; Gal. 5:16-21). Fallen people are dominated by the desires of their unregenerate natures. They greedily satisfy the desires of their flesh and mind. Desires and thoughts (*dianoia*) indicate that the effects of people's sinful selfishness are not limited to their emotions and appetites but embrace their intellects and reasoning powers as well.

They are by nature objects of wrath (2:3c, *tekna orges phusei* = children of wrath). They are under divine judgment by reason of moral choice dictated by their warped human nature (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 1:18). Numerous passages speak of the wrath of God against sin (see Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4-5; Eph. 2:3, 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9).

This passage clearly presents the Bible's teaching about human nature. Paul is saying that we naturally follow the wrong road. What is all around us in the present age seems right to us but is not. The present age is not what God intends it to be. To just go with the flow is the simplest way to lose your way. In addition, there is a ruler of the power of the air that misleads. Lastly, we are no different in essence that those souls we sense are wrong-headed and going in the wrong direction. The settled and habitual behavior of the whole human race leads them on the fast track towards death.

Historically, there have been various views of human nature in what is loosely called Christendom:

- *Pelagianism*—Pelagius was a moralist. His primary concern was for people to live good and decent lives. It seemed to him that an unduly negative view of human nature was having an unfortunate effect upon human behavior. Coupled with an emphasis on the sovereignty of God, dire estimation of human sinfulness seemed to Pelagius to remove all motivation to exert an effort to live a good life. Pelagius laid heavy emphasis on free will. He believed that human beings are free of any determining influence from the Fall. He did not believe that human nature is tainted by Adam's sin with any essential guilt. The influence of Adam's sin was that of a bad example. Since Adam's sin had no direct effect upon human beings, there is no need for a special working of God's grace. Rather, the grace of God is something present in the Law as revealed and in human conscience. Furthermore, grace is available equally to all people.

Salvation is not a redemption from a power that binds us, but something that preserves or maintains our right status and good standing before God. This view of human nature shaped classical liberalism of the 19th century.

- *Arminians* understand humankind as receiving a corrupted nature from Adam. We begin life without righteousness. All of us are unable, without special divine help, to fulfill God's spiritual commands. This inability is physical, emotional, and intellectual, but not volitional. While Arminians see guilt as an aspect of original sin, this guilt does not mean actual culpability, but only a liability to punishment. God's prevenient grace removes any culpability accrued to us through Adam's sin. Arminians understand prevenient grace as a universal benefit of the atoning work of Christ which nullifies the judicial consequences of Adam's sin. It extends to everyone and neutralizes the corruption received from Adam, allowing people to freely come to Christ.
- *Calvinists* see the whole human race lost in sin. They emphasize the concept of total depravity. Every individual is touched by the corruption received from Adam in every facet of their being. Thus tainted, people are incapable of responding to any offer of God's grace. God must first enable people to respond. Some Calvinists believe they call the federal headship view of humanity. This view sees Adam as our human representative and therefore his sin is imputed or charged to us. Others adopt the Augustinian view that the entire human race was present in Adam seminally, so that we sinned ourselves when Adam fell.
- These notes reflect the last of these three options. Paul is describing the human condition and makes it clear that human beings are unable to affect their own deliverance. We are separated from the life of God, without inherent power to change our condition, and without even the want-to to change. Salvation, from first to last, is a gift of God's unmerited favor.
- This is not to say that unregenerate human beings cannot do what seems to be good things. No, they can and often do. The depravity that is our human condition prevents us from doing redemptive good. We are prisoners of ourselves, and our natural default state is self-oriented. Even unregenerate people have noted this. Existentialists despair of the human condition. The pagan philosopher Seneca once sighed: "Men hate their vices and yet love them at the same time."

b. Present: Alive in Christ (2:4-10)—Paul now describes the Ephesians' present state. The gospel is much more than a spiritual enhancement of an ordinary life. It is life from the dead. It is being rescued from the fate you would have otherwise incurred. He discusses the initiator of new life (God—2:4-5), the source of new life (Christ—2:5-7), and the principle of new life (grace—2:7-10).

(1) Exalted to Life (2:4-7)—God initiates new life because He is rich in mercy by His very nature and because his great love refuses to leave people in their plight (2:4-5). Three compound verbs describe what God has done in Christ for every Christian:

- *Synezoopoiesen* = we are made alive with the essence of life. He made us alive together with Christ (2:5). The source of this life is in the Son. The terminology for regeneration varies in the Bible, but the concept is clear. Jesus spoke of being "born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5-8). The Scriptures speak of Christians being "born of God" or "born through the Word of God" (Jn. 1:12-13; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pt. 1:3, 23; 1 Jn. 2:29; 5:1, 4). Christians are described as a "new creation in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), as being "renewed" in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), "made alive" (Eph. 2:1, 5), and as "given life" (Jn. 6:63; 10:10, 28).
- *Synegeiren* = we are raised up. We are energized, if you will, by our participation in His resurrection life. In Christ, the spiritually dead are made alive and raised up out of our servitude

to death (2:6a). A person is born from above (Jn. 3:3) instantly and once for all and raised with Him. Positionally, this raising occurs immediately upon regeneration, but this also promises the believer's physical resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 35-37).

- *Synekathisen* = we are seated or enthroned with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6b). The position of sitting represents a finished work (Heb. 1:3). Christ's work of justification is accomplished, and the believer enjoys a security in Him as well as the certainty of God's sanctifying work into the future (Phil. 1:6; 2:13).

These are things God did by uniting the believer in a mystical union with his or her Lord and Savior.

Quote: John Bunyan, a lay Puritan preacher, expressed the glories of this union in the following way: “The Lord let me into the knowledge of the mystery of union with Christ, that I was joined with Him, that I was bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh. By this also my faith in Him as my righteousness was the more confirmed; for if He and I were one, then His righteousness was mine, His merits mine, His victory also mine. Now I could see myself in heaven and on earth at once—in heaven by my Christ, my risen head, my righteousness and life itself, though on earth by my body and person.”

2:7—In Christ, God shows us the surpassing riches of His grace. Surpassing is *huperballo*, literally “to throw beyond.” God's rich grace goes far beyond human comprehension. The church is to be God's grace exhibit to the whole creation in this age and in the ages to come.

(2) Saved by Grace Alone (2:8-10)— People in God's community are distinguished by faith, not by works, status, race, ethnicity, or any other human marker. Ephesians 2:10 describes us as God's *poema*, his work of art. Good works are the way of showing forth the new humanity of our re-creation in Christ.

Illustration—In the Spanish-American War of 1898, a story is told of an incident between Teddy Roosevelt, soon to be the President of the United States, and Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross. Pressing hard to get supplies for the sick and wounded men among his cherished “Rough Riders,” he demanded, pleaded for, and offered to personally pay for the needed supplies. These highly charged overtures were curtly refused. Clara Barton was not to be bullied. Exasperated, Roosevelt asked Barton how he could receive help. “Just ask for it, Colonel,” was the reply. What a picture of God's salvation! Unable to demand anything from God or purchase our release from sin, we come to God and receive freely from His hand, based on the merit of our elder brother, Jesus the Messiah.

2:8-9—We are saved freely by God's grace alone. Salvation is complete (thus the use of the perfect tense) in the sense that no defect or inadequacy mars God's purpose. Salvation originates in the saving love of God expressed to sinners. It enters human experience by faith, by trusting acceptance. The entire process is God's doing (2 Cor. 5:17-18), leaving no room for human boasting (2:9) or that self-confidence which is the antithesis of the self-distrust which casts itself wholly upon God and His mercy (Phil. 3:3-11).

Quote: John Calvin said: “In these three phrases, ‘not of yourselves’, ‘it is the gift of God’, ‘not of works’—Paul embraces the substance of his long arguments in Romans and Galatians, that righteousness comes to us by the mercy of God alone, is offered to us by Christ in the Gospel, and is received by faith alone without the merit of works.”

The human response to God's gracious work is faith. Faith includes:

- a knowledge of the truth believed. God's gracious provision in Christ is in view here.
- An assent to that truth.
- A personal reliance or trust in the truth. The believer places his or her reliance for their standing before God on Christ and Christ alone.

Stated another way, general faith involves believing facts about what Christ has done for us. Vital faith involves trusting Him to bring us to God and make us acceptable in His sight.

2:10—Faith and works are interconnected, but not in the manner that humans typically perceive (2:10; Jas. 2:14-26). We are saved apart from good works, but unto good works. Good works should be the consequence of our justification, but not its cause. They flow from what God does in us. They are evidence of the sincerity of saving faith (Jas. 2:17-18). The call to good works is not as a ground for claiming God's favor but as the necessary consequence of our new life in Christ as His new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 2:14). We are to work out what God, by His grace, has worked in (Phil. 2:12-13). Even the good that believers now do has its source in God.

Quote: Martin Luther once remarked: “You are saved by faith alone; but the faith that saves is never alone.”

We are described as God's *poema*, His work of art. Thus, a proper notion of the interrelationship of faith and works rebuts a moralism which falsely trusts in works and misunderstands the desperate plight of people (2:1-3). It also avoids the equally pernicious danger of libertinism which would throw off all moral discipline. Children born of the sovereign Lord should live in a manner befitting the Sovereign who bought them.

Quote: “I expect to pass through the world but once. Any good ... that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

2. Made One in Christ (2:11-22)—Years ago, I attended a church growth seminar which emphasized the homogeneity principle and abundant and convenient parking as key to effective church growth. The seminar leader stressed that people like convenience and being with people just like them. Paul never attended this kind of seminar. He certainly did not ascribe to the homogeneity principle. The early church folks were quite different from each other: Jew and Gentile, master and slave, Greek and barbarian, Roman and provincial. Yet, they were one by the grace of God.

Ephesians 2:1-10 divides neatly into two parts, 2:1-3 covering the past reality of believers before receiving Christ and 2:4-10 covering the reality of people in Christ. So too 2:11-22 divides into two parts, 2:11-12 covering the Gentiles' past separation from God and other Jewish believers and 2:13-18 covering their integration into one body in Christ. The divide between Jews and Gentiles, which was evident during Paul's time, is eliminated through Christ. God has made peace where there was none, bringing deep healing to the new humanity.

The roots of our individual and corporate identity are ontological, a matter of being. We are new beings in Christ and that newness is the basis for a new corporate unity in the body of Christ. If our churches

are divided along racial, ethnic, or cultural lines, then the gospel and our understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death is called into question.

a. Past: Separation of the Gentiles (2:11-12)—The Gentiles were the “uncircumcision” (2:11), a contemptuous nickname given them by the Jews, alienated from God and from the Jewish people. Jewish contempt for Gentiles matched the Greeks' contempt for barbarians (non-Greeks) and the Romans' contempt for provincials. It mirrored the first century's pecking order and the striving for perceived superiority. Circumcision was a Jew's external sign of participation in the covenant originally made with Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14). In truth, the only circumcision that mattered was an internal spiritual circumcision of the heart (see Rom. 2:25-29; Phil. 2:2-3; Col. 2:11). Paul describes the separation of the Gentiles in a five-fold way:

- Separate from Christ (2:12)—Being Christless, they were without rest (Mt. 11:28), without life (Jn. 14:6), without light (Jn. 8:12), without salvation (Acts 4:12), and without peace (Col. 1:20).
- Separate from Israel (2:12)—They were excluded from the right of citizenship in the divine commonwealth and elect nation.
- Separate from the covenants of promise (2:12)—They were strangers to God's sovereign assurances of Israel's destiny given to the patriarchs (Abraham—Gen. 12:2ff; 13:14ff; 17:1ff; 22:15ff; Isaac—Gen. 26:2ff; Jacob—Gen. 28:13ff; 35:9ff; Moses—Ex. 19:5-6).
- Separate from any realistic hope (2:12). They lacked any Messianic hope.
- Separate from God (2:12)—They were without God in the world in the sense that they were ignorant of the one, true God (Acts 17:22-31; Gal. 4:8).

We may not feel the import of this five-fold alienation the way the Gentiles did in Paul's day. However, each of us has, at times, felt alone, alienated, and hopeless. No one knew, no one cared, and no one could resolve our dilemma. Thank God for His deep compassion, His tender mercy and concern that touches us in our needy state and lifts us up. In Christ, we are no longer separated from God. In Christ, the Holy Spirit begins to work on the other points of alienation in our lives, healing us deep down in our souls.

b. Present: Unification of Jew and Gentile (2:13-18)—They were to remember their former separated state to properly value their new sense of belonging and oneness. Christ united Jew and Gentile in His church, doing away with distance (2:13), division (2:14-15), dissension (2:15-16), and distinction (2:16-18) between ethnic groups in the faith.

2:13—Distance from God is done away as the apostle contrasts far off with brought near (see Isa. 57:19). Far away (*makron*) and near (*engys*) are rooted in Hebrew expressions that describe the relative positions of Gentiles and Jews. The phrases originally referred to distance from Jerusalem. Jewish interpretative extrapolation (midrash) applied these phrases to the spiritual condition of Gentiles and Jews, respectively. The blood of Christ has done away with the distance between God and people. This reconciliation with God has parallel consequence and is the basis for our reconciliation with people.

2:14-15—Natural human divisions are abrogated in Christ. Christ is both our peace and our peacemaker. He brought reconciliation with God for each believer, and He incorporated believers into a reconciled and reconciling body. Too often the following limerick is all too true in the family of God:

To dwell above with saints we love,
O that will be glory.

But to dwell below with saints we know
Well, that is another story.

But now His peace and reconciliation is our peace. It is much more than the absence of hostility but connotes well-being and security at every level.

The text refers to Christ breaking down the barrier of the dividing wall. Barrier (*phragmos*) means “fence” or “railing” and dividing wall (*mesotoiichon*) is literally “middle wall.” That dividing wall might be—

- the Mosaic law with its scribal interpretation (2:15-16);
- the Temple balustrade separating the Court of the Gentiles from the temple area proper (Acts 21:27-29); or
- the Gnostic image of a wall which separates the aeons and divides the heavenly pleroma from the earthly world.

Josephus used both “barrier” and “dividing wall” to describe the Temple balustrade. That is what Paul has in mind here.

2:15-16—Dissension is abolished. The enmity or dissension is the Mosaic law with its scribal interpretation which excluded Gentiles. Abolishing (*katargesas*) means to make ineffective or powerless. Christ abolished the Law by fulfilling it (Mt. 5:17) and vicariously enduring the penalty of the Law on our behalf. God's purpose is the church as one made up of new people (2 Cor. 5:17). New (*kainos*) is not simply new in point of time, but new in the sense that it brings into the world a new kind of entity that did not exist before. The experimental token of the reality of the one new person is seen in the liberty of access to God by the Holy Spirit (2:18; see Heb. 4:16).

2:16-18—Ethnic distinctions are done away in the body of Christ. Ephesians 2:17 quotes Isaiah 57:19 bringing the far off/brought near and peace themes together. The chief sin of separation is the distortion of human personality. It damages the soul of both the one segregating and the segregated. A new unity is established in Christ in which racial and national distinctions disappear (2:15, 17; Rom. 11:25-26, 32; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

In Christ, we have access (*prosagoge*) to God. A *prosagogeis* was an official in an Oriental court who conducted visitors into the king's presence. Both Jew and Gentile have a continual royal audience with the King of kings in the bonds of the church.

(c) Cornerstone: Dwelling of God in the Spirit (2:19-22; cf. Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16)—

Membership in God's household (2:19) serves to tie the citizen/alien imagery of 2:11-18 with the building/dwelling imagery of 2:20-22. The Gentiles are now citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and not in any way aliens or second-class citizens of God's church. Spiritual refugees of all types have a home in the family of God. God has declared there to be peace in his community, a welcoming and acceptance of the “other” rather than suspicion and rejection. Paul uses the imagery of a building (a temple) in describing this new reality.

The church is depicted as a household built on the foundation of Christ, the apostles, and the prophets (2:20; see 1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus Christ is the cornerstone; He is the stone that determines the lie of the

entire building. Christians are fitted together into this structure. They are the community in which the living God is delighted to assume residence. It is a breath-taking vision! What racial, ethnic, and cultural differences do we need to overcome for that vision of the church to be a reality?

This symbol of the church (the cornerstone and living stones) makes a threefold contribution to the doctrine of the church:

- Each stone in the building is itself a living stone in that it partakes of the divine nature (2 Pt. 1:4);
- Its chief cornerstone (like its foundation) is Christ (1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pt. 2:6). Cornerstone denotes both honor and function. Each stone is fitted to Him and finds its proper place and usefulness in relation to Him. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, Christ is the foundation. Here, the apostles and prophets are the foundation and Christ is the cornerstone. The cornerstone (*akrogoniaios* = tip of the angle) refers to a capstone or binding stone that holds the entire structure together. It covered a right angle joining two walls; and
- The whole structure is itself “a habitation of God through the Spirit” (2:22). The Spirit indwells the church, both as individual members (1 Cor. 6:19) and collectively (2:21-22; 1 Cor. 3:16). In the Old Testament, God dwelt with His people; in the New Testament, God dwells in His people (see Rom. 8:9; Gal 4:6). The Holy Spirit permanently indwells this holy temple (Jn. 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20).

2:19—Two technical terms that denote inferior status are contrasted with fellow citizens (*sympolitai*). Aliens (*xenoi*) referred to short-term transient foreigners. Strangers (*paroikos*) were licensed sojourners who obtained protection by payment of a tax. Such people had no intrinsic rights, they were tolerated and accommodated. Such was the Gentile condition prior to the coming of Christ.

2:21—The word used for the entire temple precinct was *heiron*. *Naos* referred to the inner shrine. *Naos* is the term used here. Both individual Christians (1 Cor. 6:19) and the entire corporate body of Christ (1 Cor. 3:16) are described as the Lord's *naos* (inner tabernacle).

C. Strengthening Through the Holy Spirit (3:1-21)—Paul begins with a personal sidebar on dealing with hardship and discouragement and keeping a ministry focus on our trek to glory (3:1-13) before scaling the heights in prayer once again (3:14-21). He prays for empowerment—that the Ephesians would fully grasp and be grasped by the enveloping love and fullness of God.

1. Not Discouraged by Suffering (3:1-13)—Paul hears, as it were, the clink of his chains, and recalls where he is and why he is there. Paul had suffered for the Gentiles. His call to service (Acts 9:15-16; 22:21; 26:17-18) highlights his role as an apostle to the Gentiles and the inherent risks and dangers involved. That risk was a present reality as he penned these words from a Roman prison cell. However, he refused to regard himself as a victim either of the Jews or the Roman emperor Nero. He is a “prisoner of Jesus Christ.” He refused to wallow in self-pity.

Self-pity is one of the great pitfalls for God's servants. When we face opposition, are misunderstood, ridiculed, minimized, marginalized, or dismissed without due regard, it is common to feel disheartened. But this natural self-pity is a destructive root. Jonah sulking under a withered gourd, Elijah bitter under the juniper, Job complaining on the ash pile—what is all that but this: God owes me and He's not producing! Paul could have seen himself as a victim, forgotten by all, abandoned, and all alone. But he

did not do that. Rather, he focused on Christ and the ministry God had given him. Every thought, every word, and every deed done for Christ carries us away from discouragement. Specifically, Paul focused on his insight into the purpose of God (3:1-6), underlined his devotion to the ministry of God (3:7-12), and expressed his concern for the people of God (3:13).

a. Paul's Insight: Gentiles as Fellow Heirs (3:1-6)—Paul is stressing his insight into the purpose of God. The mystery is that God makes no distinctions in humanity in ethnic terms. Everyone can approach God by faith. The Old Testament, albeit a theme overlooked, certainly provided for the inclusion of the Gentiles. The difference here is that they are accepted on an equal plane.

3:2—Administration (*oikonomia*, literally “house law”) of divine grace refers to an implementation of divine strategy (see 1:10). God's saving grace is not in view so much as Paul's own equipping as an apostle to the Gentiles. God had uniquely outfitted Paul for his assignment.

3:3-6—This mystery concerning the Gentiles was revealed to Paul (Gal 1:11-12). It was not something made known to him by research or by rationalization. Most Jews believed that prophecy had ceased when the prophets died out. However, this mystery was revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit (3:5). The Spirit is the agent of inspiration and illumination (Jn. 14:26; 16:12-15). There is harmony in the interpretation of revelation where Christian leaders were of a common mind concerning the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The mystery of Christ is what grammarians would call an objective genitive. It is a mystery relating to Christ, the particular content of which is that the Gentiles are included in a church where all barriers of race are broken down (2:14, 17-18). God makes no ethnic distinctions in humanity. The Gentiles are fellow heirs (Rom. 8:17), fellow members of the body (2:15), and fellow partakers of the promises. While the Old Testament spoke of Gentile salvation (Gen. 12:2; Isa. 49:6), the incorporation of Jew and Gentile into a single body as equal members was a new concept. Thus, the mystery of which Paul speaks is primarily concerned with Gentile inclusion in the body, rather than Gentile salvation in the first instance.

Note that the Bible uses the term “mystery” (*mysterion*) in several ways encompassing the promise of God in Christ. Its various facets include the indwelling Christ, our hope of glory (Col. 1:27), the Gentiles as fellow partakers of the promise of Christ (3:6), the person of Christ Himself (Col. 2:2), and the purpose of God to gather together all things in Christ (1:9).

3:4—Paul wants them to understand his insight into the mystery of Christ. Insight results from revelation and involves the comprehension of God's purposes. God is concerned that believers know His mind on a matter that we might align our wills to His will.

3:5—This mystery was made known to the other apostles and prophets. The description of the apostles and prophets as “holy” does not invest them with an aura of ethereal sanctity, akin to a Byzantine fresco and characteristic of a later age but merely affirms that the grace of God had indeed set these men apart for the ministry He had given them. Modern scholars have taken the phrase “holy apostles and prophets” as a mark of the lateness of the epistle and as evidence of the letter's “incipient Catholicism.” Such analysis is labored and unnecessary.

3:6—The Gentiles are included in the faith. Three key descriptions:

- Co-heirs—the Gentiles are heirs together (*stgkeronoma*) with their Jewish brothers, co-legatees of the Kingdom;
- Co-members—members together (*syssoma*) conveys that the Gentiles enjoyed a corporate relationship with the Jews in the church that was the basis for the destruction of ancient cultural animosity;
- Co-partners—they were sharers together (*symmetocha*) in the faith.

b. Paul's Mission to the Gentiles (3:7-12)—The second characteristic that kept Paul from discouragement was his own devotion to the ministry that God had given him. He perceived the mind of the Lord and then threw himself into the work. The church is the herald of God's wisdom to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. The church displays to these heavenly authorities that their time is ending. Messiah Jesus is unveiling his redemption and the glorious future contained therein.

3:7-8—Paul received a stewardship of God's grace for the Gentiles. His ministry was given to him according to God's grace and the working of His divine power (3:2, 7). For the fulfillment of his God-appointed task, to preach Christ to the Gentiles and to bring to light God's redemptive purposes which included them (3:8-9), Paul needed the gift of God's supernatural supply.

Paul is conscious of his own unworthiness and his sense of unworthiness grows as his concept of the grandeur of God's purpose progresses. The more he meditated on the blessings of God in Christ, and the infinite grace of His gifts, the more he realized that he did not deserve mercy. In 1 Corinthians 15:9, he describes himself as the least of the apostles and unworthy to be an apostle. Here, he calls himself the least of the saints. In 1 Timothy 1:15, his self-description is that of the chief of sinners.

3:9-12—Paul elaborates on God's eternal purposes. The mystery of Gentile inclusion, though purpose by God in Christ (3:11-12), was hidden in God through the ages and now made known through the church (3:9-10). The church's mission was and is to know Christ and make Him known to Jew and Gentile and indeed across every human divide. The church represents God's ultimate purpose in history. The mystery has a greater reach than just the earth. It is made known to angelic hosts who were previously ignorant of it. To these cosmic forces, God's wisdom displayed in the cross of Christ dazzles them in its simplicity and apparent weakness (1 Cor. 2:6-8).

3:10—Manifold means “very varied.” God's wisdom in creation and Christ reveals many unfolding beauties. The herald of this wisdom is the bride of Christ herself, the church.

3:12—Paul draws a practical conclusion from the consideration of God's eternal purposes. The centrality of Christ has a bearing on the devotional life of believers. We have freedom and confidence before this mighty God whose purpose embraces heaven and earth. Freedom (*parresia*) conveys a sense of candor and frankness. It referred to a citizen's right to stand in the agora of the city-state and express one's views. In the New Testament, the term conveys boldness before people (Eph. 6:20; Acts 4:13; Phil. 1:20). It is an absence of fear, shame, or intimidation. “Confidence” piggybacks on freedom, but with a more personal tone.

c. Paul's Encouragement: Suffering and Glory (3:13)—There is no subject of the infinitive “to be discouraged.” Three possibilities present themselves:

- Paul is asking the believers to pray that he may not be disheartened;
- He is reassuring them that he is praying that they may not despair;
- He is entreating them not to be discouraged by suffering.

The third option is Paul's meaning here. His concern for the believers moves him beyond the vistas of his own problems. He could have been having a pity party, but he was not. He knew the cancer that loomed in such an episode.

Quote: "Self-pity weeps on the devil's shoulder. The evil one's invitation is: 'Come unto me all you who are grieved, peeved, misused, and disgruntled, and I will spread on the sympathy. You will find me a never-failing source of the meanest attitudes and the most selfish sort of misery. At my altar, you may feel free to quit, to sigh, and to fret. There you will feed your soul on fears, and indulge your ego with envy and jealousy, bitterness, and spite. There I will excuse you from every cross, duty, and hardship, and permit you to yield to temptation.'"

2. Prayer for Strengthening of the Inner Person (3:14-21)—This prayer brings together love and power—the relation of love that grows between God and the person who prays and the flowing of power from God to and through the person who prays. Paul is praying that the Lord Jesus would assume residence within in each Christian, strengthening and renewing them in their inner beings.

a. In general (3:14-19)—Heart enlightenment and empowerment is in issue here. The prayer is for the indwelling of Christ by faith that will establish their lives in love so that they may go on to a deeper understanding and experience of God. Note the Trinitarian outline of this prayer, the readers were to possess—

- the strength of the Spirit (3:16);
- the indwelling presence of Christ (3:17); and
- the fullness of God the Father (3:19).

3:14-15—Paul bows his knees to pray. Kneeling was a sign of great urgency. Normally, Jews stood to pray (Mt. 6:5; Lk. 18:11, 13). We can pray in any posture, but the position of the body can reflect the condition of the soul. Examples of kneeling in prayer include—

- Solomon at the dedication of the Temple (1 Ki. 8:54);
- Stephen at his martyrdom (Acts 7:60);
- Peter at Dorcas' deathbed (Acts 9:40);
- Paul on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:36; 21:5);
- Christ at Gethsemane (Lk. 22:41).

While kneeling, Paul addresses God as Father. Father is the distinctively Christian name for God. God's fatherhood is the archetype of human fatherhood. God is the One from whom all fatherhood derives its meaning and inspiration. The term "father" is elevated by its divine association, ennobling human fatherhood. What encouragement and challenge to every human father.

Illustration—A little boy, frightened by lightning, called out to his father. The father replied assuring his son that the heavenly Father loved him and would take care of him. "I know God loves me," the boy replied. "But right now I want a daddy with skin on."

3:16-19—Paul petition for the believers is threefold:

- To be strengthened in the inner being (3:16). Strengthen (*krataiothenai*) is to be made strong or capable, to be empowered. It is the opposite of to be discouraged (*enkakein*). This strengthening is by the Holy Spirit, which fortifies the believer's inner person, especially when under trial (see Phil. 1:19-20; Col. 1:11). The Spirit not only provides prophetic endowment, but also with purity, strength, and the ability to fulfill whatever God calls one to do.

The result of this strengthening work of the Spirit is the reality of the indwelling Christ in the lives of believers, rooting and grounding them in divine love. There is no purpose more wonderful than the surprise of being loved; it is God's hand on a person's shoulder. "Christ dwelling (*katoikein*) in your hearts" is not a transitory dwelling (*paroikein* is that), but a permanent abode. The Living Bible paraphrases 3:17 as follows: "That Christ may be more and more at home in your hearts." The thought of the hymn "Come not to sojourn, but to abide in me" is the thought here. The idea is our abiding in Christ and He in us (see Jm. 15). The indwelling Christ is the believer's assurance of moral strength. The Holy Spirit enables our moral living.

- To grasp fully the love of Christ (3:18-19a)—Paul prays that his readers will be strengthened through the Spirit in the inner person and to comprehend (*katalabesthai* = to grasp; to hold as one's own) and to know that love of Christ which exceeds (*hyperballousan* = throw beyond) knowledge. The implication is the Holy Spirit will communicate to believers a knowledge of the redemptive plan and love of Christ that exceeds ordinary knowledge.

An illustration recounts a bride-to-be shopping at a bridal shop with an unusual concern. She really was not interested in the most beautiful gown or the most economical one. No, she wanted the loudest one! She wanted the one with the noisiest fabric. Her fiancé was blind, and she wanted him to know when she was close to the altar when walking down the aisle to avoid any embarrassment. What a fortunate groom that young man was!

Christ's love finds its sweetest expression in God's redemptive plan and purpose. "Length, breadth, height, and depth" refers to Christ's love. Its breadth extends to people everywhere; its length extends to all time; its depth to the lowest condition of human need; and its height to the highest heavens. The Stoics used these terms to express the totality of the universe and here they are applied to the encompassing heart of God.

- To be filled up to all the fullness of God (3:19). The fullness of God does not mean that God passes on to the believer His incommunicable attributes or even that His communicable attributes are passed fully. We are like thimblefuls of the ocean. The thimble is full of the ocean, but the ocean is not fully in the thimble. Yet, the thimble has the "fullness" of the ocean in the sense that it contains every ingredient that makes up the ocean. All the essential ingredients of the ocean are in the thimble. So too with the believer due to the grace of God. The fullness that God intends for us is the maturity that is measured by the full stature of Christ (4:13). This suggests a progression of spiritual growth and maturity as Christ accomplishes a divine work in our hearts.

b. Doxology: God's Power in Us (3:20-21)—Paul is celebrating the church's confidence in God's ability to do exceedingly abundantly beyond our expectations. For other great doxologies, see Romans

16:25-27; Hebrews 13:20-21; Jude 24-25. Other great praise sections include Numbers 6:24-26 and 1 Chronicles 29:11-13.

3:20—Exceedingly abundantly (*hyperballo*) focuses on God's throw-beyond ability to answer Paul's prayer. God's power is at work in us. The church, in which God's fullness dwells, is in the presence of Christ (Col. 1:27). Glory is offered to God eternally (3:21) because of Christ's enabling and indwelling presence in His church.

3:21—A distinctive feature of this doxology lies in the two ways in which glory is shown and praise declared:

- in the church—the sphere of the outworking of God's purpose on earth; and
- in Christ Himself—God's purpose accomplished in Christ is indeed the central thrust of Ephesians 1-3.

II. Worthy Walk: Christ in Us (4:1-6:24)—Up to this point, Paul has employed “praise rhetoric”. He has praised the church, calling it to be what God has planned for it to be. Now he will turn to persuasive rhetoric or exhortation. Paul is giving believers fundamental instructions on living the Christian life. He elaborates on the meaning of their calling to follow the Lord Jesus; the grace which equips each of them to play their part in serving him; and the unity they have and which they are to guard. Their calling is to believe in the Lord Jesus and give him complete and undivided allegiance. This is our calling to which we must live up. God distributes gifts to believers as he wills, and we are to use these to diligently serve him and to guard the unity the Spirit gives.

A Christian's walk (*peripateo* is translated “live” in several translations) is the theme of 4:1 to 6:9 (see 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). Christians are to live worth lives (4:1), are not to live as Gentiles immersed in sin (4:17), but as new people in Christ living and expressing God's love and compassion (5:2) and reflecting His light and purity (5:8). We are to live wisely (5:15) and that wise living should show up in our everyday relationships (5:21-6:9). The guiding concepts of this practical section of the letter are Spirit, unity, and walking in submission to one another.

A. Maintaining Unity While Reaching Maturity (4:1-16)—This section deals with keeping the unity of the body, which is posited by God in our common union with Christ (4:1-6), and with reaching the maturity of a full stature in Christ, which is accomplished by the Spirit's utilization of the spiritual gifts given by the sovereign Lord for the building up of His church (4:7-16). To this end it is vital to maintain the right attitudes (4:1-6), to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (4:7-13), and for each of us to do our part and learn to speak the truth in love (4:14-16).

1. Maintaining Unity of the Spirit (4:1-6)—Unity of the church is a theme sounded throughout Ephesians. The first chapter concludes with the image of Christ as “the head over all things for the church which is His body” (1:22-23). In the next chapter, the emphasis is upon the unity of Jew and Gentile (2:14-16). The chapter concludes with Jew and Gentile joined together into a holy temple in the Lord (2:20-22). In 4:4-6, Paul compiles a list of grounds for the oneness of the church. Later in 4:11-14, the apostle develops the idea of mutuality in ministry which has the purpose of building up the church in one faith guaranteeing unity initiated in Christ.

Illustration—My first experience with an actual church split was through a law school friend who endured great personal turmoil while she stood helplessly by and watched the local congregation she loved, tear itself apart. She knew, respected, and loved people on both sides of the schism and was unable to understand why the issue that proved decisively divisive was even an issue at all. Small wonder. People involved in church splits often cannot name the issue that generated the controversy in the first place. After a while, animosity just has a life of its own and everything, even the oneness of the body so close to the Lord's heart, is of secondary importance.

4:1—A worthy walk is the Christian's response to God's calling. Worthy (*axios*) is literally “of weight.” It described the process of guaranteeing an honest scale weighing merchandise. It conveys the sense of what is fitting and proper, of what measures up. God's calling is God's summons at conversion, although the Bible does use this term to refer to sanctification as well as our initial justification.

4:2-3—These verses describe attitudes of a worthy walk. Humility (*tapeinophrosune*) is the equanimity of spirit that is neither elated by success nor cast down by failure, simply because it is not self-oriented. This was a derogatory term in classical Greek, suggesting a low-mindedness and groveling servility. It was only socially acceptable behavior when self-abasement was that of a social inferior to a superior in that very class-oriented society. Paul uses the term to signify a virtue that stood against the arrogant, high-mindedness of the heathen. Humility is a primary virtue in a believer both with respect to the unity of the body of Christ and service within that body. High-mindedness among believers undermines the bonds that bind us and is destructive of the servant heart God enjoined in His followers (see Mt. 20:24-28; Mk. 10:41-45).

Gentleness (*prautes*) is subdued strength that is considerate. A gentle person does not assert his or her own importance or authority. Thank God for the relational oil that gentleness adds to the body of Christ. It allows us to grow close without bruising each other. The church of Christ in America does not need more lessons in assertiveness, but in gentleness.

Patience (*makrothumia*) is that ability to endure a wrong or the bumps and bruises of life with an unruffled spirit and without retaliation. Patience is not an easy teacher, but an effective one. It is a bitter plant at times, but it bears sweet and bountiful fruit as we linger and submit to the sovereign hand of God.

Bearing with one another in love (4:2) is restraint even when provoked because we have learned to make liberal allowance for the faults and failures of others (having seen many in ourselves). Forbearance reminds us that we are all in a tough battle, and my reaction to an affront needs not add to a difficult situation.

Make every effort to preserve (*spoudazontes*) unity (4:3) is a diligence and a ready attention to preserve the bond that the Spirit brings to Christians. It resolves to spare no effort in its determination to preserve unity.

Live in peace (4:3) is not just the absence of hostility, but a general sense of well-being and a deep and abiding security. The peace we know with God by the reconciling atonement of Jesus Christ is the only basis for true peace among people.

4:4-6—Oneness of the body emphasizes the unity already imparted by the Spirit. Ephesians 4:4-5 forms a triad of couplets:

- one body answers to one Lord;
- one Spirit inspires one faith;
- One hope of your calling belongs to our call culminating in one baptism (see Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13).

This triad may be an early baptismal creed.

“One God and Father of all” speaks of God's transcendence and His sovereign power; “and all through and in all” speaks of His immanence and pervading action. Christians believe that we live in a God-created, God-controlled, God-sustained, God-filled world and that God indwells us and is working out His purpose through us.

In these verses, Paul's thought ascends from the realization of unity in the Spirit to the focus of unity in the Son to the source of unity in the Father. This unity is much more than social interrelatedness. It has connotations of empathy and encouragement, a deep feeling for and an understanding of one another.

2. Gifting for Unity in Faith (4:7-16)—the Lord of glory gives the unity of the body. It is not a product of human achievement. However, human effort preserves that oneness both in the attitudes of believers (4:2-3) and in their activities (4:11-16). Paul notes that God's grace is both the source of our oneness (4:4-6) and the source of our gifts that build up the body until we reach maturity.

a. Apportionment of the Gifts Stated and Illustrated (4:7-10)—These are Ascension gifts, given at Christ's exaltation. The gifts are sparkles of His exaltation. The ascended Lord bestows these gifts by first sending His gift par excellence—the Holy Spirit (see Jn. 7:39; 20:22; Acts 2:33). The gifts are needed in the body for none of us are endowed as to be able, without the assistance of our fellow members, to supply our necessities on our own.

4:8—Paul illustrates the giving of gifts by quoting Psalm 68:18, a Messianic text. The inferences drawn from this text of the triumphal return of the King are the thought of victory and the bestowal of gifts. This verse misquotes the psalm. The psalm speaks of the Lord receiving gifts from people, while verse 4:8 speaks of the Lord giving gifts. The quote was taken from the Syriac Peshitta where the text says that the Lord gave gifts to people.

4:9-10—There are at least three views of what descend into the lower parts of the earth (4:9) means:

- Christ's ascent into heaven (Lk. 24:50-51) is followed by the descend of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), when, in a realistic sense, the Lord returned to earth laden with gifts for His people;
- Descended simply refers to the sepulcher in which Jesus' body was laid; and
- Christ's ascension to heaven included His descent into Hades or Sheol to free Old Testament saints (see Mt. 27:50-53; 1 Pt. 3:19-20).

The third view reflects the belief that there was another step prior to the Lord's Resurrection and Ascension. Not only was Jesus buried, and in a borrowed tomb, but He also descended into hell, as the reference in the Apostle's Creed suggests. Based on some biblical texts (Ps. 16:10; Eph. 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pt. 3:18-19, 4:4-6) and the reference in the Apostle's Creed, some think that Jesus descended

into hell during the period between His death on the Cross and His Resurrection.

b. Gifting for Stable Growth (4:7-16)—Paul identifies four foundational gifts given to the body and describes God's dynamic process of bringing the body to maturity in Christ. The process gives prominent place to the foundational offices and to the lay ministry that is to be equipped to effectuate God's purpose.

4:11-13—Paul identifies four foundation gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Apostle (*apostolos*) is used in at least three different ways in the New Testament. It can refer to a messenger who is sent. It often does refer to the original twelve disciples of the Lord. It can describe a foundational gift, inclusive of the Twelve, that met certain qualifications which included seeing the risen Lord and being commissioned to preach the gospel by the Lord Himself. Here, “apostle” is used in this last sense.

Prophets are those who foretold or forth-told the Word of God. They received and declared the Word of God under direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelists were the rank-and-file missionaries of the early church. They went about preaching the good news of the gospel. They were and are the King's heralds (see Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5).

Pastors and teachers (*tous poimenas kai didakalous*) refer to a double gift residing in a single person and not to two separate people. These pastor-teachers shepherd, feed, and train believers for the work of the ministry.

Thus, apostles and evangelists planted churches; prophets brought a particular word of God to the situation; and pastor-teachers built up the body of Christ on a day-to-day basis. These gifts were for equipping believers for ministry. Each believer is equipped to play his or her part in the community of faith.

This passage is one of four primary references to specific lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament. Others include—

- Romans 12:6-8, listing prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy;
- 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, listing wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, and interpretation of tongues; and
- 1 Peter 4:11, which listed two categories of gifts, speaking and serving.

The continuing purpose of the gifts (4:12) is to equip or prepare the saints for service. Prepare (*pros ton katartismon*) is “to put right.” The term was associated with the processes of setting bones and repairing nets. The purpose of the gifts is to bring the saints of God to a condition of fitness for the work of the ministry. The primary objective (4:13) is for Christians to achieve maturity, reaching a state of completion that enables them to fully realize their intended potential.

Illustration—When I was a child, I played softball for a cub scout pack. I learned to play the game of baseball at the feet of my father and his friend, Mr. Steinbrenner. Night after night, they would drill our infield players in situation after situation that could arise in a game. Repeatedly, we fielded ground balls, pop ups, practiced looking runners back before throwing another runner out (occasionally

actually doing so!), took relays from the outfield, covered the bases appropriately in various situations, etc. etc. We did things wrong so many times that when we finally got something right, there was a stunned silence before a literal explosion of affirmation. We learned slowly but after two years of patient drilling, you would never have guessed that no one on our team had started out knowing anything about baseball.

God has given coaches to His body, not so the coaches would do everything, but to train the saints in the work of the ministry. It is always easier just to do it yourself. But what a loss! Thank God for patient coaches that facilitate the ministry of the saints.

4:14-16—Paul gives both negative and positive tests of the church's maturity. Negatively, the church should not be infantile, lacking in stability, and straying after false teachers, who by deliberate and scheming deceit, wrest, twist, and pervert the Word of God (4:14). The idea is the slick cleverness of people which scheme to lead people astray. Cunning (*kybeia*) is a word used for cheating at dice or trickery of every kind. Craftiness (*panourgia*) is that sordidness that stops at nothing to bring a scheme to fulfillment.

Paul had encountered gospel slicksters in his ministry. On the first missionary journey, he met up with Elymas the sorcerer (see Acts 13:9-10). Throughout his ministry, he was opposed by the Judaizers (see Gal. 1:7). Peter gave testimony of the way false teachers had perverted Paul's writings (see 2 Pt. 3:16). It was Paul's constant battle, and it is the church's constant charge to be vigilant against those who would distort the truth of the gospel.

Positively, the church should speak the truth in love (4:15). Both what we say and how we say it are important. We must learn to speak the truth, not to hurl it. We should not give people a biblical text like the jab of a spear.

Paul describes growth that is both from and towards the head (4:16). The church grows by the action of Christ on its behalf. He exercises unifying action on the body by means of His work through every joint. Joined (*harmos*) described a joint or fastening in building construction or a shoulder joint of the human body. Held together (*sunbibazomenon*) conveys the thought of bringing people together, reconciling those who have quarreled. His body thrives as love fosters mutual encouragement and responsibility.

B. Putting on the New Self (4:17-24)—Paul now moves on from practical exhortation to earnest devotion. In Ephesians 7:17-24, the apostle speaks of laying aside the old self, being renewed in our minds, and putting on the new self in Christ. In Ephesians 4:25-5:2, he gets more specific. We are to lay aside/put on various attitudes and behaviors in the nitty gritty of our lives. He is requiring nothing less than obedience to God in the closets of our lives, the particulars of our existence that we (and God) know so very well.

Paul wants Christians to allow the teaching of Jesus to have its full effect in their lives. We are in Christ. We have the responsibility, in the power of the Spirit, to forsake the old lifestyle. If we want to live as new people for the king, we need to shed our old lifestyle and put on a new one. Being renewed in the spirit of our minds is the key. If our hearts are right, it is time to get our minds right. Then we will have the energy of Spirit to bring our behavior in line. Off with the old, on with the new.

1. Putting Off: No Longer Live Like Gentiles (4:17-19)—Believers must live ethically and morally in the world (2 Cor. 6:14). The church is a colony of heaven living on earth and should be a reasonable approximation of that reality. Here, Paul paints the Gentile lifestyle in the same somber colors as in Romans 1:18-32. Pagans indulged in premarital sex, homosexuality, and idolatry. It must not be assumed that all that was true of every unbelieving pagan. What is said here is the direction that every life takes that is out of touch with God.

The Gentiles live in the futility of their thinking (4:17), which is a flawed reasoning and inclination that leads them to break God's laws (Rom. 1:18). In losing the conception of the living God, pagan society had also lost its bearings and so wandered aimlessly, hopelessly, and recklessly. Permissive behavior springs from an aimless attitude toward life that enervates moral endeavor. Why strive to live “right” when you challenge anyone's ability to say what “right” is, or even that there is such a thing as “right”?

Their understanding is darkened (4:18). Unregenerate people are hampered by a mental fog that blots out divine light. They are excluded from God's life because of their culpable ignorance of Him. This mental fog is a willful ignorance that wants to be ignorant. It is a mindset fostered by their hardness of heart (*porosis*). *Porosis* refers to the formation of a callus following the fracture and subsequent resetting of a bone. The callus is harder than the bone itself. Gentile ignorance was not an intellectual deficiency but a willful refusal to know and honor God which resulted in an ever-increasing hardness of soul.

They are callous, having lost all sensitivity (*apelgekotes* in 4:19). One translation renders this “their minds have grown hard as stone,” conveying the idea of insensitivity that is without regard for God or for moral values. Their consciences are so atrophied that sin registers no stab of pain at all. People's defiance of God had direct repercussions in their daily behavior.

They were described as given over to sensuality (*aselgeia* in 4:19), a term that denotes debauchery. This is an abandonment to all kinds of immorality that becomes a total preoccupation. In this text, people give themselves over. In Romans 1, God gives them over to pursue their lusts with greediness.

They indulge themselves with a continual lust for more (4:19). The pagan pursues what he wants—shameless, systematical, selfish, single-minded. It is a self-absorbed, greedy (*pleonexia*) pursuit. *Pleonexia* is the insatiable desire for more, no matter whom it hurts or what vile method is used.

2. Putting On the New Self (4:20-24)—The new self is the new person created in Christ Jesus. Believers were to put on the right lifestyle and put off the deeds of the former life as they would a pair of clothes. Pagan philosophers emphasized renewing the mind. They understood one's attitudes and values as affecting one's lifestyle. Paul's focus is slightly different. Mind renewal is not a self-generated thing but available because of the new life in the Lord Jesus.

The believer's choicest lesson is the Lord Himself. Instructions about Him only goes so far. Personal intimacy marked by ready obedience is the requisite to rivet the bond of union with the Savior. We lay aside what displeases Him and put Him on as we would a new suit of clothes. The metaphor of changing clothes is also employed in other parts of the New Testament (Rom. 13:12; Col. 3:9; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pt. 2:1).

4:22—First, the Christian is instructed to put off the old self as he or she would a suit of clothes. The old nature is a willing victim of the world's seduction. It is unregenerate, minutely conscious of itself and what it wants, easily entangled in sin. It is the old “I” that was crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20) and must be reckoned as dead (Rom. 6:6-14). Like a decomposing corpse, the old self grows increasingly corrupt.

4:23-24—The key battleground in this putting off is the mind (Phil. 4:8). Two elements are essential for the development of Christian character:

- progressive renewal of our highest faculty, the mind; and
- decisive acceptance of the new self and growth into that new reality.

The renewal of the mind (4:23) is by the Holy Spirit and begins at the believer's conversion (Titus 3:5). It is continual and progressive in nature. Grace abhors a vacuum, meaning that mind renewal must follow on into putting on the new self, a new set of attitudes and a new lifestyle. We receive this new self from God (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:10), made in His likeness, and fully pleasing to Him.

Two different Greek words for “new” are used in this text. *Kainos* means new in the sense of fresh; *neos* means new in the sense of young. In Ephesians 4:23, a form of *neos* is used, implying a putting off the decrepitude of the old and regaining the original youth of the new self. In Ephesians 4:24, *kainos* is used, implying new in the sense of a fresh start.

C. Separation From Sinful Practices (4:25-5:2)—Now comes a laundry list of things to put off and put on. Our natural manner is to agree with the claims of righteousness as long as they remain general. When it gets specific, we get defensive. The Lord is deadly earnest about practical, devoted living and touchy defensiveness has no place in our lives. The Spirit will search out our closets. Let us determine to be humble, teachable, malleable in the Master's hands.

These moral exhortations are the sort with which ancient moralists would concur. To avoid sinning when angry (4:26-27), laboring with your hands to be able to give to those less fortunate (4:28), learning to speak gracious, uplifting words (4:29) were among those common exhortations.

4:25—Paul lists a series of practices from which believers are to be separated. The first deals with truth and falsehood. Lying speaks of everything false: deception of every kind, dishonesty in personal relations, unscrupulous practices in public relations, and government corruption. The Old Testament condemns lying (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). It leads to suspicion and disruption in Christian fellowship. Speaking truthfully with your neighbor stresses the need for kindness and mutual frankness. Truth may be violated by overt falsehoods as well as by silence, evasion, delay, and equivocation.

Illustration—A prominent woman engaged a writer to compose a draft of her genealogy. The writer discovered that her grandfather was a murderer and was executed in an electric chair. The woman told the writer to convey that information in an appropriate way. It came out like this: “One of her grandfathers occupied the chair of applied electricity in one of America's best-known institutions. He was very much attached to his position and literally died in the harness.”

4:26-27—Next, Paul cautions believers against anger-related sins. Personal outbursts of emotional temper are not in view here. Rather, Paul is thinking of a provocation caused by the miscarriage of

justice. This is righteous anger if you will. There is truth to the adage that a person who does not know how to be angry, does not know how to be good. Indignation over evil in our midst ought to shake us to our core. However, the evil one can quickly take advantage of our noble aspirations and goad us on to nursing grudges. The believer is to resolve the situation by releasing anger quickly since there is grave danger in prolonged anger. We are not to brood over real or imagined affronts and become a cesspool of malice and bitterness. It is easy to become angry over an affront. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, in the right way, that is not easy.

Note that evil one is described as a slanderer (*diabolos*) here. Paul uses this title for the enemy five times in the New Testament compared to ten references for the term “Satan,” which means adversary.

4:28—Paul deals with the subject of stealing and honest labor. Stealing covers every kind of misappropriation of time or materials.

Illustration—The following notice (this has to be tongue in cheek!) allegedly appeared on the bulletin board of a manufacturing plant in Detroit: “Management regrets that it has come to their attention that workers dying on the job are failing to fall down. This practice must stop, as it becomes impossible to distinguish between death and the natural movement of the staff. Any employee found dead in an upright position will be removed from the payroll.”

We are to work that we may have an abundance to give. Work is *kopiaio*, referring to honest and strenuous toil that produces fatigue. The word is used in 1 Timothy 4:10 and 5:17 to refer to dedicated Christian service.

Quote: Dorothy Sayers once remarked: “Work should not be looked on as a necessary drudgery to make money, but as a way of life in which the nature of the person working finds its proper exercise and delight and fulfillment to the glory of God.”

4:29—Unwholesome (*sapros* = rotten) and edifying speech is next. Words are an index of character (Mt. 12:33-34). Good words may be evaluated by this criterion—do they build up others and help them be better people for having heard our discourse. Corrupt speech is like rotten food. It is tainted with moral decay. It contaminates the thoughts of others. This is particularly true of gossip. Unfortunately, in our time, the standards of the snide chatty talk show have become the standards of the church. The unwholesome word can be a thief of a priceless commodity, someone's reputation, which can only be restored, if at all, at great difficulty.

Quote: Shakespeare in *Orthello*— “Good name in man and woman, dear my lord, is the immediate jewel of their soul. He who steals my purse, steals trash. Tis something, nothing; twas mine, this his, and will be slave to thousands. But he who filches from me my good name, robs that which not enriching him, makes me poor indeed.”

4:30—We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. We grieve the Spirit by doing what we should not do. We quench the Spirit by not doing what we should do (see 1 Thess. 5:19). The context here is significant. Foul language and anger-related sins grieve or sadden the Holy Spirit. Note too that this is the second mention of the sealing of the Holy Spirit (see 1:13; 4:30). The seal marks us as God's possession destined for a full redemption, a complete transformation into His likeness.

4:31-32—Paul contrasts unrighteous anger with Christian love. Ephesians 4:26-27 warns against righteous anger gone wrong. Here, malice is apparent from the outset. Malice is the insidious parent of a brood of vices listed in 4:31. Bitterness (*pikria*) is a resentful spirit which refuses reconciliation. It harbors resentment and keeps scores of wrongs. Rage (*thumos*) and anger (*orge*) spring from personal animosity. Brawling (*krauge*) describes the loud self-assertion of an angry man who makes everyone bear his grievance. Slander (*blasphemia*) conveys a sense of abusive, defamatory speech that rails against someone, usually God Himself. In this context, it refers to verbal abuse directed at other people.

These vices need to be replaced with kindness (a willingness to be understanding of and patient with the faults of others), compassion (*euspangchnoi* = literally, “good bowels”), and forgiveness (*charizomai* = a word built on the word for grace (*charis*) and meaning to bestow favor unconditionally). This forgiveness is cognizant of and modeled on our own forgiveness and acceptance in Christ. It is at Calvary that we learn how much we have been forgiven. It is as we linger at the Cross, that we learn how to forgive. If we could read the secret history of our opponents and critics, we would find in each person's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm whatever hostility we sense. We are to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving, remembering that everyone we meet is fighting a difficult battle.

Quote: C.S. Lewis— “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”

5:1—We are to be imitators of God. "Imitate" (*mimetai*) is often used to describe following human examples. Here it is used of imitating God Himself. It is in the new spiritual genes, if you will. The child learns to behave like the Father.

5:2—Christ's self-sacrifice at Calvary pleased the Father and has the effect of eliciting from His followers the desire to live out of love for Him and for their fellow pilgrims. To our eyes, the Cross is an awful scene of horror. But in love so measureless, so reckless of cost, for those who naturally so unworthy of it, there was an act that filled heaven with a wonderful fragrance. The distinguishing marks of this love are forgiveness (4:32) and sacrifice (5:2). Our Lord's sacrifice involved a death that was voluntary (Jn. 10:17-18), vicarious (1 Cor. 15:3), and victorious (Rom. 4:25).

D. Separation From Sinful People (5:3-14)—This section (5:3-14) is not a neat divide from the previous one (4:25-5:2). Ephesians 4:25-5:2 spoke of laying aside sinful practices and this one continues in that vein. But by laying aside our old lives, it becomes increasingly clear that old associations and relationships must be broken for sin to be abandoned. We must not be partners with those who would drag us down into the mire (5:7).

Illustration—Prior to his conversion, Augustine, later the Bishop of Hippo and a great father of the church, was an immoral man. Upon coming to Christ, he avoided the scenes and crowds that populated his past. One day an old flame spotted his professor's robe in a crowd and shouted out to him. “Augustine. Augustine. Where have you been? We have missed you.” Not knowing what else to do, and fearing to regress to his old ways, Augustine began to run. The woman ran after him. “Augustine do not run. It is I”. Augustine continued to run. Eventually, he turned and shouted back: “Yes, but it is no longer I”. He was bought with a price, united with Christ, and he wanted to glorify God in his body. That necessarily entailed separation from old companions, old haunts, and old ways.

1. Necessity of Purity (5:3-6)—One social critic captured the American scene succinctly: “A whole nation sits glued to the tube watching all sorts of violence and adultery, night after night, and

calls it entertainment. Meanwhile, others sit at the movies and eat popcorn while being sprayed with sex, profanity, and violence. When the lights go on again and the customers file out, the management fields complaints. The popcorn was too salty!”

Welcome to modern America, where sex is an idol and where sexual pleasure is pursued with an avidity and dedication seldom surpassed. How does a Christian live in such an environment? Paul addresses this same problem as it presented itself in the licentious pagan culture of the first century of our era. Casual sex and a plethora of sexual practices flourished. People saw no need for restraint. Paul advises believers not to be deceived. Sex is a good and important part of God’s creation because it is one of the means for tenderness and intimacy between husband and wife as well as the means of procreation. It is an occasion for great blessing and emotional fulfillment. People on the road to a genuine humanity as intended by God must avoid cheap substitutes. Those who relentlessly pursue new and exciting experiments regularly end up bitter and disappointed. Casual sex demeans and cheapens not only the participants but the gift of sex itself. The concept of God’s wrath should not be regarded as an arbitrary aspect. It is inherent in the creation order. There are ways of behaving that are so out of line with the way God created the world that the behavior brings on its own punishment. Sexual promiscuity certainly belongs in this category.

Greco-Roman society would brand Christians as antisocial for refusing to take part in immoral conversations and activities. Participation in civic religious cults served as a mark of local loyalty.

5:3—Paul urges the believers to avoid immorality (*porneia*), impurity (*akatharsia*), and greed (*pleonexia*). *Porneia* includes all kinds of sexual immorality—all that works against a lifelong union between a man and a woman. *Akatharsia* is a characteristic of secularized existence that makes an idol of impermissible sex. *Pleonexia* is the insatiable desire for more regardless of consequences. It is selfish indulgence at the expense of others. These vices are directed toward the ruin of another’s sexual purity. These sins are not to be mentioned, much less permitted in the body of Christ. Such sin taints the imagination, soils the lips, and cultivates lustful behavior.

5:4—Believers are exhorted to avoid unwholesome speech and to cultivate the giving of thanks (see 4:29). Christians are to avoid shameful speech, indecent talk, off-color stories, and obscenity that undermines purity. Silly talk (*morologia*) is a type of flippant buffoonery which goes beyond good taste. Course jesting (*eutrapelia*) is an easy turn of speech, a quickness in making repartee in a profligate sense. Course jesting (*eutrapelia*) and thanksgiving (*eucharisteo*) seem juxtaposed as a play on words. One commentator renders the sense this way: “Let the grace of wit be superseded by the grace of thanksgiving.” Giving thanks is an excellent employment of the redeemed tongue.

5:5-6—This is a warning. An inheritance requires a certitude in the character and conduct of an heir as a member of God’s family. The folks described in 5:3-4 prove their lack of fitness by their lifestyle. There are grave consequences to playing fast and loose with God’s laws (see 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). These are immoral and impure persons, covetous individuals who live for pleasure, idolaters whose god is their desire (Phil. 3:19). Greediness (*pleonexia*) is linked to idolatry. Such passion, whether for money or for sexual indulgence, focuses on an idol as its object of desire. This passage indicts all promoters of permissiveness. Paul warns believers against being deceived. The evil one is a master of deceit. There should be no doubt as to the sureness of God’s righteous anger on the evil practices described in these verses.

Living chastely in America today presents challenges. We are awash in a culture full of sexual suggestiveness that features a potpourri of erotica. How do we maintain the body in the soul’s keeping? Some suggestions include—

- Flee immoral situations—There may be times, due to our naivete or otherwise, that the immoral opportunity saunters out and brazenly offers itself. Flight is our recourse. Joseph in Potiphar's house is our model (see Gen. 39:6b-20).
- Avoid immoral situations—Choose your friends, your entertainments, and your associations with care. If you do not want to do business with the devil, stay out of his shop. Modern people tend to pooh-pooh separation. But that is foolish. Pick the ground you will fight on. Do not be ambushed in the devil's back alleys.
- Cultivate a healthy sense of self-distrust—Our fleshly desires are strong, and we ought not underestimate them or proceed in an overconfident fashion. Lustful greediness resides in our fallen nature. Give it no place; allow it no room. Be ruthless with baloney lines it will feed you in justifying foolish dalliances and flirtations of thought, intent, or deed.
- Love and live for Jesus Christ—Only a sincere love for Christ cultivated in an earnest intent to live in the arena of the Spirit will garrison our souls in this battle. As we see the excellencies of His person, our hope grows that one day we will be like Him (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

2. Necessity of Separation (5:7-14)—Christians are not to be partakers with those who engaged in vile practices but have it as our ambition to please Christ (5:7-10). Not only are we to have nothing to do with immoral conduct, but we are also to live in such a way as to expose such conduct as light does to darkness (5:11-14).

5:7-10 The word is “Stop becoming fellow-partakers with them”. Paul exhorts us to walk as children of light (5:8; Mt. 5:14-16) and to learn to do what is pleasing to the Lord (5:10). Christian ethics is not just a list of don'ts but encompasses the positive ambition to please God.

5:7-8—Partners (*symmetochoi*) is the same word Paul used in 3:6 to describe the way in which the Gentiles now share in the messianic promise. We are not to share in vile practice for God has called us to live on a much higher plane.

5:9—The fruit of light is goodness and benevolence, righteousness and fairness, truth and integrity. Goodness (*agathosyne*) is moral excellence combined with a generous spirit. Righteousness (*dikaioisynē*) is a moral rectitude giving all their due. Truth (*alatheia*) is genuine and forthright honesty.

5:10—We are to find out what pleases the Lord. The word for “finding out” (*dokimazontes*) has to do with the testing of metals and conveys the sense of discovery after examination. We are to give close attention to what delights God and when we discover it, we are to go after it with diligence.

5:11-12—Believers are exhorted to have nothing to do with evil. The text describes the deeds of darkness as unfruitful, disgraceful, and secretive. The contrast here is between the natural development of the life of God in a person and the strenuous but futile striving of the natural man. Christians are to be agents of the light, exposing evil wherever it lies hidden. Expose (*elegcho*) means to convince or to prove. Given that the object is impersonal as it is here, the meaning is to expose. This exposure is not so much by way of rebuke as by simply letting the light of Christ shine through you to show darkness for what it is.

Also note that sin is promoted simply by its publication. Ugly vices can rub off on believers simply by earnest discussion to disapprove of them. Snide chattiness in the church, always seeking the “dirt” in a local congregation, is not only destructive of others' reputation, but also endangers the gossips themselves.

5:14—This may be an early baptismal creed based on Isaiah 60:1. The text links three metaphors of

turning to God—

- awaking from sleep;
- being raised from the dead; and
- going from darkness to light.

E. Living Wisely (5:15-6:9)—This section counsels believers to live wisely, making the most of the opportunities that come their way, by understanding what the Lord's will is (5:17), by being filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18-21), and then by exhibiting a wise, Spirit-directed lifestyle in their marriages (5:22-33), their family lives (6:1-4), and in their working relationships (6:5-9).

5:15-21—Wisdom (5:15), readiness for service (5:16), and godly understanding (5:17) all flow from the dynamic of Spirit-filled living (5:18-21). In a series of participles, Paul tells us that Spirit-directed lifestyles can be seen in the way we speak to one another (5:19a), in our heart devotion to Christ (5:19b), in the thankfulness that characterizes our living (5:20), and in our mutual submission to one another (5:21).

5:15-17—Believers are counseled to avoid living as unwise people. The knowledge of God and in the avoidance of all that displeases Him should be applied to the whole range of our living. Self-awareness reflecting God's will is the outstanding mark of a wise person. We need to be careful and prayerful that we do not walk in perilous places, becoming easy bait for our adversary.

5:15—“See to it carefully” (*blepete akribos*) underlines the necessity of concentration to lead a commendable life. God engages our understanding in spiritual living. The idea of a well-intentioned good ole boy just naturally doing what God wants is a myth on the level of Rousseau's noble savage. No, we need not be scholars to be dedicated saints, but we must be in the Word of God and sensitive to God's leading by His Spirit.

5:16—We are to snap up the opportunities which are available to us. Buying up opportunity (*exagorazo kairos*) has the sense of redeeming the fit times of life. *Exagorazo* functioned as a marketplace term. The term refers to Christ redeeming us from the law's curse, as mentioned in Galatians 3:13 and 4:5. In the middle voice, as used here, it signifies to buy up for oneself. The price is self-denial and strenuous work.

Buying up the time becomes imperative in the light of the knowledge that the days are evil (understood as the days leading up to the Lord's return). Paul is aware of our tendency to misuse time and miss opportunity. We have but a brief span of time in which to serve Him. Oh, for the whole-hearted offering of our time, talent, and treasure!

When as a child, I laughed and wept.
 And to my mind, time just crept.
 When as a youth, I dreamed and talked,
 and I beheld the time which walked.
 When I became a full-grown man,
 to my surprise, the time it ran.
 When older still I daily grew,
 and then the time it fairly flew.
 Soon I shall find in traveling on,
 the day will come when time is gone.

To become spiritually opportunistic, we need to grow in our courage, because it is almighty God whom we serve; to grow in our confidence, for it is the eternal, omnipotent, all-wise God who will work out His will in our lives; and in our concentration, that we will apply ourselves to the work of God with steady and focused eye.

While Paul exhorts believers to buy up their opportunities, this should not lead to an obsessive lifestyle, calculating the use of every minute. We need to be industrious but also learn how to relax and let go of an overly orchestrated lifestyle and allow God to bathe us in his peace.

5:17—Foolish (*aphrones*) is different from unwise (*asophoi*). *Asophoi* is a word conveying a lack of wisdom. It just is not there. *Aphrones* conveys not so much a lack of essential wisdom as moral stupidity in action. It signifies the imprudent ordering of one's life, not only with respect to salvation, but also the moral order God has created. Rather than behaving like fools, Christians are to understand what God's will entails. We are to grasp and act on God's design for life. Wise living involves consistently understanding God's will and diligently applying that knowledge.

5:18-21—First an aside on ministries of the Spirit in the life of the believer. We will focus on five of them here:

- Regeneration—The Spirit recreates a person, enabling them to respond by faith to God's merciful offer of salvation in the gospel, and ushering them into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3-7; Titus 3:5; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pt. 1:23).
- Baptism of the Spirit—The Spirit baptizes the believer, incorporating them into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:4-5).
- Indwelling—The Spirit indwells the believer (Jn. 7:37-39; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:12; 3:16; 1 Jn. 3:24) to guide, strengthen, and nurture the new person within (Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 3:16).
- Sealing—The Spirit seals us as God's own (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 1 Cor. 1:22). The seal implies God's ownership of us, security of our relationship with Him, and a sense of a redemptive transaction God will most certainly complete.
- Filling—This speaks of the Spirit's relative influence in our daily living. The concern here is that the Spirit has His way with the believer in the nitty gritty of our lives.

The first four of these ministries occur at the time of our conversion. They occur once, are received by faith, and cannot be lost. If a person trusts in Christ for his or her salvation, he or she is regenerated by the Spirit, baptized into Christ's body, and indwelt and sealed by the blessed Third Person of the Trinity. The filling of the Spirit is not once for all and can be lost. The Scripture speaks of grieving the Spirit (when we do what He does not want, see 4:30) as well as quenching the Spirit (when we do not do what He does want, see 1 Thess. 5:19).

Now to our text. The concept of being filled with the Spirit is explained in four participial clauses—

- Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (4:19);
- Singing and making melody in your hearts (4:19);
- Giving thanks (5:20); and
- Submitting to one another (5:21).

5:18—Drunkenness is a prominent manifestation of the folly of the former life. It leads to debauchery (*asotia*) and dissipation. This is “wild living,” an extravagant squandering of self, time, and resources in satisfying physical appetites. There is a better way to be lifted above the joyless monotony of life; a path superior to imploding self-consciousness. That quickening of words and deeds is by the filling of the Holy Spirit. We are told to be being filled with the Spirit (see 4:30; Gal. 5:16; 1 Thess. 5:19). “Be

filled” is an imperative, a command for all believers. It is in the passive voice, which presents the subject as receiving, rather than doing the action. It is in the present tense, which indicates that it is not a once for all experience, but an ongoing one that is a continuing action. The filling can be for extraordinary activity, but here it is a way of talking about the relative influence of the Spirit in our day-to-day lives.

Illustration—A.J. Gordon, founder of Gordon College, told a story of seeing a man pumping furiously and tirelessly at a distance. Curious as to the source of such great energy, Gordon went closer and checked out the scene. What he thought was a man was a wood figurine with a hinge at the elbow wired to a pump. The pump was connected to an artesian well. The pump was pumping the figurine of the man. So too with the Spirit and the trusting believer. It is the Spirit that energizes and enables us to do what God wants.

5:19—The first participial clause describing the filling dynamic of the Spirit deals with our speech. Spirit-anointed speech is the proper employment of the tongue (see 4:29; 5:4b for improper use). The tongue reflects the character of the soul. Our speech is to be edifying.

The text presupposes that Spirit-filled people will join in prayer and fellowship. This naturally leads to the second descriptive clause “singing and making music in your hearts.” One hallmark of the Spirit is the desire to give vocal expression to the heart's devotion to the Lord. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs encompass the full range of musical styles in the praise and worship of the Lord. Singing then and now remains an important part of worship.

5:20—The third participial clause speaks of giving thanks to God. Thanksgiving is a Christian characteristic. The “happy” believer understands and counts his or her blessings. The resultant expression of thanks is directed to God, who is the Father of all blessings (see Jas. 1:17).

Illustration—It is always possible to be thankful for what is given rather than to complain about what is not given. One or the other becomes a habit of life. Consider Matthew Henry, an author of a famous biblical commentary, who counted four distinct blessings upon being robbed:

- He had not been robbed before;
- They took his wallet, not his life;
- They did not get much; and
- He was the one who was robbed, rather than the one who robbed.

5:21-6:9—The fourth participial clause speaks of submitting to one another. This is not on the old nature's radar screen. In the Spirit, we can submit both to Christ and to one another. This is an individual and corporate reality. It governs Christian living and social interaction. The principle applies to marriage (5:22-33), parenting (6:1-4) and household and working situations (6:5-9). See the summary chart below for a breakdown of the group addressed, the basic command given, the reasons for the command, and Christ in relation to the command given. Also compare 1 Peter 2:13-3:7.

Group addressed	Command	Reasons	Christ in relation to
Wives (5:22-24)	Submit; respect	Husband as head	As Christ is head of the church
Husbands (5:25-33)	Love	One flesh principle	As Christ loves the church

Children (6:1-3)	Obey; honor	It is right; you will prosper	Obedience in the Lord
Fathers (6:4)	Do not exasperate; train; instruct		Training and instruction of the Lord
Slaves (6:5-8)	Obey; serve	Lord will reward	Serve as you would serve Christ
Masters (6:9)	Treat fairly; do not threaten	We are all accountable	Christ is Master

2. As Husbands and Wives (5:22-33; see also Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pt. 3:1-7)—Paul compares a husband's relationship with his wife to Christ's relationship with the church. Actually, it is the other way around. He is arguing from the Christ-church relationship to the marriage bond. Mutual submission (5:21) is the first key to a mature marriage. This submission is reciprocal, voluntary, and personal. Wives are to submit and respect their husbands and husbands are to love their wives with the self-sacrificing love of Christ.

a. Wives: Submission as Unto the Lord (5:22-24)—Wives are to submit (*hypotasso*) to their husbands as unto the Lord. Paul uses the word *hypotasso* more than twenty times in his writings. The term denotes a ranking under those considered worthy of respect either because of their inherent qualities or because of their position. When used in the middle or passive voice, as in 5:21, it carries the connotation of being subject to.

Note that this submission is in the context of mutual submission. There is no verb “to submit” in 5:22. The sentence literally reads: “Wives to your own husbands in everything.” The sentence derives its force from the verb in 5:21, which focuses on mutual submission. The wife's submission, reflected in submission and respect, has its corresponding expression in the husband's self-giving love.

b. Husbands: Love as Christ Loved (5:25-33)—Christ's love for the church is the pattern for a husband's love for his wife. The word for love used here is *agapao*. It is the kind of enduring and self-giving love that does not seek its own satisfaction, or even an affection answering affection, but strives unselfishly for the highest good of the loved one. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church (5:25-27), as he loves his own body and cares for it (5:28, 32), and as he loves himself (5:33).

The husband's position as head and his duty of sacrificial love and devoted care for his wife reflects Christ's love, self-sacrifice, and concern for His church, albeit very imperfectly. The husband is to take as his role model the Lord Jesus, in self-sacrificial mode of the Lord.

In the Greco-Roman culture of the day, the wife had obligations to the husband, but not vice versa. When Paul speaks to husbands about their marital obligations, he goes against the grain of a paternalistic and chauvinistic culture. Paul relates believer's conduct to the standards of the culture but subverts that culture's values by going far beyond them.

5:25-27—Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Christ gave Himself to sanctify (set apart) the church (5:26), to cleanse her by the washing of regeneration (5:27), and to present her faultless (5:27). Paul extends discussion about what Christ has done for the church to underline the husband's marital obligations. He is not to be sahib, a demanding potentate in his own castle, but a gentle and loving provider, encourager, friend, and lover to the one he cherishes. His wife's welfare, her

concerns and fears, her development and well-being are to be matters of great concern to husbands seeking to walk after the Lord Jesus.

5:28-32—Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. They are to nurture and cherish their wives as Christ does the church. Christ loves the church not simply as if it were His body but because in fact it is His body. So too in marriage—spouses have a one flesh relationship. That one flesh bond is foundational to the self-giving love required of husbands.

5:33—Husbands are to love their wives as they love themselves. They are to love in a self-sacrificing way that is worthy of the respect (*phobetai*) and deference required of their wives. The passage holds both spouses to a high standard. We live in a world where the best of intentions often goes unfulfilled and sometimes badly awry. J. Grant Howard delivers an opportune word on this subject:

Quote: J. Grant Howard— “We have a picture of a perfect partner, but we marry an imperfect person. Then we have two options. Tear up the picture and accept the person or tear up the person and accept the picture.”

Yes, we should attempt to live up to this exalted vision. But we must also live with grace toward one another as we experience our imperfections in the one flesh unions in which we find ourselves. The following acrostic is suggested as we attempt to put Paul's instructions into shoe leather:

- D—Defer to one another. This is a deference born of cherishing the person God has lent to you for just a little while.
- A—Attend to each another. Accept each other. Listen to each other. Facilitate each other's growth. Express your love frequently and unmistakably.
- R—Respect each other. Build up each other. Assign each other positions of honor in your hearts. Show your regard.
- E—Encourage each other. Life is hard and we all need encouragement.

3. As Parents and Children (6:1-4; see Col. 3:20-21)—

Illustration—There was a period during my childhood when my father was absorbed in his work. He was gone early in the morning and often came home quite late in the evening. One evening he arrived home just as my mother was putting my younger brothers to bed. Being the oldest, I got to stay up a little later and I was in the kitchen in view of the back door that my father used to come into the house. When he came in, he overheard one of my brothers ask my mother: “Mommy, I know what mommies are for, but what are daddies for?” I will never forget the look of pain that came across my father's face. Within a couple of weeks, he made far-reaching decisions that radically altered our family life in a very positive way. Tell me fathers, what are daddies for?

At a time when absentee and neglectful fathering is all around us, how do we get a handle on our parenting responsibilities? Paul addresses this in this passage. First, he addresses children with their obligation to obey and honor their parents before speaking to fathers about their responsibilities.

a. Children: Obedience Commanded (6:1-3)—Children are to obey and honor their parents. The term used for children here (*tekna*) gives prominence to their birth—they are their parents' natural children. *Tekna* signifies one's own children, whereas *paidios* speaks of children in general. Obey (*hupakauo*) conveys the sense of hearing someone attentively. You pay close attention to that person to

do what is required in the right spirit. Why? Because it is the right thing to do. Certain things are to be accepted, even though at the time the child may not understand the whys and wherefores.

Illustration—Susannah Wesley, mother of the 18th century ministerial giants, John and Charles Wesley, raised seventeen children. She had strong views on the necessity of obedience, counseling parents to grab the reins of authority early.

“In order to form the minds of children. The first thing to be done is to conquer the will and bring them into an obedient temper. To inform the child’s understanding is a work of time and must proceed by slow degrees as they are able to bear it; but the subjecting of the will is a thing which must be done once, and the sooner the better! ... I cannot dismiss this subject. As self-will is the root of sin and misery, so whatever cherishes [it] in children ensures their [future] wretchedness and faithlessness, [and] whatever checks and mortifies [it], promotes their future happiness and piety.”

Honor (*tima* = value highly, revere) and obedience to parents is in accord with God's will (see Ex. 20:1; Deut. 5:16) and carries with it a divine promise of blessing. Honor is an attitude of love, respect, and a congenial disposition of heart. The first commandment with a promise may mean—

- It is the earliest commandment with a promise. However, this is problematic since the second command contains promise as well and obviously precedes the fifth.
- First refers to the first with a promise in the second part of the Decalogue.
- First means the first children readily encounter; or
- First used adverbially with the meaning that it is an especially important commandment for children. That is Paul's meaning here.

The nature of the promise has engendered discussion. Is it meant to be individual or corporate? The personal pronoun “you” is singular; clearly the individual is in view. However, a community benefits when children are respectful and obedient. Is the promise absolute or given in a wisdom mode? I think plainly in wisdom mode. This is not a fixed type of promise, but an indication of the way things generally work out.

b. Fathers: Nurture and Training (6:4; see Deut. 6:6-9)—Fathers are warned not to irritate or exasperate their children by an unjust exercise of authority. Exasperate (*parorgizo*) speaks to a demand for obedience that becomes capricious. Nagging must be avoided. Such provocation produces adverse reactions, threatens the child's affection, chokes his or her desire to obey, and makes the child feel that pleasing the parent is an impossibility. To moderns, this just sounds reasonable. But in the day, it was new and different. Fathers at Roman law possessed *patria potestas*, the power of life or death over his family. The idea that a father ought to be concerned with his child's feelings was a new emphasis. Paul is in the camp of opposing harsh discipline.

Discipline and instruction were to be combined in the child's upbringing. Bring up (*ektrephete*) has to do with nourishment, education, and nurture in its entirety. Training (*paideia*) meant discipline, combining instruction with correction. Such discipline is necessary to prevent the child from growing up without reverence for God, respect for parental authority, knowledge of Christian standards, and habits of self-control. Instruction (*nouthesia*) is admonition or correction by word of mouth. The education and nurture of the child is to be exercised by careful care and constant training.

4. As Masters and Slaves (6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1)—The Christian standard for work and service is different than the standards of the world. Work and service should be given to employers as if they are offered to God. Paul speaks in terms of master and slave because household relationships in the first century of our era frequently had that context.

Did Paul believe that slavery was a good thing? I think not. However, Paul could no more envision a world without slavery than moderns could imagine and live in a world without electricity. Paul is not starting from scratch and attempting to design in rocking chair fashion a new way for the world to run. In future times, all individuals will be liberated, yet Christians must navigate the present world as it currently exists. The remarkable thing about this passage is the assumption of mutual responsibility. Fathers were to be nurturing; masters were to be fair. There is no respecter of persons with Messiah. All must give an account for their conduct.

a. Slaves: Obedience and Whole-Hearted Service (6:5-8)—Slaves are to obey their masters from the heart as unto Christ. Obey (*hupakauo*) is the same word used in addressing children in 6:1. This obedience has a fourfold mindset—

- With respect (*phobos*) and fear (*tromos*) (6:5)—This is not an instruction to craven servility but reflects a keen sense of one's own shortcomings and the diligent concern not to fall into wrong attitudes and ways.
- With sincerity (*haplotes*) of heart—conveys the sense of singleness or concentration of purpose. The Christian worker should do good for his or her employer as an expression of his or her commitment to the Lord Himself.
- With initiative—Christian workers ought to exercise initiative in seeking to do good for the employer. Service is to be rendered with goodwill, which is an eagerness that does not wait to be compelled. The believers are not to curry favor superficially (*anthropareskos*). They are not to render eye-service (*ophthalmoudoulia* = service rendered only when under inspection).
- With eternity in view—The Christian's work ethic is driven by a mindset. Work is to be wholeheartedly rendered to an earthly employer as if offered to the Lord Himself. Present opportunities for service point to the future when Christ will assess the believer at His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10).

b. Masters: Fairness Considering Divine Judgment (6:9)—In this verse we see a reciprocity of responsibility unheard of in ancient culture. Masters are to act in a way that befits their Christian calling. The Lord weighs unfaithfulness in servants and unkindness in masters on the same scales of divine equity and justice. Masters are to be—

- Fair and even-handed;
- Abandon threatening and severity;
- Realize that they are accountable for how they exercise their authority.

Christian masters/employers must not browbeat their workers. In the first century of our era, vicious cruelty was rife among pagan slaveholders. Slaves were without rights, often mistreated on the whim of the master, and without recourse. Christian masters were to be kind and equitable. They must remember that there is no favoritism (*prosolempsia*) with God. *Prosolempsia* is a picturesque term, meaning to lift up the face in order to see who someone is before deciding how to treat them. It conveyed the sense of being a respecter of persons. God is not a respecter of persons and masters are to remember that! They must act justly on each occasion, knowing that they themselves will be judged.

Paul confronts the practical issues of how slaves can deal with their situation, without commenting on the institution itself. If we were to put the theoretical questions of the abolition of slavery to him, I do believe he would agree with that. People are equal before God (6:9) and therefore slavery is against God's will.

Keeping work in perspective in modern America is not easy. On one side, there is the cry that the work ethic upon which this country was built is eroding. On the other, the drive for success in our society has turned work into an idol. How do we come to grips with work, with our vocation?

- Teach the biblical basis for an “old-fashioned” work ethic. The need for diligence, quality craftsmanship, thrift and initiative, respect for property, and the place of work in God's purposes.
- Teach the concept of vocation. Every believer has a vocational calling. It is not the situation that ministers and missionaries are called and the rest of us get jobs. We need to seek to glorify God in our work.
- We need to be aware of the ethical issues that pertain to our vocations.
- We need to repent of worldly attitudes, whether it is the take advantage attitude of the TGIF, I deserve a break today crowd, or the idolatry of getting to the top, succeed or else crew.

As for management—

- Value and affirm your employees;
- Earnestly pursue a quality work product;
- Workplace training and lifelong learning ought to be built into our work environments;
- Affirm the profit motive, but keep that in perspective;
- Cultivate a servant heart in both management and labor.

F. Standing Firm (6:10-20)— This section of the letter serves as a *peroratio*, a rousing conclusion. It has a certain resemblance to the exhortations generals gave to their armies prior to battle. The image that serves as the background for these exhortations is that of a Roman soldier equipped for battle. Roman soldiers preferred to stand together in well-defined ranks on flat, open terrain. If they did not break ranks, they proved nearly invincible. Our battle is against spiritual powers, and we must take up the full armor God provides and stand together.

1. Armor of God Delineated (6:10-17)—J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis' space trilogy, Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness* have sold millions of copies. Fiction documenting dimensions of the spiritual battle on the vistas of our imaginations has always had a market. This literature interests even those not otherwise spiritually minded, simply because it speaks of a situation we tacitly realize. Evil and the spiritual battle are real and deadly! Christians are to understand both the nature of the battle and the tactics of the enemy.

Stand (*stele* in 6:11, 13 (twice), 14) is the key word of this passage. It is a military term for holding one's position. In 6:13, it appears as a compound term withstand (*antistennai*), implying a stand against great opposition. The armor of God enables the believer to ward off the attacks of the enemy and make a stand against him.

6:10-13—The necessity of the armor of God becomes apparent as Paul describes a deadly, vicious, supernatural foe. Only the resources of God are a match for the spiritual forces of wickedness. Fortunately for us, the equipment is supplied in Christ and is more than adequate to realize the fruits of victory already secured by the Cross of Christ.

6:10—We are to be strong (*endunamousthe*). This is a passive infinitive—we are being acted upon. We are to allow ourselves to be strengthened in the inner person by Christ Himself.

6:11—Paul tells the believers to put on (*endusasthe*) the armor (*panoplia*) of God. The *panoplia* of God

is a complete outfit, covering head to foot consisting of various pieces, both offensive and defensive.

6:12—Our enemies are not just human agents which oppose us but malign forces of evil which are behind these agents. Paul gives a four-fold description of the spiritual menace—

- Rulers (*archoi*) are cosmic powers, the enemy's leading agents (see Dan. 10:12ff). These powers, though defeated at the Cross, have a certain limited power until the end of this present age.
- Authorities (*exousia*) are those who temporarily oppose the purposes of God.
- Powers of this dark world translates *kosmokratoras*. This is one who aspires to world dominion and his henchmen. It is the devil and his vile brood, Satan's agents in charge of worldly business.
- Spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places (*ta pneumatikos tes ponerous*).

We are to stand outfitted in our armor for the enemy's wiles are attractive, deceptive, and ensnaring. We are in a struggle with spiritual forces that are evil. “Heavenly places” is the scene of God's rule (1:20), the fountainhead of His blessing on His people (1:3), and the place where He is doing His wonders among, in, and through the church (3:10). While the hostile forces have power, the victory is surely ours in Christ.

6:14-17—Paul was chained to a Roman guard while under house arrest in Rome. He is describing the armor he sees his guard wearing. The basic command is to take up (*elabete*) the equipment supplied. We are to get ready for battle and be ready when the fighting breaks out. The weapons Paul speaks of are primarily defensive, equipping us to withstand attack—the belt, the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, and the helmet. Only the sword has offensive capabilities. The enemy is enraged at the victory of Christ's Resurrection and aims to oppose the gospel, distract or depress us in our faith, and to blow us off course with any number of temptations or trials. We need to recognize that attacks are coming, learn how to put on the full armor of God, and stand firm and undismayed.

6:14—“With the belt of truth buckled around your waist” may be translated “gird your loins with truth”. The belt (*zone*) served an essential purpose in Roman military apparel. It gathered the tunic and held the soldier's equipment (the breastplate and the scabbard for the sword) in place. Girding with the belt was necessary for a person to be able to move freely. When properly in place it signified readiness for duty. An unbelted soldier just was not ready. This emphasizes the need for the believer to allow God's truth to monitor his or her desires. A sincere servant without self-control will be butchered in the fray.

Breastplate (*thorax*) of righteousness (*dikaioσύνη*) covered the body's vital organs, particularly the heart. Right living guards the heart. A carnal lifestyle exposes the believer's heart to the enemy. Thus, we can understand the breastplate as standing for integrity of character, a moral rectitude, a sense of fair dealing and fair play.

6:15—Feet fitted with readiness refers to the hobnailed sandals (*caligae*) of the Roman soldier. The well-shod Roman legionaries frequently made long forced marches in military campaigns. Readiness (*hetoimasia*) may have reference to promptness in service. The word in this context also conveys a sense of a firm foundation. The knowledge of and dependence on Gospel truth is indeed foundational equipment for the spiritual soldier. Just as soldiers require secure footing for combat, believers must be well-grounded in the Word to effectively engage in spiritual challenges.

6:16—The shield of faith reveals that it is faith that puts God in the fray against the enemy. The Roman

shield consisted of two layers of wood glued together, covered with hide, and bound with iron. It covered the soldier's entire body. For the believer, the protective shield is faith. It protects us from the enemy's deadly bolts.

6:17—The helmet (*perikephalaia*) covered the head and consisted of bronze and leather. The helmet of salvation protects us from false teaching and gives us assurance and boldness in the fray. Take (*dexasthe*) is to readily receive or accept. The helmet was put on last and often handed to the soldier by an attendant. The emphasis is on givenness of salvation.

The sword of the Spirit conveys the reality that the Word of God is the believer's only offensive weapon. When tempted in the wilderness, our Lord answered the enemy with "It is written" (see Mt. 4:4-11). Verses like Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 19:15 emphasize the piercing power of the Word.

2. Prayer to God Enjoined (6:18-20)—This section deals with intercessory prayer. Paul is saying to put the armor of God on in the spirit of prayer. We are to always pray (6:18; see 1 Thess. 5:17); to keep the line of communication open with the captain of our salvation. We are to pray in the Spirit (see Rom. 8:26-27; Jude 20) and to pray intelligently and in an informed way with our eyes open to the needs around us. We are to persevere in prayer. Paul's personal request is for clarity of utterance and boldness (*en parresia* = frank and uninhibited speech) in proclaiming the gospel. Paul was going to give witness to the Lord at the imperial court.

Let us be candid. Prayer seems quite mysterious to us. No one quite knows how it works. Archbishop Temple once remarked that whatever else one might say of prayer, he noticed that when he prayed, "coincidences" happened; and when he did not pray, "coincidences" ceased. Obviously, in this observation, the archbishop was not reducing answered prayer to happenstance.

G. Final Greetings and Benediction (6:21-24)—Tychicus was the bearer of this letter and the one to the Colossians (see Col. 4:7). He is frequently mentioned in Paul's letters (6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8; 2 Tim. 4:2). He carried 2 Timothy to Timothy just prior to Paul's death and served as Timothy's pastoral replacement at Ephesus while Timothy responded to Paul's request to join him at Rome (see 2 Tim. 4:12). Tychicus also served as Paul's apostolic legate in Crete (see Titus 3:12). He must have been a capable and dependable man.

Titus probably accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey (see Acts 20:4) and was with the aged apostle during both of his Roman imprisonments (see Col. 4:7-8; 2 Tim. 4:12). The letter fittingly concludes on notes of peace, love with faith, and a focus on the grace of God in Christ.

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