

EXPOSITORY NOTES

EPHESIANS

Gordon Lyons

Expository Notes

Ephesians

Important Notice

The *New Testament Expository Notes*
may be downloaded, printed and used free of charge
by individuals, groups, and institutions

However, none of these *Expository Notes*
may be offered for sale or for commercial publication

Copyright Notices

New Testament Expository Notes

Ephesians

New Testament Expository Notes: *Ephesians*
Copyright © 2005 Gordon Lyons
All Rights Reserved

Limited extracts from this work may be quoted elsewhere, on condition that the name and author of the original work is acknowledged in a format similar to the following:

'Quoted from
Expository Notes: *Ephesians* © 2005, Gordon Lyons
Used by permission'

Quotes from this work of a more substantial nature require the written consent of the author.

Scripture quotations taken from
The HOLY BIBLE
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society
Used by permission

Principal Works Consulted

- Barnes, Alfred *Notes on The Bible*, Electronic edition (public domain)
- Bauer, Walter /
revised and edited by
Danker, Frederick
William *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other
Early Christian Literature*, (Third Edition BDAG) Chicago: The
University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Berkhof, Louis *Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust,
1939, 1941 reprint.
- Clarke, Adam *Commentary on the New Testament*: Electronic edition (public
domain)
- Dabney, R. L. *Systematic Theology*, [St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Com-
pany of St. Louis, 1871, second ed. 1878] Edinburgh: The
Banner of Truth Trust edition, 1985.
- Gill, John *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, Electronic edition (public domain)
- Hendriksen, William *Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary, Edinburgh, Scot-
land, Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, 1976 reprint.
- Hodge, Charles *Commentary on Ephesians*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth
Trust, 1856, 1964, 1991 reprint. Printed edition & electronic
edition. Electronic edition: The Ephesians Four Group, Copy-
right © 1999.
- Hodge, Charles *Systematic Theology*, Vols. 1-3; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Pub-
lishing Company, 1977 reprint.
- Jamieson, Fausset &
Brown *Commentary on The Whole Bible* (Revised edition, 1961):
Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.
- MacArthur, John Jr. *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*: Copy-
right © 1986 by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago; Elec-
tronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1997, Parson's
Technology Inc., PO Box 100, Hiawatha, Iowa. All Rights Re-
served.
- Poole, Matthew *A Commentary on The Holy Bible* Vols. 1-3 (1685-1700): Edin-
burgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1975 reprint.
- Robertson, A.T. *Robertson's Word Pictures*, Electronic edition (public domain)
- Vincent *Vincent's Word Studies*, Electronic edition (public domain)

Westminster Confession of Faith, Inverness: Free Presbyterian
Publications, 1976 reprint.

Introduction and Background

Author

There can be no doubt that this letter was dictated by the apostle Paul. He appends his name to the opening verse of the letter. The style is that of Paul, although some of the themes that he develops reach a height of spiritual comprehension and explication that he has not demonstrated in his earlier letters. This may have been more appropriate to this particular community of God's people.

This letter is one of Paul's prison epistles. Presumably, it was written during the apostle's two year house arrest in Rome. He describes himself as 'an ambassador in chains'. (Eph. 6:20) However this may have been a metaphorical expression for his imprisonment, as it was likely that he enjoyed a certain measure of freedom within the restrictions of his house arrest. (Cf. Acts 28:30-31)

Destination

This letter is assumed to be intended for the church at Ephesus, and indeed we find this in the text of the opening sentences. However, the words '*in Ephesus*' are not contained in some of the early Greek manuscripts. Certain of these manuscripts omit the name Ephesus, yet they do not append any other destination. Some early writers therefore (e.g., Marcion) have suggested that the letter may have been intended for the church at Laodicea.

It is most likely that the letter was indeed intended for Ephesus, but perhaps also it was to be passed on to other churches in the area as a kind of circular letter. This may account for the lack of personal greetings or remarks in this epistle, and also for the omission of the name Ephesus from some of the early manuscripts. We know, of course, that Paul gave instructions for the church at Colossae to pass on their letter from him to the church at Laodicea, so this may have been a regular practice with some of Paul's letters. (Col. 4:16)

Opposite the island of Samos, and near the River Cayster, Ephesus was an (artificial) harbour-city within proconsular Asia, and was located near the coast south-west of present day Izmir. Previously, Ephesus had been a Greek colony; but, at the time of this letter, it was a self-governing city overseen by the Romans.

A wealthy city, Ephesus, of course, was noted for its magnificent temple to an Asian nature and fertility goddess named *Artemis*, which the Romans called *Diana*. The temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Associated with the temple was a thriving trade in cultic emblems, such as images of Diana and other devices that were manufactured by skilled artisans in that city. (Acts 19:24-41) The name of the Asian Artemis may be derived from the Greek goddess of that name; but, nevertheless, the Asian Artemis was distinct from its Greek namesake.

Purpose

Ephesians is divided into two main parts: the first three chapters are doctrinal, instructive and devotional, the second three, practical and hortatory.

In the first part, the apostle demonstrates something of the measure of God's love for the church, and for each of its individual members from all eternity. Paul shows how each child of God had been chosen in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world,

how they had been called, regenerated and sealed unto God by the Holy Spirit, and for what purpose (holiness of life) that God had called them and made them his own. To this end, the apostle offers a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving and petition to God on their behalf.

The apostle speaks of these believers' former manner of life, of their reconciliation to God through the blood shed on the cross, and of their acceptance into the household and family of God through faith. He speaks also of the fact that they have been united with all other believers—Jewish and Gentile—as one single body in the Lord (the 'mystery' of the universal church).

In the second part of his letter (from chapter 4 onward), the apostle speaks of the believers' duties and responsibilities within the church, and he exhorts them to put into practice the faith they profess. He points out that the Lord Jesus has furnished his church with particular gifts; that every believer has been so equipped in one way or another, and that each one should employ the gift, or assume the office, that God has given him or assigned to him for the upbuilding of the church in love.

Paul also speaks of the necessity of putting off the old nature, and of putting on the new nature, created in righteousness, holiness and truth. Thus, he specifies some of the sinful practises, attitudes or habits that the Ephesian believers must abandon, and the spiritual fruit that they must now bring forth in their daily lives.

The apostle then deals with the matter of submission: firstly, in relation to Christ, then in relation to each other, then in relation to members of the family, and then in relation to slaves and masters.

Paul closes his letter with a magnificent analogy of spiritual warfare and of the necessity of being protected with the full armour of God. He shows why it is essential for the believer to don every piece of this armour in order to be prepared for spiritual warfare. Thus, he encourages the believers at Ephesus to put on the full armour (or panoply) of God. Being thus arrayed for the fight, they are to stand resolutely against the foe. Then—armed with the shield of faith and wielding the sword of the Spirit—they were to advance valiantly against the foe, and against the powers of evil, in the name of Christ their King, their Commander and their Sovereign Lord.

Paul finishes the letter by telling the church that Tychicus, his faithful friend and fellow servant of God, would advise them of his [Paul's] personal welfare and would minister to the church.

Ephesians Chapter 1

Greetings

Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, begins his epistle to the believers at Ephesus by an introduction that he commonly uses elsewhere. He declares that he is an apostle—or appointed ambassador—of the Lord Jesus. In other words, he is not speaking or writing merely by his own authority, but by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose servant he is. (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1)

Paul, however, did not take this apostolic office upon himself; nor did any church or body of men appoint him to this office of their own will. Rather, Paul was appointed to the office of apostle by the express will of God and according to the Lord's purposes for his servant from the eternal ages. (1 Cor. 9:1,2; Gal. 1:1,12-24) The church subsequently recognised Paul's God-given commission by commending him to the Lord's service.

Appointment to the apostolic office implied that all of Paul's teaching would be inspired directly by God's Holy Spirit and would be the authoritative word of God. This had been true also of the OT prophets of God, and of the other apostles of the Lord Jesus in their preaching, teaching and writing capacity. (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21)

From this it follows that no one since the days of these God-appointed prophets or apostles has any right to claim apostolic authority or the right to speak or teach infallibly, claiming direct inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. God ordained this office and this authority only for the establishing of the early church, and he restricted this office to those apostles who had witnessed the living, risen Lord Jesus—including the apostle Paul.

Returning now to verse 1, Paul continues his opening remarks by greeting the dear believers who gather in the name of the Lord Jesus in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus was located on the western seaboard of the former Asia Minor (now Turkey), and was an important metropolis of proconsular Asia. It was also the centre of the temple of Artemis (Diana). This pagan temple and its associated worship gave rise to a thriving trade in metalwork and other crafts related to the production of idolatrous objects or icons. (Acts 19:24-25)

Yet, although pagan practises and worship surrounded the church at Ephesus, the people of God had remained faithful to the Lord Jesus. Thus, Paul commends them for their faithfulness and for their desire to hold fast to the truth in the midst of an ungodly and spiritually dark land. Only in later years, did some of the Ephesians believers begin to lose their first love. (Rev. 2:1-7)

Chosen in Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14

In verse 3, which we will consider shortly, the apostle prays that God may continue to bestow upon these dear saints his matchless grace or unmerited favour, and that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In addition, the apostle prays for the peace that comes from God the Father to rest and remain upon

each one of them. Thus, they will experience the power, grace, and peace of the Lord in everything that they do in their daily lives.

Yet, Paul realises that God has prepared an abundance of spiritual blessings for all those whom he has called to belong to him through faith in his Son. The apostle, therefore, desires to make these dear saints more fully aware of the many spiritual blessings that God has promised them in Christ. Thus, in the first three chapters of this epistle, Paul will elaborate on the significance of God's grace toward the believer. Then, in the remaining three chapters, the apostle will make the believers more aware of their personal and corporate responsibilities before the Lord, both in relation to their church fellowship and in relation to their daily living outside the church.

Predestined from Eternity

In verses 3 to 6 of chapter 1, Paul begins his declaration of God's grace toward the believer by writing:

Ephesians 1:3

Praise be unto the Lord our God; i.e., all blessing, praise, honour and glory be unto God the Father—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and also our Father in heaven. He who is our own heavenly Father through our union with Christ Jesus has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. These spiritual blessings come to us from our Father in heaven by virtue of our redemption and union with his Son.

Since the accomplishment of his perfect and finished work on earth, God the Father has highly exalted his one and only Son and given him the name that is above every name. He has raised him in glory to the heavenlies—to his own right hand. Granted, the Son has existed with God from the eternal ages, endowed with all the same glorious attributes as his Father. Yet, for us, the holy Son of God was prepared to leave heaven's glory temporarily, when he came to earth as the incarnate Son—the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil. 2:5-11)

Now, however, that God the Father has exalted his Son to the highest place in the heavenlies, he has also exalted his redeemed people to that same position in Christ. However, whereas Christ occupies this position *literally* and *physically* in his glorious resurrection life, his people occupy this position united to him and raised to the heavenlies with him *mystically* and *spiritually*. (Eph. 2:6)

God has blessed his redeemed people with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. First, we note that this is written in the past tense (although with the sense of a continuing action). Thus, God considers that every one of the blessings that he has promised us in Christ are ours already and cannot fail to be provided, even if many of these blessings have yet to be bestowed upon us. God has promised, and he cannot fail to deliver. Thus, the apostle Paul writes as though every one of these blessings were ours already, which—in effect—they are.

We note also, however, that Paul is speaking here of *spiritual* blessings. God promises to provide for us out of his limitless spiritual riches in glory. However, this does not mean that he promises to provide us with *material* riches or *physical* advantages. He may indeed do this for some or many of his people, as he did with Abraham and others. However, as in all things, God bestows material riches or gains upon whom he will, when and where he will, and according to his own good and sovereign will and pleasure.

But why did God call us to himself? Why did he bestow upon us every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ? Paul begins to answer these questions in verse 4 of chapter 1:

Ephesians 1:4

God called us to himself because, from eternity, he had chosen us in Christ. Even before God had created the universe—and therefore before the creation of mankind—God knew about us. He knew us by name, and in his sovereign grace and mercy, he determined to set us apart for himself even before we were born, and therefore before we had done anything good or bad. (Cf. Rom. 9:11) According to his sovereign will and pleasure, God elected us to be called to him through the energising and regenerating power of his Holy Spirit and through faith in his Son.

But, as Paul declares to the Ephesians, God called us to himself for a reason: namely, *that we should be holy and blameless in his sight...* (v.4b). To be 'holy' means to be set apart; it means to be separated from that which is common, unclean or impure to that which is sacred, cleansed and pure. It means to be set apart from the things of this age, and dedicated to the things of God and of the age to come. Holiness, then, involves complete consecration of our whole being to God, as the Most Holy One. It involves total commitment to purity of life, in thought, word and deed.

Holiness of life, however, can only bear fruit in the believer's life through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. The more a believer submits to the power and control of the Spirit of God, *acting through and applying the truths of God's Holy Word to his or her heart and life*, the more progress that believer will make in holiness of life.

Living a life worthy of God, who called us by his grace and in whose lives the Holy Spirit dwells supreme, manifests this holiness. The fruit of God's Holy Spirit ought always to be shown in our lives in ever-increasing measure, whereas the deeds of the old sinful nature ought to have no place in the hearts and lives of God's redeemed and holy people.¹

Thus, we will live lives that are 'blameless' before God and in the eyes of the world. In the Scriptures, however, blamelessness does not necessarily imply perfection of character or conduct. No believer becomes perfect or sin-free in this life. However, it ought to be our constant aim to attain to a life that is well pleasing and honouring to God in everything that we think, say, and do. (Phil. 3:12-16)

The phrase *'in love'* may be part of the preceding sentence at the end of verse 4, or it may be seen as part of the following sentence beginning at verse 5. If the former, it may refer to the love God has for us in Christ Jesus and the love that we ought to have for God who has redeemed us by his grace and bestowed upon us so many bountiful blessings. If part of the sentence following, the expression 'in love' would assign a reason why God predestined us from eternity to be called to himself through faith in Christ.

We will consider, therefore, what Paul says in verse 5 of this passage.

Predestined as God's Children**Ephesians 1:5**

From before the creation of the world, God predestined us to be adopted as his sons; i.e., as his redeemed and holy children. Predestination, however, is not based on God's foreknowledge or foresight of a person's faith in Christ, but rather on his own sovereign will and pleasure, and according to his grace alone.

No sinner can exercise faith in Christ of his own free will. Even if he had the *will* to believe, a sinner does not possess the *ability* to exercise saving faith in Christ. While we are

¹ On the subject of holiness, see further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sanctification*, by Gordon Lyons.

still in our sins, we remain spiritually dead—dead in trespasses and sins—and under the just wrath and condemnation of God. (John 3:36; Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 1:21; 2:13; 3:6)

In this condition, therefore, we cannot exercise saving faith, which essentially is a spiritual exercise, unless God first makes us alive to spiritual truths or realities. To be made alive spiritually, however, is the work of God's Holy Spirit in effectual calling and regeneration.

Therefore, if a spiritually dead sinner is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Holy Spirit must call and regenerate him—according to God's purposes in election. By his grace, God must grant to that person new spiritual desires. These spiritual desires include a deep awareness of God's judgment on sin and on unrepentant sinners. They also include a real conviction of sin and the true desire for repentance, and for that forgiveness and cleansing which the Lord Jesus alone can provide.

Only under these conditions, can a person call on the name of the Lord for salvation. Thus, our salvation is dependent entirely on God's grace, and it is bestowed upon all those whom God has predestined to be adopted as his sons and daughters. Everyone, however, who calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved: for no-one can express genuine repentance or call on the Lord for salvation unless God's Holy Spirit has drawn him or her to Christ.

From eternity, therefore, God predestined a holy people for himself. (1 Pet. 1:20; 2:9-10) God, however, not only called and redeemed those people, but he also made them his own children. Thus, we are the children of God on two counts: we are his children by the grace and blessing of regeneration (the new birth) and we are God's children by the grace and blessing of adoption into his family. As such, God has made us heirs of his glorious inheritance and joint-heirs with his own Son. (Rom. 8:17)

But why did God predestine us? Why did he call us to himself through faith in Christ Jesus? Why did he make us his own children by regeneration and by adoption, and why did he bestow upon us every spiritual blessing?

Paul answers this in the latter part of verse 5:

^{5b} *...in accordance with his pleasure and will— (NIV)*

Or, as rendered by the New King James Version:

^{5b} *...according to the good pleasure of His will... (NKJV)*

The glorious thing about the Gospel and about God's love for us is that his grace and mercy toward us did not depend on what he saw in us. God had mercy on us because he desired to have mercy on us—not because of anything that he foresaw in us. He loved us and chose us solely according to the good pleasure of his will. (Rom. 9:14-16)

Thus, we must be thankful to God with all our hearts that he set his love on us who deserved only his justice, wrath, and punishment for our sins. But so great was God's love for us that he gave his one and only Son to make atonement for our sins and to reconcile us to himself as his beloved children.

Having paid so great a price for our redemption, what will he not now do for us? Having predestined us from eternity to be his own, what spiritual blessing will he now withhold from us? All these things are ours in Christ Jesus. It is our duty and responsibility to walk with the Lord with thanksgiving in our hearts to God, and with a desire to trust and obey him in everything. (Rom. 8:28-38)

Everything that God has done for us in Christ Jesus—from predestination through effectual calling and regeneration to justification and sanctification—should be the cause of

endless praise, worship, and adoration to God. Thus, let us look once more at what Paul has written in verse 5, but on this occasion let us follow it immediately by his remarks in verse 6:

Ephesians 1:5-6

All praise and glory be unto the Lord our God! He is the Supreme Ruler of the universe, the Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of all things. He is the one who rules in perfect majesty, power, and glory, and to whom all powers in heaven and on earth must bow in humble praise and adoration.

Yet, the God of all creation loved the sinful sons of Adam's race. And from that race, he elected a vast multitude to be adopted as his sons and daughters, according to his own good pleasure. As verse 6 intimates, God did this for his own praise and glory. And he has bestowed his matchless and glorious grace upon all those who call upon the name of his Son, and who have received the promise of life abundant—together with a heavenly inheritance.

All this was a gift of God's free and unmerited grace toward us, and not because of anything that we had done or would do. He granted us salvation because it pleased him to do so, and he granted it to us by virtue of the atoning work accomplished by his Son on our behalf. This is the message that Paul is now bringing to his Ephesian readers and to us as well.

But what exactly is involved in God's grace toward us? Paul begins to answer this question in the following passages.

Looking firstly at verses 7-8, the apostle declares:

Ephesians 1:7-8

In him—i.e., by virtue of our union with Christ in his life, death, burial, and resurrection—we have redemption. God has redeemed us, or set forth the ransom necessary to reconcile us to himself. However, the ransom required the full payment of the death penalty due to us for our sins. Thus, a perfect or totally unblemished sacrifice of atonement had to be offered in our stead.

Of necessity, this sacrifice had to take the form of a *blood offering*—i.e., the *life* of a perfect substitute had to be offered up to God *in exchange for our life*. Thus, our sin was atoned for by the shedding of blood—the blood of the perfect Lamb of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (Heb. 10:1-18; 1 Pet. 1:18-21)

Through the Lord Jesus' perfect life and by his sin-atoning death on the cross—followed by his burial and triumphant resurrection—God has granted us complete forgiveness of all sin. He has justified us and acquitted us of all charges against us. (Rom. 8:1) This redemption has been extended to us in Christ solely out of the riches of God's grace. From his boundless love, mercy, and grace, God has bestowed upon us his full and free salvation, with all spiritual wisdom and understanding of the things of the Spirit and of God.

Apart from the Spirit of God, and a right understanding of spiritual things that the Holy Spirit grants to God's children, it is impossible to comprehend aright the truths of God's Word. These truths can only be discerned spiritually, and they require the presence of the Holy Spirit to be understood correctly. However, when the Spirit of God enlightens our minds to the truth, we can see in God's Word everything that is necessary for life and godliness. In addition, we can begin to understand some of the mysteries of God's Word, as God reveals them to us by his Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:10-16)

In verses 9 and 10, the apostle Paul refers to one such mystery, or previously undisclosed truth of God's Word, when he writes:

Ephesians 1:9-10

The secret thing belongs unto the Lord our God. (Deut. 29:29) However, God sometimes reveals to his people something of his eternal purposes, especially when these purposes relate to the church. Thus, according to his own good pleasure, God has made known to his redeemed people part of his plans for the church. All God's purposes for the church will be fulfilled in and through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—the church's Head. Ultimately—in the fullness of time—God will unite all things in heaven and on earth under the supreme headship of Christ (vv.22-23).

Thus, we can see that God is working out his purposes among the nations of the earth—and throughout the heavenly realms—for the ultimate good and glory of his church. Christ is now reigning in glory. One day, however, he will reign over his redeemed people, the church. Then, everything else in all creation will submit to his sovereign sway and will praise, honour, and glorify his most high and holy name. Thus, as the Scriptures say, he is—and forever will be—King of kings and Lord of lords, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. (Rev. 1:8; 17:14; 19:16; cf. 1 Tim. 6:15-16)

In these verses, we have glimpsed something of the majesty, power, and kingly glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, though he is so highly exalted, he is still the one who loves us and who died to save us. However, we are wholly dependent on the grace of God for our salvation and for his eternal purposes for us in election. Thus, to remind us of our indebtedness to God and of our duty to praise, honour, and glorify his most holy name, the apostle Paul writes in verses 11-12:

Eph. 1:11-12

From before the creation of the world, God had chosen us and had set us apart for himself. However, he had chosen us *in Christ*; i.e., from the eternal ages, he had determined that he would send his one and only Son into the world to make atonement for our sins and to reconcile us to himself [God].

Thus, it is impossible for anyone to be forgiven and reconciled to God apart from faith in Christ and union with Christ. This was the manner that, from eternity, God had ordained for our salvation, and this is the only plan of salvation that conforms to God's will and purposes. (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5-6)

Yet, as we have noted previously, God called a people to himself, and he redeemed them through faith in Christ Jesus for a specific purpose. That purpose is that we should live to the praise of God's glory. In everything that we say and do, we should show that we belong to the Lord, and that we are desirous of honouring his name in our daily personal lives and in our private and corporate worship.

In verse 12, Paul notes that he was included among the first to trust or hope in Christ; i.e., the believing Jews. The Jewish saints were among the first to believe on the certain assurance of God's promise of eternal salvation through repentance and faith in his Son. But, although Paul and other Jews were among the first to hope or believe in Christ, they were only the forerunners of many who would follow them from among all nations, including Gentiles like the Ephesians. Thus, in verses 13-14, the apostle declares to the Ephesian believers:

Ephesians 1:13-14

The Ephesian believers, too, were added to God's church in accordance with his purposes in election. When these Gentiles had heard the Gospel—the word of truth—they had responded to its message. As the Spirit of God made them spiritually alive, aware of the Gospel's truth, and effectually drew them to Christ, the Ephesians had begun to cry out from their hearts for the salvation of the Lord. Freely and willingly, they had called

upon the name of the Lord and had experienced his bountiful mercy, grace, and full salvation. (Cf. Rom. 10:13)

Then Paul adds that every one who had believed on Christ had received the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Spirit, who had regenerated their souls and turned them to God through faith in Christ, now remained with them to live within their hearts and lives forever. God had made them a new creation. Now, they too were his sons and daughters by regeneration and by adoption. (John 14:16-18; Rom. 8:14-17)

The Holy Spirit was indeed the proof that they belonged to God for all eternity. The Spirit was the mark or seal that identified them as God's exclusive people and his special or treasured possession. Thus, everyone who has received the Holy Spirit, and who is living by the Spirit's grace and power, is truly a child of God.

Furthermore, the gift of the Holy Spirit guarantees to each believer the fact that God has prepared a place for him or her in glory. Included in that promise, is the assurance that they will share in the heavenly inheritance as children and heirs of God's riches in glory. The Spirit of God is the deposit or pledge of everything yet to follow, including the completion of our salvation in final sanctification and glorification.

These promises, however, apply only to those who are the Lord's possession and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. (Rom 8:9) But all those who are the redeemed children of God can and should live continually to the praise of God's glory and grace.

Paul Prays for these Saints

Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul rejoices in the knowledge that these believers at Ephesus and elsewhere have been chosen by God to acknowledge his Son. Thus, in verses 15 and 16, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 1:15-16

Verse 15 should not be understood as implying that Paul did not know the Ephesians personally, or that he had not ministered in that city before writing this letter. Acts tells us that Paul had served the Lord in Ephesus, and later had left that city. (Acts 19:1,10; 20:1,17-38) Possibly, this occurred some four to five years before the date of this letter. However, Paul may not have been able to maintain regular contact with these saints in the intervening period, and he may not have known of their progress in the faith until more recently—shortly before writing this epistle.

In any event, ever since Paul had heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus, the apostle had been thanking God earnestly and without ceasing for these believers. The apostle had learned, too, of how much love the Ephesians had been showing to other believers and of their practical expressions of their love to saints in need. Thus, Paul praises the name of the Lord and continues to offer thanksgiving to God for these dear saints on every remembrance of them.

Paul is anxious that these Ephesian believers will continue to make progress in their most holy faith. Thus, in verse 17, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 1:17

Paul prays to God continually, asking that the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ—the all-glorious One—may grant to these believers the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (leading to spiritual understanding).

The wisdom spoken of here, of course, is that wisdom that comes down from God above, and through which the Holy Spirit discloses to us the things of God in fuller measure.

Hence, the reason why Paul couples wisdom with revelation. The apostle desires that the Ephesian believers will receive that wisdom from God through which they will pursue the things of the Spirit and apply the Spirit's teaching of God's Word to their lives. However, this teaching is only fully revealed to those who seek him with all their hearts and who truly desire to know him better. (Jas. 3:17)

Paul continues this theme in verses 18 and 19a by writing:

Ephesians 1:18-19a

The full understanding of God's Word comes to us through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes the teaching of God's Word, the Bible, and shows us its true significance. He has already removed the veil of spiritual darkness previously covering our minds, and now he enlightens our spiritual eyes to all the glorious truths of God's holy and infallible Word. (John 16:13; 2 Cor. 3:16-18)

In that Word, the Spirit shows to God's people something of the glorious hope to which God has called them. The Holy Spirit reveals to the saints the absolute certainty of a place in heaven, together with a share in the promised inheritance.

The expression, *'the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints'* may be understood as referring to God's inheritance in his redeemed people. More likely, however, it is to be understood of the saints' inheritance in God's vast riches in glory. This is the meaning commonly attributed to similar phrases elsewhere in Paul's epistles. Thus, the apostle desires that the Ephesian church, and others by whom this epistle may be read, may realise something of the magnificent inheritance that God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Pet. 1:3-5)

The power to fulfil his promises to his saints is the power of the omnipotent God himself. Thus, these promises and its associated hope cannot fail of accomplishment. Paul illustrates the extent of God's unlimited power by writing in verses 19b to 21:

Ephesians 1:19b-21

The power of God to keep his saints secure in their faith is that of omnipotence (unlimited power). God exercised this same unlimited power when he raised his Son from death. Again, God exerts this same unlimited power on behalf of his people: For it is divine omnipotence, acting through grace and providence, which preserves the saints and guards their souls. It is divine omnipotence, acting through grace and providence, which watches over his people from conception and birth, to the day that the Lord calls them home to his glorious presence.

Thus, it is impossible for anyone or anything in all creation to separate us from the love of God, which he demonstrates to us through his Son. (Rom. 8:38-39; 1 John 3:1)

When God raised his Son from the dead by an act of his divine omnipotence, he exalted Jesus to his own right hand in glory. This is the place and position of complete equality with the Father, and of sovereign power, glory, and honour in the presence of Almighty God. This was the glorious place in heaven that the Son of God left temporarily when he came to this earth for our salvation.

However, the Father has rewarded his Son for the finished work of redemption, which he has accomplished on our behalf. God has exalted his Son to the place of highest honour. Now, God has placed the risen glorified Lord Jesus far above all rule, authority, power and dominion in the entire creation. God has made everything and everyone—except himself—subject to his Son. Christ now reigns supreme above all creation, and God has invested him with the highest titles, honours and dignity that he can bestow.

As we observe from verse 21, these honours, titles and dignity will apply to the Son forever. In other words, Christ now reigns high over all, and he will continue to reign in this age and for all the ages of eternity.

In the next few verses, Paul elaborates further on the absolute pre-eminence and supremacy of Christ over all creation, adding that this includes his sovereign rule and authority over his body, the church. Thus, in verses 22 and 23, the apostle declares to the Ephesians believers:

Ephesians 1:22-23

Verse 22 confirms what has been said already above; namely, that God has placed the entire creation in subjection to his Son. Everything and everyone in all God's creation—including mankind and angels—find themselves under the sovereign and omnipotent rule of Christ the King. In everything, God is working his purposes out through his Son, until the fulfilment of the present times.

Additionally, God has declared his Son to be the Head of the church. He is the supreme ruler, power, and authority over the entire church worldwide. He imparts life to his church through his Holy Spirit, and without that spiritual life, his church cannot live and flourish. But, wherever the Spirit of God is present, there too Christ is present—invisibly—but in all his divine power, glory, and authority.

This, then, is the one who rules creation for the good of the church. This is the one whose attributes are the very attributes of God himself. He is the one who fills all things, and determines the course of all events for the good of his elect and redeemed people and for the honour, praise, and glory of God the Father.

Ephesians Chapter 2

Saved by Grace

Ephesians 2:1-10

In chapter 1, Paul had been reminding the Ephesian believers of all that God had done for them in Christ Jesus. The apostle had highlighted their election and calling from before the creation of the world, and he had spoken of their inheritance in the Father's house. He had spoken also of their being raised to the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, being sealed by the Spirit, and the purposes of their election and calling—holiness of life.

Now, however, in the opening verses of chapter 2, the apostle Paul reminds his readers of where they stood in relation to God before God had called them in his grace to acknowledge his Son through faith in his name.

Thus, demonstrating their past way of life apart from God, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 2:1-2

Before God called them to himself through faith in his Son, the Ephesians were alienated from God by their sins and lawless deeds. In fact, God's Word tells us that they were spiritually dead—dead in their trespasses and sins (vv.1,5). Since, however, they were spiritually dead they were incapable of responding to spiritual truths, such as the claims of the Gospel. While they remained in their spiritually dead state, they could not fully understand the Word of truth, nor did they have any genuine desire to do so. At that time, their way of life was the way of the world. They aligned their lives to this world's standards of thought and behaviour. From this fallen and sinful viewpoint, they engaged in the things of which God disapproved and they lived in disregard of God's holy will.

Even worse—and wittingly or otherwise—they followed the ways of the ruler of 'the kingdom of the air'; namely, Satan. This wicked being is the spirit who now works upon, and influences for evil, everyone who remains in their sinful and unforgiven state. God's Word classes those ones as 'disobedient' (v.2), for—although they knew the truth concerning the existence, power, and glory of God—they wilfully and wickedly refused to acknowledge the truth. Instead of acknowledging God and giving him the glory, they spurned the truth of God and condoned and practised evil. (Rom. 1:28-31)

Clearly, then, while they remained in this state, they were being used by the prince of the power of the air (Satan) to further his own evil designs. This may not have involved the majority of these people in outright wickedness. However, they would have been used by the devil to dissuade others from the paths of truth and decency, to condone or encourage sinful or questionable practices, and to cast doubt on the existence and power of God and his judgment on sinful mankind.

While those people remained in this state of disobedience and rebellion against God, they possessed no genuine desire to respond to the invitation of the Gospel. Indeed, while they remained spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins, they were incapable of responding to the Gospel—and they would remain so unless called by the grace of God. Nevertheless, this situation did not prevent them from *acknowledging* the existence, power, and glory of God the Creator revealed to them through God's natural creation. Therefore, their refusal to acknowledge God and to seek to know his ways was inexcusable. (Rom. 1:18-23)

However, as Paul makes plain to the Ephesians, they were not the only people to be living in this sinful, spiritually dead, and disobedient state. As the apostle reveals in the next verse, this state of rebellion against God was common to all mankind. Thus, in verse 3, Paul writes:

Ephesians 2:3

Everyone without exception stood on exactly the same footing before Almighty God. To a greater or lesser extent, all of us were guilty of sin, rebellion and disobedience against God. At one time, all of us followed our own inward desires. We sought to satisfy the cravings that arose from our inherently sinful nature. We sought to please ourselves without regard to God's holy laws or God's standards of righteousness. What we thought in our minds, we expressed with our tongues or fulfilled through our bodies. (1 Pet. 4:3)

Thus, the apostle declares that every one of us—like all of fallen mankind generally—were by nature the objects (or children) of wrath. While we lived in this sinful and rebellious state, we remained under the just wrath and condemnation of God for our sins and disobedience. (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18)

Thus, in God's eyes, we deserved only the outpouring of his righteous and just wrath. God cannot look on sin, nor will he leave the sinner unpunished. (Hab. 1:13) His justice, holiness, and righteousness demand a reckoning or satisfactory penalty—and the penalty for sin is death. (Rom. 6:23) Yet, God does not desire the death of anyone. Rather, he desires that they repent and live. (2 Pet. 3:9)

Repentance and life, however, are beyond the abilities of fallen, sinful, and spiritually dead men and women to attain. If they are to seek genuine and godly repentance, then God must first work within them by his Holy Spirit, convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgment, convincing them of their great need of redemption, and drawing them to Christ. (John 16:8-9)

This, however, is precisely what God did for all his elect people. Thus, in a declaration of triumphant praise to God, the apostle Paul writes in verses 4-5:

Ephesians 2:4-5

God is holy, righteous, and just, and he will by no means acquit the guilty. He is the Sovereign of the universe, and he cannot permit sin to pass unchallenged. He must meet all the demands of his most holy law against sin—and this he did when he sent his one and only Son to die as a sin offering and sacrifice of atonement on behalf of his people.

Thus, we see the love, mercy, and grace of the most high and holy God toward those who deserved only his wrath and everlasting separation from him in hell.

Because of his great love for us, God...made us alive with Christ... (v.4a,5a NIV)

Who made us alive spiritually? God did. Who enabled us to understand and respond to the Gospel? God did. Who enabled us, by his grace and by his Spirit, to repent of our sins and to exercise faith—freely and willingly—in the Lord Jesus Christ? God did.

God's Holy Spirit imparted life to our souls in effectual calling and regeneration. God's Holy Spirit removed the veil of darkness previously covering our minds and preventing us from understanding the glorious truths of the Gospel. God did this *because of his great love for us*. Because he is abundantly rich in mercy, God made us alive with Christ—or in Christ—even at the very moment when we were still dead (spiritually) in transgressions, and therefore still under his just and holy wrath and condemnation. Now, of course, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1)

The fact, therefore, that we have accepted Christ as our Saviour and Lord, is due to the grace of God alone. Apart from his Holy Spirit regenerating our souls, convicting us of sin, and calling us to true repentance through faith in Christ, we would have remained in our spiritually dead state—still under God’s wrath and judgment. Therefore, it is only fitting that we acknowledge the sovereign hand of God in every aspect of our salvation. From eternity, he predestined us to be his own beloved children. In process of time, his Spirit called us and granted to us the ability to understand and believe the Gospel. Then, having understood the Gospel by the Spirit’s illuminating power, God in his grace enabled us to respond to the message of salvation and eternal life through faith in Christ—and of our own free, and spiritually renewed, will.

Then, in verses 6 and 7, Paul writes:

Ephesians 2:6-7

God saved us by his grace. However, God did not only impart to us the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life—immeasurable as these gifts are; he also raised us up spiritually with Christ. Effectively now, therefore, we are seated with Christ (spiritually) in the heavenly realms. This means that in a spiritual—*but nonetheless very real*—sense, God has united us to his Son in glory. Now, we participate in the full riches of Christ, and in all the glorious blessings that he has covenanted to give to his elect, redeemed and holy people. Where Christ is *physically*, there we are *spiritually*. One day, we will be taken to enjoy his presence forever in a physical and literal sense. But, until that day, we continue to live to the praise of his glory, conscious that—even now—we are forever united to him and with him in the heavenly realms.

Why has God the Father raised us to such great heights and united us with Christ in his glory? It is so that—in the coming ages—he might demonstrate the wonder and magnificence of his grace toward us. This grace knows no measure. It is grace that no one can earn or merit, or contribute toward in any way. It is grace that God bestows upon those deserving only his wrath and judgment; and it is grace that he bestows according to his own sovereign will and pleasure.

Such is the love, kindness, mercy and grace of the Everlasting Father toward all those whom he has called to be united with his Son, and to whom the Father has granted an inheritance in glory. This is love beyond compare. But this is a demonstration of God’s supreme love toward fallen mankind—and this love and grace is now manifested to all creation. This grace and love will continue to redound to God’s glory, and to the honour, praise and glory of his Son, throughout the eternal ages. Amen!

What part, then, did we play in our salvation? None whatsoever—except to accept the gift that God offered us freely. However, we could do this only after the Spirit of God had regenerated us and enabled us to repent and believe the Gospel. Thus, Paul writes in verses 8 and 9:

Ephesians 2:8-9

(8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—(9) not by works, so that no one can boast. (NIV)

By the sovereign will and pleasure of God, we have been saved. Before we were born, or even before the earth was created, God determined that we would be saved. However, the Lord did not set his love upon us and predestine us because of anything good that he foresaw in us. Nor did he choose us from eternity because he foreknew that we would accept his Son as our Saviour. Predestination is not based on God’s foreknowledge of events but on his sovereign will and pleasure, and it is exercised solely in accordance

with his grace. He deems to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. In any event, no one can accept Christ as their Saviour while they remain spiritually dead. They are spiritually incapable of doing so. God must renew their souls by his Holy Spirit *before* they can repent and believe. Therefore, it is by God's grace that we have been saved.

Yet, although God saves us purely by his grace, he calls upon us individually to believe the promises of the Gospel. Clearly, this is impossible until the Holy Spirit calls us to Christ. However, having called us effectually to the Lord Jesus and renewed us spiritually, God then calls upon us to believe on his Son. This is our response to God's free gift. *We accept Christ through faith*—our own personal faith in the Son of God, which we exercise freely and willingly. Yet, we owe the ability to exercise this faith to God's grace and calling alone.

What, then, is the basis of our faith in Christ? It certainly does not stem from our desire, willingness, or ability to accept Christ apart from—or prior to—the grace of God in our lives, acting through his Holy Spirit. In other words, as Paul declares in verses 8b and 9, it did not originate from ourselves. It was not of our will, desire, or effort—but purely by the grace of God.

Our salvation—including the ability to repent and believe—was a gift of God's grace. Under no circumstances did our works, deeds, desires or exercises of our will, contribute toward the salvation that God has given us in Christ. We could not have believed on Christ or accepted him, had the Spirit of God not first prepared our heart, mind, and understanding, and had he not first regenerated our souls. Thus, salvation is of the Lord. It is not by works, actions, or mental exercises of any kind. Thus, no one is able to boast of his or her supposed spiritual standing or achievements in the presence of God or man.

In Christ Jesus, God has made us a new creation. But, to emphasise that we are the product of God's handiwork in recreation, the apostle Paul writes in verse 10:

Ephesians 2:10

Yes, we have been born anew or recreated in Christ Jesus. But our new birth is the work of God. By his Holy Spirit, God created us spiritually anew in Christ Jesus. And he did this for a specific purpose. God's purpose for creating us new creatures in Christ was that we might live to his glory and perform good works.

Any 'good works' that we perform, before being made a new creation in Christ, are totally unacceptable to God and cannot possibly count toward our salvation, or in any way gain God's favour or approval. This is because all 'good works' performed by those still in their sins, proceed from a heart that remains in rebellion against God and from a life that presently is abiding under God's wrath and judgment. Thus, while we remain in this condition, all our supposed 'good deeds' are as filthy rags in God's sight. This is one of the reasons why no one can be saved by works, whether works of righteousness (so-called), or any other kind of works, deeds, or exercises of the mind or will. (Isa. 64:6)

However, when in his grace, God makes us new creatures in Christ Jesus, he renews all our spiritual and moral faculties, including our mind and will. Thus, having cleansed us by his blood from sin and iniquity, the Lord enables us to do that which is morally and spiritually good in his sight. Indeed, he requires us to practise good works; i.e., to pursue holiness of life, to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in ever-increasing measure, and to perform good deeds for the benefit of others and to the glory of God. (Gal. 5:22-23)

This is why God predestined us. This is why he called us by his grace. This is why he created us anew in Christ Jesus; and this is the very works, or righteous acts, that he prepared in advance for us to perform.

Of course, we can never add to our salvation by the performance of these good works. Nevertheless, they are a necessary evidence of our growth in sanctification. In addition, they contribute toward our reward in heaven. Thus, for the believer, it is on the basis of these works primarily that God will judge us when we appear before his throne. This judgment, however, will take the form of an assessment for reward or for loss of reward. Since Christ has already paid the penalty for our sin and since the Father has justified us, God will not judge or condemn us on this count when we are called before him. Rather, he will formally confirm our acquittal.

Jews and Gentiles One Body in Christ

Ephesians 2:11-22

However, before God called us in his grace to belong to his Son, we remained strangers to him and to his covenant promises and blessings. Thus, in verses 11 and 12, the apostle Paul writes:

Ephesians 2:11-12

Originally, God had set his electing love upon one person only (Abram), and from him—and through his seed, Isaac—one nation only. God intended to bless the nations through Abraham's descendants. However, those whom Israel thought of as 'uncircumcised' (the Gentiles) were considered by them to be beyond the pale of God's promises. In the normal course of events, the Gentile nations were not entitled to any share in God's covenant with Abraham. Therefore, they were excluded from God's salvation, unless they adopted the faith of God's chosen people, the Jews (here, understood to represent the descendants of both Judah and Israel).

Physical circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, and God required that every male child born to Abraham and his descendants, and all male members of their households, submit to this sacred rite. Nevertheless, as Paul will explain elsewhere, circumcision was the *sign* of God's covenant—not the reality. The sign was intended to be conjoined with faith, obedience, and faithfulness to God and to his Word. However, in reality, it was entirely possible for a Jew to be circumcised in body, yet remain 'uncircumcised' in heart and mind (i.e., spiritually and morally unclean). This was the state of very many of the professing 'people of God' throughout their generations. Thus, for a substantial part of their history, the *true* people of God constituted only a minority or remnant within the nation. This remnant comprised the elect of God from among his ancient people, Israel.

All those who were excluded from God's covenant with Abraham—and this included all the Gentile nations—remained separated from God: That is, they could not benefit directly from the promised seed of Abraham (the Christ or Messiah), until such times as God called them in his grace. This, however, he had already promised to do, and this promise was recorded in the words of the OT prophets of God, such as Isaiah and Amos. (Isa. 49:6; 51:5; Amos 9:12)

While people from among the Gentile nations remained cut off from God and his covenant promises to Abraham, they lived in the world without hope for the future and without a saving knowledge of the only true God. This was the state and condition of every Gentile in the world. Even so, from eternity, God had purposed to include in his plan of salvation people from among every Gentile nation. Thus, Paul celebrates this expression of God's love toward those who, formerly, were not his people, by writing in verse 13:

Ephesians 2:13

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near

through the blood of Christ. (NIV)

Now, however, declares Paul to the Ephesian church, everything has changed. Once, you were alienated from God and from his Son by your sins and evil deeds. At that time, you were strangers to God's covenant. Now, God has called you by his grace. You, who once stood far off from God and his everlasting love, have now been brought near to God through his Son. The blood shed by Christ your Redeemer has fully satisfied all the demands of a holy, righteous and just God. Now, by that blood shed on your behalf, you have been forgiven, cleansed and justified. Now, you are one with Christ, a member of God's family and household—the household of faith—and a participator in God's covenant blessings.

Thus, in Acts chapter 2, the apostle Peter declares:

Acts 2:39 (NIV)

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Formerly, we were enemies of God because of our sin, wickedness and rebellion. Now, however, God has made peace for us through the atoning or propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus his Son. By that perfect sacrifice, we have everlasting peace with God. We also have peace with ourselves in the sure and certain knowledge that God has forgiven our sins and reconciled us to himself forever. Furthermore, Christ's death, burial and resurrection has had the effect of uniting in one Body (the Church) under one Head (Christ) God's chosen people, both from among the Jews and also from among the Gentiles. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-10)

To this end, Paul writes in verses 14 to 16:

Ephesians 2:14-16

Christ Jesus is the source of our peace. By his death and resurrection, he has destroyed forever the dividing wall—or the source of antagonism—between Jew and Gentile.

Probably, Paul based this expression on the dividing wall in the temple courts that separated Jews from Gentiles, and forbade Gentiles entry into the exclusively Jewish precincts of the temple. Now, by Christ's death and resurrection, this dividing wall had been taken away forever, and now both Jewish and Gentile believers could worship together in the presence of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the law of God in every respect. He completed and abrogated the law of ceremonies and ordinances, setting aside everything in the OT that pointed forward to him. Additionally, Jesus removed the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. (Gal. 3:13) Thus, since he has paid the penalty of God's holy law on our behalf, the law is no longer our master. Yet, it was our tutor to lead us to Christ. (Gal. 3:24-25) Granted, we continue to observe the moral and spiritual principles of God's holy commandments. These, however, are intended for day-to-day living—not as a means of gaining merit or salvation in the sight of God.

In all these things, God was fulfilling his eternal purposes: namely, that through Christ's sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, the believing Jews and believing Gentiles should be united under one Head (Christ) and form part of one and the same Body, the Church. Thus, through Christ the Messiah, and by his death on the cross, God has reconciled both groups to himself in one body. Peace has come by the blood of the cross, and by that same cross the Lord Jesus has put to death the former suspicion and hostility

between Jew and Gentile—an antagonism that was common to both camps, at least prior to their conversion to Christ.

In verse 17, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 2:17

The Son of God came into this world as God's appointed Saviour of lost men and women, boys and girls. The message that he preached, and which his disciples proclaimed, was the message of peace through the blood of his cross. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed to the people the way of eternal life through repentance and faith in him. He told his disciples, however, that his way was the way of suffering; and, ultimately for the Lord Jesus, of death on the cross.

Initially, his followers failed to understand or believe this aspect of the Lord's message. Following his death, burial and resurrection, however, they began to understand everything that he had been telling them must happen in fulfilment of the OT prophets and of his personal teaching. Then, they realised that peace came through faith in Christ; but that this faith must be based on the atoning work that Jesus had completed at Calvary. Thus, too, the disciples began to carry into the entire known world this message of the cross, proclaiming the Gospel to those who were far away from God (the Gentile peoples) and to those who were near (the Jewish people).

Now, Christ's death has provided a way into the heavenly Father's presence—as Paul declares in verse 18:

Ephesians 2:18

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, both Jewish and Gentile believers have immediate access or right of entry into the very throne room of God in heaven. By the shed blood of Christ their Redeemer, they can approach the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary, just as the high priest approached the holy of holies in the earthly tabernacle or temple.

However, God's children can approach their Father's most immediate and holy presence at any time of the day or night, and at any time of the year. This is because the sacrifice that Christ offered and the blood that he sprinkled before the mercy seat in heaven, is effective forever. (Heb. 9:6-28; 10:1-25)

Thus, through Jesus Christ and by his Holy Spirit, the believer has continual freedom of access into God's presence. This approach to God was unlike that of the high priest of the OT. The Jewish high priest of that era was prohibited from approaching the most holy place other than on the one appointed day of the year—the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). We, however, have been granted the privilege of approaching God's throne boldly at any time, knowing that our Great High Priest lives forever at the right hand of God and is even now interceding for us. (Heb. 4:16; 10:22; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

In verses 19 and 20, Paul continues:

Ephesians 2:19-20

(19) Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (NIV)

Now, God has made us fellow citizens with all his redeemed people. No longer are we strangers or foreigners to the covenant promises of God. Rather, God has placed us in his own household as full members of his family.

Our faith is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets; i.e., it is founded on the Word of God as that Word has been proclaimed or taught by God's holy prophets or by the apostles of the Lord Jesus, and as it is now revealed to us in the Bible.

The chief cornerstone of our faith—or headstone of the corner—however, is Jesus Christ himself. He is the Rock of ages and the sure and immovable foundation of all his people. Above all others, it is on his unique and holy person, on his finished work on earth, and on his continuing mediation for the saints, that our faith is founded.

Paul continues with this thought in verses 21 and 22, where he writes:

Ephesians 2:21-22

The entire spiritual building (i.e., the church worldwide), of which we form a part, is united together in Christ its Head, and forms a holy temple in the Lord. (1 Pet. 2:1-8)

However, the Lord does not dwell only in the worldwide or locally gathered church, but also in each of its individual members. We too—as believers—are being built together, like individual living stones, and sanctified to God. God now dwells in our individual lives in the person of his Holy Spirit. Thus, we are united as one people in the Lord; we are one holy and spiritual temple in Christ, and our bodies individually form a temple of God's Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20)

Ephesians Chapter 3

God's Mystery Revealed

Ephesians 3:1

Paul appears to begin his opening remarks in verse 1 of Ephesians chapter 3 with an incomplete sentence. As was typical with this apostle, it would seem that some other related matter interrupted his train of thought. Thus, the apostle may have proposed to deal with this matter before returning to the original subject of his sentence in verse 14.

We learn from verse 1, however, that the apostle had been imprisoned for preaching to the Gentiles the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Clearly, the Jews had objected vigorously to Paul's preaching among the Gentiles. (Cf. Acts 22:21-23) Ultimately, their complaints and persecution of the apostle had led to his arrest and imprisonment, firstly in Caesarea then in Rome. Now, at the time of writing, Paul was being held under house arrest. Nevertheless, as we observe, the apostle was granted freedom to continue writing to the churches and encouraging the believers in their most holy faith.

In verses 2 and 3, the apostle digresses temporarily from his original subject by writing:

Ephesians 3:2-3

The word 'administration' (KJV, 'dispensation') derives from a word meaning 'economy', 'stewardship', or 'arrangement'. Here, Paul is referring to his divine calling, whereby God in his grace appointed him as an apostle to the Gentiles, and entrusted to his stewardship the Gospel of eternal salvation through faith in Christ (cf. v.8). Included in this thought is the mystery (v.3) which was revealed to the apostle on an earlier occasion; namely, the truth of the Gospel as of divine origin, together with God's plan for the redemption of individuals from every nation on earth. (Rom. 10:12; 2 Cor. 12:1-7; cf. Col. 1:25-27; see also v.6 below)

Paul calls this matter to the remembrance of the Ephesian believers. They must have been fully aware of the apostle's calling and appointment to this ministry, for he had made it known to them in the past. Therefore, the word 'Surely' is probably better understood as 'Since' or 'Inasmuch as' [you have heard...]

God, in his grace, had given this ministry or stewardship to Paul that he might be used of God to bring to the Gentiles the message of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf. Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:16; Gal. 1:12) This was the 'mystery' previously hidden from general knowledge, but now made known to Paul (and also to the other apostles). This mystery was that the Gentiles were now to be included in God's promised blessings to Abraham. Thus, Jew and Gentile believers would be united in one Body, the Church. (Eph. 1:9-10).

It is true that, frequently, the OT prophets had foretold that God would bless the Gentile nations. However, this truth was not generally understood among God's people, nor was it fully disclosed until the inauguration of the New Covenant. Prior to this, God's people, Israel, believed that Gentiles could be accepted into God's covenant blessings only by becoming Jewish proselytes or converts. Additionally, Israel believed that these Gentile converts must submit themselves and their households to all the rites and ordinances of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision.

Only when Christ inaugurated the New Covenant in his blood and established his Church did God reveal this former 'mystery' or hidden truth to his holy—i.e., sacred or consecrated—apostles and prophets.

Paul intimates that he had already written briefly to the Ephesians about this matter. However, it is not now possible to identify the letter to which he apostle is referring.

In verses 4 and 5, the apostle declares:

Ephesians 3:4-5

In this letter, Paul had been explaining at some length what this mystery entailed. He has told the Ephesian believers how God had planned from eternity to include many people from among the Gentiles in his covenant blessings. Thus, his plan was to unite both believing Jews and believing Gentiles in Christ Jesus. This 'mystery' had not previously been revealed to the people of God (in the OT), but now God had made known to his apostles and prophets his plan to unite both groups in one body, the church. This was the 'revelation' of the mystery to which Paul referred and of which he had written about earlier in his letter.

In verse 6, the apostle confirms this interpretation by writing:

Ephesians 3:6

All the blessings of salvation that God had promised to the seed of Abraham were now freely available to the Gentiles as well. All those whom God has called, both Jew and Gentile, stand to inherit the promised blessings in Christ. In him, God has made them both one body—one single communion of saints worldwide. They are heirs together of the riches of Christ Jesus. They share together in all the promises that God bestows upon his redeemed children through faith in his Son. (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 2:13,14; Gal. 3:29)

Paul explains this truth further in his letter to the Galatians, where he writes in chapter 3:

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Gal. 3:14 NIV)

In verse 7, Paul continues by writing:

Ephesians 3:7

Paul declares himself a servant or minister of the Gospel. In his immeasurable grace, God had appointed the former Pharisee, blasphemer of the Lord Jesus and persecutor of the church to proclaim the message of eternal salvation to the Gentiles. Such an inward change in the apostle's former manner of life, however, was not brought about by his own will or effort. Indeed, it required the almighty power of God to convert Saul of Tarsus to the truth and to bring him to repentance and faith in Christ. But this is precisely what God did by his Holy Spirit when the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul on the Damascus road. Thus, all praise, honour, and glory for Paul's inward transformation or renewal was due to God alone and to his Son. (Acts 9:1-22)

Paul finds the grace of God toward him almost incomprehensible. Thus, in verses 8 and 9, the apostle exclaims:

Ephesians 3:8-9

Paul considers himself as incomparably of the least significance among not only the apostles but also among the entire people of God. He elsewhere declares that he is not fit to be called an apostle. (1 Cor. 15:9) Yet, God in his mercy called Paul to himself and appointed him to this great office in his church. God bestowed grace beyond measure upon this former enemy of Christ and made him Christ's ambassador to the nations. Thus, to

people of all nationalities and ethnic groups, God had appointed Paul to declare the unsearchable or incomprehensible riches of Christ.

These immeasurable riches included the entire plan of redemption as it related to both Jews and Gentiles. They included the message that God had united both groups together in one body, the church, through faith in Christ. They included the declaration to the Gentiles that they too would now be accepted as God's children and would become heirs with their fellow-believers of the Son's inheritance in glory. What, for generations past, remained a mystery, God was now disclosing to all his elect people through his apostles and other servants of the Lord Jesus. (Col. 1:26)

Paul's task was to make plain to everyone (or to make all men see) the truth of the Gospel. In other words, the apostle was to point to the Light of the world and to diffuse the teaching of that Light among all mankind.

Yet, God the Creator of all things, had, from eternity, purposed to reveal in the latter days this very plan of redemption: a plan that encompassed both Jews and Gentiles. Thus, in verses 10 and 11, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 3:10-11

The uniting of God's redeemed and holy people into one body, the church—a body comprising the elect of every nation under heaven—was to show forth the greatly variegated and inexhaustible wisdom of God. This is a wisdom that is not merely infinite, but immeasurably good, diverse and incomprehensible in all its multifarious phases and expressions. God displays such immense wisdom throughout his entire plan of redemption, including the incarnation and the atonement, and the sanctification and glorification of his redeemed people.

But to whom particularly did God intend to display through his church this abundant wisdom? The apostle tells us that this glorious plan—

should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms
(v.10b).

The church was to make known the wisdom of God to the highest created beings in the universe. Where holy angels are concerned, the church declares the glory and wisdom of God in its worship and practice, both corporately as a church and as individual believers. Thus, the angels behold the wisdom of God in and through the church as they continue to serve the Lord in his most holy presence or as they are sent forth by to minister to the heirs of salvation. (Heb. 1:14)

However, if God has charged his church to declare his wisdom to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, then the church ought also to declare the wisdom of God to rulers and authorities in the earthly realms. By the testimony of our lives and in our church gatherings, we ought to show forth to the authorities, whom God has appointed, something of the wisdom of God in and through his called out people, the church. Even more, then, should God's people pray for those in authority, that God may reveal to them something of his truth, righteousness and justice, and show forth his manifold wisdom and sovereign power to those who govern the nations. (1 Tim. 2:1-4)

All this was, of course, part of God's eternal purposes for the redemption of sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords will one day call every ruler and authority on earth before him in judgment. Then, they will see the magnificence of his glory and of his wisdom when he judges them according to their works.

This same Jesus is the one who has redeemed us and reconciled us to our Father in heaven. Thus, in verse 12, the apostle Paul writes:

Ephesians 3:12

God has united us to and with his Son and he has raised us up together with his Son so that we are now effectively seated with him in glory. Where God has now placed us *spiritually*, he has guaranteed to place us *physically* and *literally* by giving us the pledge of his Holy Spirit. Even now, however—because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and because of our union with him in glory—we are granted complete freedom to come before God with confidence. (Heb. 4:16) We may approach him without any trace of servile fear—yet reverencing his great, majestic, and holy name—on the basis of our Lord’s work and ongoing intercession on our behalf. (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

This confidence to approach God in heaven does not rest upon anything in us, but rather purely on the work and on the merits of God’s Son. It is because of his perfect and substitutionary atonement on our behalf that we can now approach our heavenly Father’s throne through his Son. We know that, as we come into his presence, God sees within us only the perfect (imputed) righteousness of his own Son, and not our own glaring imperfections and failures.

Thus, in verse 13, Paul says:

Ephesians 3:13

The Ephesian church had learned of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome for the sake of the Gospel, and they would be greatly concerned for their former teacher and spiritual guide. Paul, however, is anxious to reassure them. The apostle encourages these dear saints and exhorts them not to lose heart on account of his present trials and afflictions in prison. Although he has been detained, and therefore prevented from visiting the churches, God is using Paul’s present circumstances to his own glory. The Lord has ensured that the apostle has not been held in bonds, but has been permitted freedom to move about and continue the Lord’s work within his temporary residence. Thus, Paul is able to write this letter to Ephesus and to other churches, and so fulfil the purposes of God for him at this time. These sufferings may involve his loss of physical liberty, but they do not involve his loss of liberty to write the words of God by the Spirit of God and to send these letters to God’s churches. For this and many other reasons, Paul declares that these present sufferings are for the Ephesians glory—i.e., they are in reality a cause of rejoicing among the saints at Ephesus, and elsewhere.

From verse 14 onward, Paul may be resuming the sentence that he began in verse 1, or he may be attributing his following remarks to everything that precedes in this epistle. In any event, the apostle makes known his response to God’s work in the hearts and lives of the Ephesian believers by writing in verses 14 and 15:

Ephesians 3:14-15

The apostle implies from these verses that he remembers with thanksgiving and praise every one of the believers at Ephesus. He tells them that he kneels before the Father, an attitude of prayer that signifies humility and reverence. This is a most appropriate position for approaching God; for, although he is our Father in heaven, he is also the Most High and Holy God. He is sovereign or supreme in majesty, power, and glory. If, then, we would acknowledge an earthly sovereign or ruler by bowing or kneeling before them, how much more ought we to recognise God’s sovereignty over our lives and over the universe by kneeling before him in prayer?

Sadly, the church seems to have lost sight of the reverence due to God, and of the humility that we ought to show in his most holy presence. We may indeed approach God’s heavenly throne with confidence and boldness through our Lord Jesus Christ. This does not mean, however, that we may approach God’s throne with familiarity or lack of due reverence.

There are, of course, other postures appropriate in prayer. The Bible mentions those who stood before God to pray (e.g., Abraham in Gen. 18:22), and also those who sat down to pray (e.g., David in 1 Chron. 17:16). Kneeling is most appropriate under specific circumstances, particularly at home or in private prayer to God. But whatever mode we adopt, we should approach God in prayer with a sincere, humble and contrite heart—and with due reverence for the holiness of his Person.

In verse 15, Paul declares that the whole family of God, the church, derives its name or existence from him. Whether they be living on earth or present with God in heaven, the entire church of the Lord Jesus Christ exists and is sustained by the grace of God and is being upheld and preserved by his almighty hand.

The phrase, *the whole family*, refers to the redeemed family of God, and does not on this occasion include the holy angels. The whole family is comprised of the entire church of God on earth (*the church militant*) together with the entire church of God in heaven (*the church triumphant*). In Hebrews, the redeemed in heaven are referred to as the spirits of just men made perfect. (Heb. 12:23)

Paul now begins to detail the prayer that he makes on his knees before God on behalf of the Ephesians believers. Thus, in verse 16 to 17a, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 3:16-17a

Paul now prays that—out of the abundant riches of his everlasting grace—God may grant spiritual strength to these dear believers at Ephesus. God's 'glory' is the sum of all his divine attributes. 'The riches of his [God's] glory' (KJV) is a phrase used to emphasise the magnificence of these attributes.

In the present context, the expression, 'the riches of his glory' (KJV), or, 'his glorious riches' (NIV), indicates something of the immeasurable wisdom, love, mercy, grace, and kindness of God toward his redeemed children. It is out of these abundant and glorious riches that Paul prays that God will bestow strength and power upon the individual members of the church at Ephesus.

The apostle multiplies his expressions by saying that he prays that God will 'strengthen them with power' (NKJV, 'strengthened with might'.) This power, of course, is not human power but the power of God Almighty, as exhibited by God's Holy Spirit in the inward lives of these believers. Thus, Paul is praying that they may be 'strengthened with power' in regard to their whole spiritual being, including their moral faculties. These faculties comprehend such things as the faculties of the will, intellect, and understanding, together with every other God-given moral or rational faculty, as now consecrated to God and to his service.

Paul's concern is that—in the person of his Holy Spirit—the Lord Jesus Christ may continue to dwell or abide supreme in the hearts and lives of these believers. Thus, with Christ as Lord of their lives, and his Spirit strengthening them inwardly by God's almighty power, they will be enabled to live to the praise of God's glory, and to serve the Lord wherever he calls them or places them. In addition, they will be able to face trial and adversity for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that he will carry them through every vexing situation. In all their day to day affairs, Paul is praying that God will grant them the spiritual and moral strength and power (or might) to conduct themselves wisely, faithfully, and honourably—ever remembering that they serve and represent the Lord of glory himself.

Paul recognises that their walk with the Lord involves faith in his Word and in his promises. Thus, the apostle prays that in virtue of God's indwelling presence, they may continue to live by faith in the Son of God who loved them and who gave himself for them. By faith, we believe he is ever with us and within us. By faith, we become aware of his

power, glory, love and mercy toward us. By faith, we live to honour him in our lives and to make known his name among others.

In verses 17b to 19, the apostle continues:

Ephesians 3:17b-19

Here, it becomes extremely difficult to explain in ordinary language just how deeply Paul yearned in prayer for these believers. He beseeches God earnestly that these saints at Ephesus might be deeply rooted or grounded in the things of God, and established firmly in the love of God. He prays with all his being that—in common with God's people everywhere—they may begin to experience something of the magnitude of Christ's love for them. Thus, the apostle implies by his use of the expressions, 'how wide, long, high, and deep', that the love of Christ for them is beyond measure, and so it is. As Paul expresses it in verse 19, the extent of Christ's eternal love for his people surpasses knowledge: i.e., it far exceeds the ability of the human mind to comprehend, measure, express, or fully understand.

In the last phrase of verse 19, Paul heaps one expression upon another. Thus, the apostle prays to God that they may be filled to the fullest possible measure of all the fullness of God. It is impossible to expound these words adequately in English or in any other human language. Paul is beseeching God in prayer to fill them to the utmost measure out of all the infinite riches of God's glory and grace. This is an extension of the apostle's earlier thought that they may be strengthened with power or might in their inward being.

Those who thus are filled with the fullness of God show it by bringing forth in their lives the fruit of holiness or the fruit of the Spirit, in ever-increasing measure. Thus, Paul is beseeching God that these believers may receive—in the fullest possible measure, and out of God's abundantly rich resources—such things as meekness, kindness, love, mercy, grace, patience, perseverance, goodness, justice, righteousness and integrity. These, and many other similar qualities, are the attributes that truly reflect the character of God their heavenly Father and of Jesus Christ his Son.

To God be the Glory!

Having reached such ineffable heights in prayer on behalf of the Ephesians, the apostle now ends the first part of his epistle with the following magnificent doxology:

Ephesians 3:20-21

(20) Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, (21) to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
(NIV)

Here, we glimpse something of Paul's view of the infinite and omnipotent God. Not only does God possess power or ability beyond measure to do anything that we ask, but he is able also to do immeasurably (KJV, *exceeding abundantly*) more than anything that we can possibly think or imagine (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). Clearly, God always responds to prayer in accordance with his divine will and purposes. However, whenever the prayers of his people accord with his will, God exercises his omnipotence to put into effect the answer to our prayers or petitions. Out of his infinite power and riches in glory, the majestic, glorious, and almighty God hears and responds to his people's cries.

The same power that God exercises in the fulfilment of his plans and purposes and in response to our prayers, is the power that is working within the believers' hearts and lives. This is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit; himself God, and possessing all the attrib-

utes of Almighty God himself. The Holy Spirit dwells within God's temple on earth (our bodies) and sanctifies us unto the Most High God.

The fact that the almighty Spirit of God can dwell within the people of God is a mystery that we cannot comprehend or explain. Yet, it finds its parallel in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Although he was truly God as well as truly man, yet God the Son could walk among the people—even although he was the Light of the world and possessed all the attributes of Deity.

When, however, Paul considers the majesty, power, and glory of the Father who works for us and in us, the apostle is constrained to exalt and magnify his most high and holy name. Thus, in verse 21, Paul blesses God's name, praying that his eternal glory may be known in and through the church in the person of Jesus Christ his Son, and throughout all generations (cf. v.10).

When Paul prays that God will reveal his glory in the church, he is praying along similar lines to Moses when this man of God asked to see God's glory. Moses was not permitted to behold the glory of God face to face, as no one could see God's glory and survive the experience. However, the LORD allowed Moses to see his *goodness*, and thus to glimpse something of the eternal glory of God Almighty.

As we noted previously, the 'glory of God' is generally considered to consist of the sum of all his attributes. This would include such characteristics as God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. It would include also God's infinite and pure holiness, justice, righteousness, wrath, integrity, wisdom, love, mercy, grace, kindness, compassion, patience, and other similar attributes of his glory. However, no one—in his or her present earthly condition—could look upon the person of the Almighty God who is characterised by such glorious attributes, and ever survive the absolutely pure and holy radiance of that illustrious sight. Even so, this is the source of God's goodness toward his church and toward individual believers. This is the power and the glory that is now at work in the church and among his people. And this—in appropriate measure—is the kind of characteristics that the Lord calls upon his people to exhibit in their own lives, by the inward working of the Holy Spirit.

When, however, we as believers attribute glory to God (or glorify God), we do so by praising, honouring, and worshipping his majestic and holy Name. The 'Name' [of God] denotes the Person of God in all his glorious attributes. Thus, by glorifying God in our prayers and worship, we are recognising God's eternal sovereignty, dignity and power. We are ascribing to his holy name the praise, honour and glory due to him.

Paul's magnificent doxology, therefore, expresses the thoughts and intents of our own hearts as he exclaims:

(20) Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, (21) to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
(Eph. 3:20-21 NIV; cf. Rom. 16:25-27)

Ephesians Chapter 4

Unity, Gifts and Service

Ephesians 4:1-16

In the first part of his letter to Ephesus, Paul emphasised the grace of God toward these believers and toward the church of the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere. The apostle spoke of God's immeasurable love, mercy, and grace toward his redeemed people, and of the fact that he had raised them up to the heavenly realms in union with his Son.

Now, in the second part of his epistle, the apostle Paul turns his attention to the believers' everyday life and conduct. In view of everything that God has done for them, and bearing in mind that they have been created anew in Christ Jesus, the apostle writes in verse 1 of chapter 4:

Ephesians 4:1

Previously, Paul had said that God had appointed him as an apostle (official representative or 'sent one') of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul also considered himself as a servant of the Lord. Now, however, Paul was being detained at Rome under house arrest. Yet, the apostle had been imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel. Moreover, even during his present confinement, the Lord was using Paul to teach and edify his church through his epistles.

From his place of confinement, the apostle beseeches the believers at Ephesus to prove the reality of their new life in Christ by living in a manner that was worthy of his holy name. In his grace and mercy and in accordance with his eternal purposes, God had called the Ephesians believers to repentance and faith in his Son. Now, they were the children of God. Thus, Paul urges these saints to live as those whom God has redeemed and whom his Holy Spirit was sanctifying in character and conduct.

In the following verses, the apostle begins to illustrate the kind of fruit these believers should be producing in their daily lives, through the inward working of the Spirit of holiness. Thus, in verse 2, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 4:2

Paul urges deep *humility* or *lowliness*. This is an essential characteristic of God's children. God's redeemed and holy people ought not to be sinfully proud, conceited, or arrogant in any sense whatever. Rather, they should consider others better than themselves and be prepared to accept the lower positions.

Similarly, Paul urges *gentleness* or *meekness*; i.e., a kind disposition toward others and a willingness to do good to or for other people. This goodness of nature excludes any tendency to be overbearing, unkind, thoughtless, unjustly critical, or indiscreet.

Next, the apostle urges *patience*. Patience means not only the determination to endure or persevere, but also the willingness to bear with others. It involves a willingness to let God act on our behalf, and not to seek to right wrongs by ourselves. Thus, the apostle adds the words, '*bearing with one another in love.*' The people of God are to be forgiving toward one another, and not to hold grudges against each other. Rather, they are to forbear—or bear with—each other, and to do so out of love, or with a loving heart.

We should note that, with God, characteristics such as humility, gentleness, or patience do not imply weakness of character. On the contrary, each of these attributes denotes moral and spiritual strength. Patience—or a longsuffering or persevering nature—together with a humble and gentle heart, indicates true strength of character. These characteristics were just some of the characteristics displayed in the life of the eternal Son of God during his incarnation. Thus, we remember the words of the Lord Jesus himself:

Matt. 11:29 NIV

...for I am gentle and humble in heart...

And in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, the apostle says in allusion to the Lord Jesus:

2 Cor. 10:1 NIV

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...

Concerning gentleness or meekness, Dr. Charles Hodge wrote in his commentary on Ephesians:

Meekness is that unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind, which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults or injuries of others. It is the disposition of which the lamb, dumb before the shearers, is the symbol, and which was one of the most wonderful of all the virtues of the Son of God. The most exalted of all beings was the gentlest²

In verse 6, the apostle continues by urging the Ephesian believers to:

Ephesians 4:3

Paul exhorts the church at Ephesus to maintain that unity of spirit among believers that finds its source and vitality in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has united all believers of all nationalities and ethnic groups into one body, the church—the body of which Christ is head. Paul had already made the Ephesians aware that God had united two previously distinct groups—believing Jews and believing Gentiles—in one body. Those, therefore, whom Christ has reconciled to his Father and united in one body, ought to make every possible effort to maintain their unity, in and through the Spirit of God.

Paul adds, however, that this unity of the Spirit should be maintained through the bond of peace. In other words, we ought to strive diligently to maintain the unity among God's people, through a spirit of mutual understanding, peace and harmony.

There is, of course, only one faith and truth to maintain. Thus, in verses 4 to 6, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 4:4

The body of Christ is one. Although the visible church is comprised of many denominations, all truly regenerated believers from each of these denominations form the one mystical body of which Christ is head. This is the true or invisible church. Thus, believers of

² Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Ephesians*, 4:2, p.141.

every nation on earth, and of countless local churches around the world, together form one body in Christ. (Rom. 12:5)

We should note, however, that only those who belong to Christ by effectual calling, regeneration and adoption form part of this worldwide church. Many people attend the visible church, and a large number profess allegiance to Christ, outwardly at least. However, not all belong to Christ. The Lord knows those who are his. (Matt. 7:23; Rom. 8:9; 2 Tim. 2:19)

Paul continues by saying that there is one Spirit. That is, there is one Holy Spirit by whom we have been called and regenerated and by whom we are being sanctified. There is one Holy Spirit who indwells each child of God to seal him or her as belonging to God and to guarantee their final salvation and glorification. (Eph. 1:14) This same Holy Spirit of God baptises and unites all believers into the one body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:13) The Spirit of holiness binds God's church in perfect spiritual unity. Thus, we ought to receive other believers as members of the same body of Christ to which we belong.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit apportions individual gifts to each believer, as he will, to be used in the service of the church and for God's glory. Paul will speak further on this in the following verses.

Furthermore, there is one hope of salvation and eternal life. (Col. 1:5) This hope or assurance is found through faith in Jesus Christ alone. There is no other name under heaven through whom anyone can be saved. (Acts 4:12) There is no other means of salvation or forgiveness of sins for anyone on this earth except through faith in the Son of God. He alone is our eternal hope and assurance of salvation. And it is to this sure hope that God called us in his grace, that we might be made partakers of eternal life.

In verse 5, the apostle Paul continues this sentence on unity in Christ by declaring that there is:

Ephesians 4:5

There is one Lord—Jesus Christ. He is our Lord, owner or possessor, and he is the one who exercises absolute and rightful authority over us. Christ is also Lord of the church, and he is Lord of all. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Lordship implies sovereignty or supreme rule. The risen, exalted and glorified Lord Jesus is sovereign over his church and over our lives. We ought always to submit to his sovereign rule over us, and willingly obey his will in everything. So also the church universal must recognise and submit to Christ as Sovereign Lord of his entire worldwide church.

The apostle continues by reminding the Ephesians of the fact that God has united them in one universal (Christian) faith—a faith that all true believers in Christ hold in common. Although they may differ in their interpretation of some non-essential matters, every truly regenerated child of God holds to the same fundamental truths of God's holy, inerrant, and infallible Word.

Commitment to this one faith—a faith which is itself the gift of God—implies wholehearted belief in all that Christ has accomplished for those who belong to him. It implies a willingness to trust him completely for everything that he will yet do in our lives and for the sake of his promises.

Finally, in verse 5, the apostle says that there is one baptism. Paul is not here indicating one mode of baptism, but is simply asserting that all believers receive one baptism into the church; a baptism that is administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Under the OT arrangement, the children of Israel received the sign of circumcision to denote their participation in God's (Old) Covenant. Under the present NT arrangement, the

children of God receive baptism to denote their participation in the New Covenant; that Covenant which Christ has sealed with his blood. (Cf. Gal. 3:27-29)

In verse 6, Paul continues by saying that there is:

Ephesians 4:6

There is only one true and living God, and this God is one. The Lord God Almighty of the OT is the same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the one whom we know as our Father in heaven. In the person of his Son and by his Holy Spirit, he pervades and fills our very being with all the fullness of his presence and power. Something of this is seen in the riches of his grace toward us, and in all the benefits and blessings that he bestows upon us in Christ Jesus.

Three divine Persons make up the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three are one. At another level, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one mystically united body, although made up of many separate local congregations. The same God who pervades and fills our individual lives by his Holy Spirit also pervades and fills the entire mystical body of Christ worldwide. Furthermore, God fills, sustains, and directs all things in the universe for the ultimate good of his church and for his own eternal glory.

Paul asserts that the one true God is God over all. He rules supremely above all. He exercises his sovereign dominion through all and in all things in heaven and earth. God rules supreme over his church and over individual believers, through his Son. Our lives are in his hands. Our steps are determined by God in heaven. (Job 12:10; Prov. 16:9)

In these last few verses, Paul has been emphasising the unity of the Spirit, and has been calling upon the Ephesian believers to maintain that unity in peace and harmony (v.3). Moreover, the apostle has declared that there is one body, the church; and that the (true or invisible) church worldwide is one single body in Christ, and of which Christ is Head.

The church universal comprises believers of every nationality and colour, and it consists of both Jewish and Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has united every one of these believers into the one body of Christ, and has placed each one within his own heavenly family, without preferring one group or person above another. All have been called by, and have received, the same indwelling Holy Spirit. All have acknowledged the same Lord; all have professed the same faith, and all have been baptised into the same body of Christ. All now submit to the same God and Father of all believers and to his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. All now endeavour to honour God by yielding to his Word as applied to their hearts and lives by his Holy Spirit.

These fundamental truths concerning the unity of the body of Christ—the true church worldwide—should be acknowledged and observed by all believers, including those at Ephesus. However, whereas these spiritual truths concern matters that are common to all believers, certain spiritual matters are not common to all. One of these is the distribution of spiritual gifts, or gifts that God gives to his church for its edification and growth in holiness of life. Specific spiritual gifts are granted on an individual basis, and each gift bestowed is in accordance with God's sovereign will and pleasure, for his glory, and for the benefit of his church.

To this end, the apostle Paul writes in verse 7:

Ephesians 4:7

Common to all believers is the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit together with his gracious influences that sanctify our lives and help us produce spiritual fruit in ever-increasing measure. However, in this place, the apostle appears to be speaking of God's grace as it is demonstrated toward his people in the assigning of particular gifts or offices within the

church. To each individual believer, the Lord Jesus apportions a specific gift, through his Holy Spirit and according to the grace of God. This gift is to be used only as the Lord intends, and for the benefit and blessing of his church.

Thus, concerning the endowment of these specific gifts of God's grace, the apostle writes in verse 8:

Ephesians 4:8

Quoting Psalm 68 verse 18, Paul speaks of the resurrected Lord Jesus' triumphant ascent to the glory of his Father's right hand. The risen and glorified Son of God had defeated Satan at the cross. Now, in his glorious ascension, he led captive sin, Satan, death and hell. (Luke 11:21-22; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15)

Furthermore, in token of his victory, he bestowed priceless gifts upon men; i.e., upon all those whom he had died to redeem and reconcile to his Father in heaven.

The one, however, who has now ascended in victory first had to descend from the heights of glory. Thus, in verse 9, Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:9

From eternity, the Son of God, occupied the place of equality, power and glory with his Father and with the Holy Spirit. However, when God sent his one and only Son into the world, the eternal Word descended from these heights of glory to a place that would involve his voluntary humiliation. The Son of God came down from the highest heavens to a vastly lower realm of God's creation—this earthly region; a region defiled by sin and under God's wrath and curse. The holy Son of God left heaven's perfections and glories to descend to the imperfections of this world. Here, the Lord of glory took upon himself human form; here he humbled himself, and here he associated with sinful men and women. Yet, throughout the time of his incarnation on earth, Jesus remained absolutely pure and sinless. (Phil. 2:6-8)

Paul continues by writing in verse 10:

Ephesians 4:10

The same Son of God who descended from the heights of glory to the lower realms of God's creation—i.e., to this earth—has also ascended again to his rightful place in glory. Jesus has ascended far beyond the highest created heavens into the very presence of the Father himself. There, seated at the right hand of his Father—the position of equality, power, glory, and supreme majesty, the Son of God exercises sovereign dominion over the entire universe. (Eph. 1:20-23; cf. Heb. 7:26)

The exalted and glorified Son of God rules in heaven, fulfilling all the ordained purposes of his Father. Thus, he continues to bring everlasting glory to the name of his Father. The risen Lord Jesus also rules in heaven for the good of the church worldwide. To this end, he fills the whole universe with his power, glory, and majesty. Everything in all creation falls under his sovereign sway (cf. Jer. 23:24).

By his omnipotence, the glorified Lord Jesus directs everything to the fulfillment of God's eternal plans. Thus, on the day of his appointing, everything in heaven above and on earth below will be compelled to acknowledge the reality and extent of his sovereign power and authority. For—on that day—every knee will bow in submission before him, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:11)

False Claimants to Christ's Gifts

From this exalted position of supreme majesty and sovereign power and dominion, the eternal Son of God dispenses his gifts of grace to the church. Thus, in verse 11 to 13, the apostle Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:11-13

Before considering this passage, let us make the following observation concerning those who receive the gifts or offices of the Holy Spirit.

None of us has the right to take upon himself any of the gifts or offices within the church. It is not for an individual believer to lay claim to such gifts or offices, nor for any group or committee of men to dispense them to others. The Holy Spirit alone dispenses the gifts and offices of Christ to his church. (1 Cor. 12:4-11)

Those whom the Spirit of God has not specifically called, and to whom he has not imparted some spiritual gift or office, have no mandate, power or authority to act in the name of Christ or to serve in his church. If this spiritual law were observed, there would be much less room in God's church for ungodly, spiritually unqualified, and improperly equipped men and women. Christ himself appoints specific spiritual gifts and/or offices to each member of his true church. Almost invariably, however, he does not appoint unregenerate men or women to serve in his church, nor does he grant them any of the gifts or offices listed in this passage.

One exception to this general rule was Judas Iscariot. The Lord knew from the outset that Judas was not truly regenerated and that he would betray him. Yet, Jesus called him to be his disciple. He appointed this scheming individual to the apostolic office among the Twelve. Judas, therefore, presumably preached the message of Christ, but with an un-sanctified heart and from an unrenewed life. Presumably, he performed signs and wonders, which would appear to attest to his calling and appointment. Yet, this man did not belong to Christ, as subsequent events would reveal. Judas Iscariot fulfilled the eternal purposes of God for his Son in regard to the plan of redemption. Nevertheless, this man remained wholly responsible to God for his sinful and evil actions. How important it is for each one of God's people to test the spirits, to see whether they are of God, and to expose and reject ungodly men and those who claim (falsely) to possess the gifts or offices of the Holy Spirit. (1 John 4:1) Those who claimed such gifts or offices, but whom Christ had not explicitly appointed to that office, were known as 'false apostles'.

Christ's Gifts to his Church

Since verses 11 to 13 form one long sentence, we will consider each of the main clauses separately, following the individual verse numbers. Thus, in verse 11, we read:

Ephesians 4:11

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (NIV)

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 28, the apostle Paul writes:

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:28 NIV)

Apostles

The first gift and office that Paul mentions above is that of the apostleship. This office is not only first in order but also first in importance. Christ would found his church upon the apostles—i.e., upon his teaching or doctrine as it was proclaimed and expounded by his Spirit-inspired apostles. To them, the Lord Jesus Christ would commit the authority (or ‘keys’) to proclaim the Gospel and to establish his church. From this, it follows that the apostolic office could exist only during the apostolic age itself. None could succeed to this office, since one had to be called directly by Christ and fulfil specific qualifications to serve in the apostleship. Furthermore, since Christ founded his church upon the original apostles—himself being the chief cornerstone—no other apostles can be added to their number.

An apostle is a messenger, ambassador, or ‘sent one’ of God. The Lord called and appointed certain individuals to serve as his apostles. These specially appointed servants of the cross were to bear the message of redemption to the world and to establish and build up local churches in Christ’s name. To qualify as an apostle, a person had to have received and believed the teachings of Christ; to have been appointed by Christ to the apostolic office, and to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 13:31)

Thus, the original Twelve disciples were known as apostles of the Lord Jesus. (Cf. Matt. 10:1ff with Acts 1:21-26) (But, concerning Judas Iscariot, see further under the preceding section, *False Claimants to Christ’s Gifts*.)

Following his conversion on the Damascus road and his witness to the resurrected Lord Jesus, Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul. Paul received his instruction in the things of the Lord Jesus directly from the Lord himself during his period in Arabia. (Cf. Acts 9:3ff with Gal. 1:16-17; see also Acts 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; Gal. 1:12)

Additionally, those whom the Spirit of God appointed and gifted as apostles of the Lord Jesus received the gift of tongues; i.e., the ability to speak in foreign and previously unlearned languages. (Acts 2:1-11) Furthermore, to attest to their ministry as apostles, the Spirit enabled them to perform outstanding signs, wonders, and other remarkable miracles. These outstanding demonstrations of God’s power confirmed the authenticity and authority of the apostle’s office.

Everything that the apostles taught the churches, or wrote to them in their letters, was the inerrant and infallible word of God. This is because—like the OT prophets of God before them—the apostles of Christ were guided and inspired in their teaching by the Holy Spirit of God. To this end, the Lord Jesus sent his Holy Spirit in special measure to these apostles to guide them into all truth and to preserve them from error in doctrine. (John 15:26)

Sometimes, in the NT, the term ‘apostle’ is used in the sense of ‘missionary’. Thus, certain missionaries of Christ, such as Barnabas are sometimes called ‘apostles’. These men, however, were not apostles in the sense described above. They had not received the teachings of Jesus directly from the Lord himself. Nor had they been personal eyewitnesses of his resurrection. These servants of the Lord Jesus, however, were considered as the Lord’s ‘apostles’ in a more general sense.

Prophets

The second office that Paul mentions in verse 11, is that of prophets. In the OT, a true prophet was a holy man of God who spoke to the people in the name of the LORD. God filled that man with his Spirit so that everything that he uttered in God’s name and under God’s authority was to be received as the very words of the living God himself. To this end, the Holy Spirit inspired the prophets of God, preserving them from error in teaching or errors in proclaiming the word and will of God to the people.

A prophet was also one who spoke on behalf of another. Thus, Aaron was known as a prophet because he spoke to the people on behalf of Moses. Moses himself, of course, had been called and appointed by God to lead his people, and to declare to them the commands and will of God. Therefore, what Aaron spoke on behalf of Moses was what the LORD God had previously commanded Moses to declare to the people.

All true prophets, therefore, did not speak on their own behalf, but on behalf of the LORD their God. The LORD had called and appointed them to this office, and he had equipped them for their task by imparting to them his Holy Spirit in special measure. Thus, these holy men of God expressed to the people the very utterances or words of God.

In the NT, God's Holy Spirit called and appointed certain people to the office of prophet, and he equipped them with the necessary gifts for that office. Thus, these NT prophets made known the truths of God's Word to the early church; they taught them in their most holy faith, and they encouraged them and instructed them in the way of holiness, righteousness and truth.

The NT prophets were not principally foretellers, although, on occasions, they did speak of future events—as for example with the prophet Agabus. Their primary ministry was to teach or expound the truths of God's Word, both from the OT Scriptures and from the doctrine of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. Their office was of a temporary nature, given by the Spirit of God to help establish and strengthen the early church. Ultimately, however, the gift and office of preaching and teaching, with which prophecy held many elements in common, would replace it.

The fact that prophecy was principally a ministry of teaching, exhortation, and encouragement, is demonstrated by Paul's remarks concerning this gift in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. In verses 1 to 5 of that passage, the apostle writes:

(1) Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. (2) For anyone who speaks in a tongue³ does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.⁴ (3) But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. (4) He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. (5) I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,⁵ but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues,⁶ unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified. (1 Cor. 12:1-5 NIV)

In verse 3 above, the apostle Paul says:

(3) But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

Thus we see how Paul and the early church viewed the nature and gift of prophecy. Although there were some exceptions, prophecy was not given primarily to foretell future events, but to strengthen, encourage, and comfort the people of God. A prophet did this by opening the Scriptures to the believers and by explaining or expounding, and applying the truths of these Scriptures to their hearts and lives. In this way, the prophets helped to build up the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Or *another language*; also in verses 4, 13, 14, 19, 26 and 27 [NIV footnote to 1 Cor. 12:2a]

⁴ Or *by the Spirit* [NIV footnote to 1 Cor. 12:2b]

⁵ Or *other languages*; also in verses 6, 18, 22, 23 and 39 [NIV footnote to 1 Cor. 12:5b]

⁶ Or *other languages*; also in verses 6, 18, 22, 23 and 39 [NIV footnote to 1 Cor. 12:5b]

We have considered the term 'prophet' and 'prophesy' as it relates to the present context. However, the words 'prophet' (or 'prophetess') and 'prophesy' is used in a variety of senses that space does not permit us to enlarge upon here. For completeness, however, we may summarise the various senses by quoting the following extract concerning prophecy from Barnes' Notes:

- (1) It means to predict or foretell future events, Matt. 11:13; 15:7.
- (2) to divine, to conjecture, to declare as a prophet might, Matt. 26:68, "Prophesy who smote thee."
- (3) to celebrate the praises of God, being under a divine influence, Luke 1:67. This seems to have been a considerable part of the employment in the ancient schools of the prophet, 1 Sam. 10:5; 19:20; 30:15.
- (4) to teach—as no small part of the office of the prophets was to teach the doctrines of religion, Matt. 7:22, "Have we not prophesied in thy name?"
- (5) it denotes, then, in general, "to speak under a divine influence," whether in foretelling future events, in celebrating the praises of God, in instructing others in the duties of religion, or "in speaking foreign languages under that influence." In this last sense the word is used in the New Testament, to denote those who were miraculously endowed with the power of speaking foreign languages, Acts 19:6. The word is also used to denote "teaching, or speaking in intelligible language, in opposition to speaking a foreign tongue," 1 Cor. 14:1-5. In this place it means that they would speak under a divine influence, and is specially applied to the power of speaking in a foreign tongue.

Evangelists

In Ephesians 4:11, the next group of men whom Paul lists as being gifted to the church were evangelists. It is not now possible to determine with accuracy the exact role of these servants of the Lord Jesus. However, the term 'evangelist' means a 'herald', a 'bringer of good news', or 'one who proclaims the Gospel'. Hence, it would appear that these evangelists were men who had not been called to the apostolic office or to the pastoral and teaching office, but whom the Spirit had equipped and commissioned to proclaim the message of Christ from town to town. Thus, these evangelists brought the message of Christ to those places where the Gospel had not been heard previously.

To a certain extent, evangelists augmented and complemented the work of the apostles. However, evangelists differed from the ministry of the apostles to the extent that the apostolic office also included responsibility for the care and governing of the churches. It also included the responsibility for the general oversight of all the churches of Christ. Furthermore, when teaching doctrine or writing their epistles to the churches, the apostles spoke or wrote by direct inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. This power and authority to speak directly in the name of the Lord was not generally given to evangelists (Philip excepted) or to any other servants of God in the NT (although, of course, a similar power and authority was given to the holy prophets of the OT).

Again, the office of evangelist differed from that of pastors and teachers insofar that, generally—although not exclusively—pastors and teachers confined their ministry to one local church or one locality.

One example of an evangelist is that of Philip. We are told expressly that Philip had been equipped for this ministry, and we know that Philip preached the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ from place to place. (Acts 8:5ff; 8:26ff; 21:8)

Paul also described Timothy as an evangelist, although Timothy held other offices and exercised other gifts. (2 Tim. 4:5)

Pastors and Teachers

It is true that the Spirit of God often gives the office and gifts of a teacher to those who are not called to be pastors. (Acts 13:1; Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28) However, the Holy Spirit never calls anyone to the office of pastor unless that person is also called to the office of teacher. Pastors of God's flock must also be teachers of God's Word.

A pastor is a shepherd, or a leader, guide and protector of the people. He is one whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to take care of God's flock, the sheep of his pasture. To this end, a pastor feeds and nourishes God's flock on the living Word; and he feeds them according to their spiritual needs. He guides, instructs, and counsels the people of God. He seeks for the lost, straying and injured sheep, binding up their spiritual wounds, and leading them back to the fold. (John 21:15-16)

A pastor, therefore, must be gifted by the Spirit to teach. He must be able to expound the Scriptures and to apply their living truths to the lives of God's people in practical terms. He must build up the flock of God through sound, godly teaching, and steer them away from prevailing errors.

As preaching and teaching duties permit, a pastor should visit the people of God when they are ill, housebound, or otherwise prevented from attending the services of the church. Additionally, he should visit the needy or those in prison or other institutions. In a number of these duties and responsibilities, the pastor may be supported by an assistant pastor or by elders or deacons. However, any assistant pastor, elder, or deacon ought to be able to teach God's Word competently, and to be capable of encouraging and strengthening God's people.

The Good Shepherd—the Chief Shepherd, or the Great Shepherd of the sheep—is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. All pastors and teachers are under-shepherds, responsible to the Chief Shepherd for their care of God's flock. (Ps. 23:1-6; Isa. 40:11; John 10:14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4)

All of the people listed above, whom the Holy Spirit gifts to the church and equips for their respective offices, are given to the church for a specific purpose. As Paul reveals in verse 12, this purpose is:

Ephesians 4:12

The reason why God has called these men to their respective offices is to build up the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That church has already been established on Christ the Rock. With Christ himself as the Chief Cornerstone, he has built his church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. (Eph. 2:20)

No one can lay any other foundation. However, those whom God has called and appointed to serve as evangelists, pastors and teachers, and other servants of the church, have been called to their office to proclaim Christ to the lost, and to establish, strengthen, and guide the people of God. In the case of God's redeemed people, the Holy Spirit is building them up so that they will be fully prepared for the works or task that God has ordained for them. This, in turn, leads to further building up of God's church, as these people assume the roles for which God has equipped them, and serve God in the way that he has planned.

The aim of these gifts to build up God's church is so that the worldwide church may be bonded together as one body, or one community of saints in Christ, all holding to the same faith in Christ and practising the same godly way of life. Thus, Paul adds in verse 13:

Ephesians 4:13

Unity of the faith cannot be achieved by human effort alone. Spiritual unity is achieved only through the grace of God and the working of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. This, in turn, produces spiritual growth and maturity. (John 17:21-23)

The more we learn of God's Word, the more the Holy Spirit can apply the truths of that Word to our hearts and lives. This should be the common goal of all believers. Thus, as we all learn the same truths, we come to a fuller, deeper and richer knowledge of the Lord Jesus and of what he has accomplished for us. By pursuing this course of sanctification and spiritual knowledge, we become increasingly more mature. Ultimately, our aim is to reach *"the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"*; i.e., full maturity or completion of faith, character and life. (Cf., 1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 1:23; 3:19)

Thus, in verse 14, Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:14

The more thoroughly God's people are taught in the truths of his Word, the stronger they will become in their faith. From infants in Christ requiring only spiritual milk, they will develop into full grown adults requiring the meat or solid nourishment of God's Word. Once established in the truths of the Bible, the children of God will be able to recognise false teaching and to avoid anything that is ungodly or even questionable. They will seek always to live by God's Word, and to practise holy and upright living.

Strengthened by their knowledge of God's Word and by the indwelling Spirit of holiness, God's redeemed children will hold fast to the truth. Unlike the sea that is tossed and driven by wind and tide, mature believers will stand fast upon their solid foundation. Christ and his teaching are the Rock and Cornerstone of their faith, and the apostles' doctrine is the foundation upon which Christ builds his church. (Eph. 2:20; cf. Rev. 21:14) Thus, when erroneous or false teaching starts to appear, the people of God will recognise the dangers and resort to the living, imperishable and inerrant Word. This is the Word of the eternal God who cannot change his character or alter one word that he has spoken and that he has revealed to us only in his holy Scriptures.

By contrast, those who have not become firmly established and mature in the truths of the Bible are more likely to be deceived by error or led astray by false teaching. This is why they are likened to infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown about by every wind of teaching. Because they are not firmly grounded in God's Word, they are much more susceptible to whatever variant form of teaching comes along. First, they follow one person's teaching or interpretation, then they change their minds and follow another person's teaching or interpretation. This is the kind of spiritual instability that Paul, together with the writer to the Hebrews, and James, refer to in their respective letters. (Hebrews 13:9; James 1:6)

The greatest dangers to the Ephesian believers probably arose either from the false teaching of the Judaizers or that of the pagan Greek philosophers. The modern parallel would be anything that resembles true religion and true faith, but which is a counterfeit or perversion of the real thing. This was the situation with which Paul dealt at Galatia—in this case, in relation to a Judaistic perversion of the true Gospel. Alternatively, the danger to our faith may arise from anything that mixes true religion with worldly philosophy or any other worldly theory of life, truth, and godliness. This, too, has the potential to lead people away from the infallible truths of the infinite God and into the personal or empirical opinions of finite and fallible men and women.

Clearly, it is essential that God's people reach spiritual maturity as rapidly as possible. For, without doubt, the evil one will use his agents to deceive and delude—if that were possible—the elect of God in order to lead them away from the truth.

Often, these agents are men and women of great ability or intellect. However, they are being used by the evil one to propound false views of God's revelation—natural and special—and to attempt by human reasoning alone to account for the origin, purpose, and destiny of life. When detached from God's special and natural revelation, this is nothing more than modern-day philosophy or human reasoning.

Other men and women—also usually marked by considerable intelligence—may proclaim the Scriptures from the pulpits of our land without themselves realising the truth of these Scriptures or having experienced spiritual regeneration. Although perhaps clothed in 'holy' vestments, these are men and women without the Spirit of God, without a saving knowledge of Christ, and therefore without the correct spiritual knowledge of God's Word and of how it should be understood, interpreted, and applied. Thus, they fall into some very serious and dangerous errors of doctrine and practice. Consequently, many of those whom they lead or teach follow them into the same errors and into the same spiritual pit of darkness.

Thus, we see how we must hold fast to God's written revelation alone, and not to the teaching of men without the Spirit of God, or to any supposed extra-biblical revelations from God, or any other supposed word from God that is not found in the holy Scriptures.

In verses 15 and 16 Paul continues by writing:

Ephesians 4:15-16

Here, the servants of God are being admonished to proclaim the whole counsel of God—the entire Word of God—in absolute and uncompromising truth. (Cf. Acts 20:27) By adhering strictly to the teaching of God's Word, they avoid errors in doctrine and practice. The Holy Spirit is the one who guides them and us into all truth. Step by step, he will reveal to us from the Bible the whole of God's will for our lives.

We note that Paul says we must speak the truth 'in love'. It is very easy to speak the truth of God's Word, yet fail to do so from a loving, caring heart. Thus, the apostle exhorts us to speak the truth—but always to do so in genuine love and compassion. Therefore, when we present God's Word of truth to the people, we ought to think of what effect it may have on their hearts and lives. Although we cannot compromise or soften the tone of God's Word, yet we must allow the Spirit of God to apply the sacred truths to each person's heart and not attempt to press home God's truth by human effort, including unkind, thoughtless, or harsh application.

What is true in relation to the teaching and preaching of the Word is true also in our personal relationships. When speaking with one another, we must always speak truthfully and openly to our neighbour. Furthermore, we must speak the truth from a loving, concerned and compassionate heart. Thus, while being truthful at all times, our truthfulness must be balanced with genuine humility, sincerity and concern.

By following this practice consistently, the apostle Paul tells the Ephesians that they will grow up or mature in everything, unto Christ who is their spiritual Head.

Like the Ephesian believers, each one of us forms part of Christ's spiritual and mystical body, the church. Each one of us is an individual and necessary part of this body. Each one of us needs the harmonious co-operation and inter-operation of all the other parts of the same body. None of us can operate independently of the other members, or without in some way affecting the other members of Christ's body, the church. Thus, we ought to work together for the mutual benefit of one another and of the entire body of Christ. We ought to pursue peace, love, and holiness of life, for by doing these things we are encouraging, strengthening, and edifying one another in love. Therefore, we are working collectively for the spiritual unity of God's redeemed and holy church. (1 Cor. 12:12-26; Eph. 2:21-22)

Paul now comes to some more practical applications of God's Word. Thus, the apostle writes in verse 17:

Ephesians 4:17

Speaking by direct inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, Paul declares—or testifies in union with the Lord—that the Ephesians must cease from living like unconverted Gentiles. The apostle insists that their thinking and conduct must no longer be like that of the ungodly world. Unconverted men and women live in accordance with their spiritually unenlightened human reason—a reason that is void of true wisdom from God above. Thus, because of the spiritual darkness of their understanding or intellect, and every other faculty of their mind or soul, they adopt all sorts of evil, idolatrous and immoral practices.

At one time, these Ephesians may have lived like this—as did many others who now belonged to Christ. Now, however, God had called them to faith in his Son. Now, he called these saints to live a life of godliness, holiness, and purity. Therefore, they must put away the unspiritual, futile, or vain reasoning and thinking of their old sinful nature. Instead, they must think, reason, and act as those who belonged to Christ—the one who had redeemed them to God by his precious blood.

In verse 18, Paul explains further what he means by referring to unconverted men and women as being futile, or spiritually unenlightened, in their thinking:

Ephesians 4:18

As with everyone else outside of Christ, the unconverted Gentiles to whom Paul refers here were living in spiritual darkness. This does not mean that they were incapable of using their minds to achieve great things in the world, both for 'good' (in the eyes of the world) and for evil. However, in relation to God and to spiritual matters, they could achieve nothing of value whatsoever. Furthermore, because they were living in spiritual darkness, they had no real inclination to seek the things of God. Their element was this world and the things of this world. (1 Cor. 2:14)

Thus, although they could and did use their minds, including all its individual faculties, to further their own and their family's interests, or the interests of a pagan and godless society, they remained in a spiritually darkened condition in relation to God. Paul continues by saying that they were separated from the life of God; i.e., they were alienated from fellowship with God and from any participation in his blessings.

But what was the reason for this separation from God and his blessings? Paul says it was due to the ignorance that was in them. Now, these unconverted Gentiles may have been among the most intelligent people on earth. They may have learned extensively of many subjects, and held many qualifications in their respective fields. However, Paul is not speaking of this kind of ignorance. Indeed, when the Bible speaks of ignorance, it is speaking of ignorance of divine things. It is speaking of lack of true spiritual understanding and knowledge in the things of God. Thus, the unconverted pagans to whom Paul refers were ignorant of God's salvation, and of the way and method of finding that salvation, and of living to the honour, praise, and glory of God.

Yet, this ignorance did not excuse these unconverted people in the least. God had revealed his existence, power, and glory to them through the natural creation. They, however, had refused wilfully to acknowledge God as the Creator of the universe. They had refused wilfully and repeatedly to 'listen to' or 'see' God's testimony in nature. Instead, they had tried to explain the existence of mankind and the natural world purely in terms of philosophy, and the science of their age. (Rom. 1:18-23)

Thus we see that these people became ignorant of spiritual matters—not because divine truths had not been revealed to them—but *because they did not want to acknowledge*

these truths. To have acknowledged these truths would have meant acknowledging the One who created the universe. This, they had no desire to do. Thus, they denied the Creator and attempted to explain away his works of creation. By so doing, however, they were refusing to give God the glory, and were in effect making mankind and other created things their idols.

As Paul says at the end of this verse, they hardened their hearts; i.e., they closed their minds against the things that they knew to be true. And, says Paul, because they hardened their hearts, they became ignorant of the truths concerning God, and completely darkened in their minds or understanding to all spiritual verities.

While they remained in this condition, they were separated from God, and indeed they were living in this world without hope and facing only certain final judgment. Nevertheless, out of his sovereign grace, God showed mercy to many of these former pagans. Included among these, were a number within the Ephesian fellowship, together with many others elsewhere. By his grace, God had delivered these people from their great spiritual darkness to the kingdom of light and life through faith in his Son. (Col. 1:13-14,21)

Concerning those who remained alienated from God, however, the apostle writes in verse 19:

Ephesians 4:19

Those who practise sin find that their sinful practices blunt their moral standards and stifle their consciences. Sin pays its wages, and the wages of sin is death; spiritual death, followed ultimately by physical death and eternal death. Thus, those who practise a sinful way of life lose their God-given sensitivity to the unrighteousness and dangers of such evil deeds. They harden their hearts and consciences by these iniquitous acts, until their hearts become so calloused that they can no longer respond to an accusing conscience or feel guilt or shame for their sinful deeds. Thus, they give themselves over voluntarily to sensuality, or the pleasing of the flesh or the evil desires of the mind.

The word Paul uses (Gk., ἀσέλγεια, NIV, *sensuality*) is a word meaning debauchery, moral self-abandonment, lasciviousness, or lewdness. Without any regard for due restraint, decency, or moral values, these people steep themselves in every form of sensual pleasure, perversion, and immoral acts. They become thoroughly impure and practise impurity without restraint, unable and unwilling to exercise control over their lusts. They have chosen the sins they love, and now the sins they love have become their masters, enslaving them to the most degrading passions and destroying them as true men or women. This is the kind of people to whom Paul refers in Romans chapter 1 verses 24-32.

Concerning the Ephesian believers, however, the apostle Paul writes in verse 20:

Ephesians 4:20

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. (NIV)

The kind of lifestyle which the apostle had just been describing could not be further removed from the holy standard of life to which the believer has been called. It was the very epitome of evil and ungodliness, and wholly contrary to the righteous life that God required of his redeemed and sanctified people. Such unrighteous and wicked living was condemned by the teaching of the Lord Jesus and by his apostles.

Their saving knowledge of Christ, however, had delivered these Ephesian believers from the practise of ungodliness, whether such as Paul has just described or less extreme. Prior to their conversion, however, it was quite possible that at least some of these Ephesians had lived such a dissolute and ungodly manner of life. Yet, By God's grace, they

had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew that, at all times, the Lord Jesus' character and conduct was exemplified by perfect righteousness, holiness and truth. Thus, those who acknowledged Christ, and who were known by him, must endeavour to live as he had lived on earth.

As far as it pertains to every redeemed child of God, they must endeavour—by God's grace—to bring their lives into conformity with the righteousness, holiness, purity, and integrity of the Lord himself. This we can do only by the power of the Holy Spirit living and working within us. With our consent to, and co-operation with, God's will for our lives, we must yield ourselves to his sanctifying power. We must allow him to produce within our lives the fruit that honours, pleases and glorifies God.

In verse 21, Paul continues by saying:

Ephesians 4:21

Surely—that is, since—these Ephesians saints had heard or learned of Christ; since they had received instruction in all the things of Christ, both in respect of his person and work, and in respect of his teaching or doctrine...

Having heard or learned all this from God-appointed apostles and teachers, they were now much more aware of the truth concerning love for God, righteous and holy living, and integrity of speech and action. These constituted just some of the truths of God and his Word that these believers had learned through their faith in Christ Jesus. These same truths were being revealed to them through the exposition of God's Word, and were being applied to their hearts and lives by his Holy Spirit.

But what precisely did the Holy Spirit teach in regard to these things? What teaching and principles did these children of God receive in regard to the truth that is in Jesus?

Paul answers this by writing in verses 22 and 23:

Ephesians 4:22-24

In their saving union with Christ Jesus, these Ephesian believers learned that they should put off everything that belonged to their former sinful way of life. This old lifestyle arose from their sinful nature, and that nature was corrupt or depraved at the core. It was bi-ased toward evil continually and sought only the satisfaction of its sinful desires or lusts. So deceitful was this old nature that it often caused these Ephesians to make excuses for their sinful desires and practises, or to attempt to justify their evil propensities.

This, however, was the very nature that they must now put off—just as they had learned the truth of these things in Christ. As Paul infers in verse 23, these believers must now be renewed or made new in their attitude of mind, and in their actions. Their mind must be completely renewed and sanctified unto God through the Word and the Spirit of God working within them. Now, instead, they must put on—and 'wear' continually—the new nature. The Lord Jesus had clothed each one of these Ephesian believers with his own perfect righteousness, and by that imputed righteousness, they now stood accepted and beloved in the sight of God.

What was true for these Ephesian believers is true also for us as God's redeemed and holy children. This new nature or new self is created after the image of God. (Col. 3:10) Unlike our old fallen nature that bore a defaced likeness of God, this new nature bears the image of God in Christ impressed upon our souls by the Holy Spirit. Again, this new self has been created anew to resemble in the believer God's attributes of true righteousness and holiness. Those who truly love God must follow such things as righteous and godly living, holiness, truth, love, mercy, and justice—together with the fruit of the Spirit.

These are the hallmarks of the new nature. We—as God’s redeemed children—should demonstrate these characteristics in our lives.

Paul has spoken in general terms of the necessity to replace the old nature with the new. In the next few verses, however, the apostle becomes much more specific. Thus, in verse 25, Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:25

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. (NIV)

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we must put off the old sinful nature, and put on the new spiritual nature. We must walk or live by the Spirit, so that we will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh that are still within us. The lusts of the flesh are those excessive, impure, or uncontrolled and sinful desires, longings, or cravings of the mind, which arise from our old fallen nature.⁷

Falsehood is giving false testimony or bearing false witness to the truth. All forms of falsehood (including lies) are sinful.

Examples of Falsehood

Half-truths; distortions of the truth; exaggerations, and all forms of deceit, are falsehoods. Similarly, to make a deliberately misleading statement is a falsehood. To provide false information (verbally, or in writing) when it is lawfully required of us is a falsehood. Again, to misrepresent the truth is a falsehood.

Falsehoods can also assume other forms. For instance, hypocrisy is a form of falsehood, since we are deceiving people about the true state of our character. Mental reservation is a form of falsehood; e.g. to say, *It wasn’t me*, when we mean, *It wasn’t **only** me* (others were involved), is a falsehood. Our answer conceals or mentally reserves part of the truth, and is intended deliberately to mislead.

Falsehood: Scripture References

Ephesians 4:25

⁽²⁵⁾ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. (NIV)

Colossians 3:9-10

⁽⁹⁾ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ⁽¹⁰⁾ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (NIV)

Acts 5:3-4

⁽³⁾ Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁽⁴⁾ Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at

⁷ This, and the paragraphs that follow in this section, are based on the author’s work, *Bible Truths Explained, Sanctification*, under *Effects of Sanctification*, and sub-sections.

your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.” (NIV)

1 John 4:20

⁽²⁰⁾ If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. (NIV)

Instead of practising deceit and falsehood, to which many of the Ephesians had been accustomed previously, Paul exhorts these believers to speak truthfully to one another. This involved living sincere, upright and honest lives, not only in the sight of other believers but also before all people and especially in the sight of God.

Paul adds that believers are members of one body, the Church—of which Christ is head. Therefore, any sin against individual members of the body is a sin against Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 8:12).

Next, Paul deals with anger. Thus, in verses 26 and 27, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 4:26-27

⁽²⁶⁾ *“In your anger do not sin”.*⁸ *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,* ⁽²⁷⁾ *and do not give the devil a foothold.* (NIV)

We must emphasise clearly that not all anger is sinful. The Bible speaks repeatedly of the righteous anger (or wrath) of God; and the Lord Jesus expressed justified and righteous anger on a number of occasions. The anger to which the apostle Paul refers in the above verses might well have been justified anger (originally, at least). We must not, however, prolong our anger, or harbour in our hearts a resentful or unforgiving attitude.

Anger of the Lord Jesus

Anger is not necessarily sinful. For example, when he cleansed the temple, the Lord Jesus was angry with the money-changers for abusing God’s house of prayer (desecration or sacrilege, by carrying on commercial enterprises within the sacred precincts).

Mark 11:15-18

⁽¹⁵⁾ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves, ⁽¹⁶⁾ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ⁽¹⁷⁾ And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written:

“ ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’
{Isaiah 56:7}?
 But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’.” *{Jer. 7:11}*”

⁽¹⁸⁾ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. (NIV; cf. Matt. 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-17)

⁸ Psalm 4:4

Jesus was angry with the Pharisees on several different occasions. On one such occasion, these religious leaders had sought to find fault with the Lord and ultimately to discredit, denounce and destroy him because he was about to heal a man on the Sabbath day. Thus, Mark writes:

Mark 3:1-5

⁽¹⁾ Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. ⁽²⁾ Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. ⁽³⁾ Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

⁽⁴⁾ Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

⁽⁵⁾ He looked round at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. (NIV; see v.6; cf. Luke 13:10-17)

On several other occasions, the Lord Jesus was angry with the teachers of the law (scribes) and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, and he rebuked them accordingly. Thus, we hear Matthew record these words of the Lord Jesus:

Matthew 23:13-15

⁽¹³⁾ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

⁽¹⁴⁾ ⁹

⁽¹⁵⁾ Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are." (NIV; see vv.16-33; see esp. v.33; cf. Luke 11:37-52)

Examples of Sinful Anger

Unjustified or uncontrolled anger, rage, and the desire for revenge (or vengeance) amount to sin. Similarly, anger resulting from malice, caprice, envy, pride, or any other evil attitude, is sinful. Again, hate, resentment or bitterness (an unforgiving and angry heart) is sinful. To hold a grudge against someone is sinful. Bad temper, ill will, moodiness, and refusing to speak to someone is sinful. Justified anger becomes sinful when we harbour bitterness or resentment against another person. In obedience to God's Word, we must settle our disputes at the earliest opportunity.

⁹ Some manuscripts to. ¹⁴ Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Therefore you will be punished more severely. [NIV footnote to v.14]

Anger: Scripture References

Ephesians 4:26-27

⁽²⁶⁾ “In your anger do not sin” {*Psalm 4:4*}: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ⁽²⁷⁾ and do not give the devil a foothold. (NIV)

Colossians 3:8

⁽⁸⁾ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. (NIV)

Romans 12:17-21

⁽¹⁷⁾ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ⁽¹⁸⁾ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” {*Deut. 32:35; Heb. 10:30*} says the Lord. ⁽²⁰⁾ On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” {*Prov. 25:21,22*}

⁽²¹⁾ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NIV; see also Matt. 5:43-45)

Hebrews 12:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord. ⁽¹⁵⁾ See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (NIV; see vv.16-17; cf. v.15a with 2 Cor. 6:1; cf. v.15b with Deut. 29:18)

James 1:19-21

⁽¹⁹⁾ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ⁽²⁰⁾ for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

⁽²¹⁾ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. (NIV; see vv.22-25)

James 4:1-3

⁽¹⁾ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? ⁽²⁾ You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

⁽³⁾ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (NIV)

James 4:4

⁽⁴⁾ You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the

world becomes an enemy of God. (NIV; see vv.5-12; see esp. vv.11-12; cf. 1 John 2:15-17)

Giving the Devil a Foothold

We give the devil a foothold (or we give place to the devil) when we allow him to lead us into temptation, or when we yield to temptation when it comes. Instead of yielding, of course, we should resist the temptation or flee from it.

Examples of Giving the Devil a Foothold

One example of giving the devil a foothold is yielding to temptation. (Temptation can have its source in the world, the flesh, or the devil. The 'flesh' means the old sinful nature.) Another example of giving the devil a foothold is to put ourselves into a situation where we know we are likely to meet temptation. We must never encourage the devil to tempt us, or make it easy for him to do so. Rather, we must resist him, and we must avoid the very appearance of evil.

Giving the Devil a Foothold: Scripture References

Ephesians 4:27

⁽²⁷⁾ and do not give the devil a foothold. (NIV; cf. 2 Cor. 2:10-11)

Acts 5:3

⁽³⁾ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? (NIV; see vv.1-10)

Ephesians 6:10-13

⁽¹⁰⁾ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ⁽¹¹⁾ Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ⁽¹²⁾ For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ⁽¹³⁾ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (NIV; see vv.14-18; see esp. vv.16-17; cf. v.12b with 1 John 5:19; contrast v.12 with Eph. 1:19-21)

James 4:7

⁽⁷⁾ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (NIV; see vv.1-12)

1 Peter 5:8-9

⁽⁸⁾ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁽⁹⁾ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. (NIV; see vv.5-7)

1 Peter 5:10-11

⁽¹⁰⁾ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you

and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ⁽¹¹⁾ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

Having spoken of lying, anger, and giving opportunity to the devil, Paul now turns his attention to theft or stealing. Thus, in verse 28, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 4:28

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. (NIV)

To steal is to appropriate to ourselves that which does not belong to us, with no intention of making payment or reparation to the rightful owner.

Examples of Theft

All forms of stealing, fraud, misappropriation of funds, goods, services, and many other forms of dishonesty, is theft. We may also include under the heading of theft, needlessly taking time off work (or being carelessly late for work). These are examples of theft of an employer's time; and, indirectly, his money. Additionally, we might include in this category, taking advantage of the privileges or fringe benefits afforded by employers to their employees. For example, the employee who abuses or misuses his staff privileges to provide goods or services to his friends at reduced prices. Unless previously agreed upon with an employer, this is stealing from an employer by depriving him of his due profit. It is therefore wrong—unless the employer has previously told his employees that they are at liberty to extend their staff privileges or benefits to certain other people as well.

Theft: Scripture References

Ephesians 4:28

⁽²⁸⁾ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. (NIV)

Luke 19:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner'." ⁽⁸⁾ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." (NIV; see vv.1-10)

Luke 16:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ⁽¹¹⁾ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ⁽¹²⁾ And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" (NIV; see vv.1-9; cf. v.10 with Matt. 25:21,29-30)

Jeremiah 7:9-11

⁽⁹⁾ “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury,¹⁰ burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known,⁽¹⁰⁾ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe”—safe to do all these detestable things?⁽¹¹⁾ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.”
(NIV; see vv.12-15; cf. v.11 with Matt. 21:13)

Romans 2:21

⁽²¹⁾ you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? (NIV; see vv.22-24a)

Paul, however, is not satisfied with warning the Ephesian against stealing. He is just as concerned, if not more so, that they engage in good and wholesome practises for their own good and for the benefit of others. Thus, Paul encourages the believers to labour diligently with their own hands, thereby shunning inactivity or idleness (2 Thess. 3:10). By earning the bread they eat, they provide support for themselves and for their families. In addition, they are in a better position to help those in genuine need.

Next, Paul considers the subject of unwholesome or corrupt talk. Thus, in verse 29, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 4:29

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (NIV)

The word rendered 'unwholesome' (Gk., σαπρός, *sapros*) means literally, *rotten* or *putrid*. Unwholesome or putrid talk includes any kind of coarse or crude talking or joking, and every kind of impure, filthy, or corrupt speech. Such speech is always sinful. To take part with others in listening to their corrupt talking and joking is also sinful.

Examples of Unwholesome Talk

Foul, coarse, or crude language; unclean remarks; remarks or jokes with an expressed, implied or suggested double meaning; common swearing; cursing; using God's name profanely or in vain, are all examples of this sin. We might also include under unwholesome and sinful talk, any form of doubtful language or expression. Again, we might include under this heading any kind of idle gossip, slander, malicious misinformation, unjust criticism, unkind remarks, or any other form of sinful speech against our neighbour. We must always remember that—in speaking evil of our neighbour—we are implicitly speaking evil of God. For man is made by God, and in God's image and likeness.

Unwholesome Talk: Scripture References

Ephesians 4:29

⁽²⁹⁾ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (NIV)

¹⁰ Or *and swear by false gods* [NIV footnote to Jer. 7:9]

Ephesians 5:4

⁽⁴⁾ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (NIV; see vv.3-7)

Colossians 3:8-10

⁽⁸⁾ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. ⁽⁹⁾ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ⁽¹⁰⁾ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (NIV; see vv.5-14; cf. v.10 with Eph. 4:23-24)

Mark 7:20-23

⁽²⁰⁾ He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. ⁽²¹⁾ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ⁽²²⁾ greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ⁽²³⁾ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'." (NIV; see vv.14-19; cf. Matt. 15:18-20)

Regarding the tongue, James says:

James 3:2

⁽²⁾ We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. (NIV; see vv.1-4)

James 3:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁽⁶⁾ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. (NIV)

James 3:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁽⁸⁾ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (NIV)

James 3:9-12

⁽⁹⁾ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ⁽¹¹⁾ Can both fresh water and salt ¹¹ water flow from the same spring? ⁽¹²⁾ My brothers, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. (NIV; see also Jas. 4:11-12; cf. Jas. 3:12 with Matt. 7:15-20)

Instead of speaking evil of one another, the Scripture says:

¹¹ Gk., *bitter* [NIV footnote to James 3:11]

Colossians 3:12-14

⁽¹²⁾ Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ⁽¹³⁾ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ⁽¹⁴⁾ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (NIV; see vv.15-17)

Too much direct speaking can be like salt on an open wound. Therefore, God's Word says:

Colossians 4:6

⁽⁶⁾ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (NIV)

Again, God's Word says:

1 Peter 3:15-16

⁽¹⁵⁾ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ⁽¹⁶⁾ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (NIV; see vv.13-17)

As with the other items that the apostle has enumerated so far, Paul (and Peter) exhorts the believers to replace foul, corrupt, or other unwholesome talk with sound speech. Such speech is speech that cannot be censured, that is above reproach, and—most importantly—that is useful for building up other believers in the faith. Thus, Paul infers that, on every occasion, the Ephesians should speak words of encouragement, hope, consolation, instruction, and love to one another. They should build other believers up according to their disparate needs. But they should never use their tongues to pull other believers down, to humiliate or criticise them unjustly, or to defile their own body, which is God's holy temple.

All these exhortations are to one chief end: namely, that the believers may not offend or grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Thus, in verse 30, the apostle writes:

Ephesians 4:30

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (NIV)

Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. As such, we should consecrate it to God. Anything, therefore, which defiles God's temple grieves the indwelling Holy Spirit. We can grieve the Holy Spirit by the things that we think, say, or do, by what we fail to say or do, or by our attitudes and inclinations.

Examples of Grieving the Holy Spirit

Misusing or abusing our body or mind grieves the Holy Spirit. Similarly, using our body to express or to fulfil the impure and sinful desires of the mind (as opposed to God-given and God-glorifying natural desires) grieves the Holy Spirit. Again, using any parts of our body, or the faculties of our mind or soul (e.g. intellect, will, emotions) for sinful purposes, grieves the Holy Spirit—for our body is the Spirit's holy dwelling place.

We also grieve the Holy Spirit, and sin against him, when we think or speak evil of another person. Similarly, we grieve the Spirit when we do not honour God fully in and with our lives. Our lives belong wholly to God. We should be living to his glory and according to his will for us—not according to our own sinful desires or selfish ambitions.

Grieving the Holy Spirit: Scripture References

Ephesians 4:30

⁽³⁰⁾ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (NIV; cf. Isa. 63:7-10; 1 Thess. 5:19)

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

⁽¹⁶⁾ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple ¹² and that God's Spirit lives in you? ⁽¹⁷⁾ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy ¹³ him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (NIV; see vv.10-14; cf. 2 Cor. 6:16 - 7:1; Eph. 2:19-22)

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

⁽¹⁹⁾ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ⁽²⁰⁾ you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body. (NIV; see vv.12-18; cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19)

1 Thessalonians 4:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.
⁽⁸⁾ Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. (NIV; see vv.1-6; cf. 1 Pet. 1:14-15)

Paul continues his exhortations to holiness of life, by writing in verse 31:

Ephesians 4:31

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (NIV)

Each of the sins listed above originates in the mind or 'heart'; i.e. in the inward man. As those who are being sanctified, we must put off everything that belongs to the 'flesh' or sinful nature. Like contaminated and filthy clothing, we must cast it from us and clothe ourselves instead with the new nature of Christ.

Examples of Putting Off Every Form of Evil

Besides the examples listed in the above verse (bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice), we should forsake anything and everything that we know to be sinful. We should also forsake anything and everything that tends to arouse our sinful desires or lusts. For example, we must forsake covetousness—for covetousness is greed, and greed is idolatry. This may constitute the sinful desire or lust to possess things that we do not need. Alternatively, we may express covetousness or greed by an inordinate desire to

¹² God's temple; Gk. *God's shrine* [GL]

¹³ God will destroy; Gk. God will defile or bring to ruin [GL]

attain to an equal or better level of achievement, or of greater material wealth or possessions, than our neighbour. *Keeping up with the Jones's* is representative of the sins of envy, covetousness, pride, and selfish ambition.

Putting Off Every Form of Evil: Scripture References

Ephesians 4:31

⁽³¹⁾ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (NIV; cf. Col. 3:8)

Galatians 5:19-21

⁽¹⁹⁾ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery,¹⁴ ⁽²⁰⁾ idolatry and witchcraft,¹⁵ hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions,¹⁶ factions¹⁷ ⁽²¹⁾ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (NIV; see vv.16-18; cf. Col. 3:5-10)

1 Timothy 6:8-11

⁽⁸⁾ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

⁽⁹⁾ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ⁽¹⁰⁾ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

⁽¹¹⁾ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (NIV; see vv.3-12)

James 3:13-16

⁽¹³⁾ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

⁽¹⁴⁾ But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ⁽¹⁵⁾ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

⁽¹⁶⁾ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (NIV; cf. v.15 with Jas. 1:5,16-17)

James 3:17-18

⁽¹⁷⁾ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (NIV)

Paul concludes this chapter by writing:

¹⁴ *debauchery*; lustful gestures or behaviour; licentiousness, or moral self-abandonment [GL]

¹⁵ *witchcraft*; magic, occultism, spiritualism, sorcery, demonism [GL]

¹⁶ *dissensions*; party divisions, cliques, schisms [GL]

¹⁷ *factions*; false or destructive opinions or doctrines, sectarianism [GL]

Ephesians 4:32

Paul implores the believers at Ephesus to show kindness and consideration to each other. They were to be good and do good to their brothers and sisters in the Lord. As those whom Christ had redeemed, they were to show compassion or care, consideration and gentleness to their fellow-believers. They were to forgive the wrongs that others had done to them, and the offences that they had committed against them or against those whom they loved. They were to remember that—for the sake of his dearly beloved Son—God had forgiven them. Thus, these believers ought always to forgive one another—fully and unreservedly. In this way, they would be proving themselves to be the true children of their Father in heaven, who loved them and who gave his own Son to die for them. (Cf. v.2)

Ephesians Chapter 5

Shun Evil

Ephesians 5:1-7

Ephesians 5:1

Here, the apostle urges his readers to become followers of God, or to imitate something of his holy and righteous characteristics in their lives. This includes God's love, kindness, mercy, compassion and forgiveness toward others, together with his detestation of sin and sinful conduct. (Matt. 18:22; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:32)

Believers in Christ are God's dearly loved children. In everything they do, therefore, they should conform to the pattern of their Father in heaven and they should strive to honour their heavenly Father's great and holy name. (1 Pet. 1:14-16)

Ephesians 5:2

The life that the believer lives should be characterised by love, grace, mercy and humility—as befits God's holy children. We should remember the boundless love that the Father showed to us when he gave his Son to die in our place and to redeem us from our sins and iniquities. The Lord Jesus surrendered himself willingly to the suffering and the shame of the cross on our account. God accepted his perfect sacrifice of atonement as a fragrant offering, well pleasing to him.

Ephesians 5:3

Those who are the beloved children of God ought not to do anything that offends the name, character or reputation of their heavenly Father. Paul therefore exhorts the Ephesian believers to shun all forms of sin and evil, and to avoid the least hint of sinful thoughts, words, or deeds. The apostle mentions specifically the sins of sexual immorality (KJV, *fornication*), impurity and greed. Each of these evils bears a relationship to the others, and all must be avoided.

Sexual immorality, or fornication, comprehends all forms of sexual sin, including sexual relations before or outside of marriage, adultery or unfaithfulness within marriage, incest, prostitution, and also every kind of unnatural sexual practice such as homosexuality, lesbianism or any other deviant form of sexual relations or licentious practises.

The apostle also forbids any kind of impurity. This includes impurity or uncleanness of heart, mind, or life. Thus, for example, lustful or sexually impure or unclean thoughts, words, or gestures are forbidden. Those who indulge in such uncleanness of heart and life end up lusting ever-increasingly for more of the same. Thus, they become greedy for sexual immorality in all its forms, until eventually the effects of their sin produces its inevitable fruit in their lives in the form of illness, disease and abject misery of heart and life.

Thus, Paul exhorts God's children to avoid utterly even the hint of any such sins in their lives. As believers, they are the Lord's redeemed people, and therefore a people whom God has chosen and is making holy by his Spirit. These holy vessels—our lives—must be kept pure for the service of the Lord and for the glory of his name.

In verse 4, the apostle continues by saying:

Ephesians 5:4

The word translated, '*filthiness*' is a word that means shameless, obscene or disgusting speech or conduct; the kind of shameful speech or conduct that flouts socially accepted standards of morality and decency.

Just as the believer must shun sexual immorality at all cost, so also must he shun inappropriate talk or speech. All forms of unclean speech and coarse joking must be avoided. So too must foolish, unwise, thoughtless, or ill-considered talk or words. Instead of these things, God's holy children should use their tongues to express praise, thanksgiving and prayer to their Father in heaven.

Sometimes, people imagine (vainly) that they can profess to believe on Christ and yet live unholy lives. Paul scotches this misconception when he writes in verse 5:

Ephesians 5:5

Speaking by divine inspiration, the apostle Paul declares most emphatically to these Ephesian believers that no-one who practises any form of sexual immorality will ever inherit God's kingdom or the kingdom of his Son. No-one who lives an impure or unclean life will ever see the kingdom of God or of Christ. No-one who is greedy for sin and who indulges in sinful or unnatural practises will ever enter the kingdom of God. (Cf. Col. 3:5)

Idolaters are excluded forever from God's kingdom. But, in the present passage, what constitutes idolatry?

- Those who commit sexual immorality are guilty also of idolatry, for they are worshipping or idolising sex for its own sake.
- Those who live impure or unclean lives are guilty also of idolatry, for they are cherishing in their hearts their impure or unclean practises and are not willing to forsake them.
- Those who are greedy for more of their evil deeds are idol worshippers, because they are setting their hearts on the object of their greatest desire, namely, the sins that they dearly love.

None of these people, therefore, will ever see the kingdom of God, for no-one can worship God and worship idols simultaneously. Those who choose sin as their first love make this their idol, thus excluding God as their first love and his Son as their Saviour.

Yet, no-one can practise such evil deeds, or despise the holiness and righteousness of the God who condemns these deeds, without paying the price. Thus, in verse 6, Paul warns anyone who vainly imagines that he can continue living an unholy life in the sight of God:

Ephesians 5:6

We must not be deceived about this, nor must we allow anyone to lead us astray by false assurances and lying promises. God will not tolerate wickedness among his people. Those who profess the name of Christ must depart from iniquity. (2 Tim. 2:19) For, if a person persists in his formerly sinful way of life, God will judge him accordingly. Indeed, those who continue to live in sin are even now abiding under God's wrath. Ultimately, God will pour out the full measure of his wrath on them at the last day, unless they renounce their sin utterly and repent of their wilful disobedience to God and to his Word.

It is no light matter, therefore, to disregard the teaching of God's Holy Word, and to practise the very thing which that Word prohibits and condemns. God's redeemed people are

a holy people. They must separate themselves from sinful practices and live consistently holy and righteous lives, as the Spirit of God and of holiness enables them by God's grace.

Ephesians 5:7

Thus, those whom God has called to belong to his Son must separate themselves from the sinful things and practises of this world. We must not be partners (participants or encouragers) with those who indulge in evil, and who grossly abuse and misuse the natural gifts of God for their own greedy or perverse pleasures. We are called to be separate from all such practises, and from associating ourselves with anyone who calls himself a brother in Christ, and yet who engages in such vile practises.

Separation from sin and from unholy believers, however, does not mean separating ourselves from sinners. This would be impossible, and completely contrary to the teaching of God's Word. Jesus was sinless, yet he associated with sinful men and women. He went about doing good, healing, helping and forgiving those whose lives had been blighted by sin and its effects. God's holy children must do likewise. They must seek to bring the Gospel of eternal salvation to sinners—among whom we too once were numbered—and to do good to people in the world wherever this lies within our power.

Contrasting our former manner of life which our new life in Christ, the apostle writes in verses 8 and 9:

Light Exposes Deeds of Darkness

Ephesians 5:8-9

Before God brought us by his Spirit to a saving knowledge of his Son, sin and spiritual darkness characterised our lives—just as it does the rest of fallen mankind. Perhaps, some of us did not indulge in outright immorality or other forms of uncleanness or wickedness. Nevertheless, our thoughts and practises were far from God and very far from pleasing God. We lived our lives apart from God, and without regard to God's will or ways. Thus, we too were living in sin. We too were alienated from God by our evil behaviour, even although of a different form of evil from others. Yet, it incurred the righteous wrath and judgment of God.

Now, however, the light of God's Word has shone into our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit bringing the truths of the Gospel home to our understanding and conscience. Now, by God's grace, we have comprehended the truth as it is in Jesus. We have believed on the one who is the Light of the world. Thus, as children of light we must live our lives according to the light; i.e., according to the principles of truth, goodness, righteousness and holiness.

In this passage, the terms translated *goodness*, *righteousness* and *truth* differ somewhat from their modern English counterparts. The following list reflects their original meanings:

- *Goodness*, in this passage, includes such qualities as benevolence, kindness, generosity, consideration, thoughtfulness and a concern for the welfare of others. In Paul's day, this word referred as much, if not more, to social goodness or 'social graces' than to religious goodness or uprightness of character.

(The word rendered 'goodness' in another passage and context in relation to the sum of God's most holy and righteous attributes, and which clearly relates to moral and spiritual goodness, derives from a different word in the original: namely, from the word translated 'glory'.)

- *Righteousness* here includes the thought of a just or upright moral and spiritual character, resulting in morally and spiritually righteous deeds or actions.
- *Truth* here relates to the truth as it is in Jesus—the Holy Spirit being the one who guides us into all truth. Again, the Holy Spirit convinces the believer to depend wholly on, and remain faithful to, that truth: i.e., to God, to his Son and to the teaching of God's Word, the Bible. We exemplify this truth by living in accordance with its holy and righteous teachings, and—as far as possible—by emulating the One who is the Way the Truth and the Life.

This, then, is what must now constitute our character and govern our conduct. In this way, we show ourselves to be the children of our Father in heaven, when we reflect something of his holy and righteous characteristics in our own lives, albeit in a frail, human finite body.

In verse 10, Paul adds:

Ephesians 5:10

The children of God ought to find out through a thorough searching of the Scriptures what kinds of things please the Lord. Each of us needs to learn the truth from the Word of Truth. We need to practise everything that the Word commands. Thus, we will be pleasing God by our obedient trust in him and in his Word and by our subsequent way of life. Let us, then, learn what God requires of his children, and follow his Word with a willing, sincere and humble heart.

In verse 11, the apostle declares:

Ephesians 5:11

In this verse, the word translated 'expose' (or 'reprove') has several meanings: It means to examine or scrutinise with the purpose of exposing and correcting; to convince and convict someone of their error or sin (from the teaching of God's Word); to demonstrate strong disapproval or disapprobation for the sin so exposed, and to discipline or take punitive measures against the offender—this last meaning being the responsibility of the church officers or leaders.¹⁸ (cf. v.13 below)

Paul exhorts the Ephesians to shun evil deeds in any shape or form. These are the deeds of darkness. They are the kinds of sins that people prefer to practise in secret or away from the glare of truth and righteousness. Like all forms of sin and evil, they constitute some of the deeds of moral and spiritual darkness. From this darkened or morally depraved state of mind, people profess right thoughts and actions to be wrong and wrong thoughts and actions to be right.

In verse 12, the apostle continues:

Ephesians 5:12

So evil, perverse or immoral are the deeds practised in secret that the very mention of them is shameful to every right living and thinking person. Thus, we ought not to dwell on such evils but rather to expose them to the light of God's living and eternal Word.

¹⁸ Cf. BDAG. See also Charles Hodge: *Commentary on Ephesians* (5:11)

To this end, Paul writes in verses 13 and 14:

Ephesians 5:13-14

Thus, says the apostle, have nothing to do with such evils. Rather, expose them for what they are. Do not compromise the truth concerning evil. Do not claim mitigating circumstances as an excuse for evil or sin. Do not make excuses for the practise of evil deeds or for those who indulge in them. Rather, expose them to the truth or light of God's Holy Word. That Word condemns evil—uncompromisingly. Yet, it offers hope of mercy and forgiveness to every truly repentant evildoer, regardless of how sinful they may have been. This is true if—by God's grace—they renounce their evil practices utterly and call upon the name of the Lord for salvation.

How, though, shall they be constrained to call on the name of the Lord for mercy, if we do not expose their sin from the light of God's soul-penetrating, convicting and convincing Word? Only when we do this, will sinners experience the light of the Gospel and the light of Christ Jesus shining upon their souls. Only then will they be raised from spiritual death, or moral and spiritual darkness, by the energising and soul-renewing power of God's Holy Spirit.

In verses 15 and 16, Paul writes:

Live Lives Worthy of the Lord***Ephesians 5:15-21*****Ephesians 5:15-16**

Paul exhorts the Ephesian church to exercise the utmost diligence in ensuring that their lives are governed by wisdom and discretion in all things.

The adjective that Paul uses for 'wise' is the opposite of foolishness or folly (the 'unwise', or those who lack moral and spiritual discernment). In this verse, the 'unwise' are those who walk in spiritual darkness, practising and relishing the sins mentioned above. However, in complete contrast to this latter category, the wise (i.e., the morally and spiritually wise or enlightened) are to walk in the way of righteousness, holiness and truth. The wisdom referred to here, of course, is the wisdom that comes down from the Father above: i.e., true moral and spiritual wisdom, which should characterise every one of God's redeemed and holy children. (Contrast Jas. 4:17 with Jas. 4:15-16)

Again, the word that Paul uses here for *wisdom* (or *wise*) (Gk., σοφία or σοφός) is the same word that the apostle uses in reference to divine truth. When Paul speaks of the wisdom (or mystery) of God (e.g., in 1 Cor. 2:7), he is referring to certain aspects of God's truth—previously hidden—which he had now revealed unto men and women through the preaching of the gospel. This message of God's eternal wisdom through the preaching of the cross includes the declaration of the only way of salvation through faith in Christ, together with instructions in holy and righteous living for all who repent and believe on his name. Walking in the light of these truths, is walking in accordance with true spiritual wisdom. Such spiritual wisdom should be the hallmark of every one of us, as we seek to live in this present evil age.

The word rendered '*evil*' can be understood of *physical* evil: i.e., disadvantageous circumstances, normal everyday problems and perplexities, and disastrous occurrences, including 'natural disasters'. However, in its present context, it is probable that the apostle is speaking of *morally* evil days; i.e., a morally wicked or degenerate age or generation.

We must steadfastly avoid the very things that Paul has just mentioned. Rather, we should make the most of every opportunity that the Lord gives us to honour his name, to live for his glory, and to benefit others.

Thus, in verse 17, the apostle continues by writing:

Ephesians 5:17

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.(NIV)

Therefore—says the apostle: i.e., because we are under obligation to walk as wise men and women, we must not behave as do the foolish,¹⁹ but must understand from our knowledge of the Scriptures what the Lord's will is, and live accordingly.

In Biblical terms, a foolish person is one who is spiritually and morally deficient. He is the kind of person who lives without reference to God and to God's ways and commands. This kind of person may be highly intelligent and of high renown in the eyes of the world. However, in the eyes of God he is foolish (or a fool), since he neglects the most important aspect of his life; namely, the welfare of his soul. (Luke 12:20; see also Ps. 14:1)

The children of God, however, are no longer living such foolish lives. By God's grace, they have been renewed spiritually. God's redeemed children are now living for the one who loved them and died for them. Thus, as the beloved of the Lord, they are to seek the Lord's will for their lives.

It is God's will that his redeemed people should be sanctified. It is the Lord's will that they should become ever increasingly like their Saviour. It is the Lord's will that they should live their lives to honour and please their Father in heaven. Therefore, they ought to pursue the things which are in accord with the Lord's will for their lives, and which glorify his great and holy name. (1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Cor. 15:49; Col. 1:10)

But—infers Paul—if we seek to honour and glorify the Lord, we cannot live any longer according to our former unregenerate manner of life. We must forsake all our former sins, including evil behaviour, speech, thoughts, and attitudes. In all things, we must exercise wisdom, discretion, purity of life, and moderation.

Citing one particular example, Paul writes in verse 18:

Ephesians 5:18

God's Word calls us to live holy, godly and sober lives. Lack of moderation in anything is sin. Excess of anything is sin. The Ephesians were familiar with the common practice of their age whereby many people in their city, and throughout the Greek and Roman world, indulged in inordinate feasting and vile orgies to Bacchus, the god of wine. Perhaps, some of the Ephesian believers had once engaged in these evil, degrading and drunken orgies. Very likely, prior to their conversion, some of them had been involved in the degenerate idol worship associated with the goddess Artemis (or Diana), whose shrine adorned their city. Now, however, the Lord had delivered them from this evil and degenerate way of life. God's Holy Spirit had filled their hearts and lives with far greater, richer and soul refreshing streams than anything that they had previously experienced in this life.

¹⁹ *foolish*: senseless or unthinking in regard to moral values, including true and false, right and wrong; one who does not make right use of his intellect or understanding. (Cf. Charles Hodge: *Commentary on Ephesians*, 5:17)

Paul says that these Ephesian believers (and all other believers) must not get drunk on wine. We must not abuse the fruit of the vine, nor any other drink or food, and thus bring disgrace on the temple of the Lord. As God's holy temple, our bodies must only be used for holy purposes, and for the service and worship of God. To abuse our bodies through drink, drugs, immorality or any other sinful behaviour is to desecrate and defile God's holy temple. Instead, however, of being filled with alcoholic spirit, or with anything else that alters our mood, mind, or behaviour, our bodies should be filled with the Spirit of God. This is his holy dwelling place; his place of residence, and the abiding place of the most holy God in the Spirit.

To be 'filled with the Spirit' is to be so influenced and directed by the Spirit of God, acting through his Word of truth, that all our thoughts, words, and deeds demonstrate clearly something of the Spirit's sanctifying power, as we bring forth consistently and abundantly the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

In verse 19—and with the sense of the Spirit's presence within—Paul encourages the Ephesian believers to:

Ephesians 5:19

In contrast to the intoxicated or drugged and filthy forms of expression of the ungodly world, Christ's people should communicate with one another from their Spirit-cleansed and Spirit-filled hearts and minds. As the Lord's people, we should praise his name, speaking his Word to one another from the Psalms, or from Christian hymns and other spiritual songs. Similarly, the Lord expects his people to join together as a congregation to praise, worship, and adore his great and holy name through community hymn or psalm singing, or through uniting in spiritual songs.

Probably, the expression 'psalms' in this verse refers to the book of Psalms sung to musical accompaniment (the word, 'psalms' being derived from a word meaning, 'to make music or melody'). Hymns may have been the specifically Christian songs of praise, which were then being prepared for the church. Spiritual songs probably encompassed all other types of Christian songs of praise, worship or adoration.

Thus, Paul encourages the Ephesians to sing unto the Lord, and to praise his great and holy name. This could be both privately in their hearts, or publicly at the worship services of their local house meeting or church.

The aim of singing these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs was to magnify the name of the Lord, and to offer to him a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving from their hearts. Thus, in verse 20, the apostle says:

Ephesians 5:20

For everything that God has done for us, we can never return adequate thanks nor can we ever begin to repay the debt of gratitude that we owe to him. Thus, Paul enjoins the Ephesian believers to give to him all that they are capable of giving. To yield to their Father in heaven the praise, thanksgiving and gratitude of a heart that truly acknowledges its profound indebtedness to God.

Like the Ephesians, we too are exhorted to sing unto the Lord of hosts; to praise his eternal and glorious name, and to offer our heartfelt praise, adoration, and worship to him, in and through the name of his one and only Son our Lord Jesus Christ. However, we are not to do this on specific occasions only, but always. On every occasion, whenever we have opportunity, we are to praise and worship our heavenly Father, either publicly or in our hearts, as the occasion requires.

Love and Submission

Ephesians 5:21-33

Ephesians 5:21

Here, the apostle is cautioning the Ephesian believers against displaying a proud and assertive spirit, for these sinful attitudes have no place in the church of the living God. These attitudes and forms of behaviour stand opposed to the teaching and example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. On the contrary, the believer ought to show true humility. We are called upon to submit to one another in love and in the fear of God (or Christ); i.e., out of due reverence for the Son, for the Father and for the absolute holiness of God. (1 Pet. 5:5-6; see also Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3) As individual members of the body of Christ, we should submit humbly to one another, and supremely to the Lord Jesus as the head of the body—the church.

The apostle Paul now moves from the general to the particular; from submission among members of the church in general, to submission among family members in particular.

Wives to Submit to Their Husbands

Ephesians 5:22

In verse 22, Paul speaks of the Christian wife. Here, he instructs each wife to submit to her own husbands as to the Lord.

We are not speaking here of a servile subjection to a husband, as some people have imagined. The Bible never entertains the idea that a wife is to be treated with anything other than the most intense love, devotion and consideration. Submission relates to a wife's position in the family order. It does not imply any inferiority of her person or her status. A wife is not inferior to her husband.

God created Adam and Eve as equals. As individual people, a man and a woman (or a husband and his wife) are equal in the sight of God. However, in the family order, God has ordained that a wife should be in submission to her husband, obediently recognising him as her head and the head of the household, and yielding to her husband as unto the Lord.

This follows the order of creation. God created man first; and then he created the woman for the man. Woman therefore was brought into being for the man, not man for the woman. Nevertheless, God created woman to be a helpmeet or suitable companion for the man. Therefore, a husband must regard his wife as God's special creation for him, and give to his wife the love, respect and honour due to her.²⁰ (1 Cor. 11:8-9; cf. 1 Tim. 2:12-15)

Ephesians 5:23

In respect of order within the family, God has ordained a particular arrangement: In his position as a husband, the man is the head of the family. As such, his wife is required by God to acknowledge this position as God-ordained and to submit willingly to her immediate head; i.e., her husband. In the same way, the husband must submit willingly to his immediate head; viz., Christ, the head of the church—of which both a believing husband

²⁰ For a fuller discussion on this subject, refer to *Expository Notes: 1 Corinthians* (chapter 11:2-16) by Gordon Lyons. See also *Expository Notes: 1 Corinthians* chapter 7.

and a believing wife are individual members of the body (the church) and of which Christ is the Head and Saviour.

Ephesians 5:24

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not subject to any man. The church is subject to the headship of Christ alone. All who occupy positions of leadership within the church are servants of the Lord, not masters of the church. They are under shepherds, but the Lord Jesus Christ himself is the one and only Chief Shepherd of the flock.

In the same way that the church is wholly subject to the headship and rule of Christ, so a wife is wholly subject to the headship and rule of her husband. As has been stated previously, however, this submission of the wife to her husband does not imply any inferiority of her person. On the contrary, *as a person*, she remains equal with her husband. However, in relation to her *position* within the family, a wife is required to yield to the headship of her husband. In this way, she fully honours her head (her husband), and she fully honours Christ.

This submission, however, is not to be limited to certain areas of family life or to certain matters only. Verse 24 says that a wife is to submit to her husband *in everything*. Ultimately, the husband must have the final say. Yet, he will be held accountable to his head (Christ) for abusing or misusing his position, and will be blessed by the Lord for honouring, loving and cherishing his wife, and for considering her views and wishes—*in everything*.

Husbands to Love Their Wives

Ephesians 5:25-26

Ephesians 5:25

In case any husband should imagine that God was giving him unlimited power over his wife, Paul quickly dismisses such a vain and inconsiderate notion. God's Word expressly commands husbands to love their wives. This leaves no room for treating a wife with anything less than full respect, consideration and devotion.

Paul, however, goes further: not only must a husband love his wife, he must love her to the extent that Christ loved the church.

And how much did Christ love his church?

- By setting an unsurpassed and perfect example by his life.
- By suffering untold agonies on behalf of his bride, the church.
- By laying down his life to save and cleanse his church.

This is the measure of love that God requires a husband to show to his wife:

- Love that sets her the most honourable example of a holy and godly life.
- Love that is prepared to suffer and endure all for the sake of his cherished wife.
- Love that, if ever the need arose, would not hesitate to lay down its life for the one that was closest to his heart—his own beloved wife.

Thus, we see that God's Word leaves no room or scope for a husband to take advantage of his wife, or to neglect her, abuse her, or demean her in any way whatsoever.

In the next two verses, the apostle elaborates on Christ's love for the church:

Ephesians 5:26-27

Christ loved the church to such an extent that he laid down his life willingly to redeem it to himself (i.e., to redeem from among mankind all those who would comprise the church). This he did to create a people who were forgiven and cleansed by his blood and by the eternal Word of God, and sanctified as holy unto the Lord; his purpose being to prepare a holy people for God, whom he could present unto his Father in heaven. These redeemed people would be the purified, sanctified and glorified people of God, who would worship and praise him throughout the eternal ages for his immeasurable grace and favour toward them. This is the radiant and spotless church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which he purchased with his own blood, and which he loves with an everlasting love.

Such was the extent and degree of Christ's love of the church (his holy bride) that he suffered and died to make it his own, and to purify it unto himself for all eternity. Such now is his love for the church that he protects and nourishes it from his living Word; he interceded before his Father on his 'Bride's' behalf, and one day he will return to take his beloved Bride unto himself, so that his church may experience eternal glorification in the Father's presence.

Ephesians 5:28

This, therefore, is the kind of love that the apostle tells believing husbands to show toward their wives. Granted, this love cannot be of the same degree or extent as that shown by Christ for his Bride, the church. Nevertheless, just as Christ loves the church, which is his own body, so a husband ought to love his wife, who is his own body. Therefore, a husband is exhorted to love his wife with all of his being; he is exhorted to suffer if need be for her sake, and he is exhorted if need be to make every reasonable sacrifice for her good. He is to love her, take care of her, and provide for her to precisely the same extent as he would cherish his own life and body. A husband must remember, too, that his body is not his alone, but belongs equally to his wife; just as her body is not hers alone, but belongs equally to her husband. (1 Cor. 7:4) Thus the apostle declares that he who loves his wife loves himself; for, in marriage, they are united as one. (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6)

Love and devotion for one's wife is surpassed only by love and devotion for God.

Ephesians 5:29

No man who is sound in health ever neglects the care of his own body. Rather, he does everything possible to preserve and protect it. He nourishes it, takes care of it, and ensures that it comes to no harm. Therefore, since his body belongs also to his wife, and since his wife has been united to him as one flesh, how much more should a husband do everything possible to preserve and protect his wife? In line with Christ's love for his church, a husband must nurture his wife, comfort her, and show her warmth and tender love and devotion. He must do all for his wife that he would wish to do for himself; everything that is consistent with honouring God, who has made them both one. A husband's example must always be the love that Christ has for his church.

Ephesians 5:30

for we are members of his body. (NIV)

Christ loves the church because it is his own body; that body which he paid for with his life, and which he now lives to preserve and protect until the day when the church is united with him in glory. But the love that he shows to his own, is a tender love, a pure love, a holy love, a selfless, giving and forgiving love—and such must be the love of a husband for his wife.

Certain other translations, following some Greek manuscripts, render this verse as follows:

(30) For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. (NKJV)

The latter part of the sentence has caused much debate among commentators, and we do not intend to enter into discussion of it here. Paul's emphasis seems to be that Christ nourishes and cherishes the church (i.e., all those whom he has redeemed) because they are members of his body. The addition of the phrase, *of His flesh and of His bones*, may be to add further emphasis to the intimate and inseparable nature of our spiritual union with Christ; and, by extension, of a husband's intimate and inseparable union with his wife.

Ephesians 5:31

Developing his theme further, the apostle gives the reason why God has ordained that a man should leave his parents and be united to his wife, thus forming one intimate and inseparable union in the eyes of God.

When the Lord says that a man should 'cleave' (or, be joined) to his wife, he is not referring to physical union alone—an aspect that is emphasised by the fact that they both become one flesh. However, in addition to this, the sense of 'cleaving' carries with it the idea of being utterly faithful and devoted to her for as long as they both should live.

Ephesians 5:32

Here, Paul speaks of the greatness of this mystery: i.e., the union of Christ with his Bride, the church, together with all that this entails in regard to his love for it and his care for it and for each of its members individually. This is a love that will never diminish and will never end. This is a love that will never fail or disappoint. For the love of Christ for his church and for its individual members is an everlasting love, which will be fully realised only in glory.

Ephesians 5:33

Paul finishes this chapter by exhorting each individual husband to demonstrate in a practical, loving and caring way the greatness of their devotion for their respective wives. In all that they did, they were to remember that their wives were especially precious to God, and that they should be treated always as those whom the Lord loved, and who were loved deeply by their husbands. At the same time, Paul reminds each wife to respect her husband, accepting him as her head and the head of the household, under Christ. A wife, too, of course was expected to show love, faithfulness and devotion to her husband, since God had united them as one, and expected them to share their love for one another to the fullest extent and with the utmost purity

Ephesians Chapter 6

Children, Fathers, and Slaves

Ephesians 6:1-9

Still speaking of love and submission, the apostle now addresses other members of the family and household. Firstly, he speaks to children, instructing them how they ought to behave as members of their respective families. Thus, in verse 1 of chapter 6, Paul writes:

Ephesians 6:1-3

Children were to demonstrate submission to their parents by being obedient to them. This was a command expressly from the Lord God himself, and it was the one command (Paul calls it the 'first' command) to which a promise was appended. In the case of Israel, obedience brought with it the promise of long life and extended blessings in the promised land. (Only when they disobeyed, did Israel forfeit God's promised blessings on their lives, and on their land.) (Exod. 20:12; cf. Deut. 27:16)

Thus, by remaining true to God their heavenly Father, and by remaining obedient to their parents, these children of whom Paul was speaking would inherit the promises and blessings of God on their lives.

Paul says that children are to obey their parents 'in the Lord.' Now, of course, this does not imply that children of unbelieving parents need not heed this injunction. Although given initially to Israel, God's command has universal implications: it applies to children in whatever situation they find themselves. They ought to submit to and obey their fathers or mothers; unless, of course, they are required to do something or say something that God expressly forbids.

However, in respect of children of at least one believing parent, they are particularly favoured and signally blessed. By virtue of their parent's faith, the children are considered holy,²¹ or 'clean', in the sight of God. (1 Cor. 7:14) All the more reason, then, for such children to submit to and obey their parents, especially since their parents belong to the Lord. Again, to the parents has been given the honour and responsibility of bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (v.4; cf. Deut. 6:6-7)

Furthermore, Paul adds, children ought to obey their parents in the Lord because this is right thing to do. Parents are responsible to God, and will give account to God, for the way they have raised and treated their children. Thus, children—especially those who are old enough to know of such things—should obey their parents in the realisation of this fact.

²¹ *holy*: i.e., sanctified, in the sense of being consecrated or dedicated to God. This meaning of the term 'holy' does not in itself imply regeneration, but rather the setting apart of an individual (or an object) unto the Lord. Nevertheless, children of believing parents are especially favoured and blessed by their parents' faith. Unquestionably, some or many of these children may also have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, justified by God through faith, and sanctified by the Spirit of God. (GL)

Above all, perhaps—at least on the human level—children should obey their parents because of their parents' intense love for them, and for their genuine concern for their moral and spiritual wellbeing. Such love, of course, should be reciprocated by the children.

Ephesians 6:4

Here, the apostle addresses fathers (comprehending fathers and mothers). Fathers are expressly commanded not to provoke their children; i.e., not to exasperate them or incite them to anger. Rather, they were to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

This represents true spiritual and moral discipline. Discipline, primarily, involves training, instruction, admonition and correction. Christian parents are exhorted by God's Word to train their children diligently in all the ways of the Lord, thereby nourishing and nurturing them on the word of life, and instilling into them a knowledge of the Scriptures of truth. Such training should be paramount, as it concerns the children's spiritual and moral welfare.

This is one of the ways in which children of believers (or of at least one believing parent) are said to be 'holy' or clean in the sight of God through their parents' faith. Because of that faith, their parents undertake to provide their children with a godly upbringing, which involves consecrating their children to the Lord, and praying for them in his presence that they might belong to him for all eternity.

Because of the great importance of this task and responsibility, fathers and mothers should do all in their power to strengthen and encourage their children morally and spiritually, that they might learn to love, trust and obey their parents all the more, and above all that they might learn the ways of the Lord and be brought to full trust in, and commitment to him. For this reason, it is imperative that parental discipline is centred on godly instruction, training, and admonition. This does not exclude punitive discipline where this is necessary, but all forms of discipline should be exercised only in love and caring compassion for the children that God has given them.²² (Cf. Deut. 32:46; Col. 3:21; 1 Tim. 3:4)

Ephesians 6:5-7

Paul now addresses slaves (or bondservants). The apostle admonishes these believing slaves to be obedient to their masters.

(The word translated 'masters' (Gk., κύριος, *kurios*) derives from a word meaning, 'lord', 'possessor' or 'owner' as well as 'master'. However, it differs from the word translated 'masters' in 1 Timothy 6:1 and Titus 2:9. There, the word 'masters' (Gk., δεσπότης, *despotes*) derives from a word meaning 'lord' 'legal owner' 'absolute ruler' or 'despot', as well as 'master' (of a household).)

It might be argued by some of these slaves that—since they were now believers, and all believers were equal in Christ Jesus—then they need no longer submit to their believing masters. However, this is not the case. The fact that individuals are believers in Christ, and equal in Christ, does not alter the God-ordained order for families or for society in general. As Paul has already stated in this epistle, believers are to submit to one another, and they have also to recognise that God has ordained certain orders within the family or household whereby a man—being the head of the household—submits to Christ, his wife submits to the husband, and children to their parents. This does not change their essen-

²² For a more detailed discussion of punitive and non-punitive discipline, see on *Bible Truths Explained: Adoption under Loving Discipline*, by Gordon Lyons.

tial equality with one another as individual people, but merely reflects God's order within each family and household.

So it is with slaves. They, too—although equal as individuals with their masters—must nevertheless submit to their masters. Thus, in 1 Timothy chapter 1, Paul writes:

*(1) All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered.
(2) Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them.* (1 Tim. 6:1-2 NIV)

Yet, in the case of believing slaves and masters, this does not imply a servile submission, but rather a willing, cheerful and sincere submission in the knowledge that—by so doing—they are serving their true Master in heaven; even the Lord himself.

The apostle adds that these slaves are to submit 'with fear and trembling' or 'with respect and fear'. Although—and as other Scriptures clearly indicate—slaves were to respect and honour their earthly masters, Paul may have been thinking more of the 'fear and trembling' that slaves ought to exhibit before God while they served their masters on earth. (Cf. 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 2:12)

Slaves, therefore, were to yield humbly, obediently and respectfully to their earthly masters, not being contentious, disobedient or lazy. This was all the more important since they were serving the Lord Christ and ought therefore to labour with all their heart as unto him who loved them and had made them his own. (Cf. Col. 3:22; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:18-21)

Ephesians 6:8

Here, Paul gives an incentive for the slaves to obey their masters willingly, cheerfully and wholeheartedly. One day, they—and everyone else—will stand before the Lord. Then, they will give account of their lives on earth, and of how they have served and honoured their Master in heaven. On the basis of their deeds, they will be judged and apportioned a reward. Those who have proved faithful to their Master in heaven by the quality of their service on earth, will receive a greater reward in heaven and greater responsibilities. Those who have neglected or failed to honour their heavenly Master while on earth, will receive a lesser reward and lesser responsibilities. Some, who have proved unfaithful in their service on earth may even forfeit all rewards, although not their salvation—since this is a gift of God's grace, not a reward for service or works. (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Matt. 25:14-30; cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15)

In view of this great fact, therefore, slaves ought to serve their earthly masters faithfully and diligently, knowing that in reality they are serving their Master in heaven, and he will reward them accordingly.

What applies here to slaves (or bondservants) applies also in principle to other forms of service. For example, the same principle applies to employees in relation to their employers. Employees ought to render wholehearted, faithful and diligent service to their employers, as unto the Lord, knowing that in reality they are serving the Lord, and that he will reward them.

Greed or selfish ambition should form no part of a believer's outlook on his employment or on his life generally. Rather, he should seek the place in which he can best honour and serve his Lord and Master. He should continue to work conscientiously and diligently in this position until the Lord advances him to a higher position or to greater responsibilities, or until the Lord calls him to another form of service for himself.

Ephesians 6:9

Now, Paul addresses masters. The apostle cautions masters not to take advantage of their slaves; not to act unkindly or unjustly toward them, and above all not to threaten them. Although they may be slaves, who were required to submit to their masters, they were no less valuable in the sight of God than were their believing masters. Therefore, they were to be treated as those whom God loved, whom his Son had redeemed, and who stood on an equal footing with all other believers (masters included) in respect of their person.

However, there is another reason why Paul cautions masters against using threats: viz., the masters themselves have a Master in heaven, and to him they must reckon an account. With this Master in heaven, there will be no favouritism and no distinction of persons, rank, class or privilege. Every individual will be judged according to their works, and on exactly the same basis as every other individual. Masters will stand on exactly the same footing as their slaves—now a freeman in the presence of the Lord. Each will be rewarded according to what they have done, not according to what position, class or rank they occupied on earth.

The Full Armour of God

Ephesians 6:10

Paul comes now to the concluding part of his letter to the Ephesian (and perhaps other) churches. The apostle has just provided these believers with some solid but essential instructions in Christian living. Now, before taking his leave of them, he wants to encourage and strengthen them in their most holy faith.

Thus, in verse 10, the apostle begins:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

The apostle realises that putting into practice the truths and principles of the Christian life is often difficult—but nevertheless essential. Furthermore, Paul realises that these believers are living in the midst of a hostile world, and yet are required to be a light to that world, that others might be saved. In addition to all this, Paul knows that even the world and its hostility is not the believers' real enemy. Rather, the believers' real enemy lies beyond the scope of the world's power.

Thus, Paul exhorts these dear children of God to seek their strength in and from the Lord. Only by remaining in close union and communion with Christ, as a branch to the vine, can believers experience the necessary strength and support for the fight. The Lord alone will be their strength and stay in the day of adversity. He alone has sufficient power—almighty power—to preserve, protect and deliver believers from harm and danger.

But, that they may be fully equipped to stand and to fight in the day of battle, Paul continues by writing in verse 11:

Ephesians 6:11

There is no possibility of any child of God being able to stand against evil, either in his own strength—moral or physical—or without being adequately and fully protected: That is, he must protect his entire being, with all its faculties, against the onslaught of evil. But, by what means? By the means that God provides. By putting on the full armour (or 'panoply') of God. By being fully equipped with the means that God provides for both defence and attack. Only by being thus clad from head to foot, will the believer be able to withstand the subtle approaches, wily subterfuges, and devious attacks of the devil.

We must remember just how devious Satan is: He is called the 'father' (or originator) of lies, for every form of falsehood, deceit and dishonesty begins with him. He is called the 'serpent', for he is cunning, stealthy, deceptively persuasive, and yet his suggestions and persuasive arguments are as deadly as a snake's venom.

Frequently, many of the Lord's people find themselves overcome for a time by the powers of evil. Very often, this has happened because these believers did not fully appreciate the spiritual dangers and attacks that form part of the Christian's conflict against the world, the flesh and the devil. Very often, they have not understood the ferocity of the forces of evil, and of the absolute necessity of being fully prepared for and protected against these wicked attacks. Sometimes, sadly, this may be due to inadequate teaching of God's Word. Among the many other great and necessary truths of God's Word, it is essential that God's people be warned of the spiritual conflict against evil, and of the necessity of being protected at all times by the power of God. However, this protection comes only through the almighty power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, through a thorough working knowledge and application of God's Word, and through a consistent and godly prayer life.

Where, however, a believer sees no real danger from the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, he will not take steps to cloth himself with the armour that God has provided. However, by his neglect, he is leaving himself wide open to attack, to hostile and sometimes intense spiritual opposition, and to the very real possibility of falling into sin.

Nevertheless, although the spiritual forces of evil are very real and very powerful, they cannot approach anywhere near to the power of God—for God is omnipotent. And it is this omnipotence that God uses to preserve his church, and to protect every single child of God within his church. Yet, even although this is true, the Lord still requires his people to equip themselves for spiritual conflict. One of the reasons for this conflict is to test and strengthen the believer in his faith and in his faithfulness to God. But we must remember that God is faithful: He will not permit any of his children to be tempted, tried or tested above their ability to endure, but will with that trial provide the way of escape. God is in total control of all circumstances and all events; not sinful man, and not wicked and powerful spiritual beings. (1 Cor. 10:13)

Yet, because these evil spirit beings exist, and because of their hatred for God and for his church, Paul exhorts these Ephesians believers to prepare themselves for battle. The apostle wants them to be fully aware of the true nature and power of the enemy that will certainly oppose them. Therefore, in the following verses, Paul tells these dear saints of God what they must do to protect themselves and to stand against the evil powers that operate from beyond this earthly realm.

In the next verse, the apostle identifies more fully the believers' real enemy. Thus, in verse 12, Paul writes:

Ephesians 6:12

The believer wrestles—or struggles (as in a contest) against his real enemy with all the might that God provides. And his real enemy is not Satan alone—evil and powerful as he is—but the entire host of wicked beings in the heavenly realms: i.e., Satan and the multitudes of mighty but fallen intelligent beings (fallen angels). No, says Paul, our chief enemy is not sinful mankind or any earthly powers or authorities. Rather, the believers' chief adversary is these mighty evil powers who operate under the control of Satan, and beyond the realm of this earth. (Cf. Eph. 2:2; 2 Pet. 2:4; 1 John 5:19; Jude 1:6; Rev. 12:9)

The apostle employs several epithets to describe these wicked but highly intelligent beings. We have listed them below:

1. *rulers* (NIV); or *principalities* (NKJV)

Lit, 'beginnings': i.e., those who are first or foremost in rank, power or authority, or who at a particular point in time are considered to be the originators of any action or process.²³

When the word translated 'rulers' or 'principalities' is used in connection with the fallen angels, it refers to Satan as the first and foremost of evil spirits—the prince of the power of the air, and the prince of darkness. The word translated 'rulers' (or 'principalities') refers also to Satan and to all other wicked spirit beings as the originators and instigators of all evil. (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2)

This evil is then expressed directly by their immediate agency (as in the NT examples of demon possession), or indirectly by their evil influence on world rulers, powers or authorities. Thus, for example, they may incite world rulers to enact ungodly and unrighteous laws, to promote ungodly and unrighteous practises, or to engage in all sorts of wicked and cruel practises against their people.

Again, acting under Satan, the evil spirits endeavour to attack anything related to God, especially his church and individual believers within the church. Nevertheless, in this respect, they can only tempt the children of God—although sometimes persistently and severely. Since he is protected by the almighty power of God's Holy Spirit, these evil beings cannot overcome a believer unless he yields voluntarily to their temptation.

2. *authorities* (NIV); or *powers* (NKJV)

Lit., those who exercise command and control, or government over some realm or kingdom, either on earth or in the realm of the heavens.

In relation to the spiritual powers in the heavens, this refers to the usurped and unlawful power or authority that these evil beings endeavour to exert over the people of this world; to a great extent successfully as far as unregenerate mankind is concerned. Nevertheless, these evil beings cannot overstep the bounds that God has set, or influence in any way the sovereign and eternal purposes of God. God's plans and purposes cannot be hindered or thwarted by anything in all creation, including these wicked spiritual beings.

3. *powers of this dark world* (NIV); or *rulers of the darkness of this age* (NKJV)

Lit., those powers who exemplify and rule over everything represented by spiritual and moral 'darkness'; viz., Satan and the demons.

Their evil influence extends to encouraging or promoting all forms of sin, sinful behaviour or practises, ungodliness, moral and spiritual depravity, and all forms of involvement with false gods or idols, occultism, spiritualism, and all other forms of spiritual wickedness.

²³ *rulers* or *principalities* (beginning or originators): cf. BDAG.

4. *the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (NIV); or *spiritual [hosts] of wickedness in the heavenly [places]* (NKJV)

Lit., those spiritual powers in the heavenly realms who exemplify the most abject baseness and extreme forms of wickedness, and who practise and encourage unregenerate men and women to engage in the most malicious and perverse forms of sinful attitudes or behaviour—taking advantage of their fallen sinful natures.

In saying that these wicked fallen angels operate in and from the heavenly realms, this must not be understood of that heaven which is God's throne and dwelling place. The fallen angels have been expelled from this (highest) heaven, and no sinful being can ever approach God's most holy presence. These evil spirits operate in the heavens beyond the realms of this world, but completely outside the holy dwelling place of God.

Once again, however, these evil beings have been 'bound': i.e., as a result of Christ's death, his triumphant resurrection, and his ascension to glory, the power and authority of Satan and his minions have been destroyed (i.e., effectively laid waste or brought to ruin, but not yet totally annihilated). As a consequence, the full force of their evil powers has been severely curtailed, and is being restricted or restrained by God, until the day of their final judgment and consignment to the lake of fire. Yet, even their remaining limited power is potentially highly dangerous. (Col. 2:15)

We must not suppose for one moment, however, that the Lord Jesus Christ is in any way hindered in guiding, guarding and preserving his church by the presence of these evil beings. We must emphasise that the Lord Jesus won complete victory over the usurped power and authority of Satan and these evil beings at the cross. The Lord is in control of all events, both in relation to the world's history and also in relation to his blood-bought church. No satanic or evil power can come between Christ and his people; for evil spirits are created, finite and fallen beings, whereas the Son is uncreated, eternal and perfect God, possessing all the attributes of his Father in heaven. One of these attributes is omnipotence—and it is this omnipotence that the glorified Lord Jesus exercises, through his absolutely pure, glorious and almighty Holy Spirit, for the protection of his church and the preservation of all his redeemed people. (Eph. 1:21)

Ephesians 6:13

Having demonstrated something of the true nature and wickedness of the believer's enemy, the apostle exhorts the Ephesians saints once more to take up the full armour that God provides. This armour of God is also called the armour of light (Rom. 13:12) and the armour (or weapons) of righteousness (2 Cor. 6:7; cf. 2 Cor. 10:4)

By being thus equipped, they will be able to stand against the attacks of the evil one even when Satan's temptations, or hostile opposition to our faith or godly lifestyle, are at their most severe. Furthermore, those saints who are equipped with the panoply of God will also be able to go on the offensive, and to resist the devil, to repudiate his lying suggestions, and to assail him with the Word of God. Thus, the people of God will be found standing their ground—not in their own strength—but in the strength of the Lord, in the power of his Holy Spirit, and through the application of the Word of God.

In the following verses, the apostles elaborates on this theme.

Ephesians 6:14

(14a) Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist... (NIV)

The soldier preparing for battle begins to don his armour by first of all girding his waist and loins with a protective military belt. This belt secured loose fitting or flowing clothing, and protected the waist and abdomen. Once in place, the soldier could then add his other accoutrements of war. In like manner, Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to begin donning their protective armour with the belt of truth.

The truth to which the apostle is referring here is not the Word of God as such (which is mentioned separately), but rather the knowledge of, and wholehearted belief in, the truth concerning God and all that he has spoken. The belt of truth includes also a fully sufficient practical knowledge of the doctrines of the faith.

From this, it follows that—to stand successfully in the conflict—a believer must be committed to a personal life of truth, honesty, integrity and wholehearted commitment to the God of truth and to the One who is the way the truth and the life. Thus, in entering into this spiritual warfare, the soldier of Christ must be utterly convinced of the truth and righteousness of his cause, for it is the cause of his Captain or Commander who cannot lie or prove unfaithful to his Word.

(14b) ...with the breastplate of righteousness in place, (NIV)

Now Paul exhorts the believers to protect their upper bodies with the breastplate of righteousness; the breastplate being that part of a soldier's armour which extended from his neck to his waist, or in some cases to his thighs. Although termed a 'breastplate' this armour was in two sections: one section covered and protected the soldier's front, and the other section covered and protected his back, shielding the heart and other vital organs.

Thus, the Christian is to protect and shield his heart, and to be prepared for attack from ahead or from behind: i.e., from expected or unexpected forms of assault by the enemy of souls.

Of course, the characteristic of righteousness or upright behaviour was to apply to the believer's whole being. Only by living a truly pure, upright, conscientious and sanctified life in the power of God's Holy Spirit, would the believer be able to stand in day of battle. Providing, however, that righteousness was his breastplate, or the hallmark of his daily life, then he would be suitably equipped both for frontal and rearward (or direct and indirect, expected or unexpected) attacks by the evil one. Thus, the believer would be able to stand his ground and to repel the one who hates the light that righteousness produces, and which exposes and condemns his vile sin. (Cf. 1 Thess. 5:8; see also Phil. 3:8-9; cf. Isa. 59:17)

Ephesians 6:15

*and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace
(NIV)*

Another piece of essential protective gear for the soldier was his greaves: i.e., the armour plating that protected his legs below the knee, and which included his footwear. One of the aims of this protective leg wear was to prevent injury to the lower limbs caused by spikes or traps, hidden and laid across his path as a form of ambush. So the believer must be prepared for unexpected traps, enticements, or ambushes laid cunningly across his path by the devil.

Paul exhorts the Ephesians believers to make themselves ready to race into battle and to stand their ground firmly against the foe. Their preparedness or readiness was to be the Gospel of peace: i.e., the good news that brings peace and tranquillity to conflict-torn hearts. Even in the midst of spiritual warfare, the Gospel of Christ has the power to impart

peace to the struggling soul; for it is the peace of God or the peace of Christ, that is shed abroad in the believer's heart by the Holy Spirit.

This protective leg wear implies that, at times, the road for the Christian will be particularly rough and difficult; and therefore will require the utmost preparation and protection against trial, storm, adversity and spiritual attack. So indeed it is; for we have been called not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for the sake of his name. Spiritual warfare against the powers of evil in the heavenly realms is an example of just one of these forms of suffering. Yet, we must always bear in mind the promise of glory to follow for all those who remain faithful to Christ and to his cause, and who continue the fight valiantly against the world, the flesh and the devil.

Ephesians 6:16

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (NIV)

We have not finished yet with the armour of God. Some essential items are still required before the soldier will be fully equipped for battle. One of the most important is the soldier's battle shield. The shield mentioned here is not the small wrist-borne shield, but rather the large oblong or door shield. This full size body shield alone would suffice for extended and fierce conflict.

Thus, Paul exhorts the believer to add to his armour the mighty shield of faith. Our faith is the victory—the victory that overcomes the world. The believer's faith, of course, is not in his own ability, or his resolve, or his imagined or real bravery, or in his own power or strength, but in the power and strength of the Lord himself and in the might of his Word. Steadfast and immovable faith in Christ is what wins the victory over Satan and the mighty spiritual forces of evil; for that faith alone—energised by the almighty Holy Spirit—is sufficient to overcome all created powers in heaven or on earth. (Cf. 1 John 2:13)

The flaming arrows or fiery darts may include all sorts of evil, unclean, or even blasphemous thoughts that enter our minds, and through which Satan endeavours to lure us into sin. Other forms of flaming arrows—or sore temptations to sin—may include inclinations toward sinful pride, greed, selfish ambition, unholy passions, and many more. At times, Satan will try his utmost to cause us to sin in any of these ways, by bombarding us with a succession of severe or fiery temptations. This is why we must bear before us the shield of faith, in order to ward off Satan's allurements, enticements or temptations to sin against the Lord.

Therefore, the apostle encourages the saints of God not merely to carry this shield of faith around at their side, but to bear it in front of them: i.e., to use their faith in God and his Word to fend off forcefully the enemy's vicious and repeated attacks, while at the same time advancing against him and repelling his assaults. Thus, no matter how many flaming darts or penetrating fiery attacks the enemy launches against the Christian, the believer will be able to stand his ground, clad with full armour of God and bearing before him the shield of his faith—a shield emblazoned with heraldic symbols proclaiming the message of the cross, the victory of Christ, and the eternal glory of the exalted living Son of God.

Ephesians 6:17

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (NIV)

There is little point in a soldier being armed for battle if he omits to protect his head and face. Therefore, Paul exhorts the believers to take the helmet of salvation...

The helmet of salvation denotes that this is a soldier of Christ: one for whom Christ paid sin's penalty; one whom he called, justified and appointed to his service. Now, this servant of Christ must take up arms to engage in spiritual warfare. The helmet over his head indicates his full protection through the salvation that Christ has provided, and through faith and confidence in the living glorified Redeemer. (Cf. 1 Thess. 5:8; cf. also Isa. 59:17)

Those, however, who claim to belong to Christ, and yet who have not been provided with the helmet of salvation—because they have never personally experienced God's salvation—cannot hope to stand against the enemy of souls. Only those who truly belong to Christ are provided with this sure protection afforded by the salvation of the Lord.

In addition to this helmet, the apostle urges the saints at Ephesus to take up the sword of the Spirit. This, the apostle explains, is the Word of God. Yet, it is not sufficient for the soldier to carry or bear the sword of the Spirit. He must use it in battle. Satan does not fear the Christian; but he stands in abject fear of the Holy Spirit who indwells the Christian. Furthermore, Satan will not be repelled by any words or challenges uttered by the Christian, but he flees in the face of the Word of God.

Therefore, to achieve victory over the temptations, allurements and enticements of Satan, the believer must wield the sword of the Spirit. He must attack Satan consistently with the Word of God. Satan cannot stand against the Word of the living Sovereign God. We need only remember how the Lord Jesus used the Scriptures to repel Satan, and how the devil was compelled to withdraw. (Matt. 4:4,7,10; cf. Ps. 119:11; Isa. 49:2; Heb. 4:12)

Ephesians 6:18

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (NIV)

Paul has now reached the end of his warrior metaphor. However, having put on the full armour of God, one essential matter remains for the Christian soldier: he must engage as a warrior in earnest importunate prayer.

The apostle exhorts these saints of God to pray—but not just to pray formally, casually or occasionally. Rather, in this verse, Paul multiplies expressions relating to prayer, in order to demonstrate its essential nature. Therefore, he exhorts the believers to pray in the Spirit... (Cf. Jude 1:20)

Cold, indifferent, formal, unfeeling prayer should have no place in the believer's prayer life, and most certainly will not be heard or answered by God. (Cf. Luke 18:10-14)

Paul says that we must pray in the Spirit... But what is the significance of praying in the Spirit? It is this:

- It is the Holy Spirit who takes our faltering prayers, interprets them and presents them to God in a manner that God finds acceptable and well pleasing to himself. (Rom. 8:26-27)
- It is the Holy Spirit who gives life and fervency to our prayers, making them prayers of the heart and not merely of the head. (Cf. 1 Sam. 1:10; 2:1; Luke 22:44; Acts 4:31)

- It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies our prayers and our prayer life, and renders them holy before the Lord.

Thus, we can see that to attempt to pray to God without the intercession of the Holy Spirit, is offensive to God and to his holy nature. We see too, that prayers offered to God without the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God are ineffectual and unavailing. Thus, it is essential that we pray in the Spirit—on all occasions.

Next, Paul says that the believers at Ephesus should pray *with all kinds of prayers and requests...*

The words used here imply intercession with God for every matter—great or small—that the Lord lays upon our hearts, or that we consider a matter for prayer. Nothing that concerns our life in Christ Jesus should be thought unimportant or unworthy of prayer. God is concerned with every detail of our lives, and he desires that we should come before him to offer him praise, thanksgiving, and worship, and to present our prayers and petitions to him in the Spirit. He will hear and answer every prayer that we offer, in accordance with the purposes of his own sovereign and holy will. (Luke 12:6-7)

The word which the NIV translates as ‘requests’ reflects a rather weak translation. The word really means ‘to supplicate’ or ‘to petition’ someone with urgency or with earnest entreaty. The apostle is saying that we should not only pray in the Spirit in a more general sense, but that we should also urgently entreat or petition God for particular matters. It indicates a marked fervency in prayer, which of course must be in the Spirit, and from a sincere and clean heart. Such was Abraham’s prayer before the LORD when he pleaded earnestly on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, doomed to destruction. (Gen. 18:22-33) Such, too, was David’s prayer when he acknowledged his sin, and earnestly pleaded with the LORD for mercy and forgiveness. (Ps. 51:1-19) Such also was the Lord’s prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane when he besought his Father that the cup of suffering might pass from him. (Luke 22:42-44)

At times, the believer must pray as these men prayed, and as the Lord Jesus himself demonstrated in his own prayer life. This is especially true for the Christian when he finds himself battling against the spiritual forces of evil. However, it is just as true on many other occasions when such earnest entreaty is appropriate: e.g., when praying on behalf of sinners who face God’s judgment unless brought to repentance and faith in Christ; or when praying on behalf of a loved one who is enduring loss, suffering, or trial; and on many other occasions. But, at all times, we must pray in the Spirit, presenting our petitions to the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus—the One who intercedes for us in heaven.

Now that these believers understood the true nature and importance of prayer in the Spirit, Paul urges them to keep alert or to remain ever vigilant. They were to remain constantly on guard against their spiritual foe, the devil. However, they were to remain on guard in all matters involving their spiritual and prayer life. They were to ‘watch’ in prayer. Just as a watch, or city guard, kept watch over the town or citadel, warning its inhabitants of approaching peril or danger, or—if all was safe—declaring the ‘all’s well’, so the Christian is to keep watch over, or guard, the citadel of his soul. Any time that he detects the approach of spiritual peril or danger, he is to entreat the Lord in prayer concerning that threat. By doing so continually, he will be able to say that, by the grace of God, ‘It is well with my soul...’. (Matt. 26:40-41; cf. Luke 21:34-36; Col. 4:2)

Now, says the apostle, we must continue—or persevere—in prayer, not only for ourselves and others, but for all the saints. We ought to remember the people of God wherever they meet, and in whatever part of the world they live, for they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus, we ought to pray for them, not just occasionally, but regularly; and we ought to persevere in prayer on their behalf. In this way, we share fellowship with the entire body of believers—the church—worldwide. In this way too the church is strength-

ened, blessed and encouraged in the knowledge that they are being upheld constantly by the fellow saints of God around the world.

But, apart from the people of God, for whom else should God's children pray?

The Word of God tells us elsewhere that we should pray for all those in authority: for rulers, leaders, governors, judges, magistrates and all who hold a similar position. For these have been appointed to their office by the will of God, and God will hold them accountable for the way that they have acted while in office. Thus, we are exhorted to pray for them and to intercede on their behalf before the Sovereign Lord and Judge of all the earth. (1 Tim. 2:1-8)

Of course, God's redeemed children should pray also for those who are lost in their sins, that they may find the mercy of the Lord. The believer ought to pray more generally for the good or welfare of his society or country, that God may be pleased to show mercy to rebellious and unbelieving societies and nations, bringing them to repentance and faith in the one and only Sovereign of the universe. There are many other things for which we, as God's children, may pray—but always from a sincere heart, and always in the Spirit.

Most importantly, the Lord Jesus instructed his followers not to grow weary or to give up in prayer, but to persevere. God waits to hear the prayers of those who petition him in the Spirit, sincerely, fervently, and without giving up, especially if there appears to be no response to their earnest prayers. (Luke 18:1-8; Rom. 12:12; 1 Thess. 5:17)

Ephesians 6:19-20

(19) Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, (20) for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.
(NIV)

Having shown these dear Ephesians saints how to pray effectively in the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostle now appeals to them to intercede before God on his behalf. We must remember, of course, that Paul was a prisoner in Rome at the time he wrote this letter. He had been imprisoned for the preaching of the gospel, and was now being detained under house arrest.

Yet, the faithful apostle of the Lord Jesus was determined to pursue his calling and his commission to the end, wherever the Lord ordained that he should serve. Thus, Paul beseeches the Ephesian church for their prayers, that the apostle may know what the Lord would have him say to his hearers, and that he might declare the message of the gospel fearlessly to all of Caesar's household, to the Roman guard, and to all with whom he came in contact during his detention in Rome.

The word translated 'fearlessly' (or 'boldly') is derived from a word meaning 'confidently' 'frankly' or 'plainly'; i.e., in such a manner as conceals nothing (of the gospel message), holds nothing back, or omits nothing (of the truth).

Paul speaks of the 'mystery of the gospel'—a phrase that he uses elsewhere. The apostle is referring to the fact that the grace of God through the gospel has now been made known—or revealed—to the Gentile nations; and that God's people, the church, now comprises both believing Jews and believing Gentiles in one body. God recognises no distinction between Jew or Gentile; or between believers of one nation and believers of another nation. All are one in Christ Jesus. Christ is the Redeemer and Head of all true believers; i.e., of the entire church of the redeemed world-wide. (Eph. 1:9ff; 3:2-11; cf. Rom. 16:25; Col. 1:25-26; 2:2; 4:3; Gal. 3:28)

In verse 20, the apostle speaks of being *an ambassador in chains*.

An ambassador is one through whom a sovereign speaks. This emissary must convey to those to whom he has been sent only the exact terms of the message that his sovereign has transmitted to him. The ambassador is not at liberty to alter or amend the message of his sovereign in any way, or to place upon it his own personal interpretation. So it was with the ambassadors of the Lord Jesus—Paul and the other apostles. They had to proclaim to others the full message of their Sovereign Lord, but they could not alter that message in any way or place upon it their own personal interpretation.

The word translated ambassador in this verse is the word from which the term 'apostle' is derived. In Paul's day, an apostle was a 'sent one'; i.e., a legate, envoy, emissary, ambassador or official representative of the government. He was a diplomat of the highest rank, who represented his government abroad in much the same way as an ambassador or plenipotentiary does today.

The term 'apostle' was the term given by the Lord Jesus to his disciples. However, the word 'disciple' and the word 'apostle' are not synonymous and interchangeable terms. They have quite different meanings. The word 'disciple' means 'pupil', 'learner', or 'understudy'; whereas the word 'apostle' means 'ambassador', 'emissary' or 'officially accredited representative'. Thus, when the Lord Jesus appointed his disciples as apostles, he was appointing them as ambassadors (abroad), or as officially accredited representatives or plenipotentiaries of the Gospel. Therefore, when an apostle proclaimed the message of the Gospel, or when he wrote an epistle to the churches or to individuals, that apostle was speaking or writing with the full accreditation and authority of the eternal Son of God. Thus, whatever the apostles of the Lord Jesus proclaimed or wrote was the express teaching of the Lord himself, and the word of the living Sovereign God. Their teaching therefore carried with it the full power and authority of God himself, as they proclaimed his word by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:20)

In saying that he was 'an ambassador in chains', the apostle may have been using this expression metaphorically to denote his prolonged and enforced detention at Rome. As far as can be determined, Paul was not kept in chains during the entire course of his two year period at Rome. For much of that time, he was permitted a degree of freedom—although his movements would have been restricted by the conditions of his house arrest.

Paul finishes verse 20 by once again requesting the prayers of the Ephesian believers. Yet, he does not request prayers for himself, for improvements in his conditions of imprisonment, or even for his liberty—as had happened on a previous occasion with the apostle Peter. Rather, Paul requests prayer that he may make known the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in all power and boldness. The apostle was being faithful to his commission; for he had said on another occasion, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel...' (1 Cor. 9:16) Thus, even in his present surroundings, Paul desired to make Christ known. He saw a great opportunity of reaching the palace household and the praetorian guard for Christ, and this he was most anxious to do. (Phil. 1:12-14).

Furthermore, the apostle was in an excellent situation to write his epistles to various churches, and to instruct them in the faith. It is from this situation that we have what are sometimes called 'the prison epistles'.

Ephesians 6:21-22

The apostle is about to close his epistle to the Ephesians. However, before he does so, he lets the believers know that his faithful friend and fellow servant, Tychicus, will tell them first hand about everything concerning his [Paul's] personal welfare and progress in the gospel. Paul says that Tychicus will comfort their hearts (v.22); presumably, by the news that he brings concerning Paul, and also by the ministry that he provides to the church.

We first hear of Tychicus in Acts chapter 20 verse 4. There we learn that Tychicus came from the province of Asia—as did Trophimus. They, and several other believers, accompanied the apostle Paul when he was travelling back from Macedonia with the collection for the needy saints at Jerusalem.

In addition to his visit to the Ephesian church, Tychicus also reported back to the Colossian church concerning Paul, after the apostle had sent the epistle addressed to them. Again, he accompanied Onesimus when they made the journey to Colossae. (Col. 4:7-9; see also 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12)

Little else is known about this dear servant of God. Paul simply refers to him as a dear or beloved brother and a faithful minister (or servant) in the Lord. Clearly, he was someone whom Paul trusted a great deal, who had proved completely reliable, and who had provided considerable assistance to the imprisoned apostle. The fact that Paul chose this man to carry his letters to the churches, to report on the apostle's current situation, and to minister the Word of God in the churches, is commendation enough.

Ephesians 6:23-24

The apostle closes his epistle with a benedictory address.

Firstly, he wishes peace to the brothers in Christ Jesus at Ephesus. This is the peace that comes only to those who have been reconciled to the Father through the blood of the cross. This is the peace that comes from true and full fellowship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the peace of God that passes all human understanding.

Likewise, the apostle invokes the blessing of love—love from the Father above. Love that unites the believers in heart and soul with one another, through their union and communion with the Son of God who loved them and gave himself for them.

Yet, as Paul next declares, this love must be united with faith—a faith that comes also from God above, and which each one of these dear saints of God have expressed by the wholehearted belief in, and commitment to, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, they find that their faith is a faith working through love.

Finally, the apostle blesses them with the grace of God—a blessing that would come upon all those who loved the Lord Jesus with unremitting devotion, and who worshipped and served him with all their heart and soul.

The phrase rendered by the NIV as 'undying love' is rendered by other translations as 'incorruptible love', 'sincere love', or 'pure love'. If we assume one of these renderings to be more accurate, then the meaning would be that the love spoken of would be a love that endured in perpetuity. Such, indeed, is the eternal love of God and of his Son. Such, too, should be our devotion to God and to his Son. For his love today is the same as it was then, and it will remain so for all the ages of eternity.

Let us then worship and praise the Lord our God who has done all things well. Let us magnify his holy name, not only with our hearts and tongues, but also with our lives and actions.

Epilogue

A Cautionary Postscript

We have seen in this letter something of the love and devotion of the Ephesian church to their Lord and to one another. Yet, we must bear in mind, and take to heart, that the church at Ephesus did not maintain the full measure of its love for Christ to the very end.

In his letters to the seven churches, the apostle John reveals to us that Ephesus later abandoned its first love.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John commends the church for their labours for Christ, for their perseverance in the faith, and for their repudiation of false teachers and false doctrine. Yet, they had forsaken one thing that was essential in the church: love. They performed all the right duties and responsibilities of their faith—but they did not do so from a heart of love. They had grown cold and formal in their worship and service. (Rev. 2:1-7)

Clearly, this must have originated from a lack of real love for God, and consequently also for their fellow-believers and for the world around them. Sadly, they must have fitted the description of a gifted and active, but loveless, personality that the apostle Paul delineates and cautions against in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

In Revelation, the Lord Jesus calls upon the church at Ephesus to repent, and to return to their first love. Thus, they were given every opportunity to renew their devotion to the Lord, and to demonstrate once again real heartfelt caring love for one another and for a lost world. Failure to respond to the Lord's solemn warning, however, would mean that their 'lampstand' would be removed from its place: i.e., the Lord would take away their privilege to shine as a light into the world, proclaiming God's Word of truth, and bearing testimony to the wonders of God's grace and mercy toward them. The glory of God would depart from their midst, and they would no longer be a living, functioning local church nurturing the people of God and bearing testimony of eternal salvation to the world.

Did the church at Ephesus heed this warning? This we are not told. However, we know from secular history that Ephesus and other churches of the province of Asia (now Turkey) passed into oblivion. Their light was extinguished. Ephesus lasted in one form or another until sometime after 341 AD, then the church and city gradually diminished and decayed. By 1308, the remains of the city was overrun by the Turks, and subsequently the city of Ephesus fell completely to ruin and has never been rebuilt.

Could this happen to a loveless or unfaithful church today? Most certainly it could. God is faithful, and he will not permit his name to be defamed or misrepresented. He is not only a God of love, mercy and grace, but also a God of light (or truth), righteousness, and holiness. If any local church consistently fails to honour his name or to represent his Son by its words and deeds, then most certainly God will warn that church through his Word. Yet, if they fail to respond to his warnings, the Lord may very well remove the lampstand from that church: i.e., the right, privilege and ability to act as a light to the world and a teacher of truth to its members.

May the Lord keep each one of us true and faithful to him, cherishing his truth, loving him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving one another in Christ Jesus just as he has loved us. And to God be the glory throughout the eternal ages!

Ephesians 6