

# Lessons on Ephesians

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*Dedication*

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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## Blessings - Ephesians 1:1-14

Often called the Queen of Epistles, the letter to the Ephesians is in fact one of Paul's most poetic works. We may begin by examining the salutation:

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**(Ephesians 1:1-2 NASB)**

Have you ever wondered what it takes to be an apostle? Many preachers today claim to be an apostle, but perhaps we might examine the original qualifications.

- ✚ First, you have to have been an eyewitness to the resurrection of Christ. Either you were with him in his earthly ministry, or he has appeared to you in bodily fashion. This seems to rule out most of the apostles of today.
- ✚ You have to have been commissioned as a messenger of the Lord. You don't volunteer to be an apostle; you don't nominate yourself; you get picked.
- ✚ Most important, God does the choosing.

That's how Paul describes himself in his salutation for this letter. It's the "from" clause. The letter itself is addressed to the Saints at Ephesus. And what does it take to be a saint? The root word is the same word that is used for "holy." It means that you are set apart from the rest of the world, that you are dedicated to Christ, in short — you are one of the faithful.

As is customary, Paul gives them his greeting in the ancient fashion by tendering his good wishes. Those wishes are for grace and peace. Grace, in the original Greek, is the source of our word for charisma — it's a gift. Peace is that peace which is not the absence of war, but a right understanding in the heart. It is the peace that surpasses all understanding.

### Blessings from God

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

**(Ephesians 1:3-6 NASB)**

### Predestination

It's unfortunate for the typical student of the Bible that the subject of predestination comes up so early in this letter. Most students understand the subject just well enough to understand that they do not understand. It is intrinsically tied up with God's foreknowledge; it is intrinsically tied up with the concept of free will. And for those who study it at any length it is just simply intrinsically tied up. We may briefly review three of the main Protestant positions:

- ✚ Martin Luther held that we were unconditionally elected if we are going to heaven. The predestination (or election) of God applies only to those going to heaven. As for the rest, it is a mystery of God.

- ✚ John Calvin, on the other hand, held that we were unconditionally elected either for salvation or hell. Where you're going is already determined.
- ✚ Arminius, the third great founder of the Protestant movement, held election was conditional — upon the faith or disbelief of the believer. He does hold, however, that God already knows the result of that decision. This view is closest to what our church would teach.

Like many other churches, ours does not teach a particular view of predestination. We believe in free will; we believe that God is omniscient and knows the future. All is surveyed but the power is given.

### Blessings of God

One of the least noted but most striking comparisons between the Old Testament and the New Testament is this: in the Old Testament, blessings are usually physical blessings. In the New Testament, they are spiritual. Paul gives a brief list here of spiritual blessings:

- ✚ We are holy and blameless. It is a matter of how God looks at us. In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices were used; now it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- ✚ We have adoption as sons. We are joint heirs of the kingdom of God with Jesus Christ. It's not just that we've been forgiven, it's that we've been accepted into God's family. There is a great deal of difference; on the one hand we have what might seem to be just a formal forgiveness. On the other hand we have a welcome home.
- ✚ Indeed, Paul has not the time in his letter to list all of the spiritual blessings we could have. But he does tell us that we have "every spiritual blessing" — just in case he missed something.

### Why?

There is an obvious question here. Simply put, why would God do such a thing? The answer seems to be in his glory. Remember that glory is to God like style is to an artist. If you walked into a museum with an ignorant friend, he might be impressed that you could point out which painter created which particular work. If you know enough about art, it's easy to tell the Picasso from Rembrandt. But your ignorant friend might not know that; he might ask you how you knew such a thing. You would reply that Rembrandt's style is different than that of Picasso. The same thing is true with God; his style is different than ours. He is extravagant in forgiveness where we are stingy.

Nowhere is this shown as well as in the grace given at the Cross. If style is to be noticed, it must be seen. Grace must also be seen — and was certainly seen in abundance at the Cross. Which brings us to an interesting point: all good things, all gifts given from on high are from the Father, via Christ. We cannot see God the eternal with our eyes; we can only see his works. That's why he sent Jesus. This way we know what God in the flesh acts like.

### Blessings of Christ

**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.**

**(Ephesians 1:7-12 NASB)**

## Redemption

If you want to understand redemption, you need look no further than the coasts of Somalia. The waters off these coasts are infested with pirates. Their method is to set out in a small boat with a large set of motors, with a couple of ladders. They sail alongside some merchant ship. Then they took the ladders to the ship climb up and take over the ship. The vessel is then taken into port, or left sailing in circles on the high seas, and a demand for ransom is presented. Backroom negotiations occur, as no shipping company wants to admit that they pay the pirates. Eventually, however, the pirates get their money and the owners get their ship back. That process is called redemption.

Another process that goes by that name is in the financial world. When the company issues bonds, it is in effect borrowing money from those who purchased the bonds. Most such bonds have conditions on them such that the company can buy back these bonds. This too is called redemption; the formal process of paying a debt.

However you want to look at, we are redeemed. It is as if Satan had hijacked us, and our Lord is buying us back. It is if our sins are a debt, and our Lord is paying them.

## Forgiveness

I once had the privilege of being with one of my students when he was accused of a very serious crime. We went to a hearing at which he was to appear; but before he came, there was a long line of people convicted of drunk driving sitting along one wall of the courtroom. The judge would review each man's folder, and finding it satisfactory (they went to drunk driving school and finished it), he would say to each man, "you may now say that you have never been convicted of drunk driving." At first this seemed absurd to me; after all, why were these people here? But after some thought I could see the purpose. Drunk driving carries with it a stigma. By doing this, the judge eliminated that stigma.

That's the kind of forgiveness we get at the Cross. It came at the price of the Incarnation; the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

Please note the plural. There is no sense here of individual treatment; rather, it's all of us in the true church.

## Revelation

Another spiritual blessing of Christ is this: Revelation. For many things, we do not need to puzzle over, "Why did God do this?" We know what God intends. He intends to put all things into submission to Jesus Christ. He will be Lord of all. This too will be to the glory of God. (Stay tuned).

## Blessings of the Holy Spirit

**In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.**

**(Ephesians 1:13-14 NASB)**

## Inclusion

Anyone who has ever been the new kid at school knows the problem: you're not included in anything. Until you managed to worm your way into the group, you might as well be on another planet. Sometimes, the group decides you're not going to join — ever. That was somewhat the attitude of the Jews of this time. As one devout Orthodox Jew told me, "all you are is fodder for the fires of hell." Only his religious group would go to heaven. The Jews viewed anyone who was a Gentile in that light at this time. They also considered women to be a very poor second-rate human being.

The resurrection changed all that. The Holy Spirit made it clear to the church that the Gentiles and women were to share in the blessings of Christ, equally. This was a radical innovation, but it was God's plan from the beginning. The sense that these people were now part of the people of God a lot of hammering on the part of the Holy Spirit. The question still comes up today and the answer hasn't changed: you are included.

## Blessings

We are told here that we are sealed. Have you considered what that means?

- ✚ One use of the seal is to prove that something is authentic. If a Christian does not have the Holy Spirit, he is a counterfeit Christian. Another word for counterfeit Christian is hypocrite.
- ✚ A second use is a guarantee of quality. In that context we are guaranteed to stand faultless before Almighty God by the blood of Christ. You can imagine wondering whether or not this would really apply to you; be of good cheer, it does.
- ✚ A third use of the seal is to proclaim authority. A seal on a document says it's genuine (think of getting a document notarized.) It says that the proper authorities vouch for the document, and it is therefore trustworthy. A Christian with the Holy Spirit should be a trustworthy guide to Christ.

We are also told that the Holy Spirit is a deposit. This is something with which we are familiar — at least if you've ever bought a house. The amount of money deposited to hold house for you is quite large. It's often 10% of the price of the home. I don't know about you, but I don't throw that much money around all too lightly. This is God's way of telling you that he is absolutely certain to bring you home, to present you before his throne pure and spotless, and then to welcome you into his eternal family.

These 14 verses look just like the beginning of the letter, something you could skip over as a serious student. I have chosen not to do so if for no other reason than this section is really designed to show us we have reason to praise God. Look at the great blessings he has given us!



## Intercession in the Church - Ephesians 1:15 – 23

### For This Reason

**For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.**  
(Ephesians 1:15-16 NIV)

### In Review

The passage starts with the phrase, "for this reason." We need to review last week's lesson just a bit to understand the reason that Paul is taking his new tack. Briefly, he gives us three reasons:

First, he speaks of there being included in Christ. Becoming a Christian is not like becoming a member of the National Geographic Society. It's not a simple membership thing. Rather, to become a Christian is to be integrated into the body of Christ. It means that you have a particular function in that body, a task to which you have been assigned and for which you will be rewarded.

You are sealed with the Spirit. It means that you have the Holy Spirit within you, it means that the Holy Spirit is your guarantee of salvation, and it means that you should be guided by that Holy Spirit.

All of this is done, as Paul puts it, "to the praise of God's glory." This means that the coming of Christ and our salvation is not the result of our intrinsic merit, nor of anything we have done. It is the result of the love of God, and all the credit (glory) is his.

### Ever Since

It's fairly obvious that Paul's thankfulness has a beginning moment in time. It is interesting to note here that the active verb is, "heard." Some scholars have speculated that, since Paul spent two years in Ephesus, this secondhand observation of faith implies that the letter was not originally written to the Ephesians. Some of the earliest manuscripts leave out that name. It is speculated that this might indeed be the long-lost letter to the Laodiceans. We may, however, examine just what it is that caused this thankfulness:

- ✚ First, we have the fact that he *heard* about their faith. Think about the last time you got good news. You can remember what you were doing when it arrived; you can still remember the smile on your face when you found out. Have you ever considered that your faith is good news to somebody? That's particularly true of the somebody is important in the church. Pastors like to know that they have been successful. It's easy to count success by baptisms, but success as determined by growth in the faith is a little harder to measure. So when you hear of someone whose faith is growing and is strong, it warms your heart. At least it does so for this teacher.
- ✚ Next, we have the fact that he heard about their *faith*. That's the important thing. It is the first condition of Christian growth; if there is no faith, then nothing else happens.
- ✚ But faith without works is dead. If your teacher is to hear about your faith, he will most often hear of it in terms of what you have done. In this instance, it is the love of the disciples which shows up as the action. Remember that Christ said the world would know we were his disciples by our love for each other.

### Giving Thanks for You

Paul is giving thanks, and the wording suggests a continuous action. In short, they were on his prayer list every night. This is a fairly common thing with Paul; in fact, it is most noticeable that Paul's

prayer list includes a great deal of Thanksgiving. We might take an example here; how often do our prayers consist solely of our requests and complaints? Perhaps the Lord would do some more closely if we were to balance those things with our prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

### Intercession

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

(Ephesians 1:17-19a NIV)

### The Nature of Intercession

It is a curiously neglected subject: intercession. Most Christians do not understand the principles behind a prayer of intercession; they are much more concerned about getting what they want. Intercession is by definition a prayer for what someone else needs. We may understand the basis of intercession in these three principles:

- ✚ The greater intercedes for the lesser. Think about that for a few minutes; are we not commanded to pray for the president of the United States, and all others in authority over us? How can this be? It is because we, as the church, stand far above any national government. We are the ones who are close to God, and therefore greater than those in authority over us — at least as far as God is concerned. We therefore must pray for them.
- ✚ Those who intercede must know quite well who God is. We must see him as God the Father; the creator and ruler of all things. If we do not understand him as such, we are praying to the wrong God. We must understand that he is indeed glorious, far beyond our imagination. If he did not command us to come to the throne of grace in prayer, our courage would not be strong enough to let us pray. Indeed so powerful is this God that the one divine human ever to walk the planet, Jesus Christ, pray to this same God.
- ✚ What may surprise you is this: intercession does not depend upon how important you are; it depends on who you know. You don't have to be prominent in the church to intercede for others. The power does not depend upon your position but upon the God whom you beseech.

### Paul Asks For...

Just what does Paul ask for? It's an interesting combination.

- ✚ First, he asks that you receive the spirit of wisdom. The Holy Spirit is our source of wisdom; please remember that wisdom is highly practical. Wisdom contains the precepts by which daily living should be conducted. But there is one key characteristic wisdom: there is nothing miraculous about it. You can read it, you can memorize it, and you can understand it.
- ✚ Revelation, on the other hand, is most assuredly divine in its nature. If God refused to reveal himself to us, there is little we could know about him. Without revelation, you do not know God. Without knowing God, your intercession will be very weak — at best.
- ✚ Finally, Paul prays that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." Do remember that the heart, in the language of the time, does not mean the seat of the emotions. It means the will of the human being. There is a curious concurrence here. Experienced Christians will tell you that sometimes you must believe your way out of a problem. You may not be able to see your way out of it. That's what's being talked about here; that your will might be so bound to God that you will see with your

own determination. Sometimes the Christian "just knows" what the answer is. That phenomenon is what Paul is talking about.

✚ Why?

Paul has a purpose in this. There are three things he wants us to know:

- ✚ First, he wants us to know God. As this is essential to the core of Christianity, we will take this as obvious. But do consider: when your life is mired in sin, isn't it true that you really don't want to see God for who he is?
- ✚ Second, that you will know the hope God has given us. He refers to this as the "riches of his glorious inheritance," meaning of course the hope we have in the resurrection of the dead.
- ✚ This is accompanied and caused by his "incomparably great power." It is quite the case that most Christians completely underestimate the power of God. Our daily lives show us our own weakness, and somehow we project that on God. Think what it must have been like during the reign of Hitler to be a Christian in Germany. Persecution, ridicule and death came to those who truly believed. But yet the church marches on; the thousand year Reich lasted less than 15 years.

### The Nature of the Church

**That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**

**(Ephesians 1:19b-23 NIV)**

### The Power of God

Talking about the power of God is somewhat like describing the direction, "up." It's a fairly simple concept until you start to measure it. The first place in which one can measure the power of God is in creation. All that exists, matter and energy and spirit, came from him. He is superior to anything in the known universe, for he is its creator.

Perhaps the most obvious and yet startling superiority of God over the universe concerns death. Nothing in this universe — matter, energy, or spirit — is superior to death. But God raised Christ from the dead. His power is not just greater than anything in the universe, it is power of a totally different kind. The very nature of his power is beyond our comprehension, let alone any limits to his power.

Indeed, we are told that he is superior to all things, both now and in the age to come. It is risky business to talk about the age to come; we have really very little information about it. But there is one solid fact you can count on: any age to come God will rule just as he does now. It's not just his universe, it's his new heaven and new Earth.

### The Authority of Christ

We might begin with a short note on authority. In the kingdom of God, authority is given in parallel with responsibility. As Christ's authority is superior to all others, so is his responsibility. One measure of his superiority is this: his party and power are exercised in weakness. A man who is just a little bit more powerful than you are might lord it over you; someone who is immensely more powerful

doesn't bother to do so. In fact, if one so powerful were to do it, we'd question his power. How great is Christ's power and authority?

- ✚ One measure is the fact that it is for this age and the age to come; again, something beyond our comprehension.
- ✚ Another measure can be seen in this phrase: "under his feet." Doesn't this bring to your mind an image of tiny little slaves approaching a giant in absolute awe? It is comforting to know, as the song says, "things over my head are under his feet."

### **The Body of Christ**

We are all familiar with the phrase that the church is the body of Christ. That is not just a phrase which describes the collection of believers; rather, it is a statement of the purpose of the church. As our physical bodies exist to do our will — we are in charge of us, so to speak — so the church exists to do the will of Christ. In effect, we are the physical hands and feet of Jesus Christ, carrying out his mission to this world.

But I submit to you that if your will is strong but your body is weak, you are likely to fail. Christ has therefore given us a way to be strong as his body. That way is simply put: the imitation of Christ. It is not just that we will do what he would do; it is that we will be what he is. Life in the church is not a matter of a checklist; it is a matter of style. Our actions should flow from who we really are. If we are in fact a collection of "little Christs," then we will do the things he would do. It is not a stretch; in fact, it comes naturally. The key is the imitation of Christ.

## Great Love - Ephesians 2:1 – 10

### Past

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

(Ephesians 2:1-3 NIV)

### Concept of Sin

The word sin has lately become a church word. It is seldom heard from our pulpit, on the theory that it is unfriendly to those who are seeking. In the emerging church, God no longer seeks us — but we are seeking God. Sin, it seems, is a barrier to that search. But as it does occur in the Scriptures quite frequently we may take the time to define it.

The essence of the word is simple: it means to miss the target. This, of course, implies that a such a thing as a target exists. For the Jew of this time, the target would have been the Old Testament Law of Moses. The target, of course, is the command of God. Those who consider themselves Christians understand this to be written in the Scriptures.

Sin is sometimes confused with the psychological concept of guilt. Guilt is a word of two meanings: there is a legal form of guilt (determined by a court, for example), and there is a psychological guilt — the feeling of being guilty. Modern psychology holds that feeling guilty is a mental problem. We often hear from the pulpit how, psychologically, guilt can be gotten rid of. That is not the guilt of which we are speaking here.

You can tell the difference by the effect: psychological guilt makes us feel bad. Our emotions are unpleasant. Sin, on the other hand, separates us from God. This is more subtle, but longer lasting. As we shall see, separation from God has eternal consequences; emotional guilt may not.

### Concept of Sinful Nature

An old preacher once told me that he loved to preach on the subject of sin. His position, he said, was that he was against it. It seems so simple: why is it that we just don't reject sin? After all, we are adults. We can make up our mind.

It is not that easy. As any sinner can tell you, "I can quit anytime I want. I've done it many times." We seem to keep coming back to the same sins. This too is something that has been known since the beginning of man; we are possessed of the sinful nature. St. Augustine explained this in terms of his doctrine of original sin; the idea is that you are born with this sinful nature. Whether you are born with it or not, I do not know: what I do know is this — you have it. And so do I. So why is it that we can't get rid of it?

Perhaps it is because we cannot distinguish between being pleased and being satisfied. Being pleased is a short term feeling; being satisfied means you are content with the long-term state. We are

creatures who live in time, and therefore we love being pleased but have to learn about being satisfied. Parents are quite familiar with the difference. When your child takes his first few halting steps you are very pleased. But you would not be pleased at all to find that this was the best he could ever do. It's like my father said: he's easily pleased, but hard to satisfy. It seems that being pleased crowds out the view of being satisfied. If you don't work at it, pleasure will squeeze out satisfaction. This is particularly true in your Christian life; you need to develop the maturity to seek satisfaction in Christ rather than pleasure in the world.

### Satan

If there is any one thing I could get across to each and every Christian, it would be this: Satan is real. Not the gentleman in the red tights with the horns and the pitchfork and the pointy tail, but the leader of the rebellion against God. One of the large universities in the South recently had to change its mascot. The previous mascot was a Confederate colonel whose appearance had become politically incorrect. So the students were left with the problem of finding an acceptable figure of one who is leading a rebellion. One suggestion was Adm. Akbar (from Star Wars). That shows you how far we have to reach to find someone who symbolizes rebellion and yet is socially acceptable. Akbar didn't make it.

When you are disobedient to God, it's not just that you are doing something God doesn't like. Rather, you are choosing sides in the rebellion — and you've chosen Satan's side. This implies that sin, as a whole, is not a random sequence of events or miscellaneous happenings. It implies that the rebellion is being planned and led. We think we are sinning on our own; the Scripture tells us otherwise. When you sin, you side with Satan — which makes it all the worse.

This might explain why sin is so offensive to God. It is offensive normally because God has established his laws in our hearts. It's bad enough to go against what he has told us to do. But this gives him the right to forgive us; the principle being that only the person offended can forgive. God is a person; when you break his laws he is offended, and therefore can forgive. But we often don't appreciate the measure of this forgiveness because we forget that sin is not just a violation of his laws but rebellion against him. If you will, this is what makes sin so sinful.

### Present

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

**(Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV)**

### Nature of Grace

Grace is the unique property of God alone. It's not obvious why. We know that when you sin, God is offended and therefore can forgive you. Of course, we forgive others on Earth as well. But we usually do it rather differently. We remember the offense; we are ready to pick it up again if it should arise once more; and we often think we forgive but don't want to rebuild the relationship. In short, we forgive partially. God forgives completely.

This is a gift. It has to be, for there is no way we could earn it. How is this? God is a perfect God; if we could earn it, we would have to be perfect. If you are perfect, I must ask why you are reading this

lesson from such a sinner. Surely it is obvious to you by now that this sinner has nothing to teach one so perfect as you.

But there's more to it: it's God's gift, and he gives it in his own way. God has a style — it's called his glory. He never does anything cheaply or inadequately; everything he gives is good and perfect.

**Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.**

**(James 1:16-18 NIV)**

### Three Fantasies on Faith

This is so simple, so obvious that we often make it much more complicated. Faith as the source of grace seems somehow to us to mean that we are doing something worthwhile by having faith. This gives rise to these three fantasies about faith:

- ✚ "God owes me." In this fantasy, we think we've piled up a good amount of credit on God's books by the simple act of accepting his grace. After all, we reason, there are plenty of people out there who haven't done this. Clearly we must be much better than they are. Therefore we have credit on God's books. This might work if you're trying to pay off your auto mechanic. But God is not your auto mechanic.
- ✚ "It's a 50-50 deal. I do my part, he does his." In this view, we see grace as a contract. One of the key characteristics of the contract is that both sides must give something to the other. The law refers to this as "an exchange of consideration". God does not work by contract, but by covenant. The eternal God simply states what is; whether he is speaking the universe into existence or telling us what it takes to up obtain his grace. There is no bargain; take it or leave it.
- ✚ "The faith itself is the work. I have faith in faith." Your teacher has often found this one particularly difficult to understand — it seems so stupid. If you'd like to know why, consider this: what if I decide that God's grace should come to me in a different way — the way that I have faith in. I'll just invent my own covenant, in effect. As long as I sincerely believe my covenant will work, isn't God obligated to do what I tell him to do? If you don't think this is absurd, apply the same concept to gravity.

### Purpose

It appears that God does nothing without a purpose. It is necessary, however, to distinguish his present purposes from his eternal purposes. A good example of a present purpose may be found in marriage. We know that it is intended to be lifelong, but we also know that marriage is dissolved at death. It is given for our good in this lifetime. Similarly, God has a present purpose for us in his grace. That purpose is to do good works.

You will note that this is prepared in advance. This is not just a gracious afterthought on God's part. He intended this from the very beginning; I suspect so that we might practice being like him. But if you will combine the thought that this is a present purpose, planned far in advance, it should be obvious that such good deeds must be done in humility. We cannot be proud of the fact that we thought them up. We cannot be proud of the fact that we invented the idea of doing good deeds. In fact, we have nothing to be proud of at all. But we should be thankful that God has allowed us to share his work by giving us good deeds to do. It of course follows that doing good deeds should not be neglected.

## Future

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 2:4-7 NIV)

I have taken this section of verses out of the usual order so that you might see the progression of God's plan. There is a certain inevitability to God's plan.

### The Future Is Shaped by the Nature of God

You must remember that God is his attributes. If God is righteous he is righteousness itself. If God is merciful and loving, he is mercy and love. It is therefore an "impossible impossible" for him to change. This is the reason I believe in the coming judgment: God is righteous. There are many people (Adolf Hitler, for example) who have yet to receive the justice they deserve. God's character prevents that from continuing forever. Similarly, his love and mercy will provide for us forever; this is just as inevitable. What does this mean?

### Preach Christ and Him Crucified

The early church had one sermon message. That message was, "Jesus Christ and him crucified." The death, burial and resurrection of Christ — those were the three points of the early churches sermons. One of the high points of that sermon was quite simply this: if Christ is raised from the dead, then we shall be raised also. It is so certain that Paul, in this passage, makes that future event into a present tense. He tells us that we "are alive" in Christ. It is a future fact; we shall live. Death is conquered.

Some Christians have some difficulty seeing this. Permit me a historical parallel. In 1863 the battle of Gettysburg was fought. After that battle, there was very little doubt as to who would win the Civil War. The decision was made — but the fighting after Gettysburg was even bloodier than the fighting before. We're in somewhat the same position; the war is won, but the fighting is not finished.

### The Riches of His Grace

It helps sometimes to review just what God has in mind. Think of the things that he has planned for us:

- ✚ He has promised us eternal life. Not just unending existence, but rather existence eternally as God himself has. We shall be like him.
- ✚ We shall be eternally in his presence. Have you ever had the feeling that God was distant from you? Then, when things work out, he suddenly seems so much closer? Think of that feeling of being so much closer. It will be much closer than that, and it will be eternal.
- ✚ We are also told that if we suffer with him we shall reign with him. We shall be like him so much that we will be considered fit to reign.
  - ✚ And beyond our imagining, there is this: he will bring to us the new heaven and a new Earth. I do not know what this will be like; but he describes it as being vastly superior what we have now. If you will look at what we have now, in those places it is untouched by man, you can see that the creator produces incredible work. Soon, we shall see his masterpiece.



## Reconciliation - Ephesians 2:11-22

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

(Ephesians 2:11-22 NASB)

### The Gap Before Christ

#### The Jewish View

If you should happen to encounter a very Orthodox Jew today, you might encounter some of this attitude. I met such a person in an elevator when I was going to college; it was quite an eye opening experience. The common Jewish view of this time would include these aspects:

- ✦ Jews did not associate with Gentiles. Just to be near one was uncomfortable; it was forbidden to go into their house. Touching one made you unclean. I suspect the closest analog we can get today is if you know someone who works at a sewage plant; you certainly hope they clean up before they come over for dinner.
- ✦ The Gentiles were intrinsically unclean. There was no possibility whatever of them meeting the requirements of the ceremonial law. As they were, in general, uncircumcised it would be impossible for them to meet those requirements – without major surgery.
- ✦ The Jews were the only people God had ever blessed, or ever would bless. As my acquaintance in the elevator put it, Gentiles are fit for nothing more than fodder for the fires of hell.

As you can see, this put substantial barriers between the Gentiles and the Jews.

#### The Gentile View

Suppose for a moment you were a Gentile of this time, and you wish to change your status. There were formidable barriers to your doing so.

- ✦ To begin with, there was a physical barrier. If you were female, it would be impossible for you to join unless your husband did also. For males, the physical barrier was obvious: circumcision. Do remember that at this time there are no anesthetics. Healing took a couple of weeks. And the rest of your neighbors would think you were a kinky sex maniac.
- ✦ There is also the social barrier: you give up all the friends you have (who are now unclean) and start to make new friends among the Jews. Worse, all those things you thought were good deeds are now so much rubbish. For example, your deity might have required you to give to the poor. Jew and

Gentile would recognize this as a good deed, but because you were Jewish at the time it didn't count. You started all over again, in a sense.

- ✚ There is also a knowledge barrier. Think of it this way: all your life you have been raised worship various deities. You have memorized rituals, you have read books of wisdom, you may even be a practiced philosopher. All that knowledge must be thrown away, and replaced by a new lifetime of learning based on the Old Testament. You cannot study the Old Testament by your self; you must have a Rabbi to teach you. You go from being knowledgeable to ignorant and stupid.

### God's View

It's interesting to take this dichotomy from the point of view of God himself. To begin with, the Gentile is an alien. Think about the aliens in our society; perhaps the ones who stand on a street corner and wait for someone to offer them a day's work. The laws of our nation, right or wrong your choice, make it so that they have little opportunity. From God's point of view at this time, the Gentile has no opportunity — he must become a Jew first.

More than that, God has made no promises to the Gentile. Consider the promises made to the Jews; they are quite extraordinary. It is quite clear that God seems to take special care of the Jews. As for the Gentiles, there is no information (other than what is available from nature and reason) and no promise.

Most of all, there is no hope. No matter what you do as a Gentile at this time, you have no hope of pleasing God. What he will do with you after death, he alone knows — but he sure didn't share the information with you.

### Transition

#### Just the Right Time

One of the things the early church fathers taught, which is neglected today, is that the coming of Christ was at the most opportune moment in history. God, in their view, had arranged matters of history so that Christ's coming would be at the perfect moment. Here's why they thought so:

- ✚ The Roman Empire has reached its full extent, for the most part. It is stable, it is blessed with a good road system, its government is uniform and relatively just. It is the incubator of Christianity. From a physical point of view, this is the best the ancient world would have to offer.
- ✚ Unlike many previous empires, the Romans held to a very strong sense of right and wrong. One of the reasons they justify themselves in conquering people was that they would bring Roman justice, which was fair and impartial for the most part, to such peoples. They would see themselves as improving the lot of those they conquered. That sense of right and wrong, however, also brought with it the idea of sin and guilt. There is a big difference between doing something the chieftain doesn't like, and violating the known law. Sin and guilt are well-known concepts to everyone in the Roman Empire. This makes the work of the Holy Spirit much easier. Or perhaps you would like to look at it this way: that was the work of the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ Very soon after the writing of the New Testament, there came a series of emperors known as the "good emperors." It was a time of peace and justice; a time of economic prosperity — the perfect time to spread a religion whose evangelism depends upon logical argument. This may seem strange to the modern Christian, who is accustomed to emotional evangelistic rallies. But if you'll recall

Paul's discourse on Mars Hill, you have an idea of what it took to spread Christianity. Our ancient forebears knew quite well the value of apologetics.

### Christ Is Our Peace

This phrase, that Christ is our peace, sometimes puzzles Christians. Let's take it through the steps logically: first, is peace just the absence of conflict? I submit that it is not; it is the resolution of the conflict. What is the source of our conduct with God, if not sin? Indeed, the root of the matter is that we are made from the flesh and God is not. From the garden of Eden we have had this problem. Christ is the resolution of this problem in two ways:

- ✚ First, and I hope this is obvious to you, by his sacrifice on the cross he has removed the cause of our conflict with God — namely, our sin. There is much to be said about this, but I suspect you know most of it.
- ✚ Interestingly, he also resolves this conflict by who he is: fully God and fully man. Because he is fully man, is now shown to be possible that man can be without sin. There is hope! And because he is fully God, there is hope that man can be like God. God the Father cannot move towards us, but we can move towards him if we take the path of Christ.

### The Nature of Reconciliation

Reconciliation requires the removal of sin in our lives. Christ does this: past, present and future.

- ✚ In the past tense, Christ has already accomplished this with what he has done at the cross. He has paid our debt; it's gone. The credit and collection agency has nothing more to quibble about.
- ✚ In the present tense, he removes sin by forgiving us completely when we repent.
- ✚ In the future tense, Christ prevents sin as we live our life in him. If you live a life filled with the Holy Spirit, it is reasonable to expect that sin is much less of a problem to you.

Christ is Lord over all of time; he is Lord of all things. The only real question is whether or not we will accept this reconciliation and become what he wants us to become.

## Temple

### A Place to Meet God — "Where His Name Is"

It's a curious thing about human beings: the idea of a God who is everywhere and nowhere, immanent in all things, is a difficult one for us. From the very beginning of God's contact with human beings, he has taken advantage of the concept of a sacred place. It might be the mountain on which he met Abraham; the mountain on which he gave the Ten Commandments to Moses; or later the Temple of Solomon. It seems we need a place; we live in space and time, and so we do.

We also seem to need some form of visual contact with God; somebody has to "draw us a picture." If you think about it, those people who tell you that they can worship God just as well in nature could say, "nature is a place." Yet you know that the people who say this don't worship God very much. Teddy Roosevelt was once given this excuse; when his friend told him that he could worship just as well in nature, Teddy replied: "Yes — but you won't." We seem to need a geographical reference which says, "God is there."

There is more to it than that; it seems we need a "Mars Hill" as well. Some people come to the evangelist rally and walked down the aisle with tears in their eyes. That's the most visible form of conversion; we see large numbers of people doing it, and conclude this must be how evangelism is supposed to work. Most people did not come to Christ this way. Most came because someone invited them to church, a place where they could inquire about this God without having to embarrass themselves in public. It appears we need a Temple at which to meet the Almighty.

### Construction by Sacrifice

A Temple, like its modern equivalent a Cathedral, differs from an ordinary church building in the way in which it is planned and constructed. At this writing, our church is planning to move to a new site in about two years. The site is not intended to be a Cathedral, but a church building, and therefore reasonable measures of economy are expected. No one wants to see gold plated columns on the front of the sanctuary. But a Temple is a building which is constructed devotionally; it therefore has three characteristics which are contrary to the ordinary church building:

- ✚ First, its features often seem to have no practical purpose. The great example of this is Solomon's Temple; many tons of gold were used in its construction. Most of that gold was used to line the inner walls, in particular the Holy of Holies — which was seen once a year by the high priest. This is extravagant use of gold. That makes it an act of devotion.
- ✚ Unlike the church building, the Temple is very costly to those who construct it. Solomon could've just varnished the interior walls. But the building is dedicated to the glory of God, and varnished just wouldn't do.
- ✚ Perhaps most important of all, those who build the Temple could have done less. You remember the story of the widows mite? She had two coins; she could have put in just one.

That's how it is with the Temple which is the church. Some of its features seem to have no practical purpose — for example, why are all these people praising God? Doesn't God already know how great he is? What's the use?

It also seems to be quite expensive. You can join some excellent organizations — for example, the Kiwanis club — at a much lower price. Christ, it seems, expect your total lifelong commitment. Everything else in this world expects you to give less than all you have; Christ asks that you give all that you are. Why? The church is dedicated to the glory of God.

As all of us know, the typical Christian is quite capable of giving less than what Christ demands. The saint turns everything over to God.

### Constructed

Paul gives us an abbreviated construction diagram for this church. If you follow the blueprints correctly, you get what the designer intended. So let's look at the blueprints.

- ✚ Christ is the cornerstone. Anything in the church which is not tied back to Christ, dependent on Christ, and honoring Christ is not part of the building. This has a lot to say about the church in politics, for example.
- ✚ The foundation is built of the apostles and prophets — whose record we find in the Scriptures. If the Bible does not play a key role and underlie all of the thinking of the church, then we are building the building over the edge of the foundation.

- ✚ As the King James version puts it, we are "fitly framed together." Our relationships with one another, particularly as they relate to the role of the church in the world, are extremely important. They must be based on Christ, informed by the apostles and the prophets — and lovingly constructed by us.
- ✚ What makes all this work is simply this: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The church is the body of Christ; one human body has one spirit.

Whenever the church takes a wrong turning, running off in what appears to be a wonderful new direction, it is the cornerstone of Christ and the foundation of the apostles which, again and again, have turned her back to be the Temple of Christ.

## Manifold Mystery - Ephesians 3

### Mystery

#### Top Secret

Probably the most momentous single event of the second world war was the invasion of Normandy. As part of the plan for invasion, Gen. Eisenhower set on foot and elaborate deception plan. The intent was to make the Nazis think that the Allied invasion would land in the Pas de Calais region of France. The deception was so successful that for many days after the invasion the Germans kept significant forces away from Normandy to counter an invasion that never came. This deception can be viewed in two ways:

- ✚ Germans would no doubt think of this as a mystery. They saw it as a problem to solve, based on the evidence they had.
- ✚ The allies saw it as a secret which must be kept. Our secret was their mystery.

This might prove to be the answer to the question, "Why doesn't God just tell us what's going to happen?" The mystery we have has a purpose, and that purpose is explained in prophecy. The details, however, are yet to be revealed. With that in mind we may now look at the Scripture.

**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.**

**(Ephesians 3:1-7 NASB)**

#### For This Reason

For what reason? We need to go back into the second chapter of Ephesians to find out. If we do, we will see that the mystery is that the Jews and the Gentiles would not only have equal status before God but would also be combined into a new thing: the church. This began at Pentecost, but was made possible at the Cross.

Paul tells us here that he is made the steward of this grace of God. It's not something he created, nor is it something he discovered. It was revealed. This puts Paul in the position of being an expert on the subject, but not necessarily by his own efforts.

#### Understand My Insight

Let's be clear about this. This matter is not something the apostles invented, nor did they discover it, nor did they propose it as a solution to the mysteries presented to them. It was revealed to them. But as Paul would be the first to tell you, if you get such a revelation you must soon begin to work on it to understand it completely. You have to "work it out." You do this by the power of God; if he doesn't want you to understand it, you won't understand it.

It has been a puzzle for the church for 2000 years; those who believe that everything can be understood by reason alone find themselves unable to understand. Reason challenges what has been revealed, but if you live in the power of Christ reason will be satisfied. Faith and reason will go forward together, hand in hand, so that you may know the power and glory of God. You cannot know them by faith alone, nor by reason alone – only in combination. This is very puzzling to many Christians. The best advice is this: just try it. It works.

### **Eternal Purpose**

**To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.**

**(Ephesians 3:8-12 NASB)**

### **The Least of the Saints**

It helps to review the history of St. Paul. Originally named Saul of Tarsus, Paul was a man who zealously persecuted the church. When he did so, he felt that he totally understood God's will. He was educated as a Pharisee, and went to the Harvard of his day —the feet of Gamaliel. In the name of God, he did horrible things to God's church. You can well understand, then, that when God called him to that church he felt horribly guilty. No doubt he expected to be told that he would end his days sitting in the very last pew at the back of the church, listening quietly, and being politely ignored by all of the real Christians. God did no such thing. He put him to work.

We must remember that the word "grace" means something that is given as a gift. For that reason, we sometimes think that we are supposed to take grace and sit back and relax. Paul saw it differently; his past impelled him to work for the church. He was grateful to have a task like this, and his words and his actions showed this. But we must also remember that Paul's education was not to be thrown away; rather, it was to be used in the service of the church. His mind had been prepared to deal with the problems of the early church in its theology. His task was to bring to light the correct solutions — as well as preach them to the Gentiles.

### **Manifold Wisdom**

Manifold means "many folds." It implies that the wisdom of God is not something which is just simple, or even puerile. In fact, it is deep and complex — as the physicists would say, it is elegant. That wisdom of God has been revealed through the church. This is very much unacceptable to the modern mind. We expect that science (or its philosophical counterpart, reason) should explain everything. Therefore, following will accept facts being revealed, we are reluctant to think of wisdom as being revealed. But it is.

The amazing thing is that the revelation of this wisdom is not primarily intended for those of us in the church. As the Scripture makes clear here, the wisdom is made known through the church but the audience consists of rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. In short, this wisdom is revealed through us but for those spiritual beings who are not human beings at all. This helps explain why God

keeps it a secret. He doesn't need to keep it a secret from us, for we can't do anything about it anyway. But he does need to keep it a secret from those spiritual forces who oppose him. When that wisdom is revealed, God does so through the church so that those heavenly authorities will know that it must have come from God — as it certain he did not come from us. There were a lot of soldiers in the Normandy invasion who would have liked to have had a short conversation with Eisenhower to find out where they were going. I suspect he wouldn't mind at all telling them — but he might have had some misgivings about letting the Germans know.

### The Yields Of Eternal Purpose

But now we are in on the secret! We now know what God is doing. This changes our behavior; in particular —

- ✚ We may now deal with God in boldness. He has told us what is going on, we know his purpose. If I may stretch the analogy, we are now on Eisenhower's staff.
- ✚ We have confident access to God. This is largely a matter of faith, but what Paul is telling us here is that faith works. If you have faith you have confident access to God.

The important thing here is the faith itself. If you take the leap of faith, God honors your boldness.

### Don't Lose Heart

Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:13-21 NASB)

### Suffering and Glory

Paul tells us here not lose heart. When you consider that he was in a Roman jail, and of the faith was persecuted across the Roman Empire, you might ask what he had been drinking. Perhaps we can put this humorously:

During the second world war, the Germans progressively knocked out all of the allies except Great Britain. As you can imagine, the British found this rather depressing. One senior officer was going to his club with a rather glum face. The commissionaire at the door tried to cheer him up: "We are in the final, Sir, and its to be played on the home ground." These days are now remembered in Great Britain as, "Their Finest Hour."

There's something of that here. The fact that Paul is in prison, in chains, on trial for his life just because he has been preaching the gospel can be viewed as a great honor. It means that Satan took him



seriously. It is worth asking: does Satan consider you a worthy foe? If he does, trials and tribulations you will most certainly have.

### Prayer in Tribulation

If that's you, you need to go in prayer. And what does Paul pray for? There are three things:

- ✚ First, he prays for strength in the inner man. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and we should not neglect it. We need to know that we are not alone, that we are on the winning side, and that the strength of God through the Holy Spirit is available to us.
- ✚ He prays that Christ will dwell in your hearts. Remember that the Greek word for "heart" really means "the will." He wants your will to be dominated by, Jesus Christ. In other words, your will should be to do what Christ's will is.
- ✚ The net result of this should be that you will comprehend the love of Christ. It is beyond all knowledge, but it is not beyond comprehension. Anyone who has ever had a sudden realization of how much someone else loves you knows this.

### Doxology

The word "doxology" comes from two Greek words. The first half relates to glory; the second half relates to the logos, or the word. We have a very good example of this in the English language in song: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.

So in times of tribulation we see from this kind of song the source of strength that Paul had: the glory of God and his chance to spread the word of it. He spread that word by God's power. So it is with us: we must see the power and glory of God in times of tribulation. Do not focus on the difficulties; focus instead on the tribulation as a form of honor. It means that Satan takes you seriously. If he does, that must mean that the power and glory of God are showing through you.

## Unity of the Church - Ephesians 4:1-10

### Walk As Called

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

(Ephesians 4:1-3 NASB)

### Prisoner of the Lord

His name was Curly. If you could see his body, you would certainly have wondered how he got up in the morning and went to do what he had to do. He had cerebral palsy; his entire skin was covered with boils; he spoke with a thick slurred speech. He also held up high the standard of Christ on campus where Christianity was officially forbidden.

You might ask why the campus police never removed him from his position, even though he cried out to all who would listen, "Jesus loves you." But look at it from their point of view: do you want to be the macho police officer who arrests an 80 pound man, a victim of cerebral palsy, for saying "Jesus loves you?" It was his frailty that kept him in place. It is a curious point: God very often uses the weakest of human beings for his purposes. The psalmist put it this way:

**From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.**

(Psalms 8:2 NASB)

Paul shares this position during the writing of the letter to the Ephesians. He is in Rome, chained to a wall. By the standards of this world Paul was helpless. But Paul was not using the standards of this world, but the power of God. There is no doubt that this method produces a great deal of suffering for the servants of God. You might think God would be a bit more careful about how he treats his children, especially when they are to be great in the kingdom of God. In fact, he is quite careful of this. He makes it clear that those who suffer for him will reign with him. There is no greater honor available on Earth than suffering for Christ.

This is based on the fact that Christ himself suffered greatly. We have to look at that and ask the question: why should I deserve anything less? Christ, after all, suffered so that I might live eternally. If the King of Kings and Lord of lords did this, just what is it that is beyond my suffering? Indeed, were it not for the fact that the gracious Lord restricts my suffering to what I can stand, I would indeed break down under the suffering. But he is gracious and kind, knows my limits, and those limits determine the honor I will receive.

### Manner worthy

So then, how are we to conduct ourselves? Paul's preaching the unity of the church, and for this he will prescribe the behavior of the Christian:

✚ First we must act in all humility and gentleness. The word for humility carries with it a meaning of being humble minded. It is a mental decision, whose obvious outcome is in the gentleness of our dealings. It is most necessary to consider the possibility that one might be wrong.

- ✦ Next he prescribes patience. The word itself was translated in many older versions as, "long-suffering." Associated with this is the concept of tolerance — but this is not the tolerance we hear of today. There is a difference between being so open-minded that you don't care about anything, and being willing to endure any human being cheerfully.
- ✦ The secret to this is love. Any mother with a toddler can tell you this. A toddler's behavior is constantly annoying, irritating and downright grating. Despite the temptation to throttle the little monster, somehow or other the human race continues. The love that explains that, explains the tolerance and forbearance of a Christian.

### Unity of the Spirit

It is a consistent theme of St. Paul: he utterly desires the unity of the church. The principle behind this is relatively easy to see: it is the unity of God himself. Perhaps this is best considered as an artistic point. God is one; therefore, everything he creates will have that same fundamental integrity. The church is his creation. Thus, it must have the same unity that God the father, God the son and the Holy Spirit have. But how do we do this?

- ✦ First, we are told to be diligent about this. The word in the Greek actually means something like, "speedy." We are in a sense to hustle towards the unity of the church. Firefighters will tell you the reason for this: the first two minutes at a fire are worth the next two hours. The first two minutes in an argument in the church are likewise most important.
- ✦ If you need any motivation to understand this, picture the church as the body of Christ. In a sly way here, Paul invokes that picture. He talks about the bond of peace. The word used for bond is also used for the word, "ligament." So the bond of peace is not a chain shackled to us, but rather as a ligament tying us together as a body should be tied together. If you have ever strained a ligament, the pain is an excellent teacher.

### Triad of Trinities

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

#### (Ephesians 4:4-6 NASB)

It is not entirely clear in the English, but this is high poetry. The thought echoes are profound. Everything revolves around the rhythmic element of three, which of course is taken from the holy Trinity. We may observe them thusly.

### Concerning the Church

We seldom hear today any discussion of the doctrine of the church itself. By this I do not mean the doctrine the church proclaims, but rather the doctrine which concerns the nature and character of the church. We have an excellent summary here:

- ✦ First, the church is one body. That means there is only one true church, composed of all those who believe on the name of Jesus Christ and have committed their actions to him. It does not mean that only one particular denomination will ever get to heaven (and you get to guess what that denomination is). It also means that those who are in the church have differing functions, just as the members of your body have differing functions. And might we point out: you don't get to pick particularly which function you get, anymore than your toes had any such choice.

- ✦ We have one spirit: the Holy Spirit. The church as a whole is moved by the Holy Spirit, just as we are moved by the spirit inside us. That means that if we are to be solid and sound members of the church, we had best know which direction the Holy Spirit is going. This is one of the primary reasons that you meditate, pray, and study the Scriptures. A congregation which neglects the inner study of the self as revealed in the Scriptures is headed for disaster.
- ✦ We also have one hope. Let me be specific and clear with this: the hope is in the resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then you and I are idiots. So what makes me think that there is the resurrection of the dead? First, Christ rose; second, he promised we would too.

### Concerning Christ

Our doctrine concerning Christ is also of great importance.

- ✦ We have one Lord. Over and over again, brilliant men and charismatic leaders have attempted the church to follow them into ruin. Over and over again, this challenge is beaten back by the Lord revealed in the Scriptures. It is to him we owe our loyalty, not to a pastor, preacher, prophet, teacher or whatever else. This is most important.
- ✦ We have one faith. It is a fact: apologetics, the defense of the faith by reason, is *identical* for the Protestant, the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox. That core faith is what unites the church. It is this faith for which you should have a ready defense; it is this faith you should share willingly. One might also submit that therefore it should be preached, taught and learned.
- ✦ We have one baptism. I regret to inform those of you who were sprinkled or baptized as an infant in any fashion that the New Testament does not know of such things. The baptism used in the New Testament and threw out clearly days of the church was baptism by immersion. If you want to do it right, that's how you do it. But please, at least do it.

### Concerning God the Father

Paul now takes us through a trio of prepositions: over, through and in. To be specific:

- ✦ God the Father is *over* all. This includes Christ, who will eventually reign over the entire universe. It is a humbling lesson to think that the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings is himself under the authority of his Father. God is not a benign, elderly gentleman hoping that you have fun here.
- ✦ God the Father is *through* all. I submit this means that no matter how deep you dig, God is still in the hole with you. He is the maintainer and sustainer of the universe.
- ✦ He is also in all; we might consider that we are made in his image and in that sense he is in each and every one of us.

Paul's point in this Triad is simply this: no matter what you do, where you go — even in hell — you cannot escape God. So you might as well deal with him.

### The Preeminence of Christ

Paul now moves to a new point. It will bring us into one of the strangest notions of the New Testament.

**But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)**

**(Ephesians 4:7-10 NASB)**

### The Gift of Christ

Most of us think that our abilities, experience and education are our own. But within the church we find a different rule: these things are gifts from Christ. This has some unusual consequences:

- ✚ If you think yourself so smart as to be superior to others, please ask: just what did I get this ability? You were born where you were, your parents were who they were, your upbringing is what it is simply because Christ selected that way. You can be grateful, but you can't brag.
- ✚ It is likewise true that he selects where you will serve. Apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and pretty much everyone else get no choice about this. God calls you; you can rebel or obey. There are no other options in the church.
- ✚ This obviously means you have no place to exercise your ego in the church. But did you also recognize it means you have no cause for complaint? The wisdom of God has you placed where you are; kindly assume he knows what he's doing.

### Concept: a Roman Triumph

Paul invokes a spectacle that most of his readers in the Roman Empire would have been familiar with: the Roman Triumph. It was a parade to celebrate a great victory. The Roman Empire placed strict rules on who could have such a Triumph; you had to take so many prisoners, so many slaves, so much gold, etc. In short, you had to be worthy.

It also helps if you were generous. The crowds would line the route, and they would certainly be expecting you to distribute from your largess. In short, it wasn't like a New Orleans Mardi Gras parade where people throw beads. You threw coins. These would preferably be made of gold, so that the crowd could see what a wonderful person you were and why they'd like to have you for the next Emperor. At least, that's the theory. Paul turns this on its head. Instead of taking gold that you confiscated from your enemies, Christ gives out his gifts as if he were in a triumphal procession from hell to heaven. We sometimes miss the sense of joy that the early church had; they could see a parade like this in their minds.

### Descended into Hell

We now encounter a strange concept: Christ's descent into hell. Paul states it here; Peter hints at it in the following verse:

**but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*.**

**(1 Peter 4:5-6 NASB)**

Peter's point is relatively clear: those who have died before the time of Christ heard the gospel when Christ preached it to them in hell. Does this mean that he led them out of hell and into heaven? If so, by what criteria did he decide who was going, who was staying? The best guess of most of the early scholars was that he indeed led them from hell, just as prisoners would be marched at the end of a Roman Triumph as a symbol of just how great the victory was. The parallel I hope is obvious. What this means for those who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, I do not know. But at least it's a bit of a hopeful sign.

More than that, it means that our Lord did not just escape death, he is Lord over death. As he says in Revelation, he holds the keys to heaven and hell. This is the awesome Lord we serve. His power indeed is beyond our comprehension, but his commands are not. He has chosen to display his strength in weakness, and we are that weakness. If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him.

## Building the Body - Ephesians 4:10-16

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

(Ephesians 4:11-16 NASB)

### Division of Labor

#### Apostles and Prophets

It is an unfortunate fact that the modern church contains many who consider themselves to be apostles. We should therefore review the qualifications for being an apostle:

- ✚ First, you must be an eyewitness to the risen Christ. This should eliminate most, if not all, contemporary apostles.
- ✚ Next, you must be appointed by Christ to the position.

The importance of these qualifications comes from the fact that an apostle is considered an authority concerning Scripture. All of the accepted New Testament Scripture was either written by an apostle, or written under his supervision. If you claim to be an apostle, you claim to have the authority to change Scripture. This can be exceedingly dangerous.

In some sense we still have prophets with us. If you will recall, there are two functions of the prophet. The first is to foretell the future; the second is to forth-tell the Christian what he needs to know. A prophet is given to rebuke. The danger in being a prophet, or claiming that you are a prophet, is that you may rebuke where it is not necessary. You may also rebuke in a way which is harmful to the church. Caution is required. The problem of fraud is ever with us.

#### Evangelists

The word evangelist actually means "bringer of good news." This office of the church is still with us, in two forms:

- ✚ The first is the evangelist in the style of Billy Graham. This style is a relatively recent development, beginning in the 19th century. It was invented by one F. E. B. Meyer, and was largely the product of the invention of the railroad. That invention allowed large numbers of people to gather in one place, and thus such preaching could be done.
- ✚ The other style is that of the missionary. This is a much slower process, but it reaches those who are not part of your own people group.

#### Pastors and Teachers

The word for pastor in this passage means a shepherd. The phrasing in the Greek here implies that these two offices are either very similar or the same. It is not at all uncommon for a pastor to be a

teacher; I would argue that a teacher is almost always a pastor as well, in the sense given here. The issue is not one of authority over the church, but responsibility for those within the church. As a teacher, I have responsibility for those students in my class. Our pastor has responsibility for the entire church. It is a practical matter of fact that it is impossible for him to be a face-to-face pastor for all of the people in this church; therefore, his responsibilities are different in that regard.

The word for teacher implies someone who stands up and lectures, teaching in the Socratic method. This would be typical of the time, but modern techniques would make this somewhat different. The key point for us is that the teacher is intended to convey doctrine in action. It is an interesting point to think what Paul might have made of PowerPoint presentations.

### **Purpose: Equipping the Saints**

Before we get into the details, we need to understand the meaning of the word equip in this context. It means one of two things: either to furnish, in the way that you would furnish a house, or to mend, as you would mend a bone. So this is either making sure you are capable of doing what you need to, or fixing something that is wrong.

### **Works of Service**

Please note that the works of service mentioned here have to do with building up the church. This does not specifically refer to those actions we might take to show compassion to those outside the church, but rather the actions we take to build up the church. The word "works" is particularly important here. In the Greek, it means to expend energy. The concept here is physical work; therefore, Paul is not talking about prayer and devotion here.

We might take an example from physics here. In physics, work is defined as a force acting through a distance. Force is defined as a mass having its velocity changed. So think of it this way: the works of service you do will be done over a distance (not instantly). They will change something which has mass (in other words, something which is not trivial). They will change either its speed, its direction, or both. So we are talking about the things the church does on a regular basis. We need to keep them going in the right direction at the right speed. Fixing these things takes time and effort.

It is not specific here whether these works regard evangelism or discipleship. As we have seen, these functions are separated in the church, but the principle of work in the church applies to both.

### **Unity of the Faith**

The word "unity" means a oneness. Paul is talking about the doctrine of the church and its effect on our actions. There is no sense of tolerance in this; doctrine is singular. But it should follow logically that if our doctrine is singular, then our actions will be united. The immediate question which usually occurs in the church is: does this imply central control? The answer varies over the centuries. The Roman Catholic Church insists upon it; the difficulty being, of course, that they add much to the Scripture. Protestant churches began with central control, and many still have governing bodies. Later, evangelical movements usually insisted upon local control, with difficulties in doctrine worked out either by schism or by para-church organizations, such as Bible colleges. Lately, however, evangelical churches associated with the "emerging church" movement have returned to central control, within the local



church, of course. This is a reflection of the fact that most mega-churches are the product of one charismatic speaker — who insists on complete control. Most of us have had the difficulty of working for a boss who said, "be sure you check everything with me first." The Scripture provides for a result, but not a method.

### Knowledge of the Son of God

Paul speaks here of the measure of maturity — and the word measure is literally that. So how does one measure of Christian's maturity? The answer is simple: it is the knowledge of Christ. Please note that this does not mean simply an academic knowledge of who Jesus is and what he said. The word in the Greek here is "epignosis," which means a full knowledge. A complete knowledge of Christ is required if you are to be mature. As far as I know, there is no instance in the Scripture in which we are commanded to have an academic knowledge only; knowledge is always coupled with action in Christ. This is so clear as a principal that it has been put down in a simple phrase: the imitation of Christ.

This has rather fallen out of favor lately. We have as of late preferred a "do your own thing" method, sometimes known as "seeking God." This is a confusion. The principle in the Scripture is still the same: we are to grow up and be like Jesus Christ.

### As a Result

#### Not Carried about

We need to realize that doctrine is not something that is the province of the elite. The Scripture is not something which is so obscure that the average man just couldn't possibly understand it. It is the case, however, that doctrine is not obvious and does need instruction. Therefore, there are teachers. You should know what it is you believe. You should think it through yourself, making it your own. If you see doctrine being perverted — accidentally or otherwise — you should challenge it. (My students do.) We must remember that Christ warned us about wolves in sheep's clothing. It is important that we are not deceived; it is also important that we are not kicked around from one doctrinal point to the other in a continuous debate. Doctrine should be a steady, settled thing. This implies, of course, that there's going to be some debate about it.

#### Speak the Truth in Love

Here is the rule for the debate. Remember that what we are trying to do is to arrive at the truth, not necessarily to convince the other guy that we had it right all along. "Winning" is not at all important compared to arriving at the truth. Once we have arrived at the truth, we are to pass it on. But we are to do so gently and with love, as our object is the maturity of our fellow Christians. Winning the debate may often mean losing the soul. Remember the parable of the wheat and tares.<sup>1</sup>

#### Grow up in Christ

The sad fact is that in this day and age we must ask the question: is maturity good? So much of the modern church emphasis is on the youth that it is easy to conclude that maturity is undesirable. Certainly, many seniors feel that their opinions on how worship should be conducted, for example, are

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:24-30

being completely ignored. We need not get into that debate. The word maturity, as used here really means "complete." Remember, in this day and age a man of 30 years was considered old. This is a reasonable position; by the age of 30, if you have grown up in the church, you should be well grounded in doctrine — and know what you should be doing. You should be complete.

The secret to this is the knowledge of Christ. Remember that this is a full knowledge; to borrow another phrase, knowledge with your heart, soul, mind and strength. It is a continuing process with a goal: to be like Christ. Next week, we shall explore further what this means.

## Old Man, New Man - Ephesians 4:17-32

### The Great Myth

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

(Ephesians 4:17-19 NASB)

### Genesis Model

It is instructive at this point for us to recall the original sin:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

(Genesis 3:1-7 NASB)

Most of us would look at this and say that sex was the root cause of the problem; after all, Eve was naked. In fact it is not so. Let's take a look at the reality:

- ✚ First, Satan's appeal is to the mind. Unlike generations of Freudians who assume that sex must be behind it all, Satan is not so stupid. If you want to tempt someone, you begin in the mind. Even sexually, one must remember that the biggest sex organ in the human body is the brain.
- ✚ It starts with an appeal to what sounds like common sense. Somehow or other, God got it wrong. Oh, perhaps the Bible only says that because it's a cultural thing from whatever century in which was written. Or perhaps you misunderstood him. Or perhaps you don't know what he really said in the first place.
- ✚ Next, evil is enlightening. The advantage to having a romantic affair with another woman is that you will know what another woman is like. Think of the experiences you've missed; think what a man of the world you would be if you had only followed your gonads.
- ✚ Then, there is a call to action. Having seduced the thought, the body is given permission to proceed.
- ✚ In all this, remember that Satan is the father of lies.<sup>2</sup>

### The Gentle Slope

CS Lewis, in his insightful work *The Screwtape Letters*, has his devil Screwtape put it this way:

"The safest road to Hell is the gradual one - the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

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<sup>2</sup> see John 8:44-45.

Ignorance is not bliss; it's ignorance. But because the mind is the starting point of all things spiritual, ignorance is the starting point of exclusion from God. Satan does his best work by keeping things out of your mind, not putting them in there.

Let's take a look at a word: harden. The word in the Greek is "porosis." It's the word from which we get our word "osteoporosis". The process is a gradual one; bones to become fragile overnight. The same is true in matters spiritual. Things go gradually from good to bad, if you just let them. A contemporary example is abortion. When we first began to hear about abortion, we were told that it would only be used in cases of rape or incest. It was something extreme; it was a necessary evil. Over the years it has become more and more necessary, and therefore less and less evil. We now abort more than 1 million babies a year in the United States alone — and no one seems to care.

### Lust Is Never Satisfied

It is the genius of the English language that words have more than one meaning. In particular, we often assign a physical meaning to a word and then use it in a metaphorical sense. An example of such a word is "callous." It originally meant one of those built-up points of skin where you had become hardened and lost all sensitivity. It means the same spiritually.

Curiously, the human being reacts to spiritual callousness by trying to penetrate it with more and more exotic experiences. We quickly become immune to yesterday's thrill. So we increase the level of the thrill. Lust is never completely satisfied.

### The New Self

**But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.**

**(Ephesians 4:20-24 NASB)**

### The Balance Beam Principle

It is a simple principle: if you get rid of some old spiritual habit, you must replace it with a new one. You must balance old and new. Similarly if you change the inward man, you must also change the outward man. You must balance inward and outward. If you don't, you are unbalanced, you are not stable. This is one of the reasons why people often fail to reform their habits of lust — in any area. They try to suppress their longings, but they don't replace them with something else. Or, they try to change their thinking but not their actions. You have only to point this out to see how failure-prone it is.

### Three Step Process

To make changes in the spiritual world, you must take it in three steps:

- ✚ You must put off the old self. This is fairly obvious — at least that you have to do it sometime. What might not be obvious is that you have to do it first. This explains why simply going after some aspect of righteousness without cleansing your self first is simply not going to work.
- ✚ Having done that, you must now renew the mind. You need to get you thinking straight; you might even need a plan. The important thing is to note that you must have a clear idea, mentally, of what

the right thing to do might happen to be. If you have no direction as to what is right, it's difficult to get there from what is wrong.

- ✚ Then you must put on the new self. The rule for this is simple: the imitation of Christ.

### The Imitation of Christ

Paul tells us here that we must be genuinely like Christ. Incidentally, this points out the importance of the incarnation. If Christ had not come to us as a man, imitating God would be rather difficult, and we face objections at every step. It's a little tough to be omnipotent. But Christ in his life certainly did not display omnipotence in going to the cross. So we have a man we can imitate, and we had his thoughts and instructions from which to learn. Just what is it that we are supposed to learn?

- ✚ First, we have righteousness. Some translations refer to this as "true righteousness." The idea is that this is not hypocrisy, or legalism, or a vain attempt at perfection. Rather, it means that we set the heart right and pursue righteousness. You know you're not going to be completely and truly righteous in this life; you're a sinner. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't head in the right direction.
- ✚ Next, there is holiness. The root idea of holiness is that you are set apart. If you're trying to become the new man, this is very important. We are creatures of habit; we like the buddy around with the same people we've always been around. We like to do it in the same places. We want to be "one of the boys." We must mentally get rid of this idea; we don't want to be "one of the boys;" we want to be holy, set apart. So yes, we're different.
- ✚ Finally there is the truth. Truth is many things, one of which is a habit. Getting in the habit of being the truth takes some time. It starts with telling the truth, but you have to move on being truthful and then being truth itself. You know people who are living a lie. Be someone who is living the truth.

### No Opportunity

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR**, for we are members of one another. **BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN**; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

(Ephesians 4:25-32 NASB)

### Don't Give the Devil an Opportunity

Do you know why you paint metal? It's to prevent rust, to be sure, but it's how you prevent rust that I'm driving at. Paint prevents rust by keeping out water; therefore, if there's a crack in the paint the paint fails. The same thing happens in spiritual life; if your armor has no cracks in it, the devil can't get in. How do we do this?

- ✚ First, you start by getting rid of falsehood. As we said before, you have to replace it with something else. Interestingly, it's not just a matter of speaking the truth. It's a matter of speaking the truth in love. If you will, the truth is the metal, the love is the paint. By speaking the truth in love, as opposed

to being belovedly blunt spoken, we prevent the virtue of telling the truth from inviting the sin of anger.

- ✚ Speaking of anger, Paul obviously knows where going to get angry. But let's do a little damage control here, people. Get over the anger quickly; patch things up as fast as you can. Why does Paul tell us not to let the sun go down? It's because will lie on our beds brooding over the insult or grievance. It gets much worse if you have time to think about it.

Paul tells us the reason for this: we are one body. If the metal is to remain one piece and not rust apart, we have to keep that paint on securely. The object is keeping the church together.

### **Don't Grieve the Holy Spirit**

Paul now begins with a practical problem. Some of the people in Ephesus, it seems, have been making their livings as professional thieves. This is not as far-fetched as it seems. We don't call the bank robbers, we call them self-service income redistribution specialists — right? Paul makes it clear that this is not acceptable for a Christian. But just as before, this evil must be replaced with something good — the labor of the hands. There's a purpose in that. It is not sufficient just to earn your own keep. You are part of the church; the church is a giving organization; you need to give. Do you see how the good replaces the evil?

Similarly, we are to watch our words. Some of us are under the misapprehension that we are to speak the truth, and all the truth. This is not so; we must consider the purpose of our words. Paul gives us three tests:

- ✚ First, is it wholesome? Is it the kind of thing a Christian should say? If one of your fellow Christians has been caught making a pornographic movie, do you go around detailing the movie scene by scene?
- ✚ Next, does it edify the church? Does it instruct others correctly and build up the church, or does it tend to tear the church down?
- ✚ Finally, does it give grace to those who hear? Is it a word that is forgiving; is it a word that encourages others to love? Do people leave your presence more gracious than when they came?

You see, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Therefore we are members of one body, and we need to remember that.

### **But Do Be**

Paul leaves us with three things which are positive replacements:

- ✚ He tells us we are to be kind. The word in the Greek can also be translated "gracious" or sometimes "useful." That's an interesting combination; it implies that kindness is useful, not just a nice to have social complement. It is an essential for the Christian.
- ✚ He tells us we are to be tender-hearted. This word is also translated "sympathetic." We need to be people who can listen to the worries and difficulties of others, returning both sympathy and Christian aid in such circumstances.
- ✚ Finally, we are to be forgiving — because Christ forgave us.

I hope you see that this is been a very practical lesson. There is not much of abstract theology in all of this, just the daily struggle to become more and more like Christ.

## Imitation of God - Ephesians 5:1-14

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."

(Ephesians 5:1-14 NASB)

## The Imitation of God

### The Principle of Imitation

Imitation, as a word, has somewhat of a bad reputation. In some senses it means a cheap copy. In this use, however, we mean it benignly.

- ✚ First, it's how we learn. Small children know that they must imitate their parents speech. Indeed, this can sometimes be funny — especially if your kid learned to talk from the cat.
- ✚ More than that, it is how we are known. If you don't think so, go to any junior high school. The girls can be classified by what fashion they wear.
- ✚ That may seem okay for children, but it's also true for adults. It's just that the word used instead of imitation is the word practice.

### Dearly Loved Children

Paul uses an interesting word here: *agapetos*. It's a diminutive form of agape, and it means "dearly loved children." Have you ever considered the characteristics of dearly loved children?

- ✚ Children who are dearly loved are children who imitate their parents. Children who are not loved are those who act out trying to get attention. There is a sense of security which gives rise to the imitation of the best thing you know.
- ✚ Loved children are disciplined children. The word "discipline" has somewhat of a bad meaning today. You can find all kinds of child psychiatrists who are horrified at the thought that you would discipline your children. Think of it, however, in terms of the phrase "disciplined athlete." Loved children are well trained.
- ✚ As a result, their parents are proud of them. Going to a high school graduation ceremony will teach you this.

### Walking the Talk

There is no concept in the New Testament of faith which is "intellectual only." The idea that you can have a faith which accepts certain facts as being true but does not reason upon them and then Act upon them is contrary to all understanding of the New Testament. As James said,

**You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?**

**(James 2:19-20 NASB)**

So, if you call yourself a Christian there is no logical way you can avoid the imitation of Christ.

### **Giving up Sin Is a Sacrifice**

Paul now launches into a list of do's and don'ts. We will take up the don'ts first:

- ✚ Sexual immorality — that's what the word means here — comes from a Greek word from which we get our word pornography. You must remember that in this time it was still a common practice for a man to go down to the Temple of some goddess and have sex with a Temple prostitute. Your wife was given no right to object, because after all you are worshiping in order to have more children, bigger crops, more animals in your herds. The children by your wife were legitimate children, who inherited your money. But sex was viewed as being something the man could have with any woman, as long as he included his wife and granted her children. It is shameful to say this, but I think we are worse than they were.
- ✚ Impurity — the word in question comes from the root word from which we get catharsis. The sense here is that of a man who refuses to cleanse himself; as a Christian, we are called upon to repent and receive the Lord's cleansing. It is one of the reasons you take communion each week. You examine yourself, repent, and then accept the body and blood of Christ as sacrifice which cleanses you from all sin.
- ✚ Greed — here is a concept that has undergone a complete transformation. In its biblical sense, it is a sin. But the same actions today are well approved of. They are called entrepreneurship, or diligent money management, or financial brilliance. One reason for this is that Christians today often identify with the conservative politics of the Republican Party. That party is pro-business; therefore making money is good, no matter the circumstances. Greed remains, however, a sin.
- ✚ Obscenity — also translated filthiness, in its root word it means something that causes you shame. This too has undergone a transformation. Modern psychology has taken the position that guilt is a feeling. The feeling of guilt is actually shame; guilt is a factual state. Modern psychology holds that one must get rid of this shame. In short, your psychiatrist should talk you out of being ashamed of something. This is an excellent way to sear your conscience. We used to justify our shame; now we reject it.
- ✚ Silly talk — this is a delightful word in the Greek. It is composed of two words: the first is logos, which is generally translated word or message. The second one is transliterated into the English as "moron." I leave as an exercise to the reader just what kind of talk this might be.
- ✚ Coarse joking — one scholar described it this way: "Sometimes it is lodged in a sly question, in a smart answer, in a quirkish reason, in shrewd intimation, in cunningly diverting or cleverly retorting an objection: sometimes it is couched in a bold scheme of speech, in a tart irony, in a lusty hyperbole, in a startling metaphor, in a plausible reconciling of contradictions, or in acute nonsense.... Sometimes an affected simplicity, sometimes a presumptuous bluntness gives it being.... Its ways are unaccountable and inexplicable, being answerable to the numberless rovings of fancy and windings of language".

### **Wrath of God**

God, by modern standards, is a benign old grandfather who wants to see the children have fun. This concept has no place in the Bible. It is the God we would like to have, not the God who is. Jehovah it seems is a God who is indeed quite capable of wrath. So it's a good idea to know what angers God.



In one word, the answer is "idolatry." That means that we worship something other than God. Now most of us think that's not really possible; after all, Greek gods left the real estate several hundred years ago. But let's back up a bit: just what does it mean to worship a God? Webster defines worship as "supreme respect." Note that word supreme; it's the key to understanding idolatry. Idolatry happens when you put something else first before God.

So what is he angry about? Let me give you a parallel example. Suppose you find some sweet young thing at your office who just thinks you are wonderful. You decide to have an affair with her, and soon all of your affections center on her. Do you think your wife will be upset? Or do you expect her to be "understanding?" You just placed another woman in front of her; what do you think she's going to think? Now you understand how God feels.

Let me list for you some things that people put first in their lives, above God: money, sex, power, prestige, notoriety, food, and most of all pride. See anything on the list that disturbs you?

### The Children of Light

#### Three Virtues

Paul now takes us through the do's. To begin with he lists three virtues which every Christian should have:

- ✚ Goodness — the word used here means someone with a benevolent spirit, a giving person.
- ✚ Righteousness — the word in the Greek means to give each man his due. It brings to mind Henry II, who implemented changes in the English judiciary system which lasted for the next 800 years by being conservative. He made radical change with the conservative principle of finding out what was due to each and every man, and rendering it to him. Righteousness has that radical quality.
- ✚ Truth — the concept of truth in the New Testament may be taken to be in three steps: fact, logic and action. You determine the facts, you reason on those facts and come to a correct logical conclusion — and then you take action on that conclusion. It is one of the most neglected concepts in Christianity.

### What Pleases God

Did you ever notice the characteristic of lovers: they always want please their beloved. It's why men bring flowers to their wives. If you think about it, flowers are practically useless. You can't vacuum the floor with them, for example. The only reason you would bring them to your wife is that she is pleased to have them — and that is quite sufficient reason.

If you would do that for one who loves you in this world, how much more should you do that for the one who loves you for your soul? Men love for many reasons; they may love your body, or your money, but true love comes when they love you for who you are. That's how God loves you: for who you are, as you are. Should you not love him in return, the same way? Therefore, should you not attempt to please him just as you would anyone else you? Lover of my soul, my soul loves you.

### Expose Evil

The Christian is *required* to expose evil. We do this in three ways:

- ✦ The first is by word. We need to speak out against the evil that is around us. Sometimes this is more practical than others, but the requirement is always there. Otherwise, we imply our approval by our silence.
- ✦ The second is by example. If you disapprove of the state of sexual morality in this country, you can show this most effectively by how seriously you take your own marriage. The choice is before you: either you do it the world's way, or you do it God's way. The people around you are going to notice which way you do it. If you view the trip to the annual sales convention as a chance to pick up girls (because your wife will never know, of course) then you are a hypocrite.
- ✦ The third is by deed. Sometimes you just have to get the thing done.

### Sleepers Wake

The reader should know that verse 15 contains some difficulty with the quotation. It is not a direct quotation from any particular part of the Scripture, though it certainly has a parallel in Isaiah 60:1. There are other passages which express the same thought. It should be noted that the sense of quotation we have today depends upon things like shorthand, digital recorders and video cameras. In our day, exact quotation can be done — and if you put quote marks around it, it should be done right. In those days however, this was not the case. Paul expresses similar sentiments in other letters.

### Bach's Cantata

The musically inclined will be familiar with Bach and his Cantata entitled, "Sleepers Wake." What may surprise you is that this is actually based on a section of Scripture, in particular this one:

**"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.**

**(Matthew 25:1-13 NASB)**

This might serve as the warning for us. You will notice that the virgins in question were asleep when the bridegroom came. Paul is not just warning us to take heed of ourselves in our immediate circumstances, but also to look forward to the return of Christ. This is one of the most difficult messages the teacher can provide. Many students simply nod their heads up and down and take no real warning. Many thinkers believe that we are in the Laodicean age of the church, the lukewarm era. It certainly appears so.

Now you know why this lesson is difficult for the teacher. It is very, very trying to repeat this message and watch heads nod North and South but see no sign of comprehension. Therefore, let me encourage you: take this seriously.

## Wives, Submit Yourselves - Ephesians 5:15 – 33

### Background

This lesson is one of the most difficult to understand that modern Christians will ever get. The reason is simple: our view of marriage and family life is radically different than that of the church for the last 2000 years. To understand this difference we must take it step-by-step. Let us review what we have learned so far:

- ✚ First, all authority belongs to Christ. He makes this explicit in Matthew, but Paul here uses it continually throughout the letter to the Ephesians. Since Paul lived in a time when authority was understood and respected, he did not necessarily explain all about authority.
- ✚ By that authority Christ created the church. That church has certain characteristics:
- ✚ The church is united. In particular it is stated that we are all "one in Christ Jesus." There is no sense in the church that one of us is more valuable than another of us.
- ✚ We do have, however, differing gifts, functions and responsibilities.
- ✚ There is a common code of Christian conduct which applies to all of those gifts, functions and responsibilities.
- ✚ The essence of that common code of conduct is the imitation of Christ.

### Be Careful How You Walk

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

**(Ephesians 5:15-21 NASB)**

(Some will argue that verse 21 belongs to the next section. Please note that it begins with a conjunction, "and." It is part and parcel of this section and should be read that way.)

### Therefore

Paul's argument here starts with the word, "therefore." He is referencing the background material above. What that means is that what he is about to say is a conclusion from the previous elements of his letter. In the middle of this section he will discuss husbands and wives rather briefly. This is one of the most controversial sections of Scripture, and it should be noted that the church in which your author belongs does not agree with him on the subject. The church to which he belongs teaches egalitarian marriage. In this author's opinion, that view is contrary to the Scriptures. When you bring this up with someone who is taught this view, however, you usually do not get the serious hearing. In short, they laugh. The author therefore begs the reader to be patient and to see whether or not there might actually be something to this point of view.

### Be Careful

Paul now commends to us three elements of Christian conduct:

- ✚ First, he begins with wisdom. It would have been normal for the Christian of the time to be familiar with the Proverbs of the Old Testament. Paul would assume that these people would know of this

wisdom literature and would read it. It is a neglected art today; we believe in psychology, not wisdom.

- ✚ Second, we are to "redeem the time." Think of it as good time management; the idea is that you don't have an infinite amount of time on this planet, and you have things to do. Get them done.
- ✚ Finally, the days are evil. The concept of evil has suffered greatly in the church as of late; we really don't like to talk about it. But it still exists — and the fact that the days of our time are in fact evil is still true. Everything is not coming up roses. Therefore, we have action to take.

### Understand the Will of God

Paul counsels us here not to be drunk, but to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's a very simple principle; you replace what is evil with what is good. One way to do this is in the singing of psalms and hymns. Those of us who are old enough to remember what hymns are, as opposed to choruses, will recall that they often taught a great deal of doctrine. This is an excellent way to memorize the points of doctrine which are necessary to the Christian life. As the subject of doctrine has lost its importance in the Christian churches, the use of hymns has become less and less necessary.

Perhaps most important of all is giving thanks. It is often difficult to be thankful for the troubles of life. Paul does not require us to drum up and the motion of thankfulness and gratitude; rather, to it knowledge that God has given us our circumstances and that we are to thank him for them. This is particularly true when we do not understand why he did so.

### Be Subject

If there is a controversial point throughout this chapter, it is the concept of submission. Let me make two specific points:

- ✚ Submission means exactly what it says. This is a correct translation of the Greek word; modern preachers to the contrary notwithstanding, it does not mean respect.
- ✚ This submission is to each other. It is not at all unusual for to Christians to be in mutual submission to each other. To give the most common example, husband and wife are in submission to each other with regard to their bodies. A man is to regard his body as being his wife's; she is to regard her body as belonging to her husband. The two are one flesh.

### Wives, Be Subject

**Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.**  
(Ephesians 5:22-24 NASB)

### Example

May I begin with an example? Let me suppose that it's three o'clock in the morning. My dear lady, you are sleeping in your bed peacefully — and naked. Suddenly you hear the sound of someone chopping down your front door with a large ax. He runs into your bedroom grabs your naked body and drags you out of the house. What do you do?

You thank him profusely. He's a fireman, and your house was on fire.

Have you ever considered just what an act of submission this is? It is indeed extremely submissive behavior. It's the kind of thing that feminists should completely abhor. Yet we praise fireman for doing this — why? Because that's what we expect them to do; it's what we pay them to do; it's what we give them authority to do. I propose now to use the firemen as an example to explain to you the nature of authority — something which has been reviled in American society for 50 years.

### The Elements of Authority

Let's take a look at authority in this context:

- ✚ Authority is hierarchical. The fireman gets his authority from the fire department, which gets it from a city ordinance, which is enabled by a state law, by a government which is in place by the will of God. The firemen doesn't get his authority from himself.
- ✚ Submission is merely the right response to righteous authority. If the fireman is behaving himself in accordance with his responsibilities and authority, it is your duty as a citizen to completely cooperate with him — even if that means being dragged out of your house naked at three o'clock in the morning. Submission does not mean that you are inferior to the firemen; it means that he has authority over you in the specific instance in question. Your right response is submission, by definition.
- ✚ Submission, ultimately, is voluntary. We put those firemen in authority over us.
- ✚ As a side note, authority is often a way to deal with the effects of sin. The most common example of this is the policeman. You can examine the Scripture, however, and find that one reason given for marriage is to deal with the man's lust — he is given authority so that his sin will be minimized.
- ✚ Authority is given by responsibility (in the kingdom of God.) All of us are familiar with the boss who tells us that he has all of the authority and we have all of the responsibility. Most of us agree this is no way to run the office, but it's a very common way in which the office is run. The method in the kingdom of God is different. In the church, responsibility defines authority. That's why the firemen has such tremendous authority — it's because he has the tremendous responsibility of saving lives from fire. Notice that he cannot use this authority whenever he wants, but only when circumstances call for it. The same thing is true of authority in the kingdom; it is given for a purpose and must be exercised only for such purposes.
- ✚ Authority in the kingdom is practiced in servant leadership. The ultimate example of this is Christ; but we can see it in the firemen as well. He does not drag you out of your house to lord it over you, but to save your life. His first question after doing so is probably, "are you all right?" His concern is for you, not for his own authority — if he does his job right.
- ✚ Authority is given by God for the benefit of those in submission. In God's case this is part of his character (love); in the fireman's case we can see this clearly.

### Therefore

It is in this context that wives are told to submit to their husbands. They are to give the right response to his righteous authority. But we may see that this authority does not come from the husband himself, nor may he presume such authority, but he must obtain it from Christ. Therefore, he is obliged to follow Christ's rules and example in exercising his authority. He must do so in servant leadership, for example. The key question is: just what is the husband's authority? To answer that question, we must look at the husband's responsibility.

## Husband's Responsibility

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, because we are members of His body. **FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.** This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

(Ephesians 5:25-33 NASB)

### Baseline: Love Your Wife

Would you like to know just what this means? It is the secret to securing your wife's submission. Listen please to the words of Chrysostom:

Do you want your wife to be obedient to you, as the Church is to Christ? Then be responsible for the same providential care for her, as Christ is for the Church. And even if it becomes necessary for you to give your life for her, yes, and even to endure and undergo suffering of any kind, do not refuse. Even though you undergo all this, you will never have done anything equal to what Christ has done. You are sacrificing yourself for someone to whom you are already joined, but He offered Himself up for one who turned her back on Him and hated Him. In the same way, then, as He honored her by putting at His feet one who turned her back on Him, who hated, rejected and disdained Him, as he accomplished this not with threats, or violence, or terror, or anything else like that, but through his untiring love; so also you should behave toward your wife. Even if you see her belittling you, or despising and mocking you, still you will be able to subject her to yourself, through affection, kindness and your great regard for her. There is no influence more powerful than the bond of love, especially for husband and wife. A servant can be taught submission through fear; but even he, if provoked too much, will soon seek his escape. But one's partner for life, the mother of one's children, the source of one's every joy, should never be fettered with fear and threats, but with love and patience. What kind of marriage can there be when the wife is afraid of her husband? What sort of satisfaction could a husband himself have, if he lives with his wife as if she were a slave, and not a woman by her own free will? Suffer anything for her sake, but never disgrace her, for Christ never did this with the Church.

May I point out one thing? There is no sense in this thought that your wife must love you first. You have the responsibility to love her, husband. Even if she is not loving you, you are to love her. It is by love the Christian triumphs, not by force nor hatred nor anger.

Just what is the objective of loving your wife? It's quite clear: it is to sanctify your wife. Husband, you are the spiritual leader of your household. It is your responsibility to see that your wife is sanctified. You are responsible for her spiritual welfare. You might think this a vague and sort of fuzzy thing, but it is not. One of the best measures of spiritual welfare is your checkbook. If your life is that of giving and sharing, then at least some of your spiritual priorities on the right place. It doesn't matter who writes

the checks; it doesn't matter who balances the budget. What matters is what the budget is used for — self gratification or the Lord's purposes?

### Style

There is a certain style to Christian leadership, particularly as it applies to husbands:

- ✚ Self sacrifice is the basis of this style. It is servant leadership. If you are not willing to give yourself up for your wife, I would question whether or not you really love her.
- ✚ Christ, you will recall, gave himself up for the church. You do this is therefore in imitation of Christ. If you want a working model of what to do, ask yourself what Jesus would do in this circumstance.
- ✚ You must always remember that the two of you are one flesh. You are to love her like your own body.

### Pastoral Technique

I once had it explained to me that the common idea of technicians that there exists a mental model of the equipment on which you are working is completely false. The psychologist who was teaching this course explained that I am nothing but a stimulus response mechanism — which of course is nothing but a mental model of the human being. The ancient church did not rely on psychology to deal with problems in marriage. They relied on the model of the church as being the bride of Christ. The husband represents Christ; the wife represents the church. That's the picture that they used first and foremost. It is surprising just how fruitful this technique is. It's also surprising how seldom it is used today.

The matter is very important. Paul tells us here that we left our parents to get married. For most of us, our parents were quite glad to see us get married — despite the fact that we were leaving their home and they were, in a sense, losing a child. It is this sense of importance of marriage which seems to be missing today. As one pastor put it, "if it doesn't work out, you can always get a divorce." It's as if marriage is a trivial, short term thing — when what God wants is a life long growing love.

Permit me to share a personal observation. When I discussed this with married couples, the usual beginning reaction is that the wife wants nothing to do with it, and the husband is willing to support that. Egalitarian marriage says that submission is wrong. That's what most Christians believe today, including the staff of this church. When I finish the discussion, the wife often tells me that this is exactly the kind of husband she wants. This is the man she thought she was marrying. I explained this to one woman in an e-mail correspondence, comparing the husband who misuses his authority to a tyrant, and the one who uses his authority correctly as a Prince. When she got the last e-mail, she replied with a simple sentence: "I want my Prince back." Unfortunately her husband did not want to return to being the Prince.

Perhaps it comes down to this: we have a choice. We can structure our marriages with the demand for "our rights." Or we can structure our marriage around the imitation of Christ. If you will recall, Christ came to this Earth and did not get his rights. Instead, he served. Husbands, take warning.

## Children and Slaves - Ephesians 6:1 – 9

### Then and Now

#### Children

It is difficult for the modern human being to recognize that Paul's words here might apply to them. Our theory of raising children — let alone the existence of slaves in America — is quite different. So we need to compare the views of the ancient Roman with their modern counterparts:

- ✚ Roman View — in ancient times the power of the father over his children was practically absolute. Nor did it stop when they reached a certain age; the father's power extended until he died. Children were not necessarily highly valued. For example, the equivalent of abortion was practiced just after birth. The midwife would present the baby to the father. If the father reached down and picked up the child, it meant that he accepted this child as his own and would raise it. If he turned his back on the child, the midwife would be expected to take the child into the wilderness and abandoned their to die. Often enough the midwife was sympathetic with the child (usually a girl) and take it down to the marketplace to be abandoned there instead. If female, the child was often picked up by a priestess of one of the local goddesses (usually fertility) and raise her as a temple prostitute.
- ✚ Modern View — today's view is not necessarily so different. Abortion is practiced all too frequently; the main difference is we don't wind up with temple prostitutes. Children are viewed as a nuisance and a hindrance to the mother's career. If you decide to keep the child (now the mother's decision) it is necessary to hire nannies and day care to raise your children. The result of this view is seen on our streets daily. If you'd like a clear view of the difference all you need to do is to watch a TV channel that shows old situation comedies. The family of the 50s is very different than the family of today. It is not surprising with this view that children have little to no respect for their parents.
- ✚ Christian View — in the Christian view children are considered a gift from God, to be cherished and loved. As we shall see, loving the child includes disciplining the child and instructing the child. This is a task which is not left to hired hands, but is placed on the list of things to do for the father. This father-centric approach to child raising is much out of favor in our time, but it is what the Scripture prescribes.

#### Slaves

It is important to remember that slavery had a very different basis in ancient Rome than it did in 19th century America. The primary driver of slave status was economic. Slaves were viewed as living tools who could be sold, but also could buy their own freedom. We cannot say that slavery in Roman times was more pleasant than in American times with any great confidence, but please eliminate from your mind any racial overtones.

Perhaps the best way to see this is society's reaction to a runaway slave. The American reaction to a runaway slave is very positive, reflecting the American experience with southern black slavery. In Roman times the view was quite different. A runaway slave would be seen as one who was stealing from his master, and ingrate who did not appreciate the food, clothing and shelter than his master had provided for him. His fellow slaves would see him as a person deserving no respect. Indeed, slaves are often identified by owner through the use of the colored belt. If your slave master was someone prominent, you would take pride in wearing his belt. It's not quite the same as being in his household,



but it was a status token among slaves. As you can see, the institution was rather different from what we know.

### Pride and Humility

Most people do not connect the concept of pride with sin in our time. We see pride as a virtue and humility as a fault. The ancient Roman would've seen it in exactly the opposite way; pride would be the sin, and virtue would reside in humility. One reason for this is that modern man thinks there is no such thing as life after death. We are designed only for our bodily lives and then we cease to exist. If this is the case there is little chance for humility to be rewarded, and human beings are very fond of being rewarded. Pride indeed is often used to cure lesser sins. We call this appealing to someone's self-respect. It is quite logical; if this life is all there is it pays to stomp on everyone else.

But if we are designed to live forever, then humility takes its proper place as a virtue. And humility is extremely important in personal relationships. In this world we are given a choice between being humble and having good relationships, versus being proud and dictating relationships. We shall see that relationships between parent and child, for example, depend upon the same structure of authority and submission that we discussed in the last lesson with regard to husband and wife. All of those same principles apply; it's just that Paul is giving us some specific advice about these particular relationships.

### Fathers and Children

**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

**(Ephesians 6:1-4 NASB)**

#### Why the Father?

It seems odd to modern Americans that Paul's advice would be given to the father. After all, we know that raising the children is the woman's problem. Most of us are quite content with the idea that many children are raised by a single mother. "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle" has been the motto of women's liberation for over 40 years now. Unfortunately, though she may not need the man (and I dispute that) her children do. The reason for this is that God has appointed the man to be the spiritual leader of the household. How often have you seen it: she brings the children to church until they reached the age of about 13. Then from the boys she hears that dad doesn't go to church, therefore they don't have to either.

The opposite experience can be seen in families with a strong father. If the father is truly in charge, and he truly loves his wife, then the children will quickly understand that disrespect for their mother means an immediate (and usually quite thunderous) reaction from the father. In most positive sense, the children learn their place in the family. This has a very positive benefit the children; there is no uncertainty as to who is in charge. It benefits the parents as well; the children quickly learn not to play father against mother. In short, families with a strong father — work.

There is one other reason for the father to be in charge. It accustoms the children to obedience to the male figure. It is easier to obey the father God you cannot see if you are in the habit of obeying the father you can see.

### Children: Why Obey?

Of course Paul quotes the Old Testament here in reminding children that obedience to their parents is right. More than that, he notes that it is the first commandment which carries with it a promise of blessing. But we might point out a couple of other reasons as well:

- ✚ The habit of obedience will serve you well into adulthood. If your attitude is, "what can I get away with" or "they can't tell me what to do" you are going to get a great deal of trouble that you don't need. Our generation denigrates this, but that does not detract from the fact it is true.
- ✚ The habit of obedience is best developed way observation: the observation of your parents. My own children saw my respectful attitude towards my father, and concluded that this is the way an adult child treats his adult parent. This was a most fortunate example for us.

### Father's Duty

You can now see why humility is the basis of good relationships. If the father thinks it's his task to "lord it over" his children, he will soon provoke them to anger. Similarly, if the father's discipline is always delivered in a fit of rage, the children see rage as an appropriate form of behavior. But consider: when the policeman stops you and gives you a ticket, does he lord it over you or act in a fit of rage? No, he delivers his message in a cool, calm and collected manner. The humble father does not focus on avenging himself for his children's wrongs, but disciplining his children so that they will not repeat them.

That word discipline bothers a lot of people. It conjures up images of a father with a huge paddle smashing it into the rear end of a small and defenseless child. That's not what the word means in the original. If you look at it in the original Greek, you will see that it is more akin to the word "training". It's the word that would be used to train an athlete. If you think about this in the spiritual sense, what the father is trying to do is train a spiritual athlete. That obviously involves a lot more than spanking the kid. (My observation is that spanking the kid is something which should be used only in the rarest of circumstances; it just didn't seem to work with my kids.)

Included in that is the concept of instruction, or as some translations have it, admonition. The idea here is that you are not going to let the child grow to the age of 21 and then decide whether or not he wants to be a Christian. You're going to train the child in the way in which he should go. You're going to teach them what is right. Given the modern trends in education, you cannot count on the public school systems to do this in your place. Indeed, they will be teaching them something that most Christians find reprehensible. But the father is ultimately responsible for the instruction and admonition of his children; I am just suggesting that you take it seriously.

### Principles of Work

**Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive**

back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

(Ephesians 6:5-9 NASB)

#### The Value of Work

Of course, we have to make a little translation in this section. We need to proceed by drawing the parallel between what a slave would've done in those days and what an employee would do in these. Similarly, the slave master now becomes the manager or the employer. To understand why Paul gives this advice we must first consider the concept of "vocation". This concept holds that you work for more than money. If you have a job which you keep only because it pays the money, then you obviously have a poor situation. I've been there. I once had a job consisting entirely of taking computer printouts, finding duplicate lines, and scratching them out. That was it. It paid pretty well for the time, too. But it was certainly something I had no intention of making a career of.

Work, if you will recall, is honored by God. The earliest version of this is the creation of the Sabbath, in which God recognizes that we must have rest from labor. Work is therefore not ordinary. Indeed, man was designed to work. If you will recall, the first man, Adam, was a gardener in the garden of Eden. God did not let him sit around all day drinking beer and eating potato chips. It is something which is intrinsically part of the human experience, and honored by God.

#### Commands to "Slaves"

Once again, we come upon the principle of submission. If you are an employee, you are in submission to the man who writes your paycheck. He may designate a manager for these commands, but you are in submission. You therefore are to be obedient, give forth a sincere effort and do so without duplicity. If this doesn't sound like you at work, perhaps you need to examine your Christian life. We have said that work is blessed by God – that's because ultimately your work is to be rewarded by God. You are to be his example in the workplace.

It makes a real difference when you're working for the Lord. Most of us think of that as being something that only professional ministers could do, but Paul is quite clear about this. Everything you do should be done as if it were being done for the Lord. Which should eliminate slop work.

#### Commands to "Masters"

Let's start with the obvious: the manager in the department has the same Master, therefore he should have the same attitude towards his own work that his employees have. In short, as a manager, you should not deliver slop work. Now you see where humility comes into the relationship. If you've ever had a boss who is best described by the words, "arrogant jerk," then you know why humility is a necessity. Unfortunately it is all too common that the manager considers himself well above his employees, a much better human being. That's pride, and pride is the sin of Satan himself.

Specifically, Paul gives the manager to commands. The first is not to threaten his employees. Most of us understand that very well. It's one thing to lay out consequences for poor behavior; it's entirely another to bluster and threaten. The manager who does this, it appears to me, is the man who

has no confidence in his own leadership. It is counterproductive, because for most of those threats you can't deliver. Your employees soon become accustomed to the bluster — and ignore it.

The second is justice. One of the reasons most companies do not post the salaries of their employees is that they fear that most employees will think they are not fairly paid. A major bank once did post all the salaries; the reaction was very interesting. The company in question was in fact paying its employees fairly, and the most common reaction was astonishment at how little difference there was between person A and person B. People resent it if they feel that they are not being treated fairly. The reality and appearance of justice are essentials of good management. It is important that employees know that you do not show partiality — either in salary, performance or even simple approval.

### Summary

Once again, we see the concept of authority and submission being displayed in human relationships. The one thing that makes this work for the Christian is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If I claim authority over my wife, it is by the authority of Christ — and therefore I must submit to the rule of Christ. If you are a Christian manager, the same applies. If you are a Christian father, the same applies. See to your duties as Christ would have you do them, and look to him for your reward.

## Armor of God - Ephesians 6:10 – 24

### Satan: An Overview

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

(Ephesians 6:10-13 NASB)

### The Nature of Satan

Ask the average Christian today, "just who is Satan?" You will get a variety of answers, but for large numbers of Christians Satan is a mythical beast. They just don't believe in that red guy with the tights and the forked tail. As a result, they can't believe in the Satan in the Bible either. But the two are quite different characters. We may now examine just who Satan is.

- ✚ Satan is a spirit, if you will an angel, who is in rebellion against God. The Bible gives us little else to go on, but this should be sufficient to convince us that our opponent is quite formidable.
- ✚ Satan is the spirit of evil. As such, he is not the opposite of God. If he has an opposite, is the Angel Michael. Evil is produced by twisting what is good; Satan cannot create, only lie steal and destroy.
- ✚ As such, he is the enemy of God. But he is also the enemy of man, for God loves us. Therefore, Satan hates us.

### The Power of Satan

It is a matter of first principles: Satan cannot create, only God can create. Therefore Satan must take what God has created and twist it. That's why he's the father of lies. Unfortunately, Satan is also the Prince of this world. As Mark Twain put it, "he is the spiritual head of 4/5 of the human race, and the political head of all of it." Christians involved in politics should remember this; fundamentally, the world's system of getting ahead is contrary to God's desires for his children. If you feel that politically you can reform the people so that heaven on earth arrives, then remember that you are reforming Satan as well. Good luck with that.

It's clear from the passages in Isaiah that Satan is some sort of fallen angel. We are taught that he fell from heaven through pride. This may pose a difficulty to some Christians today, as our society has decided that pride is now a virtue. May I suggest the problem is with our society? Is pride really a virtue? Or is it a sin? The teaching of the church since the beginning has been that pride is the most deadly of sins. CS Lewis called it, "the complete anti-God state of mind." When you look down on others you are sharing Satan's sin.

### The Works of Satan

Satan works in two ways. The first is the one most familiar to us: temptation. It is the normal way by which Satan works on human beings. In rare circumstances he is permitted to work on human beings by demon possession. This often confuses Western readers, since they have never seen a case of demon possession (and therefore conclude that it doesn't exist.) You might take up the subject with the missionary to the Third World. One of the missionaries this class supports can tell you quite clearly that

demon possession is a familiar sight in lands where Christianity is not the dominant religion. Satan's purpose in the first world is to convince you that he does not exist; his purpose of the Third World is to convince you that he is mightier than Jesus Christ. Both assertions are false.

### **The Armor of God**

Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;** in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

**(Ephesians 6:14-17 NASB)**

May we begin with the observation? It is the "whole armor" of God, not just the pieces you select.

#### **Belt of Truth**

Truth is one of the attributes of God, Aquinas tells us. That is to say that truth is so inextricably bound up in the character of God that it cannot be separated from him. This carries specific implications for Christianity. It means, for example, that Christianity must say to the world, "examine the facts." Other religions may tell you that they came out of the mists of time, or they are the speculation of learned and wise men, but Christianity must start you with the facts. This is why we are commanded to have a ready defense. Most Christians today do not study apologetics cancel all, but we should.

Some Christians are afraid of this. They are afraid that somebody will find a contradiction in what they say and the reality that other people see. And there is no doubt that some people see things differently. But the Christian knows that truth is central to the character of God — and truth is self consistent. This self consistency means that we can defend the faith by reason. The belt of truth might be easily found in apologetics.

#### **Breastplate of Righteousness**

This phrasing is somewhat ambiguous. It could mean that we are to put on the righteousness of Christ — claiming by his blood to have our sins forgiven. The sacrifice of the truly righteous one has done this for us. Alternately, it could also mean that we are to be righteous as individuals. A goodly amount of ink has been wasted on this controversy; I suspect Paul of meaning both at the same time — since both are equally valid.

#### **Gospel of Peace**

There is great wisdom in that little phrase. It also carries with it ambiguity; it could mean either peace with our fellow man or peace with God. I think it means both. But notice that the peace comes through the gospel. That this is what brings us peace with God is obvious. But it is also what brings us peace with men. How? Simply this: if you accept the gospel of Jesus Christ, you admit that you are a sinner. You must also admit that you have no right to judge somebody else in this regard. Your task is not to judge them; your task is to bring them the good news of the Gospel. Since you do not judge them, you give them no reason to be in conflict with you. It's really hard to be in conflict with someone who is bringing over a plate of cookies.

### Shield of Faith

As of late the word "faith" has been tarnished in meaning. There are those who think the word means simply having faith in a blind way, with no evidence to back it up. That is not the sense in which the Bible uses that word. We might substitute the word, "trust." God's use of this is required in a strange sort of way. Permit me to explain.

God could, of course, have made mankind so that we had no choice but to believe in him. He could have wired our minds that way, or he could've made the evidence so overwhelming that no one but the village idiot could deny it. But because he wants us to love him, he must give us a choice. To do that he has constructed the universe in which there is plenty of evidence — but no gun pointed at your head. You have to make the logical leap of faith. It's like getting married; you really don't know what she's like, and you really don't know what is going to happen. But the evidence you have indicates that you will be happy with her, and therefore you marry her. It's not a blind leap, it's a logical leap.

The truth is, if there is no faith as a possibility then there is no choice as a possibility. And God wants us to choose to love him — therefore he must woo rather than compel.

### Helmet of Salvation

In another passage Paul refers to the helmet as being the hope of salvation. It's a bit obscure, but consider that the helmet covers the area of your body in which you do your thinking. Even to this day, 2000 years later, soldiers still wear helmets. It is in the brain that you have the hope, which is the hope of the resurrection of the dead. You will live again; and that message still rings down through the ages.

Some Christians don't think this is very important. Their view is that we all go to heaven as disembodied spirits, and we play harps there forever. That is not the view of the Scripture. More to the point, it's clear from the Scripture that this hope is extremely important. May I remind you that Goliath forgot to wear his helmet? Getting your doctrine right does matter.

### Sword of the Spirit

Perhaps you didn't notice, but this is the only offensive weapon in the bunch. It's the weapon Jesus used to defeat Satan in the wilderness. May I point out to you that there is something quite important about offensive versus defensive weaponry? You put on the armor; you practice with the sword.

### Prayer

**With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible *love*.**

## (Ephesians 6:18-24 NASB)

### General Thoughts

Paul is rather inclusive of his prayer requests here:

- ✚ He asks us to pray at all times. I suspect this is a reaction to the idea that there are only certain times of the day when you pray. He makes it clear that you don't have to go to a particular place or wait for particular time to pray. That does not mean, however, that we should not set aside particular place and time to pray.
- ✚ He asks us to pray in the Spirit. This is a known function of the Spirit, something given to us to assist us in our prayers. I do not know of a Christian who has ever told me that prayer is easy and complete without effort on his part. Prayer is difficult; but if we practice the difficult it becomes easier. It is also easier because we have the Spirit to help us.
- ✚ He asks us to pray for all the saints. Dare we say that this includes those with whom we disagree?

### Praying for the Preacher

Have you ever wondered how to pray for your preacher, or an evangelist? Paul gives us a model for such prayer right here. There are two things:

- ✚ First, we are to pray that God's words will be given to the preacher. The preacher should be sound in his doctrine and alert to the needs of his congregation. We should also seek the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit so that his words will be those that God wants him to preach.
- ✚ Second, we are to pray that he will speak those words boldly. If you want to call someone to action, it's best not to mumble.

### Benediction

When your children go off to college you often send them off with good advice. My dad sent me off with good advice, and precious little cash. Paul is doing the same thing here; he wants you to be reminded of the important things that he has brought forward this letter:

- ✚ First, he implores us to be at peace with each other — peace with the brothers. The choice of the word "brother" is not an accident.
- ✚ He then challenges us to love with faith. If you think about it, if you do not have faith your actions of love are quite different. If you expect God to repay you, you will do things differently than if you don't.
- ✚ Finally, he pronounces grace upon all who love Jesus "with incorruptible love." This is not the love of the emotional sort that comes and goes, but the solid love upon which great marriages are built. This is fitting; the church is the bride of Christ. If you want to know what kind of love this is, look at those who have been married many, many years and are still happy.