

## RESOURCES CONSULTED FOR THIS STUDY

“Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians” in *Calvin’s Commentaries* by John **Calvin** (1548)

“An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians” in *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* by Matthew **Henry**

“Ephesians” in *Expositions of Holy Scripture* by Alexander **Maclaren** (1959)

"Exposition of Ephesians" in the *New Testament Commentary* by William **Hendriksen** (1967)

"Ephesians: The Glory of the Church" in *Everyman's Bible Commentary* by Homer **Kent** (1971)

“The Epistle to the Ephesians” in *The New Testament and Wycliffe Bible Commentary* by Alfred **Martin** (1971)

“Focus on Ephesians” in *Biblical Viewpoint* (1977)

“The Epistle to the Ephesians” in the *Liberty Commentary on the New Testament* by Edward **Roustio** (1978)

"Ephesians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* by A. Skevington **Wood** (1978)

"Ephesians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* by Harold **Hoehner** (1983)

"The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians" in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* by F.F. **Bruce** (1984)

"Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ" in *Preaching the Word* by R. Kent **Hughes** (1990)

"Ephesians" in the *Word Biblical Commentary* by Andrew **Lincoln** (1990)

“Ephesians” in *The Bible Exposition Commentary* by Warren **Wiersbe** (2001)

*Ephesians* by Curtis **Vaughan** (2002)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB)

# INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

The book of Ephesians is found among the Epistles of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, it is one of the Pauline Epistles.<sup>2</sup> Yet more specifically, it is one of the "Prison Epistles" (along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).<sup>3</sup> The Prison Epistles were written while Paul was under house arrest<sup>4</sup> for two years in Rome (see Acts 28:30, as well as Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, and 6:20) in the early 60s A.D. Paul's second Roman imprisonment (of the more conventional variety) in the mid-60s A.D. resulted in his martyrdom.

The book of Ephesians has been called "the greatest piece of writing in all history" (W. O. Carver, cited in Vaughan, p. 9). Peter Lange (cited in Edward Panosian, "The Epistle of the Heavens," *Biblical Viewpoint*, p. 12) has said: "Here we find the most sublime truths expressed in the most sublime words found in human language."

Ephesians is not an easy book to interpret. It has been called "the Waterloo of commentators" (E.J. Goodspeed, quoted in Bruce, p. 229). D. Edmond Hiebert (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2:267) writes: "It is generally conceded that Ephesians is the deepest book in the New Testament." The first half of the book is particularly challenging, mainly due to its lofty style, which according to Lincoln (p. xlvi) is purposeful: "[Paul] shows in other places in the letter that he is capable of producing more succinct, lively, and direct discourse, so it should be assumed that where he adopts a profuse and effusive style it is done deliberately in order to achieve particular results." Charles Erdman (cited in Ward Andersen, "To the Praise of His Glory," *Biblical Viewpoint*, p. 14) likewise has said: "The serenity and dignity of its spirit and language are in complete harmony with the sustained loftiness of its thought and teaching." Though Ephesians is deep, the treasures found in it are well worth the digging required to unearth them!

## The Author of the Book

As already indicated, the author of Ephesians was the apostle Paul (see 1:1 and 3:1). Paul ministered in Ephesus briefly at the end of his second missionary journey (see Acts 18:19-21) in

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<sup>1</sup>The New Testament can be subdivided as follows: Gospels (Matthew-John), History (Acts), Epistles (Romans-Jude), and Prophecy (Revelation).

<sup>2</sup>The Epistles can be subdivided as follows: Pauline Epistles (Romans-Philemon) and General (or better, Non-Pauline) Epistles (Hebrews-Jude).

<sup>3</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert (in *An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume Two: The Pauline Epistles*, p. 23) further subdivides the Pauline Epistles as follows: Soteriological (salvation) Group (Romans-Galatians), Christological Group (Ephesians-Colossians and Philemon), Eschatological (last times) Group (1 & 2 Thessalonians), and Ecclesiological (church) Group (1 Timothy-Titus).

<sup>4</sup>According to John Walvoord (*Philippians: Triumph in Christ*, p. 15), Paul was chained by the wrist to a Roman guard twenty-four hours a day, a new guard every six hours.

the early 50s A.D. During his third missionary journey, Paul ministered in Ephesus for 3 years (Acts 20:31) in the mid-50s A.D. (see Acts 19:1-41), his longest stint in any one place during his three missionary journeys. He first went to the synagogue (as was his custom), preaching for 3 months (Acts 19:8). After encountering some resistance, he spent the next two years preaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10). At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul briefly met with the elders of the Ephesian church in Miletus (Acts 20:17-38). After (presumably) being released from his first Roman imprisonment (during which imprisonment he wrote the book of Ephesians), Paul apparently took a fourth missionary journey, which included a stop in Ephesus (see 1 Timothy 1:3).

### The Recipients of the Book

The book of Ephesians is so called because 1:1 identifies the book's intended audience as the "saints who are at Ephesus." The believers in Ephesus were primarily Gentiles (see 2:11, 3:1, and 4:17). The local church at Ephesus would eventually be overseen by Timothy (see 1 Timothy 1:3). Tradition has it that the church was also pastored by the apostle John. The Ephesian church was the first of the seven churches of Asia addressed in Revelation 2-3 (see Revelation 2:1-7).

The city of Ephesus was the major city in the Roman province of Asia. It was located on the banks of the Aegean Sea in modern-day Turkey. In Paul's day the city of Ephesus had a population between 250,000-500,000. Ephesus was famous for being the home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of the Greek goddess, Diana (also known as Artemis, her Latin name). You may recall that Paul caused quite a stir while in Ephesus because his ministry severely curbed Diana worship, raising the ire of the Ephesian silversmiths (Acts 19:23-41). Today, the city of Ephesus lies in ruins.

### The Date of Writing

Being one of the Prison Epistles, the book of Ephesians was written in the early 60s A.D. It was likely written early on in Paul's first Roman imprisonment, as there is no indication in the book that Paul anticipated being released anytime soon (as in Philippians). Paul sent the book by way of Tychicus (6:21) at the same time he sent the books of Colossians (Colossians 4:7-8) and Philemon (compare Colossians 4:9 with Philemon 10-12), as well as the runaway slave of Philemon, Onesimus.

### The Occasion for Writing

What prompted Paul to write what he wrote when he wrote it? It is difficult to tell. "Most of Paul's letters are occasional, written for a specific purpose on a specific occasion, but it is not easy to see any particular occasion that called forth this letter" (D.A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 312). Perhaps the best explanation, albeit a simplistic one, is the fact that Paul was getting ready to send Tychicus to the province of Asia with the epistles of Colossians and Philemon (and Onesimus) and saw this as a good opportunity to write a general letter of instruction and exhortation to the church at Ephesus.

### The Purpose for Writing

Why did Paul write what he wrote? Based on the contents of the book, it appears as though Paul's purpose for writing the book of Ephesians was to remind (see 2:11) the Ephesian believers of their high calling in Christ (chapters 1-3, especially 1:3 and 2:6) and to exhort them to live up to that calling (chapters 4-6); in other words, to remind them of their privileged position and to prompt them to make their practice parallel with their position; or, to be holy because they were heavenly (see 1:3-4); or, to remind them of their calling (1:18) and encourage them to conform their conduct to their calling (4:1).

### The Theme of the Book

The book of Ephesians has been explained (by Pastor Steve Thomas) as teaching that:

1. God has a plan (see 1:4-5, 9, 11, 2:10, and 3:11)
2. by which through Christ (see 1:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 2:6, 7, 10, 13, 18, 21, 22, 3:11, 12, 4:32, and 5:8)
3. He will be glorified (see 1:3, 6, 12, 14, 2:7, and 3:21)
4. in the church (see 3:10 and 21; see also footnote 8)
5. forever (see 3:21)

The theme of Ephesians may be expressed as the praiseworthiness of God (1:3, 6, 12, 14, 2:7, and 3:21) for the preeminent position of the church (1:3 and 2:6) in its connection to the preeminent Christ (1:20-23 and 4:10) and the practice such a position is to produce (4:1f).

### The Overall Structure of the Book

As with any letter/epistle, Ephesians has an introduction (1:1-2), body (1:3-6:20), and conclusion (6:21-24). Ephesians divides nicely into two major sections.<sup>5</sup> Chapters 1-3 are doctrinal (containing only one directive, 2:11's "remember"), while chapters 4-6 are practical, with 4:1 being the "hinge." This is typical of Paul (for example, Romans 1-11 is doctrinal, while chapters 12-16 are practical). Paul understood full well that "belief determines behavior."

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<sup>5</sup>Kent (p. 3) divides the body of the book between doctrines concerning the church (1:3-3:21) and duties of the church (4:1-6:20). Likewise, the *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts* (p. 405) divides the book between belief/the position of the Christian (1:1-3:21) and behavior/the practice of the Christian (4:1-6:24). Many suggest a three-fold division, with the three divisions being 1:3-3:21, 4:1-6:9, and 6:10-20. Robert Gromacki (*New Testament Survey*, p. 247) respectively labels them calling/conduct/conflict (as does Roustio, p. 504); doctrine/duty/defense; wealth/walk (see 2:10, 4:1, 17, 5:2, 8, and 15)/warfare (as does Hughes, p. 16); and position/practice/power. Hughes (p. 16) and Martin (p. 722), following the lead of Watchman Nee, label them sit/walk/stand.

## Some Outstanding Features of Ephesians

### 1. Its similarity to the book of Colossians<sup>6</sup>

Having been written at about the same time, it is not surprising that there are many similarities between Ephesians and Colossians.<sup>7</sup> Most notable is the similarity between Ephesians 6:21-22 and Colossians 4:7-8. Accordingly, Ephesians and Colossians have been called the "Twin Epistles." Bruce (p. 241) calls Ephesians a "sequel to Colossians." Ephesians may be considered an expansion of the book of Colossians.

### 2. Its doctrinal depth

Ephesians, like Romans, is noted for its theology. Doctrines that are featured include Christology (the doctrine of Christ—Christ is mentioned over 60 times in the book), ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church)<sup>8</sup>, and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, pp. 23-24) gives a good reminder here: "... [T]his is not a letter addressed to some unusual and exceptional Christian people, it is not a letter addressed to some great scholar or theologian, it is not a letter addressed to teachers, it is not a letter addressed to so-called scholars who study the Scriptures. It is not a letter to specialists but a letter to ordinary church members ... All the high doctrine which we have in this Epistle is something that you and I are meant to receive ... Ordinary members of the Church, of all churches, are meant to take hold of these doctrines, and understand and rejoice in them."

### 3. Its long sentences

The apostle Paul is not averse to writing extremely long sentences, especially in Ephesians. The most notable example is 1:3-14, some 203 words in the original. Another lengthy sentence in Ephesians is 1:15-23, 169 words in length (others include 2:1-7, 3:1-7, 3:14-19, and 4:11-16). Fortunately, our English translations divide these

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<sup>6</sup>Of the 1,570 words in Colossians, 34% reappear in Ephesians, while 26.5% of the 2,411 words in Ephesians are paralleled in Colossians (Lincoln, p. xlvi). According to Vaughan (p. 11), of the 155 verses in Ephesians over half contain expressions identical with those in Colossians. Similarly, Robert Gromacki (*New Testament Survey*, p. 241) says that of the 155 verses in Ephesians, the content of 78 of them is repeated in Colossians with some differences. According to Hendriksen ("Exposition of Ephesians," in the *New Testament Commentary*, p. 27), two-thirds of the 95 verses in Colossians are clearly or rather clearly paralleled in Ephesians.

<sup>7</sup>See pages 6-26 of Hendriksen for a side-by-side comparison of Ephesians and Colossians.

<sup>8</sup>Marshall Neal ("Editorial," *Biblical Viewpoint*, p. 8) has called Ephesians "the Epistle of the Church." While the focus in the New Testament is overwhelmingly on the local church, the focus in Ephesians is on the church as the body of Christ. The church as the body of Christ is mentioned nine times in the book (1:23, 2:16, 3:6, 4:4, 12, 16 [2 times], 5:23, and 30).

sentences up for us into manageable parts.

4. Its impersonal tone

Uncharacteristic of Paul, the book of Ephesians contains no personal greetings. This is especially surprising in light of the fact that Paul spent 3 years ministering in Ephesus. Hiebert (p. 253 of *An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume Two: The Pauline Epistles*) calls Ephesians the "most impersonal of all the Pauline Epistles." This may be due to the fact that, as many suggest, Ephesians was intended to be a "circular letter," one that was to be circulated among several churches and, thus, written with several churches in mind.

## EPHESIANS 1:1-2

Paul begins the book of Ephesians in typical fashion with a salutation.

### 1:1

*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:*

Paul declares himself to be “an apostle” (cf. Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1, and Titus 1:1), meaning one who is sent, in this case, sent by Jesus Christ (“of Christ Jesus”). There seems to be two categories of apostle in the New Testament. Paul and the Twelve were apostles in an official sense, while others were so only in a secondary sense, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James (Galatians 1:19).<sup>9</sup>

Paul calls the Ephesian believers "saints." The Greek word means holy, set apart, or sanctified ones. Saints are those who have been set apart or sanctified from sin and to God. They are holy in a positional sense. They ought to be holy in a practical sense, as well (see 1:4).

The Greek phrase that ends verse 1, translated "in Christ Jesus," appears repeatedly throughout the book (see 1:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 2:6, 7, 10, 13, 18, 21, 22, 3:11, 12, 4:32, and 5:8) and in Paul's letters (169 times in all, according to one count), being found more frequently in Ephesians than in any other New Testament book. Hendriksen (pp. 70-71) calls it "the most important [phrase] in all the Pauline epistles." Maclaren (p. 112) writes about it: "... [U]nless, in our perspective of the Christian life, that expression has the same prominence as it has in this letter, we have yet to learn the sweetest sweetness, and have yet to receive the most mighty power, of the Gospel that we profess." It is descriptive of the doctrine known as "union with Christ," the inseparable spiritual bond that exists between Christ and the believer. These Ephesian believers (thus, called "faithful") were "at Ephesus" physically, but "in Christ Jesus" spiritually.

### 1:2

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul concludes his salutation with an interesting greeting. The typical Greek greeting was *chairen* (meaning "greetings"; see Acts 15:23, 23:26, and James 1:1), which Paul typically modified to *charis* ("grace"), while "peace" (*shalom*) was the typical Hebrew greeting (Paul likely has the benediction of Numbers 6:24-26 in mind as he writes this). Commenting on the connection between the two, Hendriksen (p. 71) states: "Grace is the fountain. Peace belongs to

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<sup>9</sup>According to Robert Thomas in *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* (p. 77), to officially be an apostle, one had to meet 3 criteria: personal contact with Christ while on earth, a witness of Christ's resurrection, and direct appointment by Christ. The secondary apostles lacked this third requirement.

the stream of spiritual blessings which issues from this fountain."

Notice that the "grace" (sanctifying grace, not saving grace, as his readers were already believers) and "peace" (the peace of God/John 14:27, Philippians 4:7, and Colossians 3:15, not peace with God/Romans 5:1, for the same reason) of which Paul speaks is from both "God our Father" and "the Lord Jesus Christ." This is a grammatical way of equating "the Lord Jesus Christ" with "God our Father." Thus, Paul is making an allusion to the deity of Christ. In keeping with the Christological focus of the book, notice how each aspect of the salutation (writer, recipient, and greeting) mentions Christ.

## EPHESIANS 6:21-24

Paul concludes the book of Ephesians in typical fashion with a benediction.

### 6:21

*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.*

The "also" may be a clue that Colossians was written prior to Ephesians (see Colossians 4:7).

Interestingly, Tychicus may have been saved during Paul's ministry in Ephesus, Tychicus being a native of the province of Asia (Acts 20:4). He was evidently the "mailman" who delivered this letter to the church at Ephesus. He was also sent to Ephesus by Paul at a later time (see 2 Timothy 4:12).

### 6:22

*I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.*

Paul uses the first person plural "us." Though Ephesians does not tell us, we do know who these other individuals were by way of Colossians 4:10-14.

Apparently, the Ephesian believers were unduly concerned about Paul's plight (see also 3:13); hence, Paul's comments at the end of this verse.

### 6:23

*Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

As in 1:2, the peace Paul wishes upon the Ephesians is not peace with God/Romans 5:1, but the peace of God/John 14:27, Philippians 4:7, and Colossians 3:15, since the Ephesians were already believers.

Once again (see comments on 1:2), Paul equates "the Lord Jesus Christ" with "God the Father."

### 6:24

*Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.*

As in 1:2, the grace Paul wishes upon the Ephesians is not saving grace, but sanctifying grace, since the Ephesians were already believers.

It is interesting to note that Paul concludes the epistle by mentioning peace, love, faith, and grace, four concepts that receive much attention throughout the book (according to Wiersbe, p. 9, grace is mentioned 12 times in the book).

## EPHESIANS 1:3-14

### Introduction

In the first major section of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul praises the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) for their respective roles in the salvation of the Ephesians, from beginning (the start of verse 4) to end (the end of verse 14). God is to be praised because He is the One who planned (the Father's role), purchased (the Son's role), and protects (the Spirit's role) our salvation. The Father selects, the Son saves, and the Spirit seals. Besides the fact that this section is one sentence in length<sup>10</sup>, another interesting fact is that many interpreters consider it to be an early Christian hymn (verses 3-5 forming the first stanza and focusing on God the Father, verses 7-11 the second and focusing on God the Son, and verses 13-14b the third and focusing on God the Holy Spirit, with verses 6, 12, and 14c forming the chorus), a song of salvation.<sup>11</sup> This passage is the basis for the school song of this writer's alma mater, Maranatha Baptist University (Watertown, WI).

### 1:3

*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,*

A similar blessing is found in 2 Corinthians 1:3 and in 1 Peter 1:3. The words, "blessed" (adjective), "blessed" (participle), and "blessing" (noun) all come from the Greek word, *eulogia*, from which we get our English word, "eulogy."<sup>12</sup>

God the Father is the God of Christ (see also 1:17, Matthew 27:46, and John 20:17) only in a functional sense.

Paul's designation of God the Father as the Father of Christ is an allusion to the deity of Christ (see John 5:17-18). Because God the Father is the Father of Christ (1:3), and because we are "in Christ," that is, united with Him, we can rightfully call God our Father (1:2).

The basis for Paul's eulogy is the fact that God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing"; we are to bless God because we have been so blessed by God. These blessings will be the focus of the verses to follow. These blessings are "in heavenly places in Christ," what Vaughan (p. 19) describes as "a realm or region of spiritually reality." In light of 1:20 and 2:6, Paul is speaking

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<sup>10</sup>It is one of the longest sentences in the entire New Testament (at 203 words, it is slightly shorter than Colossians 1:9-20's 218 words) and is "considered by some scholars to be the most cumbersome sentence in the Greek language" (Hoehner, p. 616).

<sup>11</sup>Other hymns in the New Testament epistles include Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-20, and 1 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>12</sup>It is interesting to note that *eulogia* is used only with reference to God in the New Testament.

in positional terms here. In other words, the basis of all the spiritual (i.e., soteriological) blessings we enjoy as Christians is our position “in Christ” (cf. Romans 8:32). These blessings are “a done deal”; you could no more lose these blessings than Christ could be removed from His heavenly throne. We are eternally secure! As mentioned in the comments on 1:1, our practice ought to reflect our position. Heavenly people ought to be holy people. This is exactly Paul’s point in Colossians 3:1 and following.

#### 1:4

*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love*

The first spiritual blessing the believer enjoys, and the basis for all the others, is election. Election is the act of God before time in which He freely chose those who would receive the gift of eternal life (see also 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Notice that God chose “before the foundation of the world” (cf. 2 Timothy 1:9) that is, before time began in eternity past. This means that our salvation is in no way based upon anything we might do within time (see Romans 9:11).<sup>13</sup> Election is unconditional. “You did not choose Me but I chose you” (John 15:16a).<sup>14</sup> At least one writer has suggested that some emphasis be laid upon “us.” In other words, God has chosen us, of all people (see also 1 Corinthians 1:26-29)! The only impetus behind our election is God’s love—“in love” (see also Deuteronomy 7:6-8a). The purpose for our election is that we might be holy (see also 5:25-27, Colossians 1:21-22, and 2 Timothy 1:9). This is a reminder that our holiness is the consequence, not the cause, of our election. Paul uses two terms: “holy” (presence of virtue) and “blameless” (absence of vice). The Greek word translated “blameless” has the idea of spotless or without blemish.<sup>15</sup> If you are not holy, you are not elect (see 2:10 and John 15:16b, Titus 2:14, and the entire epistle of 1 John). As Hughes (p. 251) says: “The telltale evidence of one’s election is holiness.”

#### 1:5

*He predestinated us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,*

Paul gives a second spiritual blessing believers enjoy, adoption. Adoption is the act of God by which He legally places the believer into His family, giving him all the rights and privileges of a son (see also Romans 8:14-17 and Galatians 4:5-7). Jesus Christ is God the Father’s natural son; we are His adopted sons. Our adoption, like our election, is rooted in eternity past, being part of

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<sup>13</sup>“To say that election in Christ took place before the foundation of the world is to underline that it was provoked not by historical contingency or human merit, but solely by God’s sovereign grace” (Lincoln, p. 23).

<sup>14</sup>“We must never allow our subjective experience of choosing Christ water down the fact that we would not have chosen him if he had not first chosen us” (Hughes, p. 24).

<sup>15</sup>The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) uses this word to describe the cosmetic purity required of sacrificial animals.

God's predestinating work. The basis for our adoption is "the kind intention of His will" (see also verses 9 and 11). Praise God, His will is "kind." God does as He pleases (see Psalm 135:6, Isaiah 46:10, and Daniel 4:35). This is His prerogative as God. We should not want to have it any other way.<sup>16</sup>

#### 1:6

*to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

Paul gives the ultimate purpose of our salvation (and everything), God's glory (see also 1:12 and 1:14c). Specifically, our salvation magnifies God's grace. Grace is getting what is not deserved; gift is a good synonym. This puts a theocentric (God-centered) emphasis on salvation, as opposed to the anthropocentric (man-centered) emphasis so common today.<sup>17</sup>

"The Beloved" is a designation for Christ (see also Matthew 3:17, 17:5, and Colossians 1:13). Our acceptance before the Father is the result of reconciliation, the end of hostility between two parties (see Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:21), a third spiritual blessing. Reconciliation is based on our union with Christ ("in"); because we are united with Christ, God the Father loves us, as He does the Son.<sup>18</sup>

#### 1:7

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace*

Similar words are found in Colossians 1:14. Paul identifies a fourth spiritual blessing we enjoy because of our union with Christ ("in Him"), redemption. To redeem is to buy back something previously owned and forfeited by paying a ransom price. The ransom price paid to redeem us was the blood (i.e., the death; see Leviticus 17:11 and compare Romans 5:9 with Romans 5:10) of Christ (see also Matthew 20:28//Mark 10:45, Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 1:18-19, and Revelation 5:9). Redemption also carries with it the idea of deliverance, "the delivering or the setting free of a man from a situation from which he himself was powerless to liberate himself, or from a penalty which he himself could never have paid" (William Barclay, cited in Vaughan, p. 24). When we are saved, we are delivered/redeemed from the penalty of sin (past), the power of sin (present), and the presence of sin (future). Since the verb is in the present tense here (literally "we are having redemption"), Paul's emphasis seems to be on the present aspect of redemption, deliverance/redemption from the power of sin (see Romans 6:14a). This, indeed, is a tremendous blessing!

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<sup>16</sup>"Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God" (Jonathan Edwards, quoted in Hughes, p. 41).

<sup>17</sup>"Salvation comes from [God], and its object is not simply that human needs may be met, though it accomplishes that, but that God himself may be glorified" (Lincoln, p. 43).

<sup>18</sup>"Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul, but behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and will deal with thee according as I am pleased with him" (John Bunyan, cited in Bruce, p. 288).

Yet another blessing of our salvation is the forgiveness of sins. Like redemption, forgiveness is possible only because of the death of Christ (see Matthew 26:28 and Hebrews 9:22b). Once again, the basis for all these blessings is God's rich grace (cf. 2:7).

1:8

*which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight*

A sixth spiritual blessing we receive is illumination. Illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit at the moment of and subsequent to salvation that enables the believer to perceive the truth and significance of Scripture. At the moment of salvation, God opens our eyes to the truth of the gospel (see 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 6), causing the once blind to now see (in the words of John Newton's "Amazing Grace").

1:9

*He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him*

By grace (He was under no obligation to do so), God has made known to us "the mystery of His will." A mystery was something previously unrevealed (see Romans 16:25-26 and Colossians 1:26). Based on the context, it appears that the mystery revealed to us is our personal salvation. Before we were saved, our salvation was a mystery (to us, not to God). Once again (see 1:5b), Paul points out that God saved us simply because He wanted to.

1:10

*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*

Our salvation is part of a much bigger picture, being one small part of God's goal of cosmic reconciliation (see also Romans 8:20-22, 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, and Colossians 1:20). Sin threw a monkey wrench, so to speak, into the harmony of the created order. Our salvation begins the process of realigning us, a process that will be complete upon our glorification. This cosmic reconciliation will take place in "an administration suitable to the fullness of the time" (NIV: "when the times have reached their fulfillment"), that is, when human history has run its course and time as we know it comes to an end (see 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Revelation 21:1-3), the time of "the summing up of all things in Christ."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"Paul seems to picture all ... of God's possessions as having been scattered in the conflict with the forces of evil. It was his purpose that he would gather up all these scattered holdings and put them under one supreme captain, Jesus Christ" (Ray Summers, cited in Vaughan, p. 26). Calvin (p. 205) likewise states: "Out of Christ all things were disordered, and that through him they have been restored to order."

1:11

*also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,*

Paul identifies a seventh spiritual blessing of the believer, his inheritance. Because of our union with Christ (v. 10's "in Him"), we are joint-heirs with Him (Romans 8:17). This inheritance consists primarily of our heavenly destiny (see Colossians 1:12 and 1 Peter 1:4). Once again (see 1:5b and 9), Paul reminds us that all of this is possible only because God willed it.

1:12

*to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.*

Paul once again (see 1:6a) reminds us that the ultimate purpose of man's salvation is God's glory. In this verse, he appears to have Jewish believers particularly in mind ("we who were the first to hope in Christ").

1:13

*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,*

In verses thirteen and fourteen, Paul identifies an eighth spiritual blessing, the Holy Spirit's indwelling. The Gentile Ephesians ("you also") were saved through the instrumentality of the gospel (see also Romans 10:13-17). God not only ordains the end, but also the means to the end (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13). The indwelling Holy Spirit is the believer's seal (see also 4:30 and 2 Corinthians 1:22), that is, mark of ownership. He is called the "Spirit of promise" because His presence in the believer is the promise of more to come (see 1:14a and Galatians 3:14).

1:14

*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.*

Similar words are found in Romans 8:23. Not only is the Holy Spirit the believer's seal, He is also the believer's pledge (see also 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5). A pledge is a deposit or down payment. The word was used for an engagement ring. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer is God's pledge or guarantee that all God has promised to the believer will be delivered, including his inheritance (cf. 1 Peter 1:4).

The aspect of redemption being spoken of here is clearly the future aspect (see comments on 1:7), or final redemption, a ninth and final spiritual blessing (see also 4:30, Luke 21:28, and Romans 8:23).

Paul ends this first section of the epistle by once again (see 1:6a and 1:12) reminding his readers that the ultimate purpose of their salvation is God's glory.

### Conclusion

In Ephesians 1:3-14, through the use of a hymn (likely modified at certain points), Paul praises God (and by implication invites the Ephesians to do the same) for nine spiritual blessings they have already received, are receiving, and will receive due to their salvation: 1) election (1:4a), 2) adoption (1:5a), 3) reconciliation (1:6b), 4) redemption (1:7a), 5) forgiveness (1:7b), 6) illumination (1:8b-9a), 7) an inheritance (1:11a), 8) the Holy Spirit's indwelling (1:13b-14a), and 9) final redemption (1:14b). All of these blessings are possible only because of God's love (end of 1:4), grace (1:6a, 1:7c-8a) and will (1:5b, 1:9b, 1:11b). Our salvation is part of God's plan of cosmic reconciliation in the eschaton/end times (1:10). Salvation comes through the hearing of the gospel (1:13a). The goal of our salvation is our personal holiness (1:4b). The ultimate purpose of our salvation is God's glory (1:6a, 1:12, 1:14c).

## EPHESIANS 1:15-23

### Introduction

In the second major section of his epistle to the church at Ephesus, Paul (as he typically does in his epistles) prays for his readers.<sup>20</sup> He prays that the Ephesians would be able to fully grasp the significance of the many spiritual blessings (of 1:3-14) they enjoy in Christ. Besides the fact that this section is a prayer, another interesting fact is that, like the previous section (1:3-14), this section is one sentence in length.<sup>21</sup> The entirety of chapter 1 is more or less an introduction: salutation (verses 1-2), hymn of praise (verses 3-14), and prayer (verses 15-23).<sup>22</sup>

### 1:15

*For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,*

The section starts with “For this reason,” indicating a connection with the previous section (see the Introduction above for an explanation of the connection). Approximately 5 years having elapsed since Paul had last been in Ephesus, he no longer knew firsthand their spiritual condition; it was reported to Paul. Specifically, the report made mention of their faith in Christ and love for Christians. The order is significant; it is faith in God that produces love for others (see Galatians 5:6 in the NIV); our relationship with God (vertical) dictates our relationships with others (horizontal).<sup>23</sup>

### 1:16

*do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;*

Verses 15-16 are vintage Paul, as the following chart indicates:

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<sup>20</sup>An excellent resource in this regard is *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* by D.A. Carson (see especially chapter 10). Carson’s goal is to get us to pray like Paul did. Thus, as we look at this passage, ask yourself, “Do I pray like this?”

<sup>21</sup>The sentence of 1:15-23 is 169 words long in the original (the sentence of 1:3-14 is 203 words long).

<sup>22</sup>The hymn of praise (verses 3-14) is somewhat parenthetical, Paul’s normal pattern being a salutation followed immediately by a prayer.

<sup>23</sup>Examples of this dynamic include love (see 1 John 4:11) and forgiveness (see Ephesians 4:32). Hendriksen (p. 96) uses the analogies of a magnet and a spoked wheel.

<b>Epistle</b>	<b>Paul Prays for his readers</b>	<b>Paul Thanks God for his readers</b>	<b>Paul Thanks God for their faith</b>	<b>Paul Thanks God for their love</b>
<b>Romans</b>	1:9	1:8	1:8	
<b>Ephesians</b>	1:16	1:16	1:15	1:15
<b>Colossians</b>	1:3	1:3	1:4	1:4
<b>1 Thess</b>	1:2	1:2	1:3	1:3
<b>2 Thess</b>	1:11	1:3	1:3	1:3
<b>2 Timothy</b>	1:3	1:3	1:5	
<b>Philemon</b>	Verse 4	Verse 4	Verse 5	Verse 5

“Do not cease” does not imply nonstop (see also 1 Thessalonians 5:17). The idea is that Paul thanks God for the Ephesians whenever he prays for them.<sup>24</sup> Ask yourself, “Am I the kind of person that causes others to thank God for me whenever they pray for me?” Notice that Paul thanks God (v. 17) for them. This is only proper, since God is the one who should get the glory for any good seen in us (see Philippians 2:13). This does not mean that it is improper to thank others; just that it is more proper to thank God for them.

1:17

*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit<sup>25</sup> of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.*

In verse 17, Paul begins to give the content of his prayer for the Ephesians, moving from praise (verses 15-16) to petition<sup>26</sup> (verses 17f). His prayer is addressed to “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” (see comments on 1:3 for an explanation of this title). Paul prays that God the Father would give the Ephesians “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation.” As in 1:8, Paul is speaking of illumination, which Carson (p. 174) defines as a “nonnormative experience, the enlightenment of an individual’s mind so that God’s truth and claims, values and norms, are absorbed and embraced.” It is the supernatural, Spirit-enabled sight that enables the saint to see that what is

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<sup>24</sup>“The clause is not a claim to having given over his whole life to thanksgiving, but means that the writer does not forget in his regular times of prayer to give thanks for those to whom he is writing” (Lincoln, p. 55). In light of the many different individuals and churches we know Paul prayed for, Paul either had a prayer list or an excellent memory!

<sup>25</sup>Most interpreters believe that “spirit” is a reference to the Holy Spirit (see p. 97 of Hendriksen for support) and should, therefore, be capitalized. If so, notice that all three members of the Trinity are mentioned in this one verse.

<sup>26</sup>Wiersbe (p. 14) points out: “[Paul] does not ask God to give them what they do not have, but rather prays that God will reveal to them what they already have.”

said in Scripture is certain and significant (cf. Luke 24:32, 45, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, 6, and 1 Thessalonians 1:5). Illumination is needed at salvation, Paul's focus in 1:8 (see comments on this verse); it is also needed subsequent to salvation, Paul's focus here (see also Psalm 119:18 and Colossians 1:9). One of the effects of illumination upon the mind is an increased knowledge or awareness of God ("in the knowledge of Him") and His claim upon one's life. The Ephesians already knew God, being believers (see Matthew 7:23, John 17:3, and Galatians 4:9). Paul's desire is that they might know Him better (see also Colossians 1:10; Paul desired the same for himself in Philippians 3:10). Accordingly, Paul uses an intensified form (*epignosis*) of the Greek word for knowledge (*gnosis*). *Epignosis* is a deep, full, or thorough knowledge (see 1 Corinthians 13:12 and Ephesians 4:13). "There is nothing more important in God's universe, both in time and in eternity, than knowing God better" (Carson, p. 175). Jeremiah 9:23-24 tells us the same.

### 1:18

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

The first half of verse 18 continues the description of illumination begun in verse 17. Illumination is what causes spiritually blind eyes to see (see 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 6). The Greek verb translated "be enlightened" is in the perfect tense, indicating a past event with continuing results (literally: "having been and continuing to be enlightened"). Such is illumination. It happens initially at salvation, but continues off and on throughout the believer's life.

The second half of verse 18 identifies the first two of three things Paul wants the Ephesians to be illuminated about. First, that they might grasp "the hope of His calling" (see also Ephesians 4:4). Hope is confident expectation. The hope of God's calling is the believer's confident expectation of ultimate glorification (see Romans 8:30 and 1 Peter 5:10), the "hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2), "the hope laid up for you in heaven" (Colossians 1:5), "the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), "the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). Second, Paul prays that they might grasp "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (NIV). In other words, that they might fully understand how valuable their inheritance, their heavenly home (see comments on 1:11), is.

### 1:19

*and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might*

In verse 19, Paul identifies the third of the three things he wants the Ephesians to be illuminated about: "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." To emphasize just how great this power is, Paul does several things. First, he modifies "greatness" with the Greek participle, *hyperballon*, which comes from the preposition, *hyper*, meaning over, above, or beyond, and the verb, *ballo*, meaning to throw. Thus, the meaning extraordinary ("surpassing"). Second, Paul uses four different Greek words for power or strength: "power" (the Greek noun *dunamis*, from which we get our English words, "dynamite" and "dynamic"); "working" (the Greek noun, *energeia*, from which we get our English word, "energy"); "strength"; and

“might.”<sup>27</sup>

1:20

*which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,*

To emphasize just how great the power of salvation is, Paul does a third thing: he compares it to the power behind Christ’s resurrection (see also 2 Corinthians 13:4). While the Cross was the supreme demonstration of God’s love (Romans 5:8), the Resurrection was the supreme demonstration of His power.<sup>28</sup> Paul prays that the Ephesians might grasp the power of their salvation (he prays the same for himself in Philippians 3:10). The power of salvation is seen in the way it completely deals with sin, as the following chart shows:

<b>Chronological Standpoint</b>	<b>Aspect of Sin Dealt With</b>	<b>Biblical Terminology</b>	<b>Doctrinal Term</b>
Past	Penalty	have been saved	Justification
Present	Power	are being saved	Sanctification
Future	Presence	will be saved	Glorification

Let us not lose sight of the fact that this power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is at work in us (Ephesians 3:20)! So, “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Ephesians 6:10; see also Ephesians 3:16 and Colossians 1:11)! In regards to all of this, see also Romans 6:1-13.

1:21

*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

Paul concluded verse 20 by mentioning Christ’s exaltation, setting the stage for what he is about to say in the verses to follow. God the Father exalted Christ to a position of honor and authority (the idea behind “right hand” in verse 20). This exalted position places Christ far above (spatially, but more so positionally) all angelic beings—“rule,” “authority,” “power,” and

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<sup>27</sup>“Paul here piles up four different words for power, suggesting that he needs to stretch the language to its limits to indicate the amazing divine strength available for believers” (Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, p. 42). “The heaping up of words suggests the idea of power the very telling of which exhausts the resources of language and finally defies description” (Vaughan, p. 37).

<sup>28</sup>“The resurrection introduces to us that which overcomes death, a power alongside of which the mightiest of human forces is seen for the puny thing it is” (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 46).

“dominion” being designations for angels (see Ephesians 3:10 and 6:12).<sup>29</sup> In words reminiscent of Philippians 2:9, God the Father has also exalted God the Son far above any present or future dignitary, “name” being a designation of rank or honor (Bruce, p. 273).

#### 1:22

*And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,*

The first half of verse 22 continues the thought of verse 21. Christ’s exaltation means the subjection of all things to Him (see also 1 Corinthians 15:27). The imagery is that of the defeated subjecting himself to the victor by throwing himself at the victor’s feet (see Psalm 110:1 and Philippians 2:10).

The last half of verse 22 and all of verse 23 are quite challenging to interpret. As Lincoln (p. 66) admits: “The final three clauses of the first chapter are some of the most difficult of the whole epistle for the commentator.” Perhaps Peter had these verses in mind when he wrote 2 Peter 3:16. The last half of verse 22 is the first mention in Ephesians of Christ as the “head” of the church (see also 4:15 and 5:23, as well as Colossians 1:18), a simple deduction from the fact that He is the head of all things. Christ is the ruling head of the church (as in 5:23); the church is subject to Him. The church here is a reference to the universal or invisible church, those saved during the church age (from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture).<sup>30</sup>

#### 1:23

*which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

Commenting on the difficulty of interpreting this verse, Mitton (quoted in Lincoln, p. 72) wryly states: “the writer intends to say something very important, but precisely what that is cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.” Completing the head-body metaphor, Paul states that the church is the body of Christ (the implication being that Christ is the church’s head). In verse 23, Paul is viewing Christ as the organic head of the church (as in 4:15); the church is dependent on Him.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Bearing in mind the close connection between Ephesians and Colossians, Paul’s reference to angelic beings here is likely an allusion to the “Colossian heresy,” which included an element of angelic worship (Colossians 2:18).

<sup>30</sup>The term “body of Christ” is preferable to either “invisible church” or “universal church” for a several reasons: 1) It is the term Scripture uses and 2) Inherent in the word, “church” is the idea of assembly; since the invisible or universal church never assembles (for obvious logistical reasons), the designations, invisible church and universal church are somewhat oxymoronic. Though the focus in Ephesians is on the church universal, the overwhelming focus of the New Testament is on the local church. This should be our focus, as well.

<sup>31</sup>The vine-branches metaphor of John 15 communicates the same idea.

Christ is the one who “fills all in all.” Christ is the only one who can fill (i.e., satisfy) what is lacking in anyone or anything. The church is composed of those who have been filled fully and completely by Christ (see Ephesians 3:19, 4:13, and Colossians 2:10), a fact which is brought out so powerfully in the hymn of 1:3-14. Christ is all we need to satisfy our every need!

### Conclusion

In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul concludes his introduction to the book by praying (verse 16b) that God the Father (through the Holy Spirit) might illuminate the minds of the Ephesians (verses 17a and 18a), so that they might grasp more fully the spiritual blessings given in 1:3-14 (“For this reason” of verse 15). Specifically, he prays that they might more fully know God (verse 17b), the hope of their heavenly home (verse 18b), the value of the inheritance He has given them (verse 18c), and His power at work within them (verse 19). This power is comparable to the power that raised Jesus from the dead (verse 20a) and exalted Him to the Father’s right hand (verse 20b). This exaltation resulted in Christ being given a superior position over everything (verse 22a), including angels (verse 21a), present and future dignitaries (verse 21b), and the church (verse 22b). Not only is the church subject to Christ, it is also dependent upon Christ (verse 23a) and fully satisfied by Christ (verse 23b).

## EPHESIANS 2:1-10

### Introduction

Having used the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ to illustrate the power of salvation in the previous section of the epistle (1:15-23), Paul now reminds his readers of their spiritual resurrection, a phenomenon that can only be attributed to God's grace.

### 2:1

*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,*

The section begins with "And," indicating a direct connection with what has been stated previously (see the Introduction above for an explanation of the connection).

Verses 1-7 comprise one sentence in the original.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, Paul places the object of the verb ("you") first in the sentence, likely for emphasis: "you, of all people" (see comments on 1:4).

The main verb will not appear until verse 5, "made alive," a reference to the doctrine of regeneration, the imparting of spiritual life to the spiritually dead (see also Colossians 2:13). Because of our sin, we are spiritually dead<sup>33</sup> (see also Isaiah 59:2, Romans 6:23a, Ephesians 2:12, and 4:18), that is, we cannot respond to spiritual stimuli (just as a corpse cannot respond to physical stimuli). Our only hope is for God to raise us from the dead spiritually. This is the first thing that happens at the moment of salvation, enabling an individual to respond to the gospel in repentant faith.

### 2:2

*in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.*

Paul continues to describe the past condition of his readers in verses two and three. Their spiritually dead state manifested itself in three gravitations: toward the world (verse two), the devil (verse two), and the flesh (verse three).

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<sup>32</sup>Most interpreters see a three-fold division: the believer's past (verses 1-3), present (verses 4-6), and future (verse 7). For a memorable illustration of this, see the story of Harry A. Ironside and the gypsy, as recounted in James Montgomery Boice (*Romans*, 2:819-820).

<sup>33</sup>The penalty for sin is death (Romans 5:12, 6:23, and James 1:15). This includes: 1) physical death, the separation of the body from the spirit (James 2:26); 2) spiritual death, the separation of the individual from God (Ephesians 2:1); and 3) eternal death, the permanent separation of the individual from God in hell (Revelation 20:15).

The “world” is the Greek word, *kosmos*, from which we get our English word, “cosmetic.” The word means arrangement. Here, Paul uses it in its pejorative sense for “the satanically organized system that hates and opposes all that is godly” (Hoehner, p. 622). It is the mindset that views life without God at the center as normal. See also Romans 12:2, James 4:4, and 1 John 2:15.

The devil is identified as “the prince of the power of the air.” Not only is Satan the prince of the world system (John 12:31; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4), he is also the prince of the demonic forces, “air” being the realm in which demons operate (see Ephesians 3:10 and 6:12).

Grammatically, “spirit” does not refer back to the devil (as in the KJV and NIV), but to the world (as in the NASB). The spirit of the world (1 Corinthians 2:12) is what energizes (“working” is the Greek verb, *energeo*) the unbeliever. Paul calls unbelievers “sons of disobedience” (see also Ephesians 5:6). The expression, “sons of” is a Hebraism, denoting the character of something (for example, “son of God” means one who is divine; “son of man” means one who is human).

### 2:3

*Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

Notice how Paul begins to include himself in the equation by switching from the second person (“you” and “your” in verses 1 and 2) to the first person (“we” and “our”) beginning here in verse three.

Not only did we gravitate toward the world and the devil before we were saved (external forces), but also toward our flesh (an internal force). The “flesh” is another name for the sin nature that dominates us prior to salvation and scuffles with us afterwards. The flesh’s domination prior to salvation is seen in the word translated “desires,” which literally means dictates or demands. To be more specific, the sin nature dominates one’s mind (see Romans 8:7).<sup>34</sup>

The natural result of all this is liability to God’s wrath (see also John 3:36, Romans 2:5, Ephesians 5:6, and Colossians 3:6). “Children of wrath” is yet another Hebraism, “children of” indicating what one deserves.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in his natural state, sinful man is spiritually dead (verse 1), spiritually dominated (verses 2-3a), and spiritually doomed (verse 3b).

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<sup>34</sup>This is what theologians call the “noetic” effects of sin, i.e., the effects of sin upon the mind (from *nous*, the Greek word for mind).

<sup>35</sup>David literally calls the rich man in Nathan’s parable a “son of death” (2 Samuel 12:5), which the NASB translates “deserves to die.” Judas Iscariot (John 17:12) is called the “son of perdition.” Likewise, the antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3) is called “the son of destruction.”

## 2:4

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*

Verse four begins with the two most glorious words (in this writer's opinion) in all of Scripture: "But God."<sup>36</sup> The brilliance of these words is magnified all the more in light of Paul's dark portrayal of the human condition apart from God in verses 1-3 (a pattern that we would do well to follow), as Paul goes from gloom (verses 1-3) to glory (verses 4f).

Paul begins to give several attributes of God that move Him to save. Here in verse four, it is His mercy and love (see also 1:4) that move Him to save. Mercy is not getting what is deserved (see Ezra 9:13 and Psalm 103:10). As Paul pointed out in the previous verse, we deserve nothing but God's wrath. Praise God, His mercy, as His grace (see 1:7 and 2:7) is "rich" (see also Psalm 103:8) and His love is "great!"

## 2:5

*even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you have been saved),*

In words reminiscent of Romans 5:6 and 8, Paul completes the thought of verse one.

In verses five and six, Paul lists three things that God has done for those who are saved, all three of which are based upon the believer's union with Christ. All three verbs begin with the Greek preposition, *sun*, meaning together or with. Once again, union with Christ is the key to any spiritual blessing we enjoy (see comments on 1:3). Christ's physical resurrection is the basis of our spiritual resurrection (as well as the basis of our future physical resurrection).

Paul ends the verse with a parenthetical statement (upon which he will elaborate in verses 8-9), identifying a third attribute of God that moves Him to save, His grace (see also 1:7). Salvation is "all of grace" (Spurgeon once wrote a book by this title). Grace is getting what is not deserved.

Interestingly, "have been saved" is in the perfect tense (as in verse 8), indicating a past event with continuing results (literally "having been and continuing to be saved"). As mentioned previously (see the chart accompanying the comments on 1:20), salvation can be viewed as a past (have been saved), present (are being saved), and future (will be saved) event. Paul is laying the groundwork for what he will say in verse 10, namely, that not only salvation (past), but also sanctification (present) is by grace alone.

## 2:6

*and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

Just as our union with Christ identifies us with Christ in His resurrection, so also it identifies us with Christ in His exaltation. Not only has Christ been set "in the heavenly places" (1:20), so

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<sup>36</sup>Unfortunately, the NIV fails to bring out the Greek word order. The KJV, NASB, and ESV do, however.

have we by virtue of our union with Him.<sup>37</sup> As explained previously (see comments on 1:3), Paul is speaking in positional (as opposed to experiential) terms here. Though experientially we dwell on earth, positionally we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20).<sup>38</sup> This earth is not our home, we're "just a passin' through" (see Hebrews 11:13 and 1 Peter 1:17). Accordingly, Paul commands the Colossians to set their affections on things above, not on things here below (Colossians 3:1-2). Christ's exaltation is the basis of our future exaltation. Its fulfillment is so certain, it can be spoken of as having already taken place (as in Romans 8:30).

## 2:7

*so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Here in verse seven, Paul gives the reason why God saved us. God saved us so that He might be able to magnify His gracious character (see also 1:6) throughout eternity.<sup>39</sup> We are "trophyies of His grace" (what a "show-and-tell" session we're going to have in glory!). Like God's mercy (2:4), His grace is rich (see also 1:7). It is not just rich, it is surpassing (*huperballo*—see comments on 1:19) rich. Praise God that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20)! As the songwriter has written: "Grace that is greater than all our sin." Paul could readily testify to this fact (see 1 Timothy 1:14).

Somewhat synonymous with God's grace is His kindness (see also Titus 3:4), His "love in tender action" (Wood, p. 36) or "sympathetic concern" (Lincoln, p. 110).

## 2:8

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;*

Paul now resumes the thought with which he ended verse five. Salvation is by grace through faith. Grace is its basis, while faith is its means (Christ is its object). Faith is not the cause of our salvation; rather, it is the conduit. Saving faith is the knowledge of (mind), assent to (emotion), and trust in (will) the person and work of Christ (Romans 10:9) as the only means of deliverance from sin and its consequences.

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<sup>37</sup> "...[I]t staggers the imagination to be told that the enthronement with Christ is already an accomplished fact. Paul is presenting the matter from God's point of view, and in the mind of God our position in Christ is fixed and certain" (Vaughan, pp. 49-50).

<sup>38</sup>D. A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 179) states: "Of course, in one sense I'm still here, not there. But because God views me as 'in Christ,' and Christ is seated with his Father in the heavenlies, therefore God views me as there in principle. That is my destination; that is where I properly belong."

<sup>39</sup>"It will take the unending ages of eternity itself to display adequately the opulence of God's grace" (Kent, p. 38).

There is some debate as to the antecedent of “that.” Being neuter, it is most likely a reference to the entire phrase that precedes it. In other words, salvation in every respect is not of (literally “from” or “out of”) ourselves. There is nothing inherent within ourselves that in any way contributes to our salvation. Man participates in salvation by exercising repentant faith (though, as we shall see, both of these ultimately come from God); man does not cooperate in salvation. He cannot cooperate in salvation, because he is spiritually dead (2:1). Salvation is a gift (see Romans 5:15-17 and 6:23). Repentance (see Acts 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25) and faith (see Acts 14:27 and Philippians 1:29) are gifts.

### 2:9

*not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

The flip side of the fact that salvation is by grace is that it is not of works (see especially Romans 11:6; see also 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 3:5).

Since salvation is all of grace, there is absolutely no room for boasting on our part (see also Romans 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 4:7). “Because fallen human nature is so prone to boast of its accomplishments and to take credit where there is even the slightest occasion, God devised a plan to save men in their hopelessness which allows no grounds whatever for human pride to operate” (Kent, p. 39). Our only boast is in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:31) and in the Cross (Galatians 6:14)!

### 2:10

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

If Paul hasn’t made his point already, he concludes this section by pointing out to his readers that not only are they saved by grace, but also that they are sanctified by grace.

Believers are God’s “workmanship” (see also Philippians 1:6). The Greek word is *poiema*, from which we get our English word, “poem.” The word denotes a work of art or a masterpiece (Hoehner, p. 624). We are God’s masterpiece (see also verse 7)! At salvation, we were “created” a second time, spiritually (see 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:24, and Colossians 3:10).<sup>40</sup>

The inevitable outcome of true salvation is good works (see also James 2:14-26). Though we are not saved by works (verse 9), we are saved for good works (verse 10). Works are not the cause of salvation, but they are the consequence of salvation. It is by faith alone that one is saved, but the faith that saves is never alone. As part of His predestined plan, God ordained that those who would be saved would manifest their salvation by their works. “[Paul] wants his readers to be absolutely clear that it is God, and not humans, who is to be given the credit for salvation, and that means the whole of salvation, including believers’ good works” (Lincoln, p. 118). All of

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<sup>40</sup>“Just as humans contributed nothing to their own creation so also they contributed nothing to their new creation; both are God’s work” (Lincoln, p. 114).

this, however, does not eliminate human responsibility (compare especially Philippians 2:12 with 2:13; see also Titus 3:8 in a similar context).

### Conclusion

In the third section of his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul reminds his readers that their salvation is “all of grace.” He begins by reminding them of their past condition (verses 1-3), which he describes as a state of spiritual death (verse 1), evidenced by a gravitation to the world (verse 2), the devil (verse 2), and the flesh (verse 3). As a result, they deserved nothing but God’s wrath (verse 3). However, God, because of His mercy (verse 4), love (verse 4), grace (verses 5, 7, and 8), and kindness (verse 7), delivered them from such misery by saving them, making them alive (verse 5), raising them up (verse 6), and seating them in the heavenlies (verse 6), all by virtue of their union with Christ. His purpose for doing all of this was to magnify His grace (verse 7). Paul concludes the section by firmly establishing the fact that salvation (verses 8-9) and the good works it inevitably produces (verse 10; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:10 and Titus 2:12) are attributable solely to God’s grace. As the songwriter has written, grace is amazing!

## **EPHESIANS 2:11-22**

### Introduction

Having reminded his readers of their dire condition in the previous section of the epistle (2:1-10), Paul continues this emphasis in the fourth major section, reminding his readers that, as Gentiles, their condition was particularly bleak. But once again, God intervened (2:13's "But now"), reconciling them unto Himself and bringing Jew and Gentile together to form a "third race," the church.

#### 2:11

*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—*

Paul begins this section of the letter with "therefore," indicating a direct connection with the previous section (see the Introduction above for an explanation of the connection).<sup>41</sup> As in the previous section (2:1-10), Paul wants his readers to remember their past condition ("formerly"). How prone we are to forget from where we have come! "Remember" (start of verses 11 and 12).

The Ephesians were predominantly Gentiles by birth ("in the flesh"). Consequently, they were despised by the Jews. A devout Jew would daily pray: "God, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile." The Jews called Gentiles, "uncircumcised," a term of derision (see, for example, 1 Samuel 17:36). The Jews, on the other hand, were called "circumcised" (see Galatians 2:7-9), all Jewish males being physically ("by human hands"<sup>42</sup>) circumcised eight days after birth (see Philippians 3:5).

#### 2:12

*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.*

Here in verse twelve, Paul explains the spiritual significance of the fact that his readers were Gentiles, pointing out five facets of their alienated condition.

First, they were "separate from Christ." Significantly, Paul uses "Christ," the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew, "Messiah." Salvation was "from the Jews" (John 4:22); in order to be saved, one had to go through the Jews, so to speak. For a Gentile, this meant becoming a Jewish proselyte (Ruth is a prime example). The overwhelming majority of Gentiles (including Paul's readers), however, had nothing to do with the Jews and remained, therefore, without Christ.

Second, the Gentiles were "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel." They did not share in

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<sup>41</sup>"Both passages [2:1-10 and 2:11-22], with their reminders of the readers' changed situation as a result of what has happened in Christ, can be seen as connected with the desire expressed in the thanksgiving period of 1:15-23 that the readers should have an increased appreciation of the power of God that has been operative on their behalf" (Lincoln, p. 131).

<sup>42</sup>Elsewhere, Paul speaks of the "circumcision made without hands" (Colossians 2:11), i.e., spiritual circumcision or circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29).

the special status accorded Israel (see Deuteronomy 33:29, Psalm 147:19-20, and Romans 9:4-5); they were outsiders looking in.

Third, they were “strangers to the covenants of promise.” They were not privy to the covenants made with and the corresponding promises made to the Jews, such as the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3), the Palestinian covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-16), and the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Fourth, the Gentiles had “no hope,” being without Christ, “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), and without “the God of hope” (Romans 15:13); the future held no promise for them.

Fifth, they were “without God in the world.” They were separated from God. Hendriksen (p. 131) summarizes their state as “mariners who without compass and guide were adrift in a rudderless ship during a starless night on a tempestuous sea, far away from the harbor.”

### 2:13

*But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

In words reminiscent of 2:4, Paul contrasts their previous blight (verses eleven and twelve) with their present bliss (verse thirteen). Like “but God” in 2:4, “but now” is first in the original, for emphasis. Just as God was the key to their turnaround in 2:4, so He is here.

Because Paul’s readers are now “in Christ Jesus”—as opposed to being without Him (verse 12)—their alienation (verse twelve) has given way to reconciliation (verse thirteen). Because of our sin, we were separated from God (Isaiah 59:2). Praise God, however, Christ reconciled us to God by His death<sup>43</sup> on the cross (see Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:20-22).

Though Paul is speaking specifically of Gentiles here (“you who formerly were far off”; cf. Acts 2:39), the succeeding verses show that the condition of the unbelieving Jew was the same.

### 2:14

*For He himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,*

Verses 14-18 are somewhat parenthetical, as Paul takes time to show how the reconciliation with God (vertical) described in verse thirteen leads to reconciliation with one’s fellow man (horizontal).

Paul begins verse fourteen with an emphatic stress upon Christ as the catalyst of reconciliation, as the Greek literally reads “for he he is our peace,” the repetition of the subject being for emphasis—“He himself” (so NASB, NIV, and ESV) or “he and no other.” Christ’s death made the reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles (notice the “our”) to God possible, which made their

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<sup>43</sup>That “blood” is synonymous with death is seen by a comparison of Romans 5:9 with Romans 5:10.

reconciliation to one another possible.<sup>44</sup> The radical nature of this horizontal reconciliation is difficult for us to fully grasp.<sup>45</sup> The Jews and Gentiles were bitter opponents. The Jews called the Gentiles “dogs”; the Gentiles called the Jews “barbarians.” Yet, Christ made both groups one (see also Galatians 3:28) by breaking down the wall that separated them.

What exactly is this “barrier of the dividing wall,” or “the barrier formed by the dividing wall” (as Hendriksen, p. 127 translates it)? Most likely, it is the Mosaic Law (see verse fifteen). “It can easily be seen that in functioning as a fence to protect Israel from the impurity of the Gentiles, the law became such a sign of Jewish particularism that it also alienated Gentiles and became a cause of hostility” (Lincoln, p. 141). Another suggestion for the “barrier of the dividing wall” is the “temple balustrade,” the barrier in the temple beyond which no Gentile was allowed to go.<sup>46</sup> Ironically, Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (during which he wrote these words) resulted from his being falsely accused of bringing a Gentile from Ephesus named Trophimus past this point (see Acts 21:28-29).

## 2:15

*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,*

Christ reconciled Jew and Gentile to one another by removing the source of hostility between them, the Law (see comments on 2:14). He did so by “abolishing” (nullifying, invalidating) the Law “in His flesh,” that is, through His incarnation. During His incarnation, Christ both fulfilled the Law’s demand of perfection through His sinless life (see Matthew 5:17) and paid its penalty of death through His crucifixion (see Galatians 3:13 and Colossians 2:14). The result was the formation of a “third race,” as the early church called themselves (see 1 Corinthians 10:32), consisting of both Jews and Gentiles on equal footing (see Ephesians 3:6). No longer did the Gentiles have to become Jewish proselytes to have access to God (see comments on 2:12).

The verb translated “make” is the Greek verb for create. God literally created (spiritually) a new entity when He formed the church (see also Galatians 6:15), the “one new man.”

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<sup>44</sup>Once again (see footnote 23), Hendriksen’s magnet and spoked wheel analogies are in order.

<sup>45</sup>In a classic case of understatement, Bruce (p. 301) says: “To us the abolition of the barrier separating Jews and Gentiles may not be so revolutionary as it was for Paul and his associates.”

<sup>46</sup>The balustrade allegedly contained an inscription that read: “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death” (Wood, p. 40).

2:16

*and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.*

Having focused on the horizontal reconciliation between Jew and Gentile in verses fourteen and fifteen, Paul returns (as in verse thirteen) to the vertical reconciliation that makes the horizontal reconciliation possible. Not only did Christ's death on the Cross result in the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, but even more importantly the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to God.<sup>47</sup> Once God's enemies (Romans 5:10), we have now been reconciled to Him. Therefore, enmity no longer exists between God and us.

The "one body" (see also 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:4, and Colossians 3:15) is yet another reference to the church.

2:17

*AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;*

Rather than being at enmity with God, we are now at peace with Him. The words of verse seventeen are taken from Isaiah 57:19 (thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB). Those who were "FAR AWAY" were the Gentiles (see comments on 2:13), while those who were "NEAR" were the Jews (see Psalm 148:14). Christ's death made it possible for His apostles to preach the "gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15), that is, the gospel that brings peace, to both Jew and Gentile. It is in this sense that Christ "PREACHED" peace to both of these groups (see 2 Corinthians 5:20). It is only by placing one's faith in Jesus Christ, "the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), that one can have "peace with God" (Romans 5:1) and peace with his fellow man.<sup>48</sup>

2:18

*for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

Notice how all three persons of the Godhead are involved in this process of horizontal reconciliation. It is only through Christ that the access to God the Father that reconciliation brings is possible (see John 14:6, Ephesians 3:12, 1 Timothy 2:5, and Hebrews 10:19-20).

The Greek word translated "access" was used of the official in an oriental court who conducted visitors into the king's presence (Wood, p. 41). Formerly, Paul's readers were without God (verse twelve), but now they have access to Him. The connection between peace (verse

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<sup>47</sup>Hendriksen (p. 147) aptly points out: "This is an amazing fact, namely, that the very cross which to the Jews had been a stumblingblock and to the Gentiles foolishness [1 Corinthians 1:23] was the means whereby the double reconciliation was secured."

<sup>48</sup>"The reason why there is so much strife in this world, between individuals, families, social or political groups, whether small or large, is that the contending parties, through the fault of either or both, have not found each other at Calvary" (Hendriksen, p. 136).

seventeen) and access (verse eighteen) made here is also made in Romans 5:1-2.

Our access to the Father is “in one Spirit” (see also 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Ephesians 4:4). The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is testimony to our sonship, giving us the right to call God “Father” (see Romans 8:15).

#### 2:19

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are God’s household,*

Paul once again picks up where he left off in verse thirteen (notice how he switches back to the second person—“you”). In light of what Paul has said in the parenthetical section of verses 14-18 (“So then”), his Gentile readers are no longer alienated from the Jews (verse twelve), but are “fellow citizens” with them, both groups now taking on a new, similar designation, “saints.” Formerly “without God” (verse twelve), they are now members of His household (see Romans 9:25-26).

#### 2:20

*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,*

Paul, fond as he is of metaphors, likens his readers to building blocks here in verse twenty. The Ephesians are building blocks in the structure of the church (see also 1 Peter 2:5), a church whose foundation consisted of Christ, along with the apostles and prophets.

Elsewhere, Christ is likened to a foundation (see 1 Corinthians 3:11), but here Paul is more explicit, likening Christ to a cornerstone (see also Isaiah 28:16, quoted in 1 Peter 2:6). The cornerstone was the most crucial part of the building, being the first stone set and the one with which all the others had to line up. “It was the stone on which the stability of the whole building depended” (Vaughan, p. 66).

The apostles (such as Peter, Matthew 16:18) were certainly foundational to the church, being the ones responsible for the writing of the New Testament (see comments on 1:1 for more information on the office of apostle). The prophets<sup>49</sup> spoken of here (cf. 4:11) are of the New Testament variety. Like the apostles, the prophets received direct revelation from God (3:5). Unlike the apostles, however, they did not record such revelation. The prophets also differed from the apostles in that the apostles revealed permanent truths for the benefit of the entire church throughout history, while the prophets revealed temporary truths for the benefit of the early church pertaining to the unique circumstances they encountered.<sup>50</sup> Yet another difference between the two offices is the fact that the apostles ministered primarily among the unsaved, while the prophets ministered primarily among the saved. The apostles and prophets were

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<sup>49</sup>An example of a New Testament prophet was Agabus (see Acts 11:28 and 21:10-11).

<sup>50</sup>F.W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, p. 287.

crucial to the church's founding (see also 1 Corinthians 12:28), giving it the guidance it so desperately needed early on. Once the New Testament canon was completed, however, they were no longer needed and passed from the scene—the foundation had been laid.

#### 2:21

*in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,*

By virtue of Christ being the cornerstone, the entire building of the church (1 Corinthians 3:9) is “fitted together” (Paul conveys the same idea, but with a different image, in Ephesians 4:16).

Unlike a literal building, the church is a living organism (“is growing”). The verb translated “growing” is in the present tense, indicating that the building of the superstructure was still in progress. Christ promised that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). If you are saved, you also are a building block in this grand edifice.

Paul finishes this section of the letter by using the imagery of a temple. Though some see an allusion to the temple of Diana located in Ephesus, Paul most likely has the Jerusalem temple in mind. Not only can individual believers (see 1 Corinthians 6:19) and local churches (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 2 Corinthians 6:16) be spoken of as the temple of God, but so also the body of Christ (as here).

#### 2:22

*in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*

Notice how all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned in this verse.

The temple was the place where God's presence, the “Shekinah Glory,” was concentrated (see 1 Kings 8:10-11). By virtue of the Spirit's indwelling of each believer individually (1 Corinthians 6:19), the corporate body can also be thought of as indwelt by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). No longer is God's presence to be found in the Jewish temple; now it is found in the church.

#### Conclusion

In the fourth major section of the epistle to the Ephesians (2:11-22), Paul further reminds his readers (as he did in the previous section, 2:1-10) of their perilous past, this time from the standpoint of the Jew-Gentile divide. He begins by establishing the fact that they are Gentiles in the flesh (2:11), then “fleshing out” (no pun intended) the spiritual implications of this fact (2:12). All is not lost, however, as Paul reminds the Ephesians that their alienation from God has been ended through the reconciling work of Christ (2:13). Not only has their alienation from God been ended, but so also their alienation from the Jews, also due to the reconciling work of Christ (2:14-15). Their horizontal reconciliation with the Jews was made possible only by virtue of their vertical reconciliation to God (2:16-18). As a result of all this, the Gentiles are now on equal footing with the Jews in the new spiritual entity called the church (2:19a), which Paul likens to a household (2:19b), a building (2:20-21a), and a temple (2:21b-22).

## EPHESIANS 3:1-13

### Introduction

In the fifth major section of the Ephesian letter, Paul begins to record his second prayer<sup>51</sup> for the Ephesians, but suspends it (until the next section, 3:14-21), as seen by the dash at the end of verse 1. Apparently, the mention of himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles” at the end of verse 1 prompted Paul to digress into a discussion of his special role as the apostle to the Gentiles in verses 2-13.

### 3:1

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

As mentioned in the Introduction, Paul begins this section with prayer on his mind. Verse one is the introduction to the second of his prayers for the Ephesians (the first is in 1:15-23).

Paul calls himself “the prisoner of Christ Jesus” (see also 4:1, Philemon 1, and 9). Notice that he does not call himself the prisoner of Rome. Some see a double allusion here. As Lincoln (p. 173) states: “[Paul] can use the term ‘prisoner’ in both a literal and metaphorical sense at the same time, so that his physical imprisonment can be seen as simply the consequence of his spiritual captivity to Christ.”

Paul says that his imprisonment is “for the sake of you Gentiles.” This was certainly the case, as Paul was arrested and imprisoned because of his association with a Gentile, Trophimus (see Acts 21:28-29). Interestingly, Trophimus was from Ephesus. So, when Paul says “you,” he may specifically have the Ephesians in mind.

### 3:2

*if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you;*

As mentioned in the Introduction, the prayer that Paul began in verse one is abruptly ended, to be resumed in verse fourteen. Here in verse two, Paul begins a digression.

He begins with a conditional clause (an “if” clause) that reflects a Greek grammatical construction in which the statement in the “if” clause is assumed to be true (the “if” could be translated “since”). His readers had heard of Paul’s special commission to the Gentiles (“for you”).

Paul describes this commission in terms of a “stewardship.” From the divine standpoint, this is an arrangement or administration. From the human standpoint, it is a stewardship, trust, or commission. Paul had been given a special stewardship, trust, or commission to take “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24) to the Gentiles (see also 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and Colossians

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<sup>51</sup>Wood (p. 44) is of the opinion that this is merely a continuation of the first prayer: “Paul continues the prayer that he began in the opening chapter and has never really abandoned, despite asides and digressions.”

1:25<sup>52</sup>). The description of this commission as “of God’s grace” is certainly appropriate, as Paul will attest in the following verses.

3:3

*that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.*

The gracious character of Paul’s commission is seen by the fact that it was made known to him “by revelation” (see also Galatians 1:11-12). God was under no obligation to reveal anything to man, but graciously chose to reveal some information regarding His plan to the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles.

Paul, being an apostle (see 1:1), received a particularly special revelation, one that he calls a “mystery” here. Biblically, a mystery is something newly revealed (see Romans 16:25-26, 1 Corinthians 2:7-10, Ephesians 3:5, and Colossians 1:26). Most agree that this particular mystery was revealed to Paul on the Damascus road (see Acts 26:16-18).

What is this mystery? Paul says that he has already written about it. Where? Earlier in this same epistle (2:11-22).

3:4

*By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,*

Paul was confident that when the Ephesians read what he had just written in the previous section of the epistle, they too would come to understand what this mystery was. Paul describes the mystery as being “of Christ” (see also Colossians 4:3). Christ was the key figure in the mystery, the One who made it possible (see comments on 2:14).

3:5

*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;*

Like any biblical mystery, this one was unrevealed to previous generations of men (“sons of men” is a Hebraism for mankind). Now, however, it had been revealed, not only to Paul, but also to Paul’s fellow apostles, as well as to the prophets (see comments on 2:20 for a description of these two New Testament offices).

The apostles were “holy” in that they were set apart (the basic meaning of the word, “holy”) to be the recipients and recorders of the New Testament Scriptures (see also 2 Peter 1:21).

The revelation the apostles and prophets received was “in the Spirit,” the Holy Spirit of God being the agent of revelation (see John 14:26, 16:13-15, 1 Corinthians 2:10, and 2 Peter 1:21).

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<sup>52</sup>There are many striking similarities between this section of Ephesians and Colossians 1:23-28 (one may consider consulting the chart in Lincoln, p. 169).

### 3:6

*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,*

Paul finally gets around to telling his readers what this mystery actually is. The mystery was not Gentile salvation, as this had already been revealed (see Acts 15:14-17, Romans 1:2, 9:24-26, and Galatians 3:8).<sup>53</sup> The mystery was that Jew and Gentile were now on equal footing; no longer did the Gentile have to become a Jewish proselyte to have access to God. As Bruce (p. 314) states: “[The mystery] was this: that God’s blessing of the Gentiles would involve the obliteration of the old line of demarcation which separated them from the Jews and the incorporation of Gentile believers together with Jewish believers, without any discrimination, in the new, comprehensive community of God’s chosen people.” The breaking down of the “barrier of the dividing wall” (2:14) effectively opened the flood gates to Gentile salvation, allowing Gentiles en masse to share in the spiritual blessings that, to this point, were, for all practical purposes, the domain of the believing Jew.

These spiritual blessings included an inheritance (see comments on 1:11). Consequently, the Gentiles were “fellow heirs” with the Jews (see also Galatians 3:29). Not only that, the Gentiles were “fellow members of the body” with the Jews, the church (cf. 2:16 and 4:4, as well as John 10:16, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Galatians 3:28). This was such a radical concept that Paul had to coin a new Greek word to describe it, *sussoma*, from *sun*, meaning “with,” and *soma*, meaning “body.” The Gentiles were also partakers “of the promise.” The backdrop of this statement is likely 2:12 (see also Galatians 3:29). It is difficult to know exactly how Gentiles partake in the promises made to the Jews. Lincoln (p. 181) contends that “for the new community the promise now has its own distinctive Christian content, and, in this, Gentile Christians are participants together with Jewish Christians, with no difference between them.”

All of this is possible only by virtue of being united with Christ (“in Christ Jesus”), a relationship that comes only “through [belief in] the gospel” (see Romans 1:16).

### 3:7

*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.*

Paul now returns to the thought with which he opened this digression, emphasizing once again the grace that enabled him not only to unveil the mystery, but also to proclaim it.

Paul was made a minister of the gospel (see also Colossians 1:23); he did not make himself one. Interestingly, the word translated “minister” was used to describe those who waited on tables. Paul was made a minister only because of God’s grace. “Ephesians has already stressed that salvation is all of grace (2:8-10). Now it makes clear that the apostleship which was instrumental in bringing that salvation to the Gentiles was also all of grace. As the readers have been reminded in chap. 2 of what they have become through God’s grace, so now in chap. 3 they

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<sup>53</sup>See also the many Old Testament references listed by Hendriksen on p. 154 of his commentary.

are also reminded of what the apostle became through that same grace” (Lincoln, p. 193). Most likely, “gift” should be taken as a reference to Paul’s ability to effectively minister to Gentiles (see Galatians 2:9). This ability was not native to Paul, but was energized (the Greek noun translated “working” is *energeia*, from which we get our English word, energy) by God’s power (the Greek noun translated “power” is *dunamis*, from which we get our English word, dynamite). See also Colossians 1:29.

3:8

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,*

Paul continues his emphasis upon the gracious nature of his commission by expressing how unworthy he is of it.

The words, “to me” are first in the original, for emphasis (to me, of all people).

Paul calls himself “the very least” of all saints. The Greek adjective translated “the very least” is an unusual one. It is *elachistotero*. The reason why it is so unusual is because it combines a superlative, *elachistos* (“least”), with a comparative ending, *oteros* (“-er” or “more”). A literal translation would be “leaster” or “more least.” Self-deprecating statements such as this one were not foreign to Paul (see also 1 Corinthians 15:8-9 and 1 Timothy 1:15).

By God’s grace, Paul was given the special commission of reaching the Gentiles (see Acts 9:15, 26:17, Romans 11:13, 15:16, Galatians 2:7-9, 1 Timothy 2:7, and 2 Timothy 1:11). The content of Paul’s preaching to the Gentiles was “the unfathomable riches of Christ.” The Greek word translated “unfathomable” is an interesting one. It is *anexichniastos*, which comes from *ichnos*, meaning “footprint.” Paul is saying that the riches of Christ are so great that they cannot be tracked, as one would track footprints. Already in the epistle, Paul has made reference to the riches of God’s grace (1:7 and 2:7), inheritance (1:18), and mercy (2:4). The riches he is speaking of here is Christ Himself (“riches of Christ”=the riches that are Christ). See also Colossians 1:27.

3:9

*and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;*

Paul’s commission included the unveiling of the mystery to all men. Paul was “to shed a flood of light on [the mystery], so that no one would be in the dark about it anymore” (Wood, p. 47). “As Paul fulfilled his commission by preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, as through his preaching Gentiles were brought to faith in Christ and found themselves united in church fellowship with fellow-believers of Jewish birth, the long-hidden mystery was being revealed before the eyes of men and women” (Bruce, p. 319).

Though this mystery (Jew and Gentile on equal footing) was previously unrevealed (“hidden”), it was not unplanned. It was in the mind of God from the beginning of time (“for ages”), even before time (see 3:11)!

3:10

*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.*

Once again (see comments on 1:10), a bigger picture is involved here. The unveiling of the mystery was not only for the sake of men (verse 9), but also for the sake of the angels (“the rulers and the authorities in heavenly places”; see comments on 1:21). Specifically, the unveiling of the mystery led to an increased perception of the wisdom of God (see also 1 Corinthians 2:7) by the angels. This wisdom is qualified by the Greek adjective, *polupoikilos*, from *polus*, meaning “much,” and *poikilos*, meaning “manifold.” The same word is used in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to describe Joseph’s coat of many colors. The church is God’s object lesson to the angels; it is the mirror through which God’s multi-splendored wisdom is seen.<sup>54</sup> The angels are spectators of God’s spiritual creation (see comments on 2:15), the church (see also 1 Peter 1:12), just as they were spectators of God’s physical creation (see Job 38:4-7).

3:11

*This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,*

As mentioned previously (see comments on 3:9), all of this is simply the outworking of God’s eternal plan, a plan in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the key figure (see comments on 3:4)

3:12

*in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.*

In words reminiscent of 2:18, Paul reminds his readers that it is only through Christ (more specifically, through faith in Him) that access to God is possible (on “access,” see comments on 2:18). Because Christ has made a way to the Father (see John 14:6) through His cross work, we may boldly (see Hebrews 4:16 and 10:19-20) and confidently approach the Father. Believers are “those who lack any fear or shame and have nothing to conceal, because they are assured of God’s gracious disposition toward them in Christ” (Lincoln, p. 190).

3:13

*Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.*

Paul concludes this section of the epistle by exhorting the Ephesians not to become disheartened over his imprisonment (now five years in duration). In both the first (3:1) and last (3:13) verses of this section, Paul reminds the Ephesians that his imprisonment is for their sakes (cf. Colossians 1:24). Rather than using this fact as a ploy to gain the sympathy of his readers, Paul

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<sup>54</sup>“The church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, is a mirror, in which the angels behold the astonishing wisdom of God displayed in a manner unknown to them before” (John Calvin, quoted in Hendriksen, p. 159). “Here it will help us to imagine a cosmic drama. The theatre is history. The stage is the world. The actors are the Church. The writer is God, who directs and produces the drama. And the audience? Cosmic beings” (Hughes, pp. 108-109).

uses it in a whole different light (as he does in the book of Philippians). His imprisonment is their “glory,” he says. Though Paul’s faithful stewardship of the mystery entrusted to him led to his imprisonment, it also led to the salvation of his readers (see also 2 Corinthians 1:6 and 2 Timothy 2:10).

### Conclusion

In the fifth major section of Ephesians (3:1-13), Paul takes time out from a prayer he starts in verse one to discuss with his readers his special commission as the apostle to the Gentiles (verses 2-13). This commission was graciously given to Paul by God (verses 2, 7, and 8). It was received by special revelation (verse 3a), the content of which was the mystery of the church (verses 3b-6), a mystery that magnified the wisdom of God in the sight of the angels (verse 10) and was part of God’s eternal plan (verse 11). Paul was to make the mystery known to all men (verse 9). As the gospel of the mystery was received by faith in God the Son, the recipients received bold and confident access to God the Father (verse 12). Finally, Paul points out that his commission, though having led to his imprisonment, ultimately led to the salvation of Gentiles, including his readers (verse 13).

## EPHESIANS 3:14-21

### Introduction

In the sixth major section of the Ephesian letter, Paul records his second prayer for the Ephesians<sup>55</sup>, a prayer that he began in 3:1, abruptly postponed in 3:2, and resumed in 3:14. In studying this section, reference should be made to chapter 11 of D.A. Carson's book, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*.

### 3:14

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,*

Paul restarts his prayer (compare the opening words of this verse with 3:1) with the words, "For this reason." This is a reference to the section that preceded the initial prayer attempt, 2:11-22. More specifically, it may be a reference to 2:18, in which Paul mentions the concept of access to God. Lending credence to this connection is the fact that Paul repeats this concept a few verses earlier, in 3:12. It is this access that allows Paul (or any believer, for that matter) to pray (see Hebrews 4:16). Another possibility is that the connection is with 2:22, something Paul specifically prays for in 3:17. If so, this is an example of praying according to the revealed will of God.

Paul's prayer posture ("I bow my knees") is one of many described in Scripture.<sup>56</sup>

### 3:15

*from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,*

Paul's prayer is addressed to God the Father (see verse 14), "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name" (verse 15). There are two possibilities here. Paul may be speaking of God as Creator of all things, whether in heaven or on earth (see Colossians 1:16; see also Psalm 147:4, where God names the stars that He has created). Thus, He is Father in that He is the One ultimately responsible for man's physical birth. A more likely option is that Paul is speaking of God as the Father of the church (see 2:19 and 4:6), i.e., He is Father in that He is the One ultimately responsible for the believer's spiritual birth (see John 1:12-13). God's spiritual family, the church (those saved after Pentecost), consists of those already in heaven and those still on earth.

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<sup>55</sup> Commenting on this prayer, Vaughan (p. 78) writes: "The prayer [of Ephesians 3:14-21] is generally acknowledged to be the most sublime, the most far-reaching, and the most majestic prayer found anywhere in Paul's Epistles, or possibly in the whole Bible. Compared with it, much that passes for prayer in our experience is hardly deserving of the name."

<sup>56</sup> Besides kneeling (cf. 1 Kings 8:54, Ezra 9:5, Daniel 6:10, Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60, 9:40, and 21:5) there are several other legitimate prayer postures, such as standing (1 Kings 8:22, Mark 11:25, Luke 18:11, and 13), sitting (2 Samuel 7:18//1 Chronicles 17:16), and lying prostrate (Numbers 16:22, Ezra 10:1, Joshua 5:14, and Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:35).

### 3:16

*that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man,*

Paul now begins to make specific request for his readers. He prays that God would answer (“grant”) his requests “according to the riches of His glory” (cf. Philippians 4:19). Much has been made of the fact that Paul says “according to” rather than “out of” or “from” (see also 1:7). Wiersbe (p. 32; emphasis his) writes: “How marvelous that God does not give the Spirit’s power to us ‘out of His riches’ but ‘according to’—which is a far greater thing. If I am a billionaire and I give you ten dollars, I have given you *out of* my riches; but if I give you a million dollars, I have given to you *according to* my riches. The first is a *portion*; the second is a *proportion*.” Because God is infinitely rich, we can never, within His will, ask Him for too much. As John Newton (cited in Vaughan, p. 80) once penned: “Thou art coming to a King; Large petitions with thee bring; For his grace and power are such, None can ever ask too much.” God’s glorious riches are found only in Christ (see Philippians 4:19).

Paul’s first request is that the Ephesians might be strengthened “with power” (the Greek word, *dunamis*, from which we get our English words, dynamic and dynamite) by the Holy Spirit inwardly (“in the inner man”). How unlike the focus of so many of our requests, which focus on the “outer man” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Because God’s being is infinitely weighty (in Scripture, “glory” has the idea of heaviness or weightiness; see 2 Corinthians 4:17’s “weight of glory”), He is able to bestow infinite wealth. So, there is no limit to the power He can provide. It is interesting to note the connection between strength and God’s glory elsewhere in Scripture (see, for example, Romans 6:4 and Colossians 1:11).

Hughes (p. 115) reminds us of our need for such inward spiritual strengthening when he states: “The main idea is this: just as the ill or infirm need to be strengthened so they can take in all that life has to offer, so also God’s children need to be inwardly strengthened to receive all the blessings God desires for them. Paper bags are not fit containers for valuables.”

Earlier in the letter (in 1:19), Paul prayed that the Ephesians might comprehend this power; now, he prays that God would confer it. In response to such a request, God’s power works within us (see 3:20), enabling us to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (6:10).

### 3:17

*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,*

Paul continues his first request in the first half of verse seventeen. The desired result of the inward spiritual strengthening prayed for in verse sixteen is that Christ would dwell in the hearts of the Ephesians by faith (see also John 14:23 and Galatians 2:20). Christ dwelling in the heart is analogous to the Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart, since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9; cf. Galatians 4:6). Since the Ephesians were already saved, Paul is not asking for

the Spirit's indwelling, but the Spirit's filling (see 5:18). To "dwell" means to be at home in (Hoehner, p. 631). Thus, Paul is praying that Christ may feel at home within us. D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 187) captures the idea well: "Make no mistake: when Christ first moves into our lives, he finds us in very bad repair. It takes a great deal of power to change us; and that is why Paul prays for power. He asks that God may so strengthen us by his power in our inner being that Christ may genuinely take up residence within us, transforming us into a house that pervasively reflects his own character." This is analogous to what Paul says in Galatians 4:19, that Christ would be formed in those who are saved.

Paul prays a second request for the Ephesians, beginning with the latter half of verse seventeen, in which he acknowledges the fact that the Ephesians have been "rooted and grounded in love." Paul, as he often does (see also 1 Corinthians 3:9, Ephesians 2:21, 4:16, and Colossians 2:7), mixes agricultural and architectural metaphors. The Ephesians had been rooted and founded in the soil of love. This is likely a reference to their salvation (see 1:4-5, 2:4-5, 5:2, and 25). Accordingly, the participles "rooted" and "grounded" are in the perfect tense in Greek, indicating a past event with continuing results.

### 3:18

*may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,*

Paul's second request is that the Ephesians might be able to comprehend, grasp, or perceive the significance of Christ's love for them. As in Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians (1:15-23), illumination is in order. Much has been made of Paul's multidimensional (breadth, length, and height/depth) terminology here (the same terminology is found in Job 11:8-9 in reference to God's wisdom). The basic idea is that God's love is so great it is beyond human comprehension. "The apostle is simply telling us that the love of Christ, exemplified in his magnanimity to the Gentiles, is too large to be confined by any geometrical measurements" (Wood, p. 52). According to Hughes (p. 117; emphasis his; cf. Henry, 6:700), Christ's love is *wide* enough to embrace the world (John 3:16); *long* enough to last forever (1 Corinthians 13:8); *high* enough to take sinners to Heaven (1 John 3:1-2); and *deep* enough to take Christ to the very depths to reach the lowest sinner (Philippians 2:8).

### 3:19

*and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*

Paul's second request is somewhat paradoxical, as he prays that the Ephesians might know something that passes knowledge (cf. Philippians 4:7); to comprehend what is incomprehensible; to fathom the unfathomable. The Greek verb translated "surpasses" is *huperballo* (see comments on 1:19). Though Christ's love for us cannot be *fully* known, it can be *truly* known; while it cannot be completely grasped, it can be increasingly grasped. Such knowledge, however, does not come naturally; thus, the need to pray for illumination to grasp it to some degree.

In the latter half of verse nineteen, Paul prays a third request for the Ephesians. Paul is not praying that the Ephesians might become divine (see Colossians 1:19 and 2:9). Rather, he is praying that the Ephesians might be filled (i.e., controlled) by God (see 5:18), that they might experience a state of fullness or spiritual maturity (see John 1:16, Ephesians 4:13, and Colossians 2:10). He wants them to experience practically (Christ in them) what they already are positionally (them in Christ). Several interpreters see a link between the three requests.<sup>57</sup>

### 3:20

*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,*

Paul concludes his prayer for the Ephesians (and the first half of the letter<sup>58</sup>), going from petition (verses 16-19) to praise (verses 20-21), with a doxology (from *doxa*, meaning glory or praise, and *logos*, meaning word), a word of praise.

God is able to answer the requests Paul has given because “the riches of His glory” (verse 16) are, like Himself, inexhaustible and because He is “able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” “Able” is the verb form of *dunamis*. “Far more abundantly beyond” is one word in the original, undoubtedly the strongest word at Paul’s disposal to communicate just how surpassing God’s ability to answer is. God’s ability to answer our prayers is beyond anything we ask for or could even think to ask for. God’s ability to answer is according to the power (*dunamis*) at work (*energeo*) within us (see comments on 1:19-20, as well as Colossians 1:29).

### 3:21

*to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

Words similar to these are found in Romans 16:27. The words, “to Him” are first in the original, for emphasis. God’s glory is certainly manifested through the church (as Paul has so eloquently explained in the first half of the letter) and through Christ Jesus, the church’s head. Just as the physical creation declares God’s glory (see Psalm 19:1), so also does God’s spiritual creation (see comments on 2:15). The church, as well as every individual within the church (see 1:6, 12, and 14), exists for the purpose of glorifying God.

### Conclusion

In Ephesians 3:14-21, Paul records his second prayer for his readers. He prays that the Ephesians might be strengthened within so that Christ might feel more at home within them

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<sup>57</sup>“[Paul’s prayer] is, as it were, a staircase consisting of three steps, a ladder with three rungs” (Hendriksen, p. 170). “This is a beautiful upward spiral: our capacity is strengthened according to his riches so we can appropriate more of his life; his life thus fills us and thus enlarges our capacity so we can hold more of him within” (Hughes, p. 115).

<sup>58</sup>Wood (p. 52) calls the doxology “plainly the climax of the first half of Ephesians.” Notice the same phenomenon in Romans (see Romans 11:36).

(verses 16-17a), that they might be illuminated to grasp the significance of Christ's love for them (verses 17b-19a), and that they might experience a state of fullness, or spiritual maturity (verse 19b). Paul concludes his prayer with a doxology (verses 20-21).

## EPHESIANS 4:1-16

### Introduction

Having concluded the doctrinal portion of his letter to the Ephesians (chapters 1-3), Paul now moves on to the practical portion (chapters 4-6), though, as we shall see, there is still much doctrinal truth weaved throughout the second half. This transition (notice the “therefore” in 4:1), typical in Pauline writings (see especially Romans 12:1, which begins with the same 3 Greek words as does Ephesians 4:1; cf. the book of Colossians, the first two chapters of which are primarily doctrinal, the final two chapters primarily practical), is one from doctrine to duty, from creed to conduct, from exposition to exhortation, from indicative to imperative (Hughes, p. 121), from belief to behavior.

Paul’s focus in this seventh major section of the letter is unity (perhaps something the Ephesians, like the Philippians, were struggling with). It is interesting to note the many similarities between this passage and Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 (see Lincoln, p. 229).

### 4:1

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,*

Paul, the “prisoner of the Lord” (see comments on 3:1), begins by exhorting (“implore”<sup>59</sup>) the Ephesians to “be what you are” (Hendriksen, p. 183). In the first half of the letter, Paul reminded them of who they are (in Christ). In the remainder of the letter, he will challenge them to live in light of who they are (cf. the start of Philippians 1:27). Their position must be reflected in their practice; their calling in their conduct. The Ephesians were to “walk” (see also 2:10, 4:17, 5:2, 8, and 15) in a manner befitting their high calling (see also Colossians 1:10 and 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which literally means “called out ones” (*ek*, “out” + *kaleo*, “to call”). Those who are saved have been “called out” from the world unto God. Scripture speaks of both a *general* call to salvation given to all (see Matthew 11:28), as well as an *effectual* call given only to the saved (see Matthew 22:14, Romans 1:6-7, 8:30, 1 Corinthians 1:9, and 2 Timothy 1:9). Paul is speaking in terms of the second here (see also 1:18 and 4:4).

### 4:2

*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,*

As mentioned in the Introduction, Paul’s primary focus throughout this section is unity. The key to unity is humility (see also Philippians 2:2-8; cf. the converse in Proverbs 13:10a). “The more lowly-mindedness the more like-mindedness” (Henry, 6:702). “Humility” (literally, lowly in mind) and “gentleness” were characteristics of Christ (see Matthew 11:29, as well as Philippians 2:5 and its surrounding context). Such humility and gentleness should naturally lead to the patience and forbearance spoken of in the last half of the verse.

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<sup>59</sup> In the original, “implore” is first in the sentence, for emphasis. A literal rendering would be: “Implore therefore you I the prisoner of the Lord.”

“Patience” (literally, long-tempered) and “showing tolerance” are roughly synonymous. Hendriksen (p. 184) summarizes these last two character qualities well when he states: “In view of the fact that God has been so longsuffering toward me, even though in *his* holy eyes my sins must stand out far more clearly than do my brother’s blemishes in *my* eyes, I must surely be patient with my brother.” See also Colossians 3:12-13.

#### 4:3

*being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Unity does not come naturally; it must be worked at, and continually (“being diligent” is in the present tense). The Greek verb translated “being diligent” means to take pains or to “make every effort” (NIV). As Paul has previously established earlier in the letter (see especially 2:13-19), unity between believers already exists on a positional level. Such unity, however, must be manifested on a practical level. Positional unity among believers is based on the fact of Spirit baptism (see 1 Corinthians 12:13), the judicial placement of the believer by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ at the moment of conversion (thus, unity “of the Spirit”).

#### 4:4

*There is one body, and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;*

Continuing his stress on the positional unity of believers, Paul speaks of “one body” (see also Romans 12:5 and Ephesians 2:16), the body of Christ (or the “universal” or “invisible” church).

Unity is also based on the fact that there is “one Spirit” (see also 2:18 and 4:3). It is interesting to note how all three persons of the Godhead are found in verses 4-6: the Holy Spirit in verse 4, the Son in verse 5, and the Father in verse 6.<sup>60</sup> Commenting on the significance of this fact, John R. Stott (quoted in Hughes, p. 125) states: “The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead.”

Believers are also united by virtue of the fact that they share a common hope (for “hope,” see comments on 1:18).

#### 4:5

*one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

Believers are united under “one Lord,” Jesus Christ (see also 1 Corinthians 8:6b).

They share a common faith in Christ (see 3:12), “the faith” (see Galatians 1:23 and Jude 3). Efforts at unity that downplay doctrine are counterproductive, for doctrine is designed to unite believers (cf. the start of 4:13).

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<sup>60</sup>It is also interesting to note that Paul reverses the typical functional order: Spirit, Son, and Father rather than Father, Son, and Spirit (the same phenomenon is found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

They are united by “one baptism,” Spirit baptism (see comments on 4:3), which can also be spoken of as being baptized into Christ (see Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27), in that Spirit baptism places one into Christ’s body (1 Corinthians 12:13).

4:6

*one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

Finally, believers are united positionally by virtue of the fact that they have the same Father (see comments on 3:15<sup>61</sup>). The “one God and Father” (see also 1 Corinthians 8:6a) of believers is over them (transcendent; the Creator/creature distinction), works through them (we are His instruments or agents to accomplish His purposes), and is in them (by virtue of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling). “When the Church fails to maintain and express unity, it radically undermines the credibility of its belief in the one God” (Lincoln, p. 241).

4:7

*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*

Paul now turns his focus to spiritual gifts. However, he will go on to show how the exercise of these gifts fosters unity, the primary focus of the passage. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift (see also 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, and 1 Peter 4:10). Spiritual gifts are literally “grace gifts” (*charismata*—from *charis*, the Greek word for grace). See also Romans 12:6. Paul was given a special ability to minister to the Gentiles because of God’s grace (see 3:2, 7, and 8).

4:8

*Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”*

Verses 8-10 are somewhat parenthetical, as Paul identifies when spiritual gifts were first given. Spiritual gifts were bestowed upon the church corporately or collectively at Christ’s ascension.<sup>62</sup>

Paul is quoting from Psalm 68:18 (thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB), where a victory processional is in view (in which the victor would parade the defeated army before his countrymen and divide the spoils with them<sup>63</sup>; cf. Judges 5:12 and Colossians 2:15). Paul likens Christ’s ascension to such a processional. Christ’s ascension/exaltation was visible proof of His victory over the forces of evil (see 1:20-21), that which He led captive.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>As in 3:15, Paul is speaking of God’s “redemptive Fatherhood” (Hendriksen, p. 187), rather than His creative Fatherhood.

<sup>62</sup>To be more precise, they were bestowed a few days later on the Day of Pentecost. See Acts 2:33.

<sup>63</sup>“It might be said that a conqueror, having received ‘gifts’ from the defeated enemy, bestows them . . . on the spectators lining the processional route” (Bruce, p. 343).

<sup>64</sup>Some interpreters believe that verses 8-9 are speaking of a supposed descent of Christ into

4:9

*(Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?*

This verse has puzzled interpreters for centuries. There are two major views. One is reflected in footnote 64. The other takes “of the earth” to be in apposition to “the lower parts” (in other words, “the lower parts, the earth”; so ESV), which the Greek grammar allows. Thus, Paul is referring to Christ’s incarnation. Support for this view can be found in John 3:13, 8:23, Acts 2:19, and Philippians 2:5-11. A third option would be to view this as a reference to Christ’s death/burial (see Psalm 63:9).

4:10

*He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)*

As a result of His exaltation/ascension, Christ filled all things (see also 1:23). Christ’s ascension was the capstone of His work, signifying its completion, a work that secured all that is lacking in believers (see comments on 1:23) and in the cosmos (see Romans 8:19-22).

4:11

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*

Paul once again resumes his focus on the gifts themselves, identifying several gifted individuals given to the church.

For apostles and prophets, see comments on 1:1 and 2:20.

The evangelist (such as Philip in Acts 21:8; see also 2 Timothy 4:5) was what we would consider today a missionary.<sup>65</sup> Wood (p. 58) describes them as “missionaries who pioneer outreach in areas where the faith has not as yet been proclaimed.” Hughes (p. 133) calls such individuals the “obstetricians” of the church, the pastors and teachers being the “pediatricians.”

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Hades (which at that time had two compartments, a lower one for unbelievers and a higher one for Old Testament saints, “Abraham’s bosom,” with a great gulf between the two—see the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31) in the days between His crucifixion and resurrection, during which time He preached to the “spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19; cf. 1 Peter 4:6), those in the lower compartment. According to this view, at His ascension Christ emptied out Abraham’s bosom (or Paradise), taking its occupants to Heaven and, thus, making Hades (or Hell) one compartment, the abode of the lost.

<sup>65</sup>This does not imply that there is no biblical warrant whatsoever for what we commonly call the “evangelist” today (i.e., an itinerant preacher). Though an extrabiblical office, it is not an unbiblical office. It would perhaps fall under the spiritual gift of exhortation (Romans 12:8). For more on this, one may consult William Combs, “The Biblical Role of the Evangelist,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, Fall 2002, pp. 23-48.

There is much debate as to whether “pastors and teachers” is describing two aspects of one office (pastor-teacher) or two separate offices. Based on an appeal to the Greek grammar involved,<sup>66</sup> most see one office in view. Based on White’s argument (see footnote 65), however, two offices are likely in view. The office of teacher is found elsewhere in the New Testament (see Acts 13:1 and 1 Corinthians 12:28). Though all pastors are to be teachers (see 1 Timothy 3:2 and 2 Timothy 2:24), not all teachers are pastors.

#### 4:12

*for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;*

In what Hughes (p. 134) calls “a watershed text,” Paul gives the purpose for the five gifted offices mentioned in verse eleven, all five of which are Word-related.

There is some debate as to whether 1) all three clauses in this verse refer back to verse eleven<sup>67</sup> or 2) just the first clause. Most interpreters opt for the second. Thus, the gift of pastor is given to the church for the “equipping” of the saints. The Greek verb means to make complete or supply what is lacking (see 1 Thessalonians 3:10). As pastors give themselves to “the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4), parishioners are given what is needed to do the work of the ministry. As believers do the work of the ministry (remember, they have been gifted to do so), the body of Christ is edified or built-up.

#### 4:13

*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 the dynamic of verse twelve operates, unity results. So, why did Paul launch off into a discussion of spiritual gifts back in verse 7 in the midst of a discussion about unity? Because God gave the gift of pastor (among others) to minister the Word so that 1) the positional unity of believers in the faith (4:5) might be practically attained (start of this verse) and 2) believers would be able to effectively use the gifts they have been given to do the work of the ministry, resulting in the edification of the body, which in turn results in unity.

Besides unity, other results include an increased knowledge of Christ (see comments on 1:17) and spiritual maturity (see also Colossians 1:28, as well as comments on 3:19). Commenting on the connection between unity and maturity, Wood (p. 59) flatly states: “Individualism is a mark

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<sup>66</sup>At issue is the “Granville Sharp Rule.” Though space does not permit a full explanation here, it should be pointed out that the rule does not apply to plurals (see James White’s discussion of this on pages 267-270 of his book, *The King James Only Controversy*). Thus, pastor-teacher is not necessarily correct.

<sup>67</sup>This is the view of Lincoln. Reference can also be made to an article by T. David Gordon in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 1994) entitled, “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?”

of immaturity.”

On an even more practical level, consider this: When believers are busy doing the work of the ministry, unity results. The flip side of this is that when believers are not busy doing the work of the ministry (i.e., not on the “front lines”), they tend to sit back and become critical, thus hindering the unity of the church.

#### 4:14

*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;*

The importance of the Word-based gifts mentioned in verse eleven is magnified in light of the dangers posed by false teachers. Those who are not mature (verse 13) are immature, like “children” (the Greek word actual means infant). The Word makes the difference between maturity and immaturity (see Hebrews 5:12-14).

Those not grounded in the Word are unstable (see also Psalm 1) and, thus, are carried about with the waves of the sea (see also James 1:6)<sup>68</sup> and with the wind (see also Hebrews 13:9). The Greek verb translated “carried about,” used of spinning tops, conveys the idea of a violent spinning that makes one dizzy (Hoehner, p. 635). False teachers can make the spiritually immature dizzy with their clever teachings.

“Trickery” translates the Greek word for dice-playing. “In the ancient world dice-playing frequently had negative connotations of trickery” (Lincoln, p. 258).

#### 4:15

*but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*

The counter to the false teaching of verse fourteen is truth. Those who intimately know the true will readily be able to identify the false, as those trained to spot counterfeit cash. Truth must not, however, be divorced from love (nor must love ever be divorced from truth).

To make sense out of the last half of verse fifteen, some interpreters suggest the analogy of a baby, whose head is disproportionate to the rest of his or her body. As the baby matures, however, the body as it were grows up into the head. Christ is the church’s organic head (see comments on 1:22 and 1:23).

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<sup>68</sup>It is interesting to note that on his voyage to Rome leading up to his imprisonment, Paul witnessed such tempestuous waves (see especially Acts 27:27).

#### 4:16

*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.*

Whereas verse fifteen talks about the body growing into the head, verse sixteen talks about the body growing out of the head.

As each member of the body (see also 1 Corinthians 12:14-27), empowered by God (“proper working” is *energeia*), performs its role, the body is built-up or edified (cf. 4:12). See also Ephesians 2:21 and Colossians 2:19. “If even one Christian fails to develop spiritually, the church as a whole is not as strong as it ought to be” (Kent, p. 75).

#### Conclusion

In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul encourages unity among his readers. In order to be unified, they need to be humble (verse 2); work at it (verse 3a); realize that this unity already exists in a positional sense (verses 3b-6); and exercise the spiritual gifts that they have been given (verses 7-16), which will result in unity (verse 13a).

## **EPHESIANS 4:17-32**

## Introduction

In the eighth major section of the book of Ephesians, Paul continues to exhort his readers to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their calling (see 4:1). Rather than living like “Gentiles” (i.e., unbelievers), they are to live like those who have “learn[ed] Christ” (4:20). This involves “putting off” old vices and “putting on” new virtues.

### 4:17

*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,*

Paul begins by connecting this section with the previous one through the use of a “So.” To make the connection, one must go back to 4:1 (compare the “walk” of 4:1 with the “walk” of 4:17).

If the Ephesians are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which [they] have been called” (4:1), they must live differently than the pagan world around them. They must not walk (live) as Gentiles do. Though Paul’s readers are Gentiles by race (see 2:11 and 3:1), they are no longer Gentiles by religion. This is in keeping with Paul’s emphasis in 2:11-22 that the old categories of Jew and Gentile have been obliterated with the creation of the “third race,” the church.<sup>69</sup> Paul’s readers once walked as Gentiles walk (see 2:2). Having been saved, they now are to walk in good works (see 2:10, as well as Romans 6:4’s “walk in newness of life”).

Paul ends verse seventeen by beginning yet another (see also 2:1-3 and 11-12) description of the unsaved condition. The unbeliever’s mind is futile, or without purpose (see also Romans 1:21). Unbelievers act like they do (“walk”) because they think like they do (“mind”).

### 4:18

*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;*

Paul continues his description of the unbeliever. The unbeliever’s mind is not only purposeless, but also darkened (see also Romans 1:21). The unbeliever is spiritually blind (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). As Hendriksen (p. 210) states: “The person who is spiritually and morally darkened is blind even to the fact that he is blind.” The natural result is that the unbeliever is alienated from God (see 2:12 and Colossians 1:21) and the life that God gives. The unbeliever is ignorant of spiritual reality (see also 1 Peter 1:14). The root cause of all of this is the fact that the unbeliever has hardened<sup>70</sup> his heart (see Mark 3:5) through unbelief (so, ultimately the problem is not mental, but moral). God in judgment hardens the heart of the unbeliever, producing a vicious

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<sup>69</sup>“Christians who are ethnic Gentiles are exhorted not to live like Gentiles. This underscores the ‘third race’ mentality of [Paul], which emerged from 2:11-22 where the Church was depicted as a new creation, as one new person replacing the two old ethnic entities of Israel and the Gentiles” (Lincoln, p. 276).

<sup>70</sup>The Greek word translated “hardness” is *porosis*, from *poros*, “a stone harder than marble” (Hughes, p. 140). The unbeliever has, as it were, a “heart of stone” (see Ezekiel 11:19).

cycle of hardening⇒more unbelief⇒more hardening, etc. (Pharaoh is a prime example; see also Romans 1:18-32), a cycle that only God in His mercy can break (see 2:4-5).

#### 4:19

*and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.*

Because the unbeliever willfully chooses not to believe the truth, God in judgment hardens the unbeliever's heart, setting in motion the cycle mentioned above. Eventually, the unbeliever's heart becomes calloused (the "seared conscience" of 1 Timothy 4:2), resulting in increasingly degenerative activity (once again, see Romans 1:18-32). Here, the unbeliever gives himself over; in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28, God gives the unbeliever over. The first precedes the second.

The unbeliever gives himself over to "sensuality," the word used to describe the behavior of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Peter 2:7).<sup>71</sup> This he does greedily (NIV: "with a continual lust for more"). The flesh has an insatiable appetite. John Stott (in Hughes, p. 140) sees in verses 18-19 a four-step downward spiral, consisting of hardness (v. 18c), darkness (v. 18a), deadness (v. 18b), and recklessness (v. 19).

#### 4:20

*But you did not learn Christ in this way,*

As he has done earlier in the letter (see also 2:4 and 13), Paul contrasts his readers' state with that of the unsaved. The words, "But you" are first in the original, for emphasis (see also 2:4 and 13). The Ephesians "learn[ed]" Christ<sup>72</sup> when they were saved, having been taught Christ (see Acts 5:42) by Paul during his ministry in Ephesus (see the Introductory Lesson).

#### 4:21

*if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,*

The Ephesians learned Christ by virtue of hearing about Him (see Romans 10:14b and Ephesians 1:13) through the teaching of Paul (see Romans 10:14c). In this sense, they "heard" Christ and were taught "in" Christ (see comments on 2:17).<sup>73</sup> This teaching was true because it was based upon the written Word ("the word of truth"—Ephesians 1:13), which is embodied by Jesus, the living Word ("the truth"—John 14:6).

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<sup>71</sup>Kent (p. 77) defines it as "outrageous sensuality," Bruce (p. 356) as "vice that throws off all restraint and flaunts itself." Does this not accurately describe our decadent culture?

<sup>72</sup>Maclaren (p. 225) makes a perceptive point: "You can accept the truths and dismiss into oblivion the men from whom you get them. But you cannot reject Christ and take Christianity."

<sup>73</sup>"When true preaching takes place, Jesus is invisibly in the pulpit and walking the aisles personally teaching his own" (Hughes, p. 142).

4:22

*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,*

In light of the fact that they are believers (verses 20-21), Paul commands his readers to live accordingly. The Greek verb translated “lay aside” conveys the idea of removing clothing (see, for example, Acts 7:58). The Ephesians were to take off the “old self” a term that described their former manner of life as unbelievers (see also Romans 6:6 and Colossians 3:9<sup>74</sup>). This way of life is marked by the corruption brought on by lusts (see also 2 Peter 1:4).

4:23

*and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,*

Verse 23 is the crux of the put off-put on dynamic introduced in verses 22 and 24 and applied in verses 25-32. In order to effectively obey this directive, one’s mind must be renewed (see also Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 4:16, and Colossians 3:10; cf. the emphasis upon the mind of the unbeliever in verses 17 and 18). Such renewing takes place through the Word. The mind is where the battle for sanctification is won or lost. This is a constant battle, as the verb, “renewed” is in the present tense in the original (so, “be being renewed”).

4:24

*and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

It is not enough to remove the old self (the negative); the believer must also put on the “new self” (the positive). See the end of Isaiah 1:16 (“Cease to do evil”) and the start of Isaiah 1:17 (“Learn to do good”).

The new self is the manner of life characteristic of the believer. According to Colossians 3:10, the believer put the new self on positionally at salvation; now he must do so practically (see footnote 74). Hughes (p. 144) calls this “a daily appropriation of that which we already possess.” Romans 13:14 (a command for the believer to put on Christ practically) and Galatians 3:27 (a reminder that the believer has already put on Christ positionally) say the same.

To sum up the process of verses 22-24: remove (verse 22), renew (verse 23), replace (verse 24).

Just as man was physically created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), so the new self is spiritually created (see comments on 2:10 and 15) “in the likeness of God” (see also Colossians 3:10).

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<sup>74</sup>Much has been made of the fact that both of these references indicate that the “old self” was laid aside at the moment of salvation, whereas the verse at hand indicates that he still needs to be laid aside. This fits well with Paul’s overall argument to this point, namely, that believers are to become practically what they already are positionally. Accordingly, Lincoln (p. 285) states: “This injunction is not an exhortation to believers to repeat that event but to continue to live out its significance by giving up on that old person that they no longer are.”

The old self is characterized by “deceit” (verse 22), while the new self is characterized by “truth” (verse 24).

4:25

*Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.*

Having given his readers a general command to put off their former way of life and to put on their new way of life (verses 22-24), Paul specifies what this means (“Therefore”) in verses 25-32 (as he does in Colossians 3:8-14), as the following chart (taken partly from Bruce, p. 360) indicates:

<b>Vice to Put Off</b>	<b>Virtue to Put On</b>
Falsehood (v. 25a)	Truth (v. 25b)
Sinful Anger (v. 26a)	Timely Reconciliation (v. 26b)
Stealing (v. 28a)	Sharing (v. 28b)
Corrupt Communication (v. 29a)	Constructive Communication (v. 29b)
Malevolence (v. 31)	Benevolence (v. 32)

See also Romans 12:21 and 13:12.

Paul begins with an exhortation concerning the proper use of speech, quoting from Zechariah 8:16 (thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB). Believers are to shun lying (see also Colossians 3:9) and embrace truth-telling. This is particularly in keeping with the “deceit” (verse 22)-“truth” (verse 24) contrast of the previous verses.

The reason for this admonition is that “we are members of one another” (see also Romans 12:5). Lying tends to produce dissension (see Proverbs 6:19), hindering the unity of the body; “speaking the truth in love,” on the other hand, edifies the body (see 4:15). Deceit is characteristic of the old way of life (see 4:22); truth of the new way (see 4:21 and 24).

4:26

*BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,*

Based on Psalm 4:4 (thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB), Paul gives a second specific admonition, this time regarding anger. Paul is not commanding us to be angry, but not to sin in our anger (so NIV). There are times when anger is justifiable. Christ displayed “righteous indignation” at times (see Matthew 21:12-13//Mark 11:15-17//Luke 19:45-46; Mark 3:5; and John 2:13-16). However, since righteous anger can so easily degenerate into sinful anger<sup>75</sup>, it is

<sup>75</sup>“To be angry without sinning is as rare as it is difficult” (Bruce, p. 364).

always best to be “slow to anger” (James 1:19). When we are guilty of sinful anger, we must quickly make amends, by the end of the day, if at all possible.<sup>76</sup> Keep short accounts!

4:27

*and do not give the devil an opportunity.*

Satan has many “schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11 and Ephesians 6:11). One of them is to convince believers to let anger fester, resulting in discord among the brethren. Doing so gives Satan an opportunity to do damage in a local congregation.

4:28

*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.*

Paul gives a third specific admonition, this time in regards to the proper use of one’s hands. Rather than using his hands to steal (the Greek verb is *klepto*, from which we get our English word, “kleptomaniac”),<sup>77</sup> the believer should use them to work, so that he might have funds to give to those in the body who are in need (see also Acts 20:34-35).

4:29

*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.*

Paul gives a fourth specific admonition, once again in regards to the proper use of speech. The Ephesians are to let no “unwholesome” (the same word was used to describe rotten fish in Matthew 13:48 and a diseased tree in Matthew 7:17-18) communication proceed out of their mouths (see also Colossians 3:8). This is a general term embracing negative speech of any kind. On the contrary, they are to speak only words that edify or build-up others, so that they might be blessed (see also Job 4:4 and Colossians 4:6).

4:30

*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

If one is guilty of corrupt speech, he will grieve the Holy Spirit (see also Isaiah 63:10).<sup>78</sup> Like a

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<sup>76</sup>“It may not always be possible to straighten out the problem with the other person before nightfall, but at the very least one can settle the matter of his own heart attitude before retiring” (Kent, p. 82).

<sup>77</sup>Every day, employees steal a whopping sixteen million dollars worth of merchandise from their employers (Hughes, p. 152)!

<sup>78</sup>This verse, among others, shows that the Holy Spirit is a person.

child who refrains from certain behaviors because he knows they will grieve his parents, so Christians should refrain from corrupt speech, knowing it grieves the Holy Spirit, the One with whom they are sealed until the time of final redemption (see comments on 1:13-14).

#### 4:31

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

Paul gives a fifth specific admonition, once again in regards to anger. “Vice lists” such as this one are common in Paul’s writings (see, for example, the “works of the flesh” listed in Galatians 5:19-21). The believer is not to be characterized by any of these qualities associated with anger (see also Colossians 3:8). See page 85 of Kent for an explanation of each of these vices.

#### 4:32

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Rather than the vices listed in verse 31, the believer should be characterized by the virtues listed here (see also 1 Peter 3:8). “Virtue lists” such as this one are also common in Paul’s writings (see, for example, the “fruit of the Spirit” listed in Galatians 5:22-23).

Paul zeroes in on the virtue of forgiveness (the Greek word is *charizomenoi*, the root of which is *charis*, the Greek word for grace). We should graciously forgive others because God has so graciously forgiven us (see also Colossians 3:13 and the parable of the wicked servant in Matthew 18:23-35) through Christ (see also 1:7). “What God has done in Christ for believers, which has been the theme of the first half of the letter, now provides both the norm and the grounds for the believers’ own behavior” (Lincoln, p. 310).

#### Conclusion

In Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul continues to exhort his readers to live like the Christians they are. This is done through the process of putting off the old self (verse 22), i.e., the way of life characteristic of the unbeliever (verses 17-19), and by putting on the new self (verse 24), i.e., the way of life characteristic of the believer (verses 20-21). The key to the put-off-put on process is the renewing of the mind (verse 23). Putting off the old self and putting on the new results in shunning lying (verse 25a) and embracing truth-telling (verse 25b), so that the unity of the body might be preserved (verse 25c); in shunning sinful anger (verse 26a) and embracing timely reconciliation (verse 26b), so that Satan will not gain an opportunity (verse 27); in shunning stealing (verse 28a) and embracing work (verse 28b), so that the needs of others can be met (verse 28c); in shunning corrupt speech (verse 29a) and embracing edifying speech (verse 29b), so that the Holy Spirit might not be grieved (verse 30); and in shunning anger of all kind (verse 31) and embracing kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness (verse 32).

## **EPHESIANS 5:1-21**

### Introduction

In the ninth major section of the Ephesian letter, Paul continues to exhort his readers to practically live out their position in Christ, to be holy in practice as they are in position (“saints”).

5:1

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;*

Paul begins by commanding the Ephesians to be godly, to “mimic” God (the Greek noun translated “imitators” is *mimetai*, from which we get our English words, “mime” and “mimic”).

What is the “therefore” there for? It either goes back to 4:1 (notice the “walk” in 5:2) or to the previous verse, 4:32, in which Paul commands the Ephesians to imitate God’s forgiveness.

The reason believers can imitate God is because they are His “beloved children” and, thereby, bear somewhat of a resemblance to Him (both the resemblance and the imitation, however, are quite limited in their degree). See comments on 1:5. Because God is love (1 John 4:8 and 16) and light (1 John 1:5), and believers are His children, believers can and should walk in love (5:2) and in light (5:8).

5:2

*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.*

Imitating God includes imitating His love.<sup>79</sup> His love was most clearly expressed in the sacrificial death of Christ (see Romans 5:8). This is the impetus for our love for others (see especially 1 John 3:16). Once again, the vertical (our relationship with God) dictates the horizontal (our relationships with others). Christ voluntarily gave himself for us (see 5:25 and John 10:17-18) as a sacrifice (see 1 Corinthians 5:7).

5:3

*But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;*

Being a port city, Ephesus (such as Corinth) was well known for its immorality. Thus, Paul felt it necessary to exhort his readers to refrain from sexually sinful activities in verse 3 and following.

In light of the context, “greed” should be interpreted in keeping with the Tenth Commandment’s prohibition against coveting your neighbor’s wife (Exodus 20:17). See also Ephesians 5:5.

So shameful are such sins that they should not even be talked about (see also verse 12).<sup>80</sup> “The

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<sup>79</sup>Besides His forgiveness (see 4:32) and His love (see 5:2 and 1 John 4:11), believers are also commanded to imitate God’s mercy (see Luke 6:36) and holiness (see 1 Peter 1:15-16).

<sup>80</sup>“He cannot have meant that sex must never be discussed, and that warnings with respect to the evil of immorality and its attendant sins must never be heard, for he himself is at this very moment discussing it and issuing such a warning” (Hendriksen, p. 228).

assumption behind this prohibition is that thinking and talking about sexual sins creates an atmosphere in which they are tolerated and which can indirectly even promote their practice” (Lincoln, p. 322). Such sins are totally unbecoming to those who are “saints,” holy ones.

5:4

*and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*

Having prohibited the Ephesians from even talking about sexual sins in verse three, Paul continues in the same vein here in verse four. Sexually suggestive language (innuendo, double meaning, etc.) is also unbecoming (“not fitting”) of the Christian. Rather, Christian speech should be characterized by thanksgiving. This is yet another example of the put off/put on dynamic of the previous section (see especially 4:29).

5:5

*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.*

Those who habitually commit sexual sins (verse three) and talk about them (verse four) are so by nature; in other words, a person who commits fornication and talks about it does so because he or she is a fornicator.

A sexually covetous person is an idolater (see also Colossians 3:5) because he or she places his or her lust and/or the object of his or her lust ahead of God. “The whole situation just mentioned constitutes men as idolaters, for they place sensual pleasures and temporal concerns in the forefront of their lives, and devote themselves with their passions to these instead of to God” (Kent, p. 90).

The sexually immoral man is an unsaved man (see also 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21).

5:6

*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

Apparently there were some who vainly taught that committing such sexual sins was no big deal (sound like our day?). Wood (p. 69) calls such individuals the “propagandists of permissiveness.” Paul, however, knew better.

Such sins are very serious because they incur the wrath of God (see also Colossians 3:6). “These sinister practices attract God’s displeasure like a fully lit up enemy target attracts bombs” (Hendriksen, p. 230). Interestingly, the Greek verb translated “comes” is in the present tense, the idea being that God’s wrath is already being poured out upon such individuals (see also Romans 1:18-32), as well as that it is certain.

For “children of disobedience,” see comments on 2:2.

5:7

*Therefore do not be partakers with them;*

The natural outcome (“therefore”) of all of this, as far as the believer is concerned, is separation from such vices.

5:8

*for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light*

As he has done so many times before in the letter (see comments on 4:20), Paul reminds his readers both of what they once were and of what they now are, this time using the metaphors of darkness and light (see also Acts 26:18, Romans 13:12, Colossians 1:12-13, 1 Thessalonians 5:5, and 1 Peter 2:9). The Ephesians WERE (see also 1 Corinthians 6:11) darkness, BUT NOW (see also 2:13) they are light (see also Matthew 5:14 and Philippians 2:15) because they are “in the Lord,” who is light (see 1 John 1:5-6).<sup>81</sup>

Paul concludes the verse by once again exhorting the Ephesians to be what they are. They are light; therefore, they need to live accordingly.

5:9

*(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),*

Living as children of Light means bearing the fruit of the Light, which includes goodness, righteousness, and truth. See also Colossians 1:10.

5:10

*trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*

Living as children of Light also means “trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” “Trying” means to prove or verify by means of testing (see 1 Corinthians 3:13 and 1 Peter 1:7). The word was used to describe the testing of metals. The idea is to discern (another meaning of the word) what is pleasing to God and then doing it (see also Romans 12:2, Colossians 1:9-10, and 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

5:11

*Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;*

As earlier (see verse seven), Paul exhorts the Ephesians to separate from the darkness. Living as children of Light (verse 8) and separating from darkness go hand-in-hand; you cannot do one without also doing the other (see also 2 Corinthians 6:14).

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<sup>81</sup>Believers, like the moon, have no light of their own, but merely reflect the light of Christ (the sun).

The deeds of darkness are “unfruitful,” unlike the fruit of the Light (verse nine).

It is not enough merely to separate from the deeds of darkness; the believer must also expose them. In light of verses 12-13, the believer does so primarily by his manner of life. “Since v 12 discourages even speaking about such deeds, this exposure is meant to take place through the readers’ behavior. As they refuse to join in evil actions and display a different quality of life, they cast their illuminating beam into the dark recesses of the surrounding society and will invariably show up its immoral practices for what they are” (Lincoln, p. 330).

5:12

*for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.*

As earlier (see verse three), Paul exhorts the Ephesians to not even talk about the deeds of darkness. “The shamefulness of these ugly vices may rub off on Christians if they are continually talking about them, even if it is to disapprove of them” (Wood, p. 70).

5:13

*But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.*

Light dissipates darkness. As believers bear the fruit of the light (verse nine), the deeds of darkness are exposed for what they are. See also John 3:20-21.

5:14

*For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.”*

Paul quotes from an unknown source here in verse fourteen. Though some argue that Paul is quoting from Isaiah 60:1 (see Hendriksen, p. 235), most interpreters believe he is quoting from an early baptismal hymn (in this case, the “it” would be the hymn). The belief is that the congregation would sing this hymn as the candidate emerged from the waters of baptism as a testimony of what had taken place in that person’s life. In light of the symbolism involved in baptism, such a hymn would certainly be fitting (see Romans 6:4). Christ gives light (see 2 Corinthians 4:6), enabling the spiritually darkened sinner (see 4:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:4) to awake from the slumber of spiritual death (see 2:1).

5:15

*Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,*

Paul begins a new paragraph (notice the repetition of “walk”) in this section by exhorting the Ephesians to live carefully. Watch your step! Living carefully takes wisdom. The wise person is the one who does what God says (see comments on verse seventeen).

5:16

*making the most of your time, because the days are evil.*

Living carefully includes “making the most of every opportunity” (so NIV). See also Colossians 4:5. Taking advantage of every opportunity to strike a blow for the cause of Christ is the only thing that will counteract the evil of the days in which we live.

5:17

*So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Once again (see also verse fifteen), Paul exhorts his readers to be wise. The wise person is one who understands (and does) the Lord’s will. The only way one can know God’s will is through the pages of Scripture.

5:18

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,*

Part of the Lord’s will for the believer is being Spirit-filled. To be Spirit-filled is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. As alcohol controls those it physically fills, so the Holy Spirit controls those He spiritually fills. Unlike the first, however, the second does not result in a loss of self-control, as self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:23).

“Be filled” is a present passive in the original, the present implying that this is a continual (as opposed to a one-time) process and the passive implying that this is something the believer yields to. The issue is not how much of the Holy Spirit you have (all), but how much the Holy Spirit has of you. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, it can be concluded that the filling of the Spirit is inseparably linked to Scriptural intake (see Colossians 3:16 and following).

5:19

*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;*

In verses nineteen through twenty-one, Paul gives three evidences of the Spirit’s filling. The first evidence of the Spirit’s control upon one’s life is singing (see also Colossians 3:16). The sphere in which this singing takes place is in the local assembly (“to one another”). Such singing includes “psalms” (music accompanied by stringed instrument), “hymns” (more “doctrinal”), and “spiritual songs” (more “experiential”). As with all acts of worship, singing is to be wholehearted (“with your heart”) and “to the Lord.” Interestingly, Paul wrote these words while imprisoned (see also Acts 16:25).

5:20

*always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*

A second evidence of the Spirit’s control upon one’s life is thanksgiving (see also Colossians 3:17). Thanksgiving is giving thanks, not just mere gratitude (see the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19). Once again, remember that Paul wrote these words while “the prisoner of the Lord” (4:1). The believer is to give thanks for all things (see also 1 Thessalonians 5:18). As

with singing, thanks is to be given “to God” (see comments on 1:16). It is to be given “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” because the believer’s union with Christ is the reason the believer has so much for which to give thanks.

### 5:21

*and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*

A third evidence of the Spirit’s control upon one’s life is submission. The Greek word is *hupotasso*, from the preposition, *hupo*, meaning “under,” and the verb, *tasso*, meaning “to place.” Submission is willingly placing oneself under the authority of another.

Verse twenty-one serves as the basis for the next section of the epistle (5:22-6:9). In no way does it alter the submission of wife to husband (in 5:22-33), child to parent (in 6:1-4), or slave to master (in 6:5-9) commanded in it.<sup>82</sup>

### Conclusion

In Ephesians 5:1-21, Paul continues his lengthy exhortation begun in 4:1, namely, that the Ephesians live (walk) in light of their calling. Doing so includes: 1) Imitating God (verse 1) by loving like God loves (verse 2) and by shunning sexual sins (verses 3 and 7), including sexually suggestive talk (verse 4); 2) Living like the children of Light (verse 8b) that they are (verses 8a and 14), which means bearing the fruit of the Light (verse 9), discerning and doing what pleases the Lord (verse 10), and shunning (verse 11a) and exposing (verses 11b and 13) the deeds of darkness, refusing to even talk about them (verse 12); and 3) Living carefully (verse 15a), which includes living wisely (verses 15b and 17a) and making the most of every opportunity (verse 16). Living wisely means understanding the Lord’s will (verse 17b), which includes being Spirit-filled (verse 18). Being Spirit-filled is evidenced by singing (verse 19), giving thanks (verse 20), and submission (verse 21).

## **EPHESIANS 5:22-6:9**

### Introduction

Having completed the ninth major section (5:1-21) of his letter to the Ephesians by identifying submission as one of the evidences of the Spirit’s filling (5:21), Paul makes this the theme of the tenth major section (5:22-6:9). The entire section can be neatly divided into three subsections: husbands & wives (5:22-33), parents & children (6:1-4), and masters/employers & slaves/employees (6:5-9).

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<sup>82</sup>See chapter 8 of *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. Kent (p. 98) writes: “This submission in verse 21 must not be explained as being in contradiction to the passage which follows. When Paul says that Christians should submit to one another, he does not mean, for example, that husbands and wives are to submit to each other, for that would render verse 22 meaningless and destroy the very pattern of authority which he is about to teach.”

### 5:22

*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*

Paul begins his instructions on submission by focusing on the husband-wife relationship (5:22-33), first discussing the role of the wife (verses 22-24), then that of the husband (verses 25-33; notice that here much more space is devoted to the husband's role, while in 1 Peter 3:1-7, the reverse is true).

The wife's role in marriage is to be "subject," "an incendiary word in today's western culture" (Hughes, p. 181), to her husband's leadership. See also Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1. As mentioned previously (see comments on 5:21), the Greek word literally means "to place under." Subjection/submission should be done with a sweet spirit. While obedience is more of an action, submission is more of an attitude. It is possible to be obedient without being submissive.<sup>83</sup>

Wives are to submit to their "own" husbands.<sup>84</sup> The submission of the wife to her husband is to be "as to the Lord." In other words, it is part of her overall submission to the Lord. To fail to submit to one's husband is to fail to submit to the Lord, who has placed the husband in such a role.

### 5:23

*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.*

Paul gives the rationale for the wife's submission to her husband ("For"). The husband is the head of the wife (see also 1 Corinthians 11:3) in the same respect that Christ is the head of the church (see also Colossians 1:18). "Head" can indicate either authority or source (see comments on 1:22-23). Here, it clearly implies authority.

Though there is a difference in terms of *function* (what each partner does) in marriage, there is no difference in terms of *essence* (what each partner is). This is what Hughes (p. 182) calls an "ordered equality." Just because the wife has a different *role*, it does not follow that she is inferior in terms of her *worth* or *value* (the primary philosophical flaw of the feminist movement). See Galatians 3:28. Comparison can be made to the Trinity, where there is difference of function (Father, then Son, then Holy Spirit), yet equality of essence (Father=Son=Holy Spirit). Compare, for example, John 14:28 with John 10:30. This same dynamic applies to any human relationship involving subordination.

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<sup>83</sup>The story is told of the child who, after being made to sit in the corner, replied, "I may be sitting on the outside, but I'm still standing on the inside."

<sup>84</sup>The Greek word translated "own" is *idios*. Wives, draw your own conclusion. Sorry, guys, I couldn't resist ☺.

Let it also be said that it is just as sinful for the husband to fail to lead as it is for the wife to fail to submit. The husband is to be a “servant leader” (see Luke 22:26).

At the end of verse twenty-three, Paul adds that Christ is “the Savior of the body.” “Body” is a reference to the body of Christ, the church universal. Christ is the Savior of the church in that His work on the Cross made salvation from sin in every respect possible (see the chart under comments on 1:20). Some (such as Henry, p. 714 and Roustio, p. 524) see a correspondence in the husband’s relationship to the wife at this point (husband as protector of wife), while others (such as Lincoln, p. 370 and Vaughan, p. 116) do not.

#### 5:24

*But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

Paul draws an obvious conclusion from what he has just said in verse twenty-three, making the implicit explicit. Since the husband-wife relationship is a picture of the Christ-church relationship<sup>85</sup> (Christ being the groom and the church being the bride), and since the church is subject to Christ, so should wives be subject to their husbands in everything (that is, everything relating to his leadership in the home). Of course, this last phrase (“in everything”) must be understood in light of such passages as Acts 5:29.

#### 5:25

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,*

Paul now turns his attention to the husbands, commanding them to love (literally: be loving) their wives (see also Colossians 3:19).<sup>86</sup> The Greek word is *agape*. Of the many Greek words for love, this one emphasizes its selfless, sacrificial nature. Accordingly, Paul likens it to the love that Christ showed for the church when He gave His life for her on the Cross (see John 15:13, Galatians 2:20, and comments on Ephesians 5:2). While a husband will never be able to love his wife to the degree that Christ loves the church, it is to be the same kind of love (Martin, p. 748). If the role of the wife in marriage is sweet submission, then the role of the husband is loving leadership. These roles are complementary. As Kent (p. 101) states: “No normal wife resents her husband’s headship, provided that his love for her is what it should be.”

#### 5:26

*so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,*

Verses twenty-six and twenty-seven are somewhat parenthetical, as Paul gives the reason for (“so that”) Christ’s work of redemption. Jesus died for the church in order that He might

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<sup>85</sup>“The standard and prototype for the writer’s instructions about human marriage is the bond between the heavenly bridegroom and his bride” (Lincoln, p. 352).

<sup>86</sup>Though the wife is not commanded to love her husband in this passage, she is commanded to in Titus 2:4.

sanctify and cleanse it (see also Titus 2:14). This sanctification and cleansing is most likely a reference to the work of progressive sanctification, the gradual, life-long conforming of the believer to the image of Christ.

Progressive sanctification takes place through God's Word (see Psalm 119:9, John 15:3, and 17:17).

Just as there is the washing of regeneration (see 1 Corinthians 6:11 and Titus 3:5), so also there is the washing of sanctification.

#### 5:27

*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.*

The ultimate goal of the progressive sanctification process is that the church might be holy, or perfectly pure. Paul describes this condition both negatively (“no spot or wrinkle”<sup>87</sup>) and positively (“holy and blameless”<sup>88</sup>). This goal of perfect purity will not be realized in an absolute sense until the church is glorified. At that time, Christ, not the typical third party—“for He is the only one who could prepare her for this occasion” (Kent, p. 102)—, will present His bride to Himself officially at “the marriage of the Lamb” (see Revelation 19:7).

Whereas verse 25 speaks of the past work of Christ in relation to the church and verse 26 speaks of the present work, verse 27 speaks of the future work.

As with “Savior of the body” in verse twenty-three, verses twenty-six and twenty-seven may or may not imply a corresponding work for the husband toward his wife.

#### 5:28

*So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;*

Paul returns to the main point of his analogy between the husband and Christ. Once again (as in verse twenty-four), he draws an obvious conclusion (“So”) from what he has said previously (in verse twenty-five). Since the husband-wife relationship is a picture of the Christ-church relationship, and since Christ loves the church, so should husbands love their wives.

Paul introduces another reason why husbands should love their wives (“as their own bodies”). In verse thirty-one, Paul points out that the husband and wife are not two, but one. In this verse and the next (verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine), Paul points out that a man naturally loves himself (there really is no such thing as a lack of self-esteem). Putting these two truths together, Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives as they love themselves (see also Leviticus 19:18), seeing

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<sup>87</sup>Are you familiar with the song whose chorus contains these words?

<sup>88</sup>See also Ephesians 1:4 and Colossians 1:22, where the same two Greek words are used.

their wives are part of themselves. “Since husband and wife are ‘one flesh’ or one body, to love one’s wife is not merely a matter of loving someone else *as oneself*; it is in effect loving oneself” (Bruce, p. 391).

5:29

*for no one ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,*

Paul further points out the fact that a man naturally loves himself, as evidenced by the way he cares for himself. Once again, Paul makes a comparison with Christ. Just as a man cares for himself, so Christ cares for the church, seeing the church is part of Himself through union with Christ. Just as Christ loves the part of Himself called the church, so the husband should love the part of himself called his wife.

5:30

*because we are members of His body.*

Paul gives the reason why (“because”) Christ cares for the church: It is because the church is part of Him (see also Romans 12:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:27).

5:31

*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.*

Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24 (thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB).<sup>89</sup> The word “JOINED” has the idea of glued (Wood, p. 78). As mentioned earlier (see comments on verse twenty-eight), this truth (union of husband and wife) is a key factor in Paul’s exhortation to husbands to love their wives. Just as husband and wife become one physically through the sexual union, so Christ and the church become one spiritually through Spirit baptism (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). See 1 Corinthians 6:16-17.

5:32

*This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*

Kent (p. 105) calls this verse “a most difficult verse to interpret.” Perhaps by this point we can readily agree with Paul that all of this is indeed a great mystery. Paul’s point seems to be that the physical union of husband and wife alluded to in verse thirty-one is a picture of the spiritual union between Christ and the church. The “mystery” (something previously unrevealed) most likely is the union of the believer to Christ through the church. Just as Eve was created for Adam (see Genesis 2:19-22), so was the church created (see comments on 2:15) for Christ.

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<sup>89</sup>Kent (p. 105) gives a bit of practical wisdom concerning this verse: “As dearly as one may love and respect his parents, marriage creates a new and higher allegiance which supersedes the former one. Brides and bridegrooms must recognize this and be willing to ‘leave’ father and mother. Until they are ready to do this, they are not mature enough for marriage.”

5:33

*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.*

Paul summarizes the roles of the husband and the wife. For “respects,” see also 1 Peter 3:2.

6:1

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

Paul now turns his attention to the parent-child relationship. The role of the child in this relationship, like that of the wife in the husband-wife relationship, is submission (see also Colossians 3:20). Contrary to our culture, the Scriptures treat the sin of disobedience to parents very seriously (see Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Romans 1:30, and 2 Timothy 3:2).

The Greek verb translated “obey” literally means “to listen under.” “The word means to hear as under another with listening and attentive ears, to give obedient heed” (Roustio, p. 525). Children are to do what their parents say. Practically speaking, this typically applies as long as the child is under the parent’s roof. The command of the next verse (“HONOR”), however, continues to apply.

Is “in the Lord” some kind of qualifier? In other words, is it limiting the command only to children with believing parents? Or is it limiting the scope of obedience only to those commands that are consistent with Scripture? Most likely, it identifies obedience to one’s parents as part of the Christian child’s obedience to the Lord (as is the wife’s obedience to her husband—see comments on 5:22).

Paul concludes the verse by giving a simple reason why (“for”) children should obey their parents: It’s right! Parents, train your children to obey you. If you fail to do so, do not be surprised when they fail to obey all other authority figures in their lives, including God.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>In his book on the Puritans entitled *A Quest for Godliness*, J. I. Packer (p. 272) states: “Parents were called to teach their children obedience to God and to themselves (the Puritans did not expect to see the first without the second).” “If a child rebels against his parents, he will eventually rebel against civil and divine authority. Early training in obedience prepares the child to obey God and all authority God will place over him later” (Walter and Trudy Fremont, *Formula for Family Unity*, p. 112). “You must not wonder that men refuse to obey their Father which is in heaven, if you allow them, when children, to disobey their father who is upon earth” (J. C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*, p. 21). “We do our children no service by allowing them to speak and act in disrespectful ways. Our permissiveness in allowing them to be both disrespectful and disobedient to us only cultivates the same sense of disrespect and disregard toward God, the Father in heaven. The permissiveness and leniency pervasive in even Christian homes today provide a breeding ground for training our children to think that they can do what they please and disregard proper authority. But when they learn instead that their fathers mean what they say, and that they expect the respect and obedience of which they are rightfully

6:2

*HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise),*

Paul continues his admonition to children by commanding them to honor their parents, the Fifth Commandment and, thus, in ALL CAPS in the NASB (see Exodus 20:12a and Deuteronomy 5:16a). Whereas obedience (verse 1) is more of an action, honor (verse 2) is more of an attitude. Obedience is the duty, honor the disposition (S.D.F. Salmond, cited in Vaughan, p. 120). Christ denounced the Pharisees and scribes for dishonoring this command (see Mark 7:9-13).

The command to honor one's parents was "the first commandment with a promise" in that it was the first commandment with an explicit blessing promised to those who observed it (see verse three).

6:3

*SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.*

The promised blessing for observing the Fifth Commandment was well-being/quality of life and long life/quantity of life (see Exodus 20:12b and Deuteronomy 5:16b). Seeing we are no longer under the Old Testament theocracy, this promise applies only in principle today. As John Eadie (quoted in Kent, p. 108) states: "Filial obedience, under God's blessing, prolongs life, for it implies the possession of principles of restraint, sobriety, and industry, which secure a lengthened existence" (see also Hughes, pp. 198-199). See Proverbs 4:10 and 10:27. Godliness has promise for this life, as well as for the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8).

6:4

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*<sup>91</sup>

Paul now turns his attention to the parents, specifically fathers, seeing that fathers have been given the responsibility to lead the home.<sup>92</sup>

Negatively, fathers are commanded not to provoke their children to wrath (see also Colossians 3:21), while positively they are commanded to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This is reminiscent of the put off/put on dynamic discussed earlier in the epistle (see 4:22-32).

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deserving, then children grow in an atmosphere where proper authority is followed, including—most importantly—the absolute authority of God" (Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, p. 61).

<sup>91</sup> An excellent treatment of this verse may be found in chapter 4 of *Disciplines of a Godly Man* by R. Kent Hughes.

<sup>92</sup>With greater responsibility comes greater accountability. To whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48).

How does a father provoke his children to wrath? By unjust demands, unreasonable severity, and unremitting criticism (Kent, p. 109). By being unreasonable, fault-finding, neglectful, and inconsistent (Hughes, p. 200). Through over-protection, showing favoritism (see the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 37:3-4), discouragement, neglect, unfair comparison, and physical or verbal abuse (Hendriksen, pp. 261-262). By excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, and subjecting a child to humiliation (Lincoln, p. 406). By severity, unreasonableness, sternness, harshness, cruel demands, needless restrictions, and selfish insistence upon authority (Roustio, p. 525). By unreasonable demands, needless restrictions, and punishing too severely (Vaughan, p. 121). By saying one thing and doing another, always blaming and never praising, being inconsistent and unfair in discipline, showing favoritism, not keeping promises, and making light of problems (Wiersbe, p. 54).

Implied in the word “discipline” is the parental responsibility to corporally discipline their children (yes, Proverbs 13:24 and 19:18 are still in the Bible).

The word translated “instruction” has more of a verbal, rather than physical, connotation. Parents, learn to tell your children, “No.” Don’t be an Eli (see 1 Samuel 3:13). Weave instruction into the fabric of life (Deuteronomy 6:7). Also teach by example.

#### 6:5

*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;*

Paul now addresses the master-slave relationship. Before proceeding, it is advisable to take a moment to consider the whole matter of slavery.<sup>93</sup> It is interesting to note that Paul does not explicitly condemn slavery in this passage. In fact, he will go on to send this epistle to the Ephesians by the hand of Tychicus (see the Introductory Lesson), who will also bear Paul’s epistle to Philemon, a slave owner! On the other hand, both Testaments condemn slavery (see Exodus 21:16 and 1 Timothy 1:10, where “kidnappers” can also be translated “slave traders,” as in the NIV). One possible explanation is that two different types of slavery are in view, one being more voluntary, the other more coerced. “Roman slavery in the first century was far more humane and civilized than the American/African slavery practiced in this country much later” (Hughes, p. 206). “Modern readers need to free themselves from a number of assumptions about first-century slavery, including the assumptions that there was a wide separation between the status of slave and freedperson, that all slaves were badly treated, and that all who were enslaved were trying to free themselves from this bondage” (Lincoln, p. 416). “Some people actually sold themselves into slavery in order to climb socially, to obtain particular employment open only to slaves, and to enjoy a better standard of living than they had experienced as free persons” (Lincoln, p. 418).

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<sup>93</sup>For a more thorough discussion of this issue, see pages 233-237 of “Philippians, Colossians and Philemon” in the *New Testament Commentary* by William Hendriksen and pages 415-420 of Lincoln.

Paul's concern in these verses is not so much the issue of slavery, as it is the roles of the individuals involved.<sup>94</sup> Slaves are to obey their masters (see also Colossians 3:22, 1 Timothy 6:1, Titus 2:9, and 1 Peter 2:18) "according to the flesh." This last phrase is a not-so-subtle reminder that their true Master is not according to the flesh (see especially verse nine). Their submission is to be done reverently ("with fear and trembling") and sincerely ("in the sincerity of your heart," see also Colossians 3:22).

Once again (see also 5:22 and 6:1), submission of the subordinate to the superior is seen as part of the subordinate's overall submission to Christ ("as to Christ").

Though slavery no longer exists, the principles contained in this section can be readily applied to the employer-employee relationship.

#### 6:6

*not by way of eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*

Slaves are to obey consistently, not just when "the boss is watching" ("not by way of eyeservice"; see also Colossians 3:22), remembering that they are "slaves of Christ," whose eye is always on them.

Slaves are to obey wholeheartedly ("from the heart"; see also Colossians 3:23). Once again (see also verse four), the put off/put on dynamic is at work.

#### 6:7

*With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,*

Slaves are to obey enthusiastically ("with good will"), understanding that their service is ultimately for the Lord, not for men (see also Colossians 3:23), or for a paycheck for that matter.

#### 6:8

*knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.*

Paul gives another reason why slaves should obey their masters: Because the Lord will reward such obedience (see also Colossians 3:24). Such reward will be meted out at the Judgment Seat of Christ (see Matthew 16:27 and 2 Corinthians 5:10).

#### 6:9

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<sup>94</sup>“The Bible neither condones slavery nor advocates its violent overthrow. Even though the New Testament lays down principles which eventually undermined the system, this was a by-product. The main thrust of the biblical teaching is that every man should live righteously in whatever circumstances he may be” (Kent, p. 109).

*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.*

Paul concludes his discussion of the master-slave relationship with instructions to masters. Masters are to treat their slaves properly. Why? Because they also are slaves, being in subjection to their heavenly Master (see also Colossians 4:1), to Whom they will one day give an account of how they treat their slaves.

God's judgment is totally impartial ("there is no partiality with Him"<sup>95</sup>; cf. Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Colossians 3:25, and 1 Peter 1:17); it does not take into account the social status of the individual being judged ("whether slave or free," verse eight).

### Conclusion

In Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Paul applies the virtue of submission to a variety of human relationships. Wives are to submit to their husbands, while husbands are to love their wives. These roles are to reflect the submission of the church to Christ and the love of Christ for the church. Children are to submit to their parents, while parents are to properly train their children. Finally, slaves/employees are to submit to their masters/employers, while masters are to treat their slaves properly, realizing that they are enslaved to their heavenly Master, who will hold them accountable for this.

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<sup>95</sup>The Greek noun translated "partiality" literally means "to receive the face." God's judgment is righteous; it is in no way swayed by outward appearances (see John 7:24).

## EPHESIANS 6:10-20

### Introduction

In the eleventh and final major section of the book of Ephesians, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to put on the armor of God. Some interpreters view this passage as a third distinct section in the letter<sup>96</sup>, others as the conclusion of the second section. Regardless, this passage is a favorite of many.<sup>97</sup>

### 6:10

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.*

With the word, “finally,” Paul indicates that he is bringing the epistle to a close.

He commands the Ephesians to “be strong” (see also 1 Corinthians 16:13). The verb (*dunamao*, from which we get our English words, dynamite and dynamic), is in the passive voice, indicating that the believer’s strength comes from without (see also 2 Peter 1:3). Because the Ephesians are “in the Lord” (i.e., saved), they have access to great spiritual strength (see also Philippians 4:13—“through Christ”). Paul wants his readers to avail themselves of this strength, a recurring emphasis in the epistle (see also 1:19-20, 3:16, and 3:20).

### 6:11

*Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

Being “strong in the Lord” (verse 10) means putting on the “full armor” (sometimes called the “panoply,” from the Greek word, *panoplian*) of God.

The reason why this is necessary is the fact that the believer has an enemy that is out to destroy him (see especially 1 Peter 5:8). We are in a war (see 2 Timothy 2:3-4)! The devil has many “schemes” (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:11). The Greek word is *methodeias*, from which we get our English word, methods. In Greek, the word has a negative connotation, being translated “craftiness” in 4:14. Satan is certainly crafty (see 2 Corinthians 11:14-15).<sup>98</sup> “His craft and power are great” (Martin Luther, in *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*). Paul has already alluded to one of Satan’s schemes earlier in the letter (see 4:27).<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>An example is Watchman Nee’s *Sit, Walk, Stand*, “sit” corresponding to 1:1-3:21, “walk” corresponding to 4:1-6:9, and “stand” corresponding to 6:10-24. See footnote 5.

<sup>97</sup>It was a favorite of the Puritan, William Gurnall, whose exposition of these verses, entitled *The Christian in Complete Armour*, is 1,200 pages in length (Bruce, p. 410)! And you think my notes are long ☺.

<sup>98</sup>Lincoln (p. 443) writes: “The devil does not always attack through obvious head-on assaults but employs cunning and wily stratagems designed to catch believers unawares.”

<sup>99</sup>See Hendriksen, p. 272 for more examples.

### 6:12

*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.*

The war the believer is engaged in is not a physical one (“against flesh and blood”), but a spiritual one (see also 2 Corinthians 10:3-4). The enemy is the devil (v. 11) and his minions (v. 12).

The terms used to describe the enemy here in verse twelve (“rulers,” “powers,” etc.) have been used earlier in the letter to describe angelic beings (see 1:21 and 3:10). Here, demons are clearly in view.

“Struggle” is not intended to imply an athletic metaphor (although Paul is not averse to mixing metaphors), but rather the hand-to-hand nature of the combat. Before the Ephesians were saved, there was no conflict, as they were under the sway of “the prince of the power of the air” (2:2).

“In the heavenly places” is a reference to the sphere in which demonic forces operate, the atmosphere (see also 2:2). Praise God, the believer is already seated in the heavenly places (the third heaven, the abode of God) positionally (2:6); therefore, his ability to “break through” the ranks of the enemy, so to speak, is assured. “Although the opposing forces are formidable, the fact that they are in the heavenly realms need no longer pose a threat to believers, because they are not fighting to break through the hold of such powers and penetrate to the heavenly realm themselves . . . , but are to see themselves as fighting from a position of victory, having already been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms” (Lincoln, p. 445).

### 6:13

*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.*

Because the believer is in a war, it behooves him to be properly equipped. The Roman soldier (with which Paul became very familiar, being continually chained to one during his house arrest in Rome) was outfitted with physical armor, the believer with spiritual armor (see also Romans 13:12, 2 Corinthians 6:7, and 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Spiritual armor enables the believer to “resist” (literally “to stand against”) enemy attack. This is a defensive term. In Scripture, the believer is always commanded to defend himself against Satan (see also James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:9), never to go on the offensive against him (see Jude 9); counterattack, yes (see comments on verse 17); attack, no. “The decisive victory has already been won by God in Christ, and the task of believers is not to win but to stand, that is, to preserve and maintain what has been won” (Lincoln, pp. 442-443).

6:14

*Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,*

“Stand” is a favorite command of Paul (see also 1 Corinthians 16:13, Philippians 4:1, and 2 Thessalonians 2:15). In order to stand, the believer must wear his armor (see also verses 11 and 13). Starting in verse fourteen, Paul begins to specify what the spiritual armor of the believer includes.<sup>100</sup>

First is the belt of truth (“HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH”). Paul is likely citing from Isaiah 11:5 (thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB). The belt was the first piece of armor the Roman soldier would put on.<sup>101</sup> It served two primary purposes. First, it would allow the soldier to “gird up his loins,” tucking-in his tunic so that it would not impede his steps. Second, it would give the soldier something upon which to fasten his breastplate and sword. Thus, the belt was a foundational part of the soldier’s armor. Likewise, truth is a foundational part of the believer’s armor. Though truth in the objective sense (the truth of Scripture) would fit well here, most interpreters consider this to be a reference to truth in the subjective sense (truthfulness, sincerity, or integrity), seeing there is no definite article (“the”) preceding “TRUTH” in the original. Lincoln’s (p. 448) caveat is appropriate at this point: “The qualities to which the various pieces of armor point are used rather generally and loosely and cannot always be pinned down precisely.”

The second piece of armor is the “BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS” (a citation of Isaiah 59:17; thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB). The primary function of the breastplate was to protect the vital organs (heart, lungs, etc.) of the soldier. Is “righteousness” objective (imputed righteousness) or subjective (imparted righteousness)? In favor of the first is the fact that “RIGHTEOUSNESS” is preceded by the definite article (“the”) in the original. Nevertheless, most interpreters opt for the second (since those in view are already believers). Just as the breastplate was essential for the physical survival of the Roman soldier, so righteousness is essential for the spiritual survival of the soldier of Christ.

Interestingly, the combination of truth and righteousness here in verse fourteen is found earlier in the letter, in 4:24 and 5:9.

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<sup>100</sup>“It is commonly pointed out that no armour is provided for the back. No provision is made for one who flees from his opponent. The soldier must always face his foe and resist him” (Marshall Neal, “Christianity in Conflict,” *Biblical Viewpoint*, April 1977, p. 56). So also Henry (p. 719).

<sup>101</sup>In fact, many interpreters believe Paul lists the various pieces of armor in the same order in which the Roman soldier put them on.

### 6:15

*and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;*

The third piece of the soldier's armor was his footwear. Once again, Paul is citing from the Old Testament, here from Isaiah 52:7 (thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB). The Roman soldier would typically wear a nail-studded boot. This gave him firm footing in the midst of the battle. In like manner, the fact that the believer has peace with God (see Romans 5:1) by virtue of his belief in the gospel gives him firm footing in the midst of spiritual warfare. No matter how intensely the battle rages, the believer knows that he is rightly related to God and, therefore, cannot be mortally wounded. How paradoxical that the "gospel of *peace*" (cf. Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15) equips the Christian soldier for *war*.

### 6:16

*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.*

The fourth piece of the soldier's armor was the shield. The shield was an oblong piece of wood covered with leather, measuring four feet in height and two and-a-half feet in width. Its purpose was to deflect or absorb the fire-tipped arrows launched by the enemy, the leather coating extinguishing them. These arrows were "dipped in pitch or some other combustible material and set on fire before being thrown at the enemy" (Vaughan, p. 129). According to one battle account (see Wood, p. 88), one soldier had 220 such arrows stuck in his shield after the smoke of the battle had cleared (literally and figuratively). The believer's shield is his faith, which enables him to deflect or absorb all the fiery arrows the enemy shoots at him.<sup>102</sup>

### 6:17

*And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

The fifth piece of the soldier's armor was the helmet. The purpose of the helmet was the protection of the head. For the Christian soldier, it is the "HELMET OF SALVATION" (a citation of Isaiah 59:17; thus, the ALL CAPS in the NASB; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:8). If a person is unsaved, he has no protection from Satanic onslaught. Since, however, Paul is writing to those who are already saved, perhaps he is thinking more in terms of the *present* aspect of salvation (sanctification), not the *past* aspect (see the chart under comments on 1:20). If the believer is not spiritually strong, he will be much more susceptible to being wounded by the enemy.

The sixth piece of armor is the sword. This particular sword was a short one, ideal not only for defense, but also for counterattacking. The believer's sword is the Word of God (see also Hebrews 4:12). It is called the sword "of the Spirit" because the Holy Spirit is the agent of inspiration (see 2 Peter 1:21) and because it is the Holy Spirit who energizes the Scriptures by illuminating the mind of the believer to understand their significance (see 1 Corinthians 2:14). Notice how Christ wielded the sword of Scripture against the enemy in Matthew 4:1-11//Luke 4:1-13. The Word of God is crucial to spiritual victory (see 1 John 2:14b). Sadly, many

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<sup>102</sup>See p. 450 of Lincoln for examples.

Christians keep their sword in its sheath.<sup>103</sup>

6:18

*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,*

Technically, Paul ends his spiritual armor imagery in verse seventeen. However, prayer is just as essential in spiritual warfare as what has already been mentioned. Paul commands the Ephesians to pray “at all times” and “with all perseverance” (see also Luke 18:1, Romans 12:12, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

They are also to pray “in the Spirit” (see also Jude 20), meaning their prayers should be in accordance with God’s will as revealed in Scripture, the sword of the Spirit (verse seventeen).

Praying is often associated with “watching” in Scripture (see also Matthew 26:41//Mark 14:38, Mark 13:33, Luke 21:36, and Colossians 4:2). The Christian soldier must always be alert, for the enemy may attack at any time.

6:19

*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,*

Having concluded verse eighteen by commanding that prayer be made “for all the saints,” Paul specifically includes himself in verses nineteen and twenty. Earlier in the letter (see 1:15-23 and 3:14-21), Paul prayed for the Ephesians; now he asks that the Ephesians pray for him. Paul often made this request of his readers (see also Romans 15:30-32, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

Rather than asking them to pray for his release, Paul asks the Ephesians to pray that he might have boldness to witness. We should pray this for one another. Perhaps Paul specifically had in mind the appeal he would soon have to make before Caesar.

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<sup>103</sup>Even preachers can be guilty of blunting the sword of Scripture: “It is a mystery to me that many evangelical ministers say they believe in the inerrancy of the Scriptures, but when they preach there is no serious attempt to open them, but rather a chain of illustrations lengthened to support a life-situation story with an allegedly Scriptural moral. Sometimes I suspect this is from sloth, because preaching the Word takes work. But I also think it is often because they do not truly believe in the power of the Word. They really do not believe it is a sword” (Hughes, p. 244).

## 6:20

*for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Paul concludes his “prayer request” by pointing out that it is because of the gospel that he has been imprisoned. Paul was an ambassador for Christ (see also 2 Corinthians 5:20).<sup>104</sup> Though he was bound, he was determined that his witness would not be.

## Conclusion

In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord (v. 10) by putting on the whole armor of God in order to withstand Satanic attack (vs. 11-13). This armor includes the belt of truth (v. 14a), the breastplate of righteousness (v. 14b), the footwear of the peace with God which belief in the gospel brings (v. 15), the shield of faith (v. 16), the helmet of salvation (v. 17a), and the sword of Scripture (v. 17b). Though technically not part of the armor, prayer is also an essential ingredient in spiritual warfare. Therefore, Paul commands the Ephesians to pray for all the saints (v. 18), including himself (vs. 19-20).

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<sup>104</sup>Lincoln (p. 454) aptly remarks: “Normally an ambassador had diplomatic immunity and could not be imprisoned by those to whom he was sent.”