

Notes on
Ephesians
2000 Edition
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Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Almost all Christians believed in the Pauline authorship of Ephesians until the nineteenth century when destructive biblical criticism gained influence (cf. 1:1; 3:1). The critics built a case against Pauline authorship from linguistic and stylistic features, literary comparisons chiefly with Colossians, historical evidence, and doctrinal peculiarities.

"When all the objections are carefully considered it will be seen that the weight of evidence is inadequate to overthrow the overwhelming external attestation to Pauline authorship, and the Epistle's own claims."¹

Most conservative New Testament scholars hold to the tradition that Paul wrote Ephesians along with Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians, the other "Prison Epistles," during his first Roman imprisonment, 60-62 A.D. (3:1; 4:1; 6:20; cf. Acts 28:16-31). During this time Paul was under house arrest. He lived in his own rented quarters under guard by Roman soldiers. He could have visitors and could minister without hindrance as far as his confinement permitted (Acts 28:16, 30-31). He was not chained in a prison cell at this time as he was during his second Roman imprisonment when he wrote 2 Timothy (cf. 2 Tim. 1:16). For some interpreters, the reference to Paul having recently sent Tychicus to Ephesus in 2 Timothy 4:12 seems to put the composition of Ephesians in the second imprisonment (cf. Eph. 6:21-22). However the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians have led most scholars to conclude that Paul wrote these two letters at the same time. The evidence for his having written Colossians and Philemon during the first imprisonment is strong.



Paul knew Ephesus and the church in that city well. He had ministered in Asia Minor, the Roman province of which Ephesus was the capitol, with Ephesus as his headquarters for about three years, 53-56 A.D. (Acts 19:1—20:1). It appears that he sent this epistle to the

¹Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:127.

Ephesian church so the Christians there would subsequently circulate it among the other churches.² Three other New Testament books went first to Ephesus: 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:1). Tychicus evidently delivered this epistle to the Ephesian church (Eph. 6:21-22).

PURPOSE

Paul's frequent references to the church as a mystery, previously unknown but now revealed, identify the apostle's main purpose in writing as having been the exposition of the mystery of the church (1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). His emphasis on the church as Christ's body in which both Jewish and Gentile believers are one suggests that Paul wrote to promote unity in the Ephesian church and in the universal church. The emphasis on the importance of love is also strong. More than one-sixth of Paul's references to love in his 13 epistles occur in Ephesians. This also shows that he wanted to promote Christian unity in the church.

MESSAGE³

The Book of Ephesians enables us to view God's creation from an alpine altitude. When we study this book, it is as though we have climbed a high mountain peak because the book gives us that kind of perspective on what God has created. Recall the opening scenes in *The Sound of Music* movie where Maria Von Trapp is standing in a high meadow looking over the valleys and mountains beyond. Yet the creation Ephesians opens up to our vision is not the physical creation but the church and its position and importance in the panorama of God's program. The church is the subject of Ephesians.

One of the features of this book that distinguishes it from other Pauline epistles is its universal character. Ephesians deals with matters of perspective that are important to all churches of all ages. Ephesians is not like 1 Corinthians that concerns itself with the situation of one local congregation primarily. It is more like Romans that deals with the great revelations that transcend local church polity.

Ephesians is an exposition of one of the most important statements Jesus ever uttered during His earthly ministry. That statement is in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." Other epistles similarly expound other teachings that Jesus gave while He walked this earth. For example, the Epistle of James is really an exposition of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. John's first epistle is an exposition of Jesus' Upper Room Discourse. Likewise Ephesians explains Jesus' teaching concerning the church. All the New Testament epistles deal with the church, of course. However, Ephesians lifts us above all the other revelation on this subject and puts the church in perspective in the plan of God. Paul developed both the building of the church and the conflict of the church, suggested in Jesus' statement, here.

²See my comments on 1:1.

³Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:166-84.

Paul introduced the central teaching of Ephesians in its first verse. We read, "To the saints . . . in Christ Jesus." This phrase indicates the composition of the church. It alerts us to what will follow in the epistle. The phrase "the saints" reflects the diversity and differences that exist in the church. Paul had much to say in this letter about God's individual blessing of believers (e.g., 1:3—2:10). However the phrase "in Christ Jesus" emphasizes the unification of these individuals in one united church. Paul also had much to say about the corporate calling of believers in this letter (e.g., 2:11—3:19). The church is one organism that God has created from individual believers in this age whom God has united in a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. The figure of the human body with its diverse members controlled by one head (2:14-16) is the perfect illustration of the church.

As we examine the central teaching in Ephesians we can see that it falls into two parts. First, there is revelation concerning the eternal character of the church. Second, there is teaching about the temporal conduct of the church.

Consider first the revelation concerning the eternal character of the church. Ephesians tells us three things about the character of the church.

First, it reveals its conception. The church was in the plan of God from eternity past. It was not something God devised the day Jesus Christ died because the Jews had rejected their Messiah. Some dispensational expositors have referred to the church as a parenthetical part of God's eternal plan. That does not mean the church was an afterthought by God. The church is just as much a part of God's plan for human history as the nation of Israel. God did not reveal it in the Old Testament. It is a mystery, a New Testament revelation not revealed previously. Nevertheless it was always part of God's plan. This is important for us to realize because when we see that God brought the church into existence it is easier to believe that Satan will never destroy the church.

The second thing Ephesians reveals about the eternal character of the church is its construction. Whereas God viewed the church in the past as part of His eternal plan, He is constructing it in the present by His eternal power. In Ephesians there is much emphasis on power, the tremendous power of God. Paul prayed that his readers would grow in their understanding of the eternal power of God, the power that raised Jesus from the grave (1:18-19). Paul used four different Greek words for power in 1:19. This is the same power that has raised the Christian up and seated him or her with Christ in the heavenly realms now (2:4-6). Moreover it is the same power available to you and to me as we engage our spiritual enemy who is trying to tear down the church (6:10-11). Too often the church fails because Christians think it cannot succeed. We fail to appreciate the eternal divine power presently available to build the church and to defeat its foes.

The third thing we learn from this epistle about the character of the church is its consummation. This too involves an eternal perspective. Ephesians reveals that the church will serve the purpose of God throughout eternity future (2:4-7; 3:8-10). The church will demonstrate the richness of God's grace to all beings forever (2:7). It will also demonstrate the richness of God's wisdom to all beings forever (3:10).

In summary, Ephesians reveals the important place the church has in God's eternal plan for history. In the past He conceived of it as part of His eternal plan. In the present He is constructing it with His eternal power. In the future He will bring it to consummation in fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

Whereas the revelation of the church's eternal character constitutes a major portion of this epistle Paul also taught much about the temporal conduct of the church. The church's eternal character has major implications for its temporal conduct (4:1). We can organize this part of the revelation under three headings as well.

The first implication of the character of the church that I want to point out that Paul stressed relates to its construction. Since the church is what it is, the unified body of Christ, it is very important that Christians preserve this unity (4:1-3). Note that this is not a unity among professing Christians that we must achieve. It is a unity among genuine Christians that we must preserve. We must be very careful to avoid causing divisions in the body of Christ. One of the seven things Solomon wrote that the Lord hates is someone who spreads strife among his brothers (Prov. 6:19).

A second implication of the character of the church relates to its confession. The church, Paul urged, must make a confession or give testimony to God. This is the will of God (5:15-17). We do this by sanctifying all of life to God, setting it apart to Him for His honor and glory. Consequently Paul talked about the basic relationships of life—husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees. Our faith must have an impact on these relationships. The church makes its confession before the world not primarily by formulating creeds of belief but by demonstrating sanctification in conduct.

Third, another implication of the character of the church that Paul explained relates to its conflict with the forces opposed to God's purposes. We must arm ourselves, stay alert, and take a stand against these spiritual forces (6:10-11).

To summarize, the church must maintain unity as it grows. It must sanctify every relationship as it makes its confession to the world. It must also stand firm against its spiritual enemies as it conflicts with Satan's forces. You see how these points clarify Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." The church cooperates with God as He builds it in three ways. It must remain united itself. Second, it must present a message of purity and holiness to the world by its sanctified relationships. Third, it must fight God's enemies after putting on the whole armor of God.

Attempting to summarize the teaching of Ephesians into a short message statement I would phrase it this way. Ephesians reveals that the church is part of God's eternal plan, and it grows as a result of God's power working through believers' lives, overcoming their spiritual enemies.

We come next to the abiding appeal that this letter contains. I said Paul summarized the central revelation of Ephesians in 1:1, "the saints . . . in Christ Jesus." Similarly he

summarized the timeless exhortation of this letter in 4:1, "Walk . . . worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

First, we are to walk in view of God's eternal plan. That is, we should live now with God's purposes throughout eternity clearly in view. God chose us before the creation of the world so He could conform us to the image of His Son (1:4; Rom. 8:29). We are to "grow up . . . into Him . . . even Christ" (4:15). The measure in which we are living in holiness and in love is the measure in which we are conforming to God's eternal plan. Paul did not tell us to be holy because decency demands it, or because God may discipline us if we don't. We are to live thinking about God's eternal plan and remembering that God had our individual lives in His mind from eternity past.

We can walk according to God's plan only by appropriating His almighty power. God is able to enable us to walk in this plan by His power. "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding . . ." (3:20-21). We have the power to walk worthily. However, we must allow God's Spirit to control us if we want to walk in harmony with God's will (5:18).

Third, we are to walk opposing God's unseen enemies as well as in view of God's eternal plan and appropriating God's almighty power. We need to balance the passive "be filled with the Spirit" with the active "stand firm" (6:14). Our enemies are not primarily other people but the unseen demonic personalities behind them. In former years, people scoffed at the idea of demons and malignant spiritual forces. Today there is a more realistic awareness of their existence and powerful influence. We must engage spiritual enemies with spiritual arms: truthfulness, righteous conduct, the gospel, trust in God, the Word of God appropriate to the need, and prayer (6:14-18).

Finally let me make application of the message of this epistle to us.

The measure of the church's power to change the world is the measure of her other-worldliness. Many in our day criticize the church for being uninvolved, or at least not involved enough, with the physical problems of people. Ephesians teaches us that the way to help people the most is by dealing with unseen issues: unity, love, holiness, prayer, and evangelism. We do the church's work much more effectively by praying than by picketing, by protesting, and by politicking. The measure of the church's power to help the world is the measure of her other-worldliness. The church must remember her heavenly calling in the eternal plan of God to realize all God purposes for her.

Conversely the measure of the church's other-worldliness is the measure of her influence in the world. If we really see God's purpose for the church, we can never remain unconcerned about or uninvolved with the physical problems of people. Was our Lord insensitive to suffering, unconcerned about injustice, or lacking in compassion toward the oppressed? Never, and He is the Head into whom we are to grow up.

"The church of God can never help God when she ceases to be other-worldly. When she is other-worldly she helps the world; and cannot avoid doing so."⁴

⁴Ibid., 2:1:183.

OUTLINE

- I. Salutation 1:1-2
- II. The Christian's calling 1:3—3:21
 - A. Individual calling 1:3—2:10
 - 1. The purpose: glory 1:3-14
 - 2. The means: knowledge 1:15-23
 - 3. The motive: grace 2:1-10
 - B. Corporate calling 2:11-3:19
 - 1. Present unity 2:11-22
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 - C. Doxology 3:20-21
- III. The Christian's conduct 4:1—6:20
 - A. Spiritual walk 4:1—6:9
 - 1. Walking in unity 4:1-16
 - 2. Walking in holiness 4:17-32
 - 3. Walking in love 5:1-6
 - 4. Walking in light 5:7-14
 - 5. Walking in wisdom 5:15—6:9
 - B. Spiritual warfare 6:10-20
- IV. Conclusion 6:21-24

Exposition

I. SALUTATION 1:1-2

In most of his epistles Paul began by setting forth foundational truth and then concluded by applying that truth to the lives of his readers. This pattern is very obvious in Ephesians where the first three chapters deal with doctrine (teaching) and the last three with practice (application). Of course, there is some doctrine in the last three chapters and some application in the first three, but generally this is how Paul organized his material.⁵

The salutation contains Paul's introduction of himself to the original recipients of this letter and his greeting to them.

1:1 Paul referred to himself by name as the writer of this book twice (cf. 3:1). Even though some critics have denied the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, largely because of the vocabulary, style, and doctrine it contains, the early church accepted it without dispute.⁶

"Ephesians, then, was unhesitatingly assigned to Paul from the time when the New Testament corpus began to be recognized as such in the mid-second century. Since Clement of Rome reflected its language when he wrote to Corinth in A.D. 95, it is likely that this attestation runs back to the first century."⁷

The New Testament writers used the word "apostle" (lit. "sent one") in a general and in a particular sense. Sometimes it refers generally to anyone sent out as a representative of Jesus Christ (Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). Usually it refers to one of the 12 apostles or Paul who saw the risen Christ, as here. The Lord Jesus commissioned and sent Paul out with the gospel message. He received his apostleship on the Damascus road because of God's "will" or decision, not his own choosing (Acts 26:16-18).

The original recipients of this epistle were "saints" (Gr. *hagiois*, holy ones), people set apart by God for His use. They lived in Ephesus, the capitol of the Roman province of Asia, where Paul had ministered for three years during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:31).

The words "at Ephesus" or "in Ephesus" do not appear in three early Alexandrian (Egyptian) manuscripts. This omission has led some scholars

⁵Compare the Book of Romans in which chapters 1—11 contain mainly doctrine and chapters 12—16 mostly practice.

⁶See W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 357.

⁷A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in *Ephesians-Philemon*, vol. 11 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 4.

to conclude that Paul originally sent this epistle to several undesignated local churches probably in the province of Asia for the recipients to circulate among them. Advocates of this view have pointed to the absence of any reference to individuals as evidence that Paul meant it to go to several churches rather than just to the Ephesian church. However it seems best to regard the Ephesian church as the original audience for the following reasons. Most ancient manuscripts do contain the words "at Ephesus" or "in Ephesus." Moreover no manuscript contains the name of any other city or even the words "at" or "in." Furthermore all of Paul's other inspired epistles mention the recipients.

Perhaps Paul omitted personal names of Ephesian believers because he felt no need to greet them since this letter would circulate to other churches. Another possible reason may be that if he had named believers he would have had to mention many since he knew so many in the Ephesian church.

It is quite possible that Paul intended Ephesians to be an encyclical letter. All the New Testament writings circulated among the churches, and Paul may have written Ephesians with this in view (cf. Col. 4:16). Since Ephesus was a strategic city in both the Roman Empire and in Paul's ministry, it would have been natural for him to send this letter to that city first.

Not all saints are "faithful," but the Ephesian believers were. They had been holding fast to the teaching they had received when Paul wrote this epistle (cf. Acts 20:28-32; Rev. 2:1-7).

"In Christ" describes all who are saints. Every believer occupies a location in space. These saints were in Ephesus. However every Christian saint also lives within the sphere of God's family because of Jesus' work, which Paul spoke of as being "in Christ." This phrase was a favorite of Paul's. He used it nine times in 1:1-14 and about 25 times in this epistle. It occurs approximately 130 times in the New Testament. Much of what follows in chapters 1—3 is an explanation of what it means to be "in Christ."

"Thus our being in Christ means that the Lord Jesus surrounds and embraces the believer in His own life, and separates him at the same time from all outside and hostile influences. He protects the believer from all perils and foes, and supplies him with all that is necessary. In Ephesians the meaning of this being 'in Christ' reaches its highest thought. The peculiar truth in Ephesians is the heavenly nature and divine fullness of this sphere of our new life."⁸

⁸August Van Ryn, *Ephesians: The Glory of His Grace*, p. 17. See also A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Some Observations on Paul's Use of the Phrases 'In Christ' and 'With Christ,'" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (October 1985):83-97.

"That phrase *in Christ* strikes the keynote of the entire Epistle; from that prolific germ ramifies the branching oak of the forest."⁹

1:2 Paul greeted his readers by wishing God's grace and peace on them, as he did in all of his other epistles. Grace (Gr. *charis*) expresses God's unmerited favor and divine enablement, which are the portion of every saint. Peace (Gr. *eirene*, which translates the Hebrew *shalom*) is our condition resulting from God's grace to us. We have peace with God and we can experience the peace of God, the fullness of His blessing, because of His grace.

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING 1:3—3:21

". . . the first three chapters are *one long prayer*, culminating in the great doxology at the end of chapter 3. There is in fact nothing like this in all Paul's letters. This is the language of lyrical prayer, not the language of argument, and controversy, and rebuke."¹⁰

A. INDIVIDUAL CALLING 1:3—2:10

Paul began the body of his letter by revealing the spiritual blessings that God has planned for believers in His Son.

1. The purpose: glory 1:3-14

In the Greek text verses 3-14 are one sentence. The Holy Spirit carried Paul along in his thinking as he contemplated God's provision so that he moved quickly from one blessing to the next. It is as though he was ecstatically opening a treasure chest, lifting its jewels with his hands, letting them cascade through his fingers, and marvelling briefly at them as they caught his eye.

". . . Ephesians 1:3-14 is one of the longest psalms of the New Testament, and it is a praise psalm in its form."¹¹

The believer's position in Christ 1:3

Christians should bless or praise (Gr. *eulogetos*, speak well of) God the Father for bestowing these blessings. Paul was thinking of God as both the Father of believers (v. 2) and the Father of His Son (v. 3). God has already blessed believers in the ways the

⁹E. K. Simpson, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, p. 24.

¹⁰William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 76.

¹¹Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Paul's Prison Epistles," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 309. Other praise psalms are in Luke 1:46-55 and 1:67-79.

apostle proceeded to identify. This blessing happened before creation as will become evident in the following verses. "Spiritual" blessings are benefits that relate to our spiritual life in contrast to our physical life. Since God has already given us these things, we do not need to ask for them but should appropriate them by faith and give thanks for them.

"When you were born again into God's family, you were born rich."¹²

"In the heavenly places" or "realms" refers to the sphere in which these blessings operate. The heavenly realms are where Paul spoke of the believer as being presently in his or her spiritual life. Whereas physically we are on the earth, spiritually we are already with Christ in the heavens (cf. v. 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). God has united us with Jesus Christ so we are in that sense with Him where He is now. When we die, our immaterial part will go into Christ's presence (2 Cor. 5:6-8). When God resurrects our bodies they will go into His presence and unite with our immaterial part. Presently our lives are already with the Lord in the heavenly realms spiritually. We are there because of our present union with Christ. We are "in Christ." Union with Christ by saving faith places us in the heavenly realms.¹³

"The key thought of *Ephesians* is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ."¹⁴

"Ephesians 1:3 tells much about God's blessings on believers: (a) *when*: eternity past; (b): *with what*: every spiritual [not material] blessing; (c): *where*: in the heavenly realms; (d): *how*: in Christ."¹⁵

"Ephesus was considered the bank of Asia. One of the seven wonders of the world, the great temple of Diana, was in Ephesus, and was not only a center for idolatrous worship, but also a depository for wealth. . . .

"Paul's letter to the Ephesians is as carefully structured as that great temple of Diana, and it contains greater beauty and wealth!"¹⁶

¹²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:9.

¹³See W. Hall Harris, "The Heavens' Reconsidered: *Ouranos* and *Epouranios* in Ephesians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):73-74. *Ouranos* (heaven or heavenly) appears in 1:10; 3:15; 4:10; and 6:9 while *epouanios* (heaven or heavenly realms) occurs in 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; and 6:12. "*En tois epouraniois* [in the heavens or heavens] is the location of the current conflict in which believers participate through their presence there 'in' Christ. But *hoi epouranioi* [the heavens or heavens] in Ephesians is primarily viewed as the location of the exalted Christ, the place where He now is and from which He exercises His universal sovereignty in the present age" (p. 89).

¹⁴Barclay, p. 77.

¹⁵Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 616.

¹⁶Wiersbe, 2:10.

The selection of the Father 1:4-6

The spiritual blessings that have come to us are the work of all three members of the Trinity. God Himself is the basis of these blessings.

1:4 The first blessing is election. God has sovereignly chosen some people for salvation (cf. v. 11; Rom. 8:30; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 1:1). Salvation is ultimately God's doing, not man's (Eph. 12:8-9). Salvation comes to the elect when they trust in Jesus Christ (v. 13; 2 Thess. 2:13).

Belief in divine election is probably the most fundamental tenet of Calvinistic theology. Someone who denies it is not a Calvinist.

God chose us "in Him" (Christ, v. 3) in the sense that He is our representative. When we trust Christ, we become a member of the redeemed race within mankind of which Jesus Christ is the Head (vv. 10, 22; Rom. 5:12-21; Col. 1:18). God has ordained that all the elect should be under Christ's authority. Some interpreters have concluded that God chose Jesus and that all who believe in Him become elect by their faith. However this verse states that God chose "us" to be in Christ.

"Here is a vast host of people hurrying down the broad road with their minds fixed upon their sins, and one stands calling attention to yonder door, the entrance into the narrow way that leads to life eternal. On it is plainly depicted the text, 'Whosoever will, let him come.' Every man is invited, no one need hesitate. Some may say, 'Well, I may not be of the elect, and so it would be useless for me to endeavor to come, for the door will not open for me.' But God's invitation is absolutely sincere; it is addressed to every man, 'Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely' (Rev. 22:17). If men refuse to come, if they pursue their own godless way down to the pit, whom can they blame but themselves for their eternal judgment? The messenger addressed himself to all, the call came to all, the door could be entered by all, but many refused to come and perished in their sins. Such men can never blame God for their eternal destruction. The door was open, the invitation was given, they refused, and He says to them sorrowfully, 'Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.' But see, as the invitation goes forth, every minute or two some one stops and says, 'What is that?' 'The way to life,' is the reply. 'Ah, that I might find the way to life! I have found no satisfaction in this poor world.' We read, 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' 'I should like to know how to be free from my sin, how to be made fit for the

presence of God.' And such an one draws near and listens, and the Spirit of God impresses the message upon his heart and conscience and he says, 'I am going inside: I will accept the invitation; I will enter that door,' and he presses his way in and it shuts behind him. As he turns about he finds written on the inside of the door the words, 'Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.' 'What!' he says, 'had God His heart fixed on me before ever the world came into being?' Yes, but he could not find it out until he got inside. You see, you can pass the door if you will, you can trample the love of God beneath your feet, you can spurn His grace if you are determined to do it, but you will go down to the pit and you will be responsible for your own doom."¹⁷

The time of our individual election was before God created the world. The purpose for which God chose us was two-fold. First, it was that we should be "holy" (Gr. *hagious*; cf. *hagiois*, "saints," v. 1), which means different and set apart to God. Second, it was that we should be "blameless" (Gr. *anomous*), which means without blemish (cf. 5:27; Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:22; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 14:5).

"In love" probably modifies "to be holy and blameless in His sight" rather than "He predestined us" (v. 5). Normally the modifying phrases follow the action words in this context (cf. vv. 3, 6, 8-10). Also the other occurrences of the phrase "in love" in Ephesians refer to human rather than divine love (cf. 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2). Furthermore love is appropriate to connect with holiness and blamelessness since it provides a balance. Our duty is to love God as well as to be pure.

". . . the freer the Lord's paramount choice, the deeper the debt of the chosen to live divine."¹⁸

1:5 Predestination is the basis for election (cf. Rom 8:30). Having marked us out beforehand (the meaning of *proorisas*, translated "predestined") God chose us. Predestination looks more at the "what" than at the "who" of election. Election refers to people and predestination to purposes (cf. v. 11; Acts 4:25-28; Rom. 8:29-30). God predetermined the final destiny of the elect, namely that He would adopt us as His full-fledged sons (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:4-7). Jesus Christ was the agent who made that adoption possible by His death. Sons adopted in Greek culture received the same rights and privileges as children born into the family. Likewise

¹⁷H. A. Ironside, *In the Heavens*, pp. 27-29.

¹⁸Simpson, p. 26.

our adoption does not imply an inferior status in relation to God. God predestined us to adoption because He delighted to bless us in this way.

"You do not get into God's family by adoption. You get into His family by regeneration, the new birth (John 3:1-18; 1 Peter 1:22-25). Adoption is the act of God by which He gives His 'born ones' an adult standing in the family. Why does He do this? So that we might *immediately* begin to claim our inheritance and enjoy our spiritual wealth!"¹⁹

Some Calvinistic interpreters have concluded that since God predetermined the final destiny of those He chose for salvation it is only logical that he also predetermined the damnation of the non-elect. It is therefore unnecessary, they say, for us to concern ourselves with the salvation of individuals since God has predetermined this. This view, called "double predestination," goes beyond the teaching of Scripture. The Scriptures never state that God has predetermined the fate of the non-elect. The emphasis of Scripture, on the other hand, is on the possibility, from the human viewpoint, of anyone trusting in Jesus Christ and receiving salvation (John 3:16, et al.).²⁰

"We should not see predestination as a grim process whereby God condemns great numbers of people to eternal loss. Rather, it is the outworking of a loving purpose whereby he delivers great numbers of people for salvation."²¹

1:6 The ultimate goal of predestination and election is that believers will contribute to the praise of the magnificence of God's undeserved favor that He has shown toward humankind (cf. vv. 12, 14). This grace was "freely bestowed" or "given" in the sense that the elect need do nothing to merit it. It comes to us through Jesus Christ described here as the Beloved of the Father (cf. Col. 1:13). Since God loves His Son, believers who are in Christ can rejoice that we too are the objects of God's love.

The sacrifice of the Son 1:7-12

1:7 The "Him" in view is the beloved Son (v. 6).

¹⁹Wiersbe, 2:11.

²⁰For four views of two Calvinists (John Feinberg and Norman Geisler) and two Arminians (Bruce Reichenbach and Clark Pinnock) on the problem of harmonizing Scriptural revelation on the subject of divine sovereignty and human freedom, see David and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will*.

²¹Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, pp. 17-18.

Redemption (Gr. *apolytroisin*) means release from slavery (cf. v. 14; 4:30; Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 11:35). It involves buying back and setting free by paying a ransom price. Jesus Christ has redeemed us from sin (Heb. 9:15), namely set us free from slavery to it. The blood, representative of the life, of the perfect Sacrifice had to flow out of Him for this to happen (Rom. 3:24-25; cf. Heb. 9:22).

NEW TESTAMENT WORDS FOR REDEMPTION²²		
Greek Words	English Meanings	References
<i>agorazo</i> (verb)	To buy, to purchase in the market (or slave market)	1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4
<i>exagorazo</i> (verb)	To buy out, to purchase out of the market (or slave market)	Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5
<i>lytron</i> (noun)	Ransom, price of release	Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45
<i>lytroomai</i> (verb)	To ransom, to free by paying a ransom price	Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18
<i>lytroisis</i> (noun)	Act of freeing by paying a ransom price	Luke 1:68; 2:38; Heb. 9:12
<i>apolytroisis</i> (noun)	A buying back, a setting free by paying a ransom price	Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 11:35

The immediate result of our liberation from sin's slavery is that God has forgiven our sins (Gr. *paraptoma*, false steps, transgressions).

Jesus Christ's death affected our redemption. This was the extent to which God was willing to go for us. God's grace was that great. The gift of Jesus

²²Adapted from *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 153.

Christ did not exhaust the supply of God's grace, however (cf. Phil. 4:19). Rather that gift is an evidence of the extent of God's favor to us (cf. v. 5).

- 1:8 God has given abundant grace to us, not just the bare essential amount needed. This reference hints at many other benefits of Christ's death that Paul did not enumerate here.²³

"Wisdom" (Gr. *sophia*) is what is highest and noblest, and "insight" or "understanding" (Gr. *phronesei*) is the means by which we perceive it.²⁴ Again we have to decide whether the last part of this verse modifies the first part of verse 8 or the first part of verse 9 (cf. v. 4). As I pointed out above, normally the modifying phrases follow the action words in this passage. Paul's idea therefore seems to have been that God lavished His grace on us in His infinite wisdom knowing how we would respond to it. The wisdom and insight are God's, not ours.

- 1:9 This verse probably begins a new thought, as the NIV suggests by putting a period at the end of verse 8. The New Testament uses the term "mystery" to refer to a truth previously hidden but now made known by divine revelation (cf. Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25-26; et al.).²⁵ The mystery revealed here is God's purpose to bring everything into submission to Jesus Christ in the future (v. 10). God's "kind intention" (NASB) is His "good pleasure" (NIV, cf. v. 5). "In Him" (NASB) means "in Christ" (NIV).

- 1:10 The Greek word translated "administration" in the NASB (*oikonomia*), and not translated in the NIV, means dispensation, arrangement, or administration. The main idea in this word is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household.²⁶ The dispensation in view is the millennial reign of Christ on earth during which everything will be under His rule (1 Cor. 15:27; Col. 1:20). Even though in one sense everything is under Christ's authority now, Jesus Christ will be the head of all things in a more direct way in the messianic kingdom. Everyone and everything will acknowledge and respond to His authority then (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 11:1-10).

- 1:11 "In Him" (v. 10) probably begins the thought continued in this verse, as the NIV indicates.

For the first time in this epistle Paul made a distinction among believers. Until now he spoke of all believers, but here he contrasted "we" and "you"

²³See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:234-65, where he discussed 33 riches of divine grace that become ours when we trust Christ as our Savior.

²⁴Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 263-67.

²⁵See the chart listing various mysteries referred to in the New Testament under my note on 3:3.

²⁶See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 22-47; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 23-43..

(v. 13). The "we" evidently refers to Jewish Christians and the "you" to Gentile believers, as the context suggests (vv. 12-13). Note the presence of "also" in both verses 11 and 13 that provides continuity as well as marking discontinuity.

Some translators who rendered the Greek word *eklerothemen* "obtained an inheritance" (NASB) introduced the idea of the believer's inheritance. The word really means "chosen" (NIV, lit. appointed or obtained by lot). God has chosen Jewish believers for salvation because He predestined them to have a part in His sovereign plan. Paul would say later that God's plan for the present involves the church, which consists of both Jewish and Gentile believers (2:14-22). However, God chose the Jews first (cf. Acts 3:26; Rom. 1:16).

This verse contains one of the strongest statements in Scripture that God is sovereign (cf. Ps. 115:3; Prov. 16:9, 33; Dan. 4:34-35). God is sovereign over all things. This includes the election of some people to salvation. "Purpose" (Gr. *prothesin*) refers to the goal God intends to accomplish. "Counsel" (Gr. *boule*) refers to God's purpose or deliberation. "Will" (Gr. *thelema*) denotes willingness. The idea contained in this verse is that God chose a plan after deliberating on the wisest course of action to accomplish his purpose.²⁷

How does God carry out His plan? He accomplishes some things directly and exclusively Himself without using other agents. He accomplishes other purposes through the agency of others, secondary causes, which include angels and humans. Unquestionably God is absolutely sovereign (i.e., the ultimate authority over all things). How He carries out His plans—working with secondary causes, giving people freedom to choose, and then justly holding them responsible for their choices—is difficult to explain.²⁸

Personally I believe the solution to this puzzle lies beyond the ability of human beings to understand and explain fully. However, Scripture clearly teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.²⁹

1:12 God chose Jews to be believers for the praise of His glory (cf. v. 6). This verse shows that the Jews are the "we" in view in verse 11. The Jews were the first to put their trust in Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 1:8; 13:46; 28:25; Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10).

²⁷B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 15; and T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, p. 20.

²⁸See Basinger and Basinger for four explanations.

²⁹For a very helpful article on how prayer fits into the sovereign plan of God, see John Munro, "Prayer to a Sovereign God," *Interest* 56:2 (February 1990):20-21. See also Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 149-52.

The work of the Son in salvation was setting the sinner free from his or her sin and revealing God's plan to head up all things in Christ at the end of the ages. This includes the salvation of Jewish believers.

The seal of the Spirit 1:13-14

"God's spiritual blessings for believers are based not only on the sovereign election of the Father (vv. 3-6) and the redemptive work of the Son (vv. 7-12), but also on the seal of the Holy Spirit."³⁰

1:13 In contrast to the Jews who were the first to hope in Christ (v. 12), Gentiles also had come to salvation when Paul wrote this epistle. The vehicle God uses to bring his elect to faith is the message of truth, namely the gospel message, the good news of salvation. When the Gentiles heard it, they listened to it and believed it. This resulted in their salvation and their sealing by the Holy Spirit.³¹ The AV translation implies that the sequence is hearing, believing, and then sealing. However the sealing takes place at the same time as believing (cf. Acts 19:2). It is not a second or later work of grace.

When these Gentiles believed, God sealed them in Christ. This provided a guarantee of their eternal security.³² Seals at the time Paul wrote indicated security (Matt. 27:66; Eph. 4:30), authentication and approval (John 6:27), genuineness (John 3:33), and ownership (2 Cor. 1:22; Rev. 7:2; 9:4). God seals the believer by giving him or her the indwelling Holy Spirit who keeps the Christian in Christ. The Lord Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would permanently indwell believers (Luke 24:49; John 14:16; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 1:5). That is evidently why Paul referred to Him as the "Holy Spirit of promise" (NASB).

The Spirit seals all believers, not just Gentile believers. Though Paul addressed Gentile believers in particular in this verse, "you also" shows that what he said of them was also true of Jewish believers (cf. v. 11). All the blessings spoken of go to both Jewish and Gentile believers.

1:14 The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is a pledge of all that God will give us as His children. This pledge is not just a promise but the first part of our inheritance, the down payment so to speak. The fact that we possess Him

³⁰Hoehner, p. 619.

³¹There are about 59 references to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians, one-fourth of the total references in the New Testament.

³²See Eldon Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):139-63. See also Robert G. Gromacki, *Salvation is Forever*; and Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*.

now assures us that the rest of our salvation will inevitably follow. An engagement ring is this kind of pledge.

"The inheritance here is unmistakably heaven. It is an inheritance which goes to those who have believed. As in the Old Testament there are two kinds of inheritance in the New. All Christians are heirs of God, but not all are heirs of the kingdom and joint-heirs with Christ. The content of the inheritance here is life in heaven with God."³³

The redemption in view here (Gr. *apolytroisin*) is a different aspect of our salvation than the redemption mentioned in verse 7. Here it is not release from sin's guilt (v. 7), but release from sin's presence (cf. Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20-21). In verse 7 justification is in view, but here glorification is, the final aspect of our redemption. We experience redemption in three stages: we have been redeemed in Christ (1:7), we are being redeemed as the Spirit makes us more like Christ (Rom. 8:1-4), and we shall be redeemed when Christ returns and we become like Him. God's possession is the believer whom He has chosen (vv. 3-6), redeemed (vv. 7-12), and sealed (vv. 13-14) "to the praise of His glory" (cf. vv. 6, 12, 18).

The spiritual blessings Paul identified in verses 3-14 are election, predestination, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, knowledge, sealing, and inheritance. The recurrence of the phrase "in Christ" and equivalent expressions emphasizes that all these blessings come with our union with our Savior (vv. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 [twice]). Likewise the repetition of "His will" and its equivalents emphasizes that the sovereign God is responsible for all these blessings (vv. 5, 9, 11). These verses (3-14) contain a compact statement of the believer's spiritual riches. The passage is similar to a bank statement because it lists every Christian's spiritual assets.

"We have been listening to an overture of the hallelujahs of the blest, and it closes, as it began, on the note of the praise of God's glory, the highest of all themes. . . . False and true theology may be discriminated by a simple criterion. Do they magnify God or man?"³⁴

2. The means: knowledge 1:15-23

Having reviewed his readers' blessings in Christ, Paul next prayed that they would appreciate and appropriate these good things in their own lives. Verses 15-23 are one sentence in the Greek text as are verses 3-14. Intellectual understanding is one thing, but it is also important that we use this knowledge to come into intimate relationship with God.

³³Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 90.

³⁴Simpson, p. 36.

Commendation 1:15-16

As was his custom, Paul first commended his readers for what they were doing well. Then he told them what his prayer requests for them were.

1:15 In view of their spiritual blessings, Paul felt constrained to pray for his original readers. Even though God had greatly blessed them, they needed even more from God. In addition to informing them, Paul also interceded for them.

The apostle had personally witnessed the faith and love of the Ephesians a few years earlier, but he had evidently received fresh reports of their condition. His statement also suggests that "you" may include other churches beside the one or ones located in Ephesus. Faith is the expression of the believer's trust in God, our vertical relationship. Love is the evidence of his or her proper relationship with other people, our horizontal relationship (cf. 6:23; Col. 1:14; 2 Thess. 1:3).

1:16 These qualities in his readers stimulated Paul to give thanks to God for their present condition and to petition Him for their present and future needs. He said he prayed for them repeatedly.³⁵

Supplication 1:17-23

1:17 Paul returned to his concept of God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 3; cf. Matt. 6:9). He combined with this fact the idea that all glory belongs to the Father (vv. 6, 12, 14; cf. Acts 7:2; 1 Cor. 2:8).

Paul asked God to give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and revelation. The spirit in view probably refers to an attitude rather than to the Holy Spirit, wisdom and revelation being the description of that attitude (cf. 1 Cor. 4:21). These attitudes become ours through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us, however (cf. Isa. 11:2). Wisdom (Gr. *sophia*, v. 8; 3:10) enables one to perceive reality accurately. Revelation is the unveiling of the subject contemplated, in this case God Himself.

"William Chillingworth said: 'The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.' That is true; but so often we would not think so. The exposition of scripture from the pulpit is a first necessity of religious wakening. We are interested, not in what a preacher thinks, but in what God says."³⁶

³⁵See W. B. Pope, *The Prayers of St. Paul*.

³⁶Barclay, p. 105.

The end in view was that the readers might gain greater knowledge of God. The Greek word translated "knowledge" (*epignosis*) refers to exact, complete, experiential knowledge, not just abstract knowledge of God or even facts about Him.³⁷ Paul wanted his readers to get to know God more intimately as their Father, to become closer friends with Him (cf. John 15:14).

"To know God personally is salvation (John 17:3). To know Him increasingly is sanctification (Phil 3:10). To know Him perfectly is glorification (1 Cor. 13:9-12)."³⁸

1:18 They would gain this greater knowledge as God would enlighten their understanding. The heart refers to the center of personality in the Bible. The eyes of the heart, a vivid mixed metaphor, suggests not just intellectual understanding but total apprehension of God.³⁹

The reason Paul prayed this prayer was three-fold. He wanted his readers to know (Gr. *eidenai*) factually three things. First, he wanted them to know the hope that was theirs because God had called them to salvation through election. Every Christian should appreciate his or her sure hope for the future that rests on his or her calling to salvation in the past.

Second, the readers needed to realize that they themselves would be an inheritance that God would receive when they went to be with Him. Paul spoke of the believer's inheritance in verse 14. Here he spoke of God's inheritance. This inheritance will be valuable because believers are people for whom God paid dearly with the blood of His own Son. It is glorious because when we see the Lord we will experience glorification, cleansing, and removal from sin (cf. vv. 6, 17 for other glorious things).

1:19 Third, Paul wanted the Ephesians to know the great power of God that affects the Christian. Power (Gr. *dunamis*) refers to a spiritually dynamic living force. "Working," "strength," and "might" or "mighty" further describe this power. These three words describe it as energetic, inherent in God, and able to overcome resistance respectively. This is the power of God that is available to believers.

"By making us His inheritance, God has shown His love. By promising us a wonderful future, He has encouraged our hope. Paul offered something to challenge our faith: 'the

³⁷Trench, pp. 268-69.

³⁸Wiersbe, 2:15.

³⁹In Hebrew thinking, which Paul employed, mixed metaphors enriched the thought rather than confusing it, as in English. See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1—72*, p. 151.

exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe'
(Eph. 1:19)."⁴⁰

1:20 God manifested this power in Christ in three instances that Paul cited to help us appreciate it more. God's power resurrected Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to God's right hand in heaven.⁴¹ The same power is available to us now (cf. Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:11).

1:21 Christ's ascension has resulted in His exaltation over every other authority (cf. Col. 1:16), human and angelic (cf. Phil. 2:8-11), present and future (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23-28). The Jews believed angels controlled human destiny, but Paul saw Jesus Christ doing this.

1:22 The second manifestation of God's power in Christ was the Father's making all things subject to Christ. Adam lost his lordship over creation when he sinned, but Jesus gained lordship over creation by His obedience (1:10; Rom. 5:12-21). His lordship over creation will be obvious in the future when He reigns during the Millennium (Ps. 8:6; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:6-8).⁴²

The third manifestation of God's power in Christ is the Son's appointment as Head over the church (cf. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18). This aspect of His lordship is evident now.⁴³

"There is given to the Church, and for the Church's benefit, a Head who is also Head over all things. The church has authority and power to overcome all opposition because her Leader and Head is Lord of all."⁴⁴

1:23 The church is both the body of Christ and the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way, namely Jesus Christ. The church is the fullness of Christ probably in the sense that He fills for Himself (middle voice in Greek) the church with blessings (cf. 4:10-11). Jesus Christ who fills all things with all things (i.e., with blessings) is filling the church with

⁴⁰Wiersbe, 2:16.

⁴¹Jesus Christ's present rule on His Father's throne over the church is not the same as His rule on David's throne over David's kingdom. The first is present and heavenly, but the second is future and earthly. See Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March):81-82.

⁴²See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 45.

⁴³Morris, p. 36, took "the head" here, and in 4:15, as "the beginning."

⁴⁴Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 65. See also Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS5 (1954):211-15.

blessings. The church could not come into existence until Jesus Christ had ascended into heaven to become its head.⁴⁵

After showing that believers have received all spiritual blessings (vv. 3-14), Paul prayed that believers might come to know God intimately (v. 17). This is necessary so we might better appreciate our past calling to salvation that gives us hope (v. 18), the future inheritance that we constitute for God (v. 18), and the present power of God available to us (v. 19). God manifested this power in the past in Christ's resurrection and ascension (v. 20-21). He will manifest it in the future by making Jesus Christ the head over all creation (v. 22). He is now manifesting this power in Jesus Christ's headship over the church (vv. 22-23).

3. The motive: grace 2:1-10

Paul concluded his revelation of the Christian's individual calling in Christ (1:3—2:10). He began this section of the epistle by explaining the purpose of our calling (i.e., the glory of God, 1:3-14). He then expounded the means whereby we appreciate our calling (i.e., knowledge given by the Holy Spirit through God's revelation, 1:15-23). Finally He enunciated the motive for our calling (i.e., the unmerited grace of God, 2:1-10).

These verses continue the theme of redemption (1:7). The pericope is a condensation of Paul's exposition of redemption in Romans. Whereas we were once dead to God (vv. 1-3), we are now alive in God (vv. 4-10).

"Having described our spiritual *possessions* in Christ, Paul turns to a complementary truth: our spiritual *position* in Christ. First he explains what God has done for all sinners in general; then he explains what God did for the Gentiles in particular."⁴⁶

Once dead to God 2:1-3

These verses are really preliminary to Paul's main point. They describe the Christian's condition as an unbeliever before God justified him or her. In the Greek text verses 1-7 are one sentence. The subject of this sentence is God (v. 4). The three main verbs are "made alive" (v. 5), "raised up" (v. 6), and "seated" (v. 6). The object is "us," and the prepositional phrase "with Christ" describes "us." The main point then is that God has made believers alive, raised us up, and seated us with Christ. Everything else in verse 1-7 is of subordinate importance.

2:1 Before their regeneration, believers were spiritually dead, separated from God, and unable to have fellowship with Him (cf. 4:18; John 17:3). We were living in the sphere of rebellion against God (cf. v. 2).

⁴⁵See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 117.

⁴⁶Wiersbe, 2:17.

Transgressions (false steps, cf. 1:7; 2:5) and sins (acts of missing the mark) describe deliberate offenses against God.

"There are three outstanding schools of moral pathology traceable throughout the centuries. Pelagianism asserts the convalescence of human nature. Man merely needs teaching. Semi-pelagianism admits his ill-health, but affirms that the symptoms will yield to proper treatment, to a course of tonic drugs and a scrupulous regimen. But Biblical Christianity probes the patient to the quick. Its searching diagnosis pronounces that mortification has set in and that nothing less than infusion of fresh lifeblood can work a cure. Nostrums and palliatives aggravate rather than allay the disease. Sin is an organic epidemical malady, a slow devitalizing poison issuing in moral necrosis; not a stage of arrested or incomplete development, but a seed-plot of impending ruin."⁴⁷

"The unbeliever is not sick; he is dead! He does not need resuscitation; he needs resurrection. All lost sinners are dead, and the only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay."⁴⁸

2:2 The apostle further described the sphere in which unbelievers live in three ways. First, it is a lifestyle in which people follow the ways of the world. The philosophy that seeks to eliminate God from every aspect of life dominates this lifestyle (cf. John 15:18, 23).

Second, the unsaved follow the person who is promoting this philosophy, namely Satan. As prince of the power of the air, Satan received temporary freedom to lead this rebellion against God (cf. 1 John 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9). The "spirit" now working probably refers to the "power" or "kingdom" (lit. authority) of the air rather than to Satan since that word is its nearest antecedent. "Sons of disobedience" is a way of saying people marked by disobedience, as a son bears the traits of his parent. Unbelievers resemble Satan in their rebellion.

2:3 Third, not only does the philosophy of the world guide unbelievers and Satan control them, but they also indulge the flesh. The term "flesh" (NASB, Gr. *sarkos*) when used metaphorically as here refers to the sinful nature that everyone possesses. It is our human nature that is sinful. The unbeliever characteristically gives in to his or her fleshly desires and

⁴⁷Simpson, p. 46.

⁴⁸Wiersbe, 2:18.

thoughts whereas the believer should not and need not do so (cf. Rom. 7—8).

"Children of wrath" and "sons of disobedience" are both phrases that describe unbelievers. "Children" (Gr. *tekna*) highlights the close relationship between a child and his or her parents. "Sons" (Gr. *huioi*) stresses the distinctive characteristics of the parents that the child displays. Unbelievers have a close relationship to God's wrath because of their rebellion against Him (cf. Rom. 1:18—2:29; John 3:36).

These verses (1-3) picture the hopeless unbeliever as a part of the world system, controlled by Satan, indulging the flesh, and destined to experience God's wrath. When an unbeliever trusts Jesus Christ, the world, the devil, and the flesh become his or her three-fold enemy.

Now alive in God 2:4-10

The wrath of God on the unbeliever (v. 3) contrasts with the grace of God on the believer (vv. 5, 7, 8). God's grace toward some unbelievers gives them life (vv. 4-5), raises them up (v. 6), and seats them in heavenly realms with Christ (vv. 6-10).

2:4 Paul introduced the contrast between the condition of the unbeliever and that of the believer with "But." God, the subject of this passage (vv. 1-7), makes all the difference. "Mercy" (Gr. *eleos*, the word the Septuagint translators used to render the Hebrew *hesed*, loyal love) means undeserved kindness. God's great love (Gr. *agape*) sought the highest good in the objects of His choice even though we were rebellious sinners.

2:5 Unbelievers are spiritually dead in their sins (cf. v. 1). However, God has given new life to believers. The only way a dead person can have any fellowship with the living God is for God to give him or her new life (cf. Rom. 4:17). Regeneration is an act of God in grace. Regeneration results in the commencement and continuation of new life. "Have been saved" is in the perfect tense in Greek indicating an ongoing permanent condition.

2:6 God has, second, raised up believers with Christ. This describes our spiritual, not physical experience. He will yet raise us physically, but spiritually He has already raised us to a new type of life (cf. Col. 3:1-2). As our Lord's resurrection life, ours is also powerful and eternal.

Third, God has seated us in the heavenly realms with Christ (cf. 1:20). That is where our heavenly citizenship lies (Phil. 3:20). What Christ did physically (i.e., died, arose, and took His seat in heaven) God has already done for the believer spiritually. The fact that God enabled Christ to do these things physically should help us believe that He has done these things for us spiritually.

2:7 God's ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself. The "ages" to come include all future ages. God will use the regeneration of believers to demonstrate the wealth and richness of His grace (cf. 1:7). Specifically His kindness toward believers as displayed in all that we have in Christ is in view. We see God's kindness in His giving life to those who were dead in sin.

Note that verses 1-3 describe what we were in the past, verses 4-6 what we are in the present, and verse 7 what we shall be in the future.

2:8 Verses 8 and 9 explain the surpassing riches of God's grace (v. 7) and expand the parenthetical statement in verse 5.

The basis of our salvation is God's grace (unmerited favor and divine enablement; cf. Rom. 3:22, 25; Gal. 2:16; 1 Peter 1:5). The instrument by which we receive salvation is faith (i.e., trust in Christ). Faith is not an act or work that earns merit with God that He rewards with salvation. When a person puts out his hand to take a gift that someone else offers, he or she is doing nothing to merit that gift. The giver gets credit for the gift, not the receiver. Likewise faith is not a meritorious work.⁴⁹

To what does "that" or "this" refer? Since it is a neuter pronoun it evidently does not refer to "grace" or "faith" both of which are feminine in gender in the Greek text. Probably it refers to the whole preceding clause that describes salvation (cf. 1:15; 3:1). Salvation is the gift of God.⁵⁰

"If we breathe, it is because life has been breathed into us; if we exercise the hearing of faith it is because our ears have been unstopped. We are born from above. Spiritual life is not of the nature of a subsidy supplementing dogged exertion or ruthless self-flagellation, but a largess from the overflowing well-spring of divine compassion, lavished on a set of spiritual incapables."⁵¹

2:9 Salvation is not by works since its basis is grace and its means of reception faith. No one will be able to boast that he or she has done something that earned him or her salvation. All the glory will go to God for accomplishing salvation.

⁴⁹See Morris, p. 104.

⁵⁰See Roy L. Aldrich, "The Gift of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:487 (July-September 1965):248-53; and Gary L. Nebeker, "Is Faith a Gift of God? Ephesians 2:8 Reconsidered," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 4:7 (July 1989):1, 4.

⁵¹Simpson, p. 55.

"Since we have not been saved by our good works, we cannot be lost by our bad works."⁵²

2:10 Here Paul gave the reason salvation is not from man or by works. Rather than salvation being a masterpiece that we have produced, regenerated believers are a masterpiece that God has produced. "Workmanship" (Gr. *poieme*, from which we get the word "poem"; cf. Rom. 1:20) means a work of art, a masterpiece. The Jerusalem Bible translates it "work of art" here. As a master worker, God has created us in Christ Jesus. The word translated "created" here (Gr. *ktizo*) describes only God's activity and denotes something He alone can produce.

Good works are not the roots from which salvation grows but the fruit God intends it to bear. God has not saved us because of our works (vv. 8-9), but He has saved us to do good works (v. 10). God saves us by faith for good works. Good works are what God intended for us to practice with His divine enablement. He intended that we walk in them, as a pedestrian walks along a path, before He saved us. This verse reveals that God is ultimately responsible for our good works (cf. Phil. 2:13). Paul developed the idea of walking in good works further in chapters 4—6.

". . . God has prepared a path of good works for believers which He will perform in and through them as they walk by faith. This does not mean doing a work for God; instead, it is God's performing His work in and through believers . . ." ⁵³

However this verse does not say that Christians will inevitably walk in the good works that God has freed us from sin's penalty and power to pursue. God has saved us so we can do works that are good in His sight, but this is obviously only part of His purpose in saving us. He has also saved us to take us to heaven, for example (John 14:1-3). He has guaranteed that all who trust in His Son will reach heaven (our glorification, John 10:28-29). He has not guaranteed that all who trust in Jesus Christ will persevere in good works (our progressive sanctification). That depends on our obedience (Titus 3:8).

God desires that everyone experience salvation (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), but the fact that some will perish does not put God's desires or power in question. He has given us enough freedom to choose if we will believe or not. Likewise God has provided salvation so His children will be able to obey Him and do good works, but He does not compel us to do so (Titus 2:11-12).

⁵²Wiersbe, 2:19.

⁵³Hoehner, p. 624.

"One could legitimately characterize the whole lordship controversy as a dispute over efficacious grace. All points in the discussion ultimately come back to this: Does God's saving grace inevitably obtain its desired effects? If all sides could come to consensus on that one question, the debate would be settled."⁵⁴

I would respond by saying that God's saving grace inevitably obtains all that God has said it will inevitably obtain including the believer's justification, positional sanctification, and glorification. However it does not inevitably obtain what God has said depends on the choices of His people. We must be careful to distinguish what God wants to happen from what He has said He will make happen.⁵⁵ His desires are not the same as His decrees.⁵⁶

God does not force Christians to persevere in good works any more than He forced the Israelites to persevere in good works. The Israelites' failure to walk in the good works that God had foreordained for them does not mean that His efficacious grace failed. Neither does Christians' failure to do so mean that.

This section of the epistle (2:1-10) contrasts what the believer was before regeneration with what he or she is after. All the glory for the change goes to God. He provided salvation for man. We do not need to do good works to merit salvation, but we should do good works because we have received salvation. This is God's plan for the believer.

B. CORPORATE CALLING 2:11—3:19

New spiritual life does not just mean that we have experienced regeneration individually. Additionally God brings every Christian into union with every other Christian. In Christ we have oneness with other believers as well as oneness with God. Paul next explained this corporate aspect of our being in Christ.

". . . a major focus of this letter and of the Prison Epistles in general is the corporate nature of those who are in the body of Christ. Believers do not have a private faith; they have corporate relationship and responsibility to each other."⁵⁷

⁵⁴John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p. 61.

⁵⁵The doctrine of God's sovereignty means that God is the ultimate authority in the universe. It implies that He has power sufficient to control everything that happens. It does not mean that God will inevitably bring to pass everything that He wishes would happen. If that were the case, no one would go to hell, and everyone would obey Him perfectly.

⁵⁶See Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* pp. 73-74.

⁵⁷Bock, p. 308.

1. Present ministry 2:11-22

The apostle first stated the reality of the union of all believers in Christ (vv. 11-13). Then he explained what this involves (vv. 14-18). Finally he described the consequences of this union (vv. 19-22).

The reality of Gentile believers' union with Jewish believers 2:11-13

2:11 In view of what God has done for us in changing us, we Gentile believers need to remember certain things. Paul used "flesh" here in the literal sense (i.e., the body) rather than in one of its metaphorical sense (i.e., the sinful human nature or all that we are in Adam). Great differences existed between Jewish and Gentile believers before the Cross.

"The one word that best describes the Gentiles is *without*. They were 'outside' in several respects."⁵⁸

2:12 Paul listed five privileges Gentile believers did not enjoy that Jewish believers did enjoy before the Cross. First, Gentile believers were separate from Christ, Messiah. They had no corporate national hope centered in a Messiah as the Jews did. Second, God excluded them as a people from citizenship in Israel. Individual Gentiles could become members of the nation of Israel, but as a whole the Gentiles had no part in what God planned to do in and through Israel. The Gentiles were aliens from Israel in this sense. Third, they had no direct part in the promises of God to Israel contained in the biblical covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic).⁵⁹ Fourth, as a people they had no corporate future promised by God to which they could look and in which they could hope as Israel did. Fifth, they were separate from God. In contrast God had reached out to Israel and drawn her to Himself.

2:13 "But" points to another great contrast (cf. v. 4). Because of Jesus Christ's death God has brought Gentiles near to Himself and to the Jews in a sense never before true. Sin results in death and separation. However, Christ's obedience resulted in life and reconciliation with other people as well as with God for Gentiles.

There is obvious continuity between the redeemed people of God in the Old Testament and the redeemed people of God in the New Testament. However here Paul stressed the differences between these two groups.⁶⁰ Covenant theology stresses the continuity

⁵⁸Wiersbe, 2:22.

⁵⁹Morris, an amillennialist, believed the singular "promise" refers to "God's promise to send his Messiah" (p. 62). Probably the singular "promise" simply stresses the promise element that is foundational to all the biblical covenants.

⁶⁰See the helpful essay by Carl B. Hoch, Jr., "The New Man in Ephesians 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 98-126.

between the two groups whereas dispensational theology stresses the differences between them. Many covenant theologians deny these differences.

The significance of Gentile believers' union with Jewish believers 2:14-18

Essentially Jesus Christ's death has resulted in peace between Gentile believers and Jewish believers and peace between Gentile believers and God.

2:14 To understand this verse we must discover what dividing wall Paul had in mind. Perhaps it was the wall in Herod's Temple courtyard that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Jews.⁶¹ This seems improbable since that wall still stood and divided Jews and Gentiles when Paul wrote this epistle. Perhaps he had in mind the veil between the holy and most holy places in that temple. However, that veil—it was not a wall—did not separate Jews from Gentiles but people from God. It seems most probable that Paul had in mind a spiritual rather than a physical barrier that had separated Jews and Gentiles since Abraham's time. This is in harmony with Paul's emphasis on spiritual realities that marks Ephesians.

"This new institution does not dissolve ethnic distinctions, but displays reconciliation, with every believer equally qualified to share in the benefits of salvation and peace that emerge from the uniting of Jews and Gentiles into a new living community."⁶²

This verse is a strong testimony to the fact that with the death of Jesus Christ God began dealing with humankind on a different basis than He had in the past. He now stopped working with and through the Jews and Judaism primarily (though temporarily, cf. Rom. 11). Instead He began dealing with Jews and Gentiles on the same basis, namely their faith in His Son. In other words, He began a new dispensation or administration in His dealings with humanity.

"When verse 14 says Christ is our peace, it means that Jesus is the source of restored relationships, not only between an individual and God but also between individuals. Now people form a new community, the household of God, which itself is compared to a holy temple, a sacred work of God (2:18-22)."⁶³

⁶¹Morris, p. 65.

⁶²Bock, p. 314.

⁶³Idem, "The New Man' as Community in Colossians and Ephesians," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 161.

- 2:15 The body of Jesus sacrificed on the cross terminated the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. It did so in the sense that when Jesus Christ died He fulfilled all the demands of the Mosaic Law. When He did that, God ended the Mosaic Law as His rule of life for the Jews. The word "abolished" (Gr. *kataresas*) means "rendered inoperative." The Mosaic Law ceased to be God's standard for regulating the life of His people (Rom. 10:4; et al.). The Mosaic Law had been the cause of the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. Its dietary distinctions and laws requiring separation in particular created hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The NASB translation implies that the law was the barrier. Really it was the cause of the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus Christ destroyed the barrier and the hostility that resulted from it by terminating the Mosaic Law.
- Jesus Christ had two purposes in ending Jewish Gentile hostility. First, He wanted to "create" one new man, the church (v. 6), out of the two former groups, Jews and Gentiles (v. 11). In the church God does not deal with Gentiles as He did with the Jews, nor does He deal with the Jews as He did Gentiles. Jews do not become Gentiles nor do Gentiles become Jews. Rather God has created a whole new (Gr. *kainon*, fresh) entity, the church. In it believing Jews become Christians, and believing Gentiles become Christians. God deals with both believing Jews and believing Gentiles now equally as Christians.⁶⁴
- 2:16 Jesus Christ's second purpose for ending Jewish Gentile hostility was to bring Jewish and Gentile believers to Himself in one body, the church. The Old Testament never spoke of Jewish and Gentile believers as being in one body. Ironically the Cross in one sense terminated Jesus, but Jesus terminated the enmity between Jews and Gentiles with the Cross. Not only have Jews and Gentiles experienced reconciliation with one another (v. 14), but they have also experienced reconciliation with God by the Cross (v. 16).
- 2:17 Not only is Jesus Christ our peace (v. 14), but He also preached peace. He preached the message of peace, the gospel, through His apostles following His ascension (cf. Acts 1:1-2, 8) to both Gentiles and Jews (vv. 12-13).
- 2:18 As a result of the Cross both Jewish and Gentile believers have access to God. Formerly access to God was through Judaism, but now it is by the Holy Spirit. As a result of Christ's death, all believers now have direct access to the Father (cf. 3:12; Rom. 5:2). The Holy Spirit gives Jewish and Gentile Christians equal access to God. Note that all three members of the Godhead appear again here.

⁶⁴See Fruchtenbaum, p. 118.

Controversy over whether Gentile believers had to come to God through Judaism or whether they could come directly to God as Gentiles raged in the early church (Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 1—2). Paul gave the solution to this problem again here (cf. Acts 15:6-21; Gal. 3—4). God has made Jewish and Gentile believers one in the church (v. 14). He created a new entity, the church, out of two others, namely Jews and Gentiles (v. 15). Both kinds of believers experience reconciliation with each other in that body (v. 16), and both have access to God by one Spirit (v. 18).⁶⁵

The consequences of Gentile believers' union with Jewish believers 2:19-22

2:19 Because of this union Gentile believers are no longer strangers (foreigners) and aliens respecting Israel. They are fellow citizens with Jewish believers in the church, God's new household (1 Tim. 3:15). Christians are also fellow citizens of heaven with all the other saints of other ages.

2:20 Paul compared the church to a temple. It rests on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Evidently New Testament prophets are in view since the word "prophets" follows "apostles" (cf. 3:5; 4:11). These men constituted the foundation of the church since it was through them that God revealed and established the church. Until then He had not revealed or established it (3:5).

When Paul wrote, the cornerstone was the crucial part of the foundation of a building. It was the stone with which the builder squared up every other stone including the other foundation stones.⁶⁶

"In the East it was considered to be even more important than the foundation."⁶⁷

2:21 Paul pictured the church as under construction with God adding new believers constantly (cf. 4:15-16; Matt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 2:5). The individual stones represent believers, both Jewish and Gentile. Today God does not inhabit a physical temple somewhere on earth as He did in Old Testament times. He indwells His church, which is a spiritual temple spread over all the earth. It began on the day of Pentecost, and it will continue until the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). As physical temples glorified the gods they represented in ancient times, so the church glorifies God today.

Paul may very well have used the illustration of a temple because the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was the city's most outstanding claim to fame. It was four times as big as the Parthenon that still stands in Athens.

⁶⁵See Bruce W. Fong, "Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principle of Eph 2:11-22," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:4 (December 1995):565-80.

⁶⁶Hoehner, p. 627.

⁶⁷Wood, p. 42.

One hundred twenty white columns rose 60 feet high and surrounded an image of the goddess Artemis (Diana). Authorities still regard this temple as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (cf. Acts 19:23-41).

2:22 The Holy Spirit indwells the church universal. He, of course, also indwells every believer individually (John 14:17; Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:2; 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). Paul also compared the individual believer to a temple of God elsewhere (1 Cor. 6:19). He also referred to the local Christian congregation as a temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16). However here he revealed that all Christians are part of one great temple, the church universal.

"Now His presence is dispersed, not localized. Now His presence is incarnated, instead of confined behind a veil."⁶⁸

"What a fellowship rivets our gaze in the communion of saints! Where shall we find its like? Gathered from east and west, from patriarchs of the prior and laggards of the last times, from the courts of kings and the cabins of beggars, from babes-in-arms and centenarians, right honourables and ragamuffins, from the ranks of the learned and the ignorant, the pharisee and the publican, the sharp-witted and the feeble-minded, the respectable and the criminal classes—what a divine power must be put forth to mould all these incongruous elements into one consentient [united in opinion] whole, stamped with one regenerate likeness for evermore, the radiant image of the 'Alpha and Omega,' God's Yokefellow and theirs, coequally David's Son and David's Lord!"⁶⁹

God's plan for believers included the building of a new entity after Jesus Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. Matt. 16:18). It was to be the church. The church is not just a continuation and modernization of Israel but a new creation (v. 15). In it Jewish and Gentile believers stand with equal rights and privileges before God. Membership in this new body is one of the great blessings of believers in the present age along with our individual blessings (vv. 1-10). Paul glorified God for that blessing in this section of Ephesians.

2. Past ignorance 3:1-13

Paul began to pray for his readers again (cf. vv. 1, 14), but he interrupted himself to tell them more about the church. What he said in this section gives background information concerning the church as a mystery.

⁶⁸Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 314.

⁶⁹Simpson, p. 68.

3:1 "For this reason" refers to what Paul had said about God's blessings that are now the possession of both Gentile and Jewish believers. Since God has blessed us so greatly, Paul prayed that his readers would comprehend fully the extent of God's love for them (vv. 14-21).

His reference to himself as Christ's prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles led him to digress and explain why he was such. When Paul wrote this epistle, he was under house arrest in Rome. This imprisonment had resulted from his service for Christ, specifically his ministry among Gentiles for which the Jews had mobbed him in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:21, 18; 2 Tim. 1:11-12). The apostle regarded his imprisonment as God's will for him then.

3:2 This verse begins another long sentence that runs through verse 13 in the Greek text. "If indeed" (NASB) means "Surely" (NIV, cf. 4:21). The Ephesians had heard of Paul's ministry.

"Stewardship" or "administration" (Gr. *oikonomia*, dispensation, v. 9; 1:10) here has the idea of the management of someone else's business (cf. 1 Cor. 9:17; Col. 1:25). Paul viewed God as in the process of dispensing His grace throughout history through various administrators. Paul's responsibility was to carry God's grace to all people but particularly to the Gentiles (cf. v. 8; 2:7).

"God's principles do not change, but His methods of dealing with mankind do change over the course of history. 'Distinguish the ages,' wrote St. Augustine, 'and the Scriptures harmonize.'"⁷⁰

3:3 This duty involved the reception of revelation not previously given (i.e., the mystery), specifically that Gentiles and Jews were equal partners in the church (2:16; 3:6). Paul had written of this mystery before in this epistle (1:10; 2:11-22).

**NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO "MYSTERIES"
(THINGS PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN BUT NOW REVEALED)⁷¹**

Matt. 13:11

The secrets (mysteries) of the kingdom of heaven

Luke 8:10

The secrets (mysteries) of the kingdom of God

⁷⁰Wiersbe, 2:27.

⁷¹Adapted from *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 48.

**NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO "MYSTERIES"
(THINGS PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN BUT NOW REVEALED)⁷¹**

Rom. 11:25	The mystery of Israel experiencing a hardening of heart
Rom. 16:25-26	The mystery hidden for long ages past but now revealed
1 Cor. 4:1	Christ's servants entrusted with the secret things (mysteries) of God
Eph. 1:9	The mystery of His will
Eph. 3:2-3	The administration of God's grace, the mystery made known to Paul by revelation
Eph. 3:4	The mystery of Christ
Eph. 3:9	The mystery that God kept hidden for ages past
Eph. 5:32	A profound mystery, namely Christ and the church
Col. 1:26	The mystery kept hidden for ages and generations but now disclosed
Col. 1:27	The mystery, namely Christ in you
Col. 2:2	The mystery of God, namely Christ
Col. 4:3	The mystery of Christ
2 Thess. 2:7	The secret power (mystery) of lawlessness already at work
1 Tim. 3:9	The deep truths (mysteries) of the faith
1 Tim. 3:16	The mystery of godliness
Rev. 1:20	The mystery of the seven stars (angels)
Rev. 10:7	The mystery of God that will be accomplished
Rev. 17:5	Mystery Babylon the great

3:4 What Paul had already written about this mystery revealed his understanding of it.

3:5 The mystery was unknown before God revealed it to the New Testament apostles and prophets. Prophets may be a more specific description of apostles here. That means He did not reveal it in the Old Testament. Specifically what is the mystery in view here?

Traditional dispensationalists have understood the mystery to be the church, the body of Christ.⁷²

"Paul then, is explaining, not limiting the mystery there set forth [by his reference to the equality of Jews and Gentiles]. The concept must stand that this whole age with its program was not revealed in the Old Testament, but constitutes a new program and a new line of revelation in this present age."⁷³

"At least four defining characteristics of the church are described as a mystery. (1) The body concept of Jewish and Gentile believers united into one body is designated as a mystery in Ephesians 3:1-12. (2) The doctrine of Christ indwelling every believer, the Christ-in-you concept, is called a mystery in Colossians 1:24-27 (cf. Col. 2:10-19; 3:4, 11). (3) The church as the Bride of Christ is called a mystery in Ephesians 5:22-32. (4) The Rapture is called a mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. These four mysteries describe qualities that distinguish the church from Israel."⁷⁴

Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists say that the mystery is not the church itself but the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church.⁷⁵

"The mystery referred to in the 'dispensation of the mystery' (Eph. 3:9) is the relationship of Jews and Gentiles to Christ and to one another. This relationship is the distinguishing characteristic of the church."⁷⁶

"The mystery of verse 6 may thus be summed up as the coequal participation of the Gentiles with Israel in the full messianic salvation that is realized in the crucified and risen Christ and made effective to both through the apostolic proclamation of the gospel. This truth of the unity of Gentiles and Israel in the church, which has already been introduced in connection with the 'mystery of his will' (1:9-

⁷²E.g., Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 133-34. By "traditional dispensationalists" I am referring to normative dispensationalists, which some have subdivided into "classical" and "revised" dispensationalists.

⁷³J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 137. See also Charles C. Ryrie, "The Mystery in Ephesians 3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:489 (January-March 1966):25.

⁷⁴Fruchtenbaum, pp. 117-18.

⁷⁵Morris, pp. 87-89, 93.

⁷⁶Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensations in Biblical Theology," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 121.

14, esp. vv. 12-13) and elaborated in 2:11-22, stands behind all of the teachings of the epistle as the central theme."⁷⁷

These two groups of interpreters view the church differently. Traditional dispensationalists understand the church to be an intercalation or parenthesis in God's kingdom program. Some of them refer to the church as the mystery form of the kingdom. They see the church as a hiatus in God's dealings with Israel on the earth. Consequently the church is a new entity, not simply the continuation of the Old Testament theocracy. (Non-dispensationalists refer to the church as the "new Israel."⁷⁸) This view stresses the discontinuity between Israel and the church in the past and in the future.

Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists view the nature of the church differently. They believe the church is a progressive stage in the historical unfolding of God's kingdom program on earth.⁷⁹ They stress the continuity between the past, present, and future rules of God over the earth.

Was the mystery revealed in any sense in the Old Testament, or was this revelation something entirely new in Paul's day? Traditional dispensationalists respond that neither the church as a distinct entity nor the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church was previously revealed. They appeal to the meaning of "mystery" for support. "Mystery" (Gr. *mysterion*) in the New Testament refers to "'a truth which was once hidden but now is revealed,' 'a truth which without special revelation would have been unknown.'"⁸⁰ Moreover "as" (v. 5) does not mean that God had revealed it previously but now revealed it more fully in Paul's day, as the context (v. 9; cf. 2:16) and Colossians 1:26 make clear. God had not revealed anything about the church in the Old Testament.

Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists say yes and no. The church was revealed in the Old Testament, not by that name but as a future stage in the earthly kingdom of God. Nevertheless the equality of Gentiles and Jews in one body (2:15-16) was new revelation.

⁷⁷Robert L. Saucy, "The Church as the Mystery of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 136-37.

⁷⁸See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 133-34; idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 124-25; John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 232-37; James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 254.

⁷⁹It is from this progressive unfolding of the dispensations or economies in God's earthly kingdom program that the term "progressive dispensationalism" comes. See Craig A. Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 49.

⁸⁰J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 166.

". . . it [the mystery] was new and unknown in a relative sense only, being in its essentials an important theme of prophecy from the time of Abraham . . ."81

". . . a 'mystery' need not even have been unknown or unappreciated previously, except perhaps relatively so . . ."82

"A mystery may be hidden in the sense that its truth has not yet been realized."83

The correct interpretation depends on a proper identification of the mystery and an accurate understanding of the nature of the church.

The question of whether or not the Davidic (messianic) kingdom has already begun relates to the answer. Traditional dispensationalists say that it has not since the Davidic kingdom is an earthly kingdom and Christ will only begin to reign over it when He returns to earth. Amillennialists, covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists say that the messianic kingdom has begun since Christ is now enthroned in heaven.⁸⁴

If the Davidic kingdom is an exclusively earthly reign of Messiah, then it seems that the church is not just a segment of this kingdom. Messiah would need to be present to reign over this kingdom.⁸⁵ The church enters into many blessings because of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, not because He rules as the Davidic king from heaven now. Some of these blessings are identical to what believers will enjoy when Christ returns to reign on the earth. This should not lead us to conclude that the church is the first stage of Christ's messianic kingdom.

I believe that the mystery in view here is the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church, but this is only one mystery concerning the church that the

⁸¹Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 97. See W. Harold Mare, "Paul's Mystery in Ephesians 3," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 8:2 (Spring 1965):83.

⁸²J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*, p. 126. See J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2:448-49.

⁸³Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 150. See his ch. 6, "The Church and the Revelation of the Mysteries," for a fuller explanation of the progressive dispensational interpretation of the mysteries.

⁸⁴These groups, however, interpret the nature of the messianic kingdom differently. Some amillennialists say the messianic kingdom is Christ's heavenly rule. Others say that it will be His earthly rule in the new heavens and earth. Covenant premillennialists and progressive dispensationalists say that the messianic kingdom is a two-stage rule. Christ now rules from heaven through the church, and in the future He will return and reign on earth. Thus there is an "already" aspect, and there is also a "not yet" aspect to the messianic kingdom.

⁸⁵Unquestionably He exercises universal sovereignty presently, but this seems to be different from His reign as David's heir over David's earthly kingdom.

New Testament reveals. Taken together all these mysteries present the church as a distinct entity in God's plan and not just one aspect of the messianic kingdom. Neither the church nor the present equal relationship of Jews and Gentiles was revealed in the Old Testament, though Gentile blessing was. God had revealed His purpose to bless Gentiles along with Jews from Genesis 12:3 onward (cf. Isa. 2:1-4; 61:5-6).

Note that Paul said God revealed the mystery to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. He did not just reveal the church to Paul. Ultradispensationalists claim that the church could not have begun before Paul appeared on the scene since he was the apostle through whom revelation concerning this mystery came.⁸⁶

- 3:6 This is the content of the mystery (cf. 2:11-22). First, Gentiles and Jews are fellow heirs of God's riches that He presently bestows on believers (cf. 2:19; 1:13-14; Gal. 3:29; 4:7). Second, they are fellow members of the body of Christ, which is the church (Col. 1:18). Third, they are fellow partakers of the promise concerning Christ in the gospel (i.e., that whoever trusts in Him has everlasting life; John 3:16; et al.). The mystery is not that Gentiles would enjoy salvation and enter into blessing along with Israel. God revealed that in the Old Testament (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 42:6; et al.). It is that God has joined Jews and Gentiles as equals in one body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).
- 3:7 God graciously gave Paul the opportunity to serve Him by proclaiming the gospel aided by God's supernatural enablement. "Minister" (Gr. *diakonos*, deacon) emphasizes service, not servitude (cf. Gr. *doulos*, slave).
- 3:8 Paul considered himself the least worthy (lit. the "leaster") of all the saints (1:1) to have received such a privilege. Rather than thinking God owed him something Paul regarded God's entrusting him with the gospel as pure grace, unmerited favor (cf. 2 Cor. 12:11). The unfathomable riches of Christ are what Paul preached and what he expounded in this epistle particularly (cf. Rom. 11:33).
- 3:9 The second part of Paul's ministry, besides preaching to the Gentiles, was explaining the mystery of the church to everyone. Even though God had not revealed the church earlier, it was in His plan from the beginning (1 Cor. 2:7; Rom. 16:25-26).
- 3:10 Paul ministered in these two ways so the manifold wisdom of God might appear clearly to the angelic hosts (cf. 1:21; 6:12). "Manifold" (Gr. *polypoikilos*) means variegated or made up of different kinds. Individual

⁸⁶Cornelius R. Stam, *Acts Dispensationally Considered*, 2:17-19. For a discussion of ultradispensationalism, see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 192-205; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 197-207.

redemption is not in view here but the church composed of people of different types, namely Jews and Gentiles. God's manifold wisdom is apparent in the church's manifold construction. The angels marvel at God's wisdom as they observe Jews and Gentiles united in one body.

". . . the church is to be an audio-visual display of God's reconciling work. In this primary way she testifies to God's grace and wisdom. So Paul encouraged living life in Christ in such a way that reconciliation is the dominant feature of church life."⁸⁷

3:11 This plan was part of God's eternal purpose (1:11). God brought this part of His plan to fruition through our Lord's earthly ministry. Specifically the Jews' rejection of their Messiah resulted in the postponement of the messianic (Davidic) kingdom and the beginning of the church.

"God's program today is not 'the headship of Israel' (Deut. 28:1-13), but the headship of Christ over His church."⁸⁸

3:12 Jesus Christ's past work has an abiding present effect for believers today. Because of His work we now enjoy the rights of address and access to God. We can address God and approach Him confidently because our Savior's work has brought us to God (cf. Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:2).

"Forgiven sinners do not come to God hesitantly, wondering about their likely reception. They rest not on their own achievement but on what Christ has done for them, and for that reason they come full of confidence."⁸⁹

3:13 In this verse the apostle returned to the thought with which he began this section (v. 1). God had entrusted Paul with the mystery of the church and had given him a ministry of evangelizing the Gentiles. Therefore his Ephesian readers should not view his present imprisonment as a tragedy but simply as part of his ministry. His ministry was for them and for their glory, so they should view his tribulations as part of God's good will for him and for them.

"The mystery of Ephesians 3 is the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. This equality and this body were not revealed in the Old Testament. They were made known only after the coming of Christ by the

⁸⁷Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 315.

⁸⁸Wiersbe, 2:29.

⁸⁹Morris, p. 97.

Spirit to the apostles and prophets including Paul but not excluding others."⁹⁰

Saucy, also a dispensationalist, interpreted the mystery in a slightly different way.

"Our examination of the mystery in Ephesians 3 leads us to a mediating position between traditional dispensational and nondispensational views. The unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ is taking place in the church in partial fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Messianic days have dawned, albeit in a way not clearly anticipated in the prophecies. Rather than one grand age of fulfillment under the messianic reign, the prophetic fulfillment has been divided into two ages related to the two comings of Christ. In this first age of fulfillment, the spiritual messianic salvation is already present in the gospel. This gospel is broadly spoken of as the mystery, or the mystery of Christ, or the mystery of the gospel. The specific spiritual unity of all peoples entailed in this gospel is the content of the mystery of Ephesians 3."⁹¹

Whereas the Old Testament predicted the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers, it did not reveal their complete equality in Christ. On this point all dispensationalists and covenant theologians agree.

3. Future comprehension 3:14-19

Paul had explained that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (2:15). Therefore he prayed that they might experience the unity that was theirs spiritually in their relations with one another. Verses 14-19 are also one sentence in the Greek text.

"In the first prayer [1:15-23], the emphasis is on *enlightenment*; but in this prayer, the emphasis is on *enablement*. It is not so much a matter of *knowing* as *being*—laying our hands on what God has for us and by faith making it a vital part of our lives."⁹²

3:14 "For this reason" goes back to verse 1 from which Paul departed in verses 2-13 to give more information about the mystery. Bowing the knees and kneeling in prayer were postures that reflected an attitude of submission to God. Kneeling was not the common posture for prayer. Usually people stood when they prayed (cf. Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13). Praying on one's knees signified especially fervent praying (cf. Luke 22:41; Acts

⁹⁰Ryrie, "The Mystery . . .," p. 31. This article contains an excellent explanation of the mystery from the dispensational viewpoint as well as refutation of the amillennial, covenant premillennial, and ultradispensational views.

⁹¹Saucy, "The Church . . .," p. 151. This is the progressive dispensational view.

⁹²Wiersbe, 2:30-31.

7:60).⁹³ "Before" suggests intimate face-to-face contact with the heavenly Father (cf. Matt. 6:9).

3:15 Paul made a word play from the word "father" (v. 14, Gr. *patera*). A father is the head of the typical family (Gr. *patria*). God is not only the Father of the family in which Gentile and Jewish believers are one (i.e., the church), but He is the prototype father. He is the ultimate Father over every other family that has a father. Every human family exists as a family with a father because of God's relationships as a Father.

3:16 In this prayer Paul requested one thing: that God would strengthen his readers in the inner man. He asked that God would provide this power (Gr. *dunamis*) according to his vast resources (cf. 1:18). The power comes to us through the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Phil. 1:19) who strengthens our inner man, namely our innermost being (i.e., not just our muscles but our entire person).

3:17 The result of this request is that Christ may be "at home" in the personality of the believer. He indwells every Christian (1 Cor. 12:13) but is at home in the lives of those believers who let Him be first in their attitudes and activities (John 15:14). As the believer keeps trusting and obeying, Jesus Christ can continue to occupy this place in his or her life. Paul was praying that his readers would enjoy intimate fellowship with their Lord (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

The believer may grasp Christ's love because God has rooted the Christian as a plant and grounded him or her as a building in love. Jesus Christ's lordship over the life produces the love in view here.

Note another reference to the Trinity in verses 14-17: Father (v. 14), Spirit (v. 16), and Son (v. 17; cf. 1:13-14, 17; 2:18, 22).

3:18 When believers accept Jesus Christ's revelation of the mystery of the church, they are able to comprehend that God's love is broad enough to embrace both Jews and Gentiles in the church. They can appreciate that it is long enough to stretch from eternity to eternity. They can see that it is high enough to raise both Jews and Gentiles into the heavenly places. They can understand that it is deep enough to rescue both kinds of people from sin's degradation and from Satan's grip.

3:19 Paul desired that his readers would apprehend the love of Christ fully. Yet he acknowledged that full comprehension of that love is impossible because it is greater than mortals can conceive.

⁹³Morris, pp. 100-101.

"No matter how much we know of the love of Christ, there is always more to know."⁹⁴

The ultimate goal of Paul's request was that his readers might be so full of knowledge and appreciation for God that they might allow Christ to control them fully (4:13).

"These four requests are more like four parts to a telescope. One request leads into the next one, and so on."⁹⁵

C. DOXOLOGY 3:20-21

"The doxology is plainly the climax of the first half of Ephesians; it may be regarded as the climax of the whole letter, which rises to a spiritual peak at this point and then concentrates on practical outworkings."⁹⁶

The basis for Paul's confidence that God is able to do far beyond what he had prayed for or could even imagine was God's bringing Jews and Gentiles together in one body. With God's provision of love, both groups could function harmoniously together in the church. Glory would come to God in the church for uniting these two previously irreconcilable groups and for enabling them to love and to work together as fellow members of the same body. This praise will continue forever.

This is one of the clearest passages in the New Testament that sets forth the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father (cf. John 17:24; 1 Cor. 15:24, 28; Phil. 2:9-11).⁹⁷

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S CONDUCT 4:1—6:20

Practical application (chs. 4—6) now follows doctrinal instruction (chs. 1—3).

A. SPIRITUAL WALK 4:1—6:9

Paul had explained the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in the church and had prayed for the realization of that unity in experience (2:11—3:21). He now told how to attain a spiritual walk, namely a life that manifests the Holy Spirit's control.

"The key word in this last half of the book is *walk* (Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), while the key idea in the first half is wealth."

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 107.

⁹⁵Wiersbe, 2:31.

⁹⁶Wood, pp. 52-53.

⁹⁷See John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64.

1. Walking in unity 4:1-16

He began by stressing the importance of walking (or living) in unity. God will not enforce unity in answer to prayer. Believers have a responsibility to obey Him as well.

The basis of unity 4:1-6

4:1 "Therefore" or "then" refers to what Paul had said in chapters 1—3. To walk worthily or in balance means to harmonize one's conduct with his or her calling. Calling here refers to God's calling to live in unity as Jews and Gentiles in the church (2:13-16). To walk worthily then would involve behaving in a united way, living in unity with Jewish brethren if one is a Gentile or vice versa in the church. By referring to himself as the Lord's prisoner again (3:1), Paul reminded his readers of his authority to urge them to live this way. He was in prison because he had followed God's will faithfully.

4:2 Three virtues contribute to unity in the church. Humility is a proper assessment of oneself in God's program. A humble Jew or Gentile would regard his ethnic counterpart as equal with himself, not as inferior or superior to himself. Gentleness is the opposite of self-assertion. A gentle person is one whose emotions are under control.

". . . meekness is a virtue of the strong, those who could exert force to get their own way but choose not to."⁹⁸

Patience is endurance even under affliction. When wronged, the patient person does not retaliate (cf. Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:11; 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:2).

Believers should practice all these virtues with loving forbearance toward one another.

4:3 Christians must preserve the unity between believers that God has created in the church. Paul viewed peace as what keeps potential factions together. He had in mind peace between all kinds of diverse groups in the church the most basic being Jews and Gentiles.

4:4 Seven elements of unity follow that unite believers in the church. Believers should remember them when tempted to break unity. Again all three members of the Trinity are in view and play a part in this process.

The one body is the church, the universal body of believers in the present age (1:23; 2:16; 3:6). The one Spirit is the Holy Spirit who indwells the church as a whole and every individual believer in the church (2:22; 1 Cor.

⁹⁸Morris, p. 114.

12:13). The one hope is the hope of the future that each Christian has and the whole church has (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3; 3:15). This hope began when God called us to salvation (1:4, 18; 2:7; 4:1). These identifications seem clear from their occurrences elsewhere in the epistle.

- 4:5 The one Lord is Jesus Christ, the Head of the church (1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The one faith is probably the faith that each Christian and the whole church has in Christ rather than Christianity viewed as a faith (cf. Col. 2:7). This identification unites faith with Christ in the context (2:8).

The one baptism may be the baptism that unites all believers in the body of Christ. This is Spirit baptism, which water baptism symbolizes. Both kinds of baptism were probably in Paul's mind.⁹⁹ However baptism falls in the second triad of elements that relate to Christ rather than to the first that relate to the Spirit in this verse. Therefore it probably refers to water rather than to Spirit baptism.

- 4:6 "All" refers to all believers. God is the Father of all believers, who are His children. He is over them in the sense of being their sovereign. He lives through them and manifests Himself in them.

Evidently Paul began this list of seven elements of unity with the Spirit's work because he had been speaking of the unity of the Spirit (v. 3). He then proceeded to discuss the gifts of the Spirit (vv. 7-13; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-6).

The preservation of unity 4:7-16

Having described the basis of Christian unity Paul next explained the means by which we can preserve it, namely with the gifts that the Spirit gives.

- 4:7 Whereas each believer has received grace (unmerited favor and divine enablement) from God (3:2) God does not give each Christian the same measure of grace. Paul spoke of God's gift of grace here as ability to serve God. Though Jews and Gentiles both receive enabling grace from God, God gives this ability to different individuals differently (cf. v. 11; Rom. 12:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:4-6).

"Gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools to build with. And if they are not used in love, they become weapons to fight with . . . (1 Cor. 12—14)."¹⁰⁰

- 4:8 Paul's paraphrase of Psalm 68:18 confirms his statement that God gives gifts to people. A military victor has the right to give gifts to those

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰⁰Wiersbe, 2:37.

identified with him. Christ, the victor over sinful people, has the right to give those people to the church as gifts.¹⁰¹ In Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 Paul spoke of gifts given to people (cf. v. 7), but here he spoke of people given to the church as gifts.

"Some have alleged that Paul erred in his citation from Psalm 68:18 on at least two counts: (1) he altered the verb of the psalm from 'received' to 'gave,' thus reversing its meaning, and (2) he gave an interpretation to the Old Testament passage that is unwarranted. With regard to the first point, the origin of the reading 'gave' is not to be found in Ephesians 4:8. Rather, this is a variant reading for Psalm 68:18 that has an ancient pedigree, as may be seen by its presence in both the Aramaic Targum and the Syriac Peshitta. However, Paul was not necessarily quoting with one of these sources in mind; the reading probably had a history not limited to its appearance in these particular sources. It was apparently a variant reading that was well known, especially within Jewish rabbinic circles. Furthermore, Paul must be permitted some latitude in his citation. His purpose was not to provide a formal and exact representation of the Old Testament phraseology, but rather to expound and apply the passage to the work of Christ as Lord of the church. That the apostle used a variant reading of the psalm should not in itself be overly surprising.

"Regarding the second point, it seems clear that Paul used an analogical patterning of Old Testament teaching within the New Testament context. This was common among New Testament writers. Such a practice does not obviate the Old Testament contextual setting, nor does it purport to provide the only fulfillment of the Old Testament passage. When Matthew, for example, related Hosea 11:1 ('Out of Egypt have I called My son') to the flight of the holy family, he did not thereby deny that Hosea 11:1 refers to the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. He simply drew an analogy between the two events. Likewise in Ephesians 4:8 the application of Psalm 68:18 to Jesus as the bestower of gifts for ministry within the church does not eliminate or contradict the Old Testament application of the words to the victorious Israelite King. In keeping with common *Midrash peshet* techniques, but in a way that avoids the excesses to which the method was pushed by some nonbiblical writers, Paul made a valid application of

¹⁰¹Who the captives were seems to have been of less interest to Paul than the fact that Christ won a great victory (Ibid., pp. 123-24).

Christological significance to the Old Testament passage. On the one hand, according to Psalm 68:18, God ascended Zion as a victorious king worthy of being the recipient of gifts of homage. On the other hand, according to Ephesians 4:8, Jesus also ascended to the heavenly Zion as the victorious Lord who lovingly bestowed on His church the gifts of ministry essential to her future well-being. The one passage provides the pattern for the other."¹⁰²

A slightly different interpretation follows.

". . . Paul apparently followed the Jewish interpretation of the day (the Targum), which paraphrased this verse as follows: 'You did ascend to the firmament, O Prophet Moses! You led captivity captive; you taught the words of the Law; you gave [not 'received,' as in the Heb.] gifts to the sons of men.' (This interpretation saw Moses as God's representative.) Paul followed this Jewish exegesis because it explained that the conqueror *distributed* the gifts to His loyal subjects. The apostle applied that idea to Christ's victory over the forces of evil and His granting spiritual gifts (cf. Eph. 4:11) to those on His side. By this analogy (based more on the Jewish interpretation of the psalm than on the exact Heb. wording) Paul emphasized the greatness of believers' spiritual victory in Christ."¹⁰³

4:9 In verses 9-11 Paul commented on the meaning of "ascended" and "gave" in his citation.

For Christ to have ascended to heaven He first had to descend to "the lower parts of the earth." This is probably a reference to Jesus' grave (genitive of possession)¹⁰⁴ rather than to the earth (genitive of apposition)¹⁰⁵ or to hades (genitive of comparison)¹⁰⁶ in view of the context. In His death Jesus Christ gained the victory over sin, and He redeemed those whom He would give as gifts to the church.

¹⁰²Richard A. Taylor, "The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 in Light of the Ancient Versions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):335-36.

¹⁰³Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 843.

¹⁰⁴Hoehner, p. 634; and Simpson, p. 92.

¹⁰⁵John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, pp. 293-95; Abbott, pp. 115-16; A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 242-48; and W. Hall Harris III, "The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):198-214.

¹⁰⁶Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, pp. 521-22.

- 4:10 Paul identified the descended Christ with the ascended Christ who now is in position to rule over all (cf. 1:23). He fills all things with His fullness (cf. Col. 1:18; 2:9; Prov. 30:4).
- 4:11 This verse explains "gave" (v. 8) and begins a sentence that runs through verse 16 in the Greek text.

After Jesus Christ ascended, He gave gifts to the church that enabled it to function. This order of events is in harmony with the revelation that the church is a new entity that came into existence after Jesus' ascension.¹⁰⁷

Christ gave gifted people to the church as gifts to the church. He gave some individuals to be apostles in the church. "Apostle" means someone sent as an authoritative delegate. Twelve men plus Paul were official apostles who had seen the risen Christ and had received personal appointment from Him (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 15:8-9; Gal. 1:1; 2:6-9). However there were other men who while not apostles in this limited sense functioned as apostles. The New Testament writers called them apostles too (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:6; Rom. 16:7; cf. 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:7; 1 Cor. 4:6, 9). The duty of the apostles was to establish the church and the churches (2:20; 3:5).

New Testament prophets (Gr. *prophetes*, one who speaks forth) provided edification, exhortation, and comfort to the church (1 Cor. 14:3). Some of them conveyed new authoritative revelation to the church (2:20; 3:5; Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). Much of this is the revelation that we have in the New Testament books. Most of the prophets, however, simply "spoke forth" truth that God had previously revealed (cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26-33).¹⁰⁸

"Christians today do not get their spiritual knowledge *immediately* from the Holy Spirit, but *mediately* through the spirit teaching the Word."¹⁰⁹

Evangelists preached the gospel and served as modern missionaries both at home and abroad (Acts 21:8; 8:6-40; 2 Tim. 4:5). Paul did not identify these people as foundational to the church as he did the apostles and prophets (2:20). Nevertheless their ministry was and is essential. They equipped people to minister (vv. 12-13) at least by leading them to faith in Christ.

¹⁰⁷See Fruchtenbaum, p. 117.

¹⁰⁸See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

¹⁰⁹Wiersbe, 2:37.

We might better translate the Greek phrase rendered "pastors and teachers" as "pastor-teachers." The Greek construction suggests that one kind rather than two kinds of people is in view. The Greek article translated "the" occurs only before "pastor." Moreover the Greek conjunction translated "and" between "pastors" and "teachers" is different from the one used elsewhere in the verse (*kai* rather than *de*). However, the Greek construction may describe two types of gifted people whose ministries are among settled congregations in contrast to the itinerant ministries of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Probably the phrase describes the overseers of local churches who pastor and teach (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

4:12 The purpose of all these gifted leaders is to prepare the rest of the saints to minister and so build up the body of Christ, namely the church. "Equipping" (Gr. *katartismos*) means preparing, mending, or restoring people to their proper use (Gal. 6:1; cf. Matt. 4:21; 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 13:21). The role of these leaders is to minister the Word to the saints in the church so the saints can minister the Word in the world. All the saints should participate in service, not just the leaders.¹¹⁰ Every Christian has a gift or gifts with which he or she can serve (4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

4:13 The end in view is completeness in Christ. As each believer exercises the gifts (abilities God has given him or her, v. 7), three things happen. First, the body enjoys unity (vv. 3-6). Second, it becomes more spiritually mature (v. 15). Third, it becomes more Christ-like (cf. 1:23; 3:19). Unity of the faith (cf. v. 5), full knowledge (cf. 1:17), and maturity constitute the three-fold goal in view. This equals the fullness of Christ.

"God is not trying to produce successful Christian business people who can impress the world with their money and influence. He is not trying to fashion successful church leaders who can influence people with their organizational and administrative skills. Nor is He trying to fashion great orators who can move people with persuasive words. He wants to reproduce in His followers the character of His son—His love, His kindness, His compassion, His holiness, His humility, His unselfishness, His servant attitude, His willingness to suffer wrongfully, His ability to forgive, and so much more that characterized His life on earth."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰See T. David Gordon, "'Equipping' Ministry in Ephesians 4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):69-78, for a caution against viewing only the leaders as doing equipping ministry.

¹¹¹Richard L. Strauss, "Like Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:571 (July-September 1986):264.

4:14 One result of gifted people equipping the saints to serve the Lord and others is that believers may be stable in their faith. Infants are easily swayed and confused, as waves blown by the wind. False teachers create such winds by their teaching and seek to trick people into following them.

4:15 Another result is that believers should maintain truth in love in both speech and conduct. Paul contrasted the deception of heresy with the integrity of the gospel.

"This fundamental concern for the truth is the secret of maturity in the church."¹¹²

The church that stresses both the truth and love will produce spiritually mature Christ-like believers.

Loving, effective confrontation involves speaking the truth in love. The truth may be as medicine to the person who needs it, but love is the sugar that added to the medicine makes it palatable. Remember Mary Poppins' prescription: "A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down."

4:16 Jesus Christ is both the One into whom we grow (v. 15) and the One out of whom we grow as a whole church. The whole body grows as each part carries out its proper function. All parts of the body alluded to in this verse are Christians except the Head, Jesus Christ.¹¹³

The church then is a diverse body composed of many different people who must give attention to preserving their unity (vv. 7-16). Paul's emphasis was on body growth more than on individual growth in this passage. Each believer contributes to body growth as he or she exercises his or her particular gifts (abilities) in the service of Christ.

2. Walking in holiness 4:17-32

In the first part of this chapter Paul stressed the importance of living in unity in the church. He turned next to the importance of living in holiness.

"The Bible was written to be obeyed, and not simply studied, and this is why the words 'therefore' and 'wherefore' are repeated so often in the second half of Ephesians (4:1, 17, 25; 5:1, 7, 14, 17, 24)."¹¹⁴

¹¹²Wood, p. 59.

¹¹³See Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):139-44.

¹¹⁴Wiersbe, 2:39.

The old man 4:17-19

The apostle began by reminding his readers how not to walk, namely as they used to walk before their conversion to Christianity.

- 4:17 The "therefore" in this verse is coordinate with the one in verse 1. Here we have more instruction concerning walking worthily. Paul's exhortation that follows repeats Jesus' teaching on the importance of holiness. Christians should not conduct themselves as Gentiles who do not know the Lord. Those unbelievers do not typically have a useful aim or goal in life, the idea behind "the futility of their mind [thinking]."
- 4:18 Here Paul traced the attitude of typical unsaved Gentiles to its source. Lack of worthy purpose rests on unclear understanding (cf. Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4). This in turn results from separation from the life that comes from God (cf. 2:12). Separation arises from natural ignorance of God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14). That in turn rests on insensitivity to God and His ways (cf. Rom. 1).
- 4:19 As a result of this condition, unsaved Gentiles typically give themselves over to lives of sensual self-indulgence (cf. Rom. 1:24-28). The Greek word *aselgeia*, translated "sensuality," contains the idea of wanton violence.¹¹⁵

The new man 4:20-32

Paul turned from how not to walk to the positive responsibility Christians have to live in holiness.

- 4:20 In contrast to unsaved Gentiles, Christians' minds are no longer dark, they are no longer aliens from God, and their hearts are no longer hard and impure. They did not learn to follow Christ by the natural mental processes that customarily lead to the degradation of unsaved Gentiles. They learned to follow Him as His disciples from the gospel.

"Usually we learn subjects, not persons; but the Christian's choicest lesson-book is his lovable Lord."¹¹⁶

- 4:21 "If indeed" (NASB) means "surely" (NIV, cf. 3:2). The Ephesian believers had received teaching about Christ and had learned to live in the sphere of His will. This is the truth in Jesus that is in view. Whenever Paul used the name of Jesus in Ephesians, as here, he drew attention to the death and

¹¹⁵Morris, p. 137.

¹¹⁶Simpson, p. 104.

resurrection of the Savior. He did so here to remind his readers of the essence of the gospel message as an incentive to live for Christ.

4:22 Here is what the Ephesian Christians had heard. Christians should put their former unsaved manner of life aside. The old self (or man) is the person the Christian was before his or her regeneration. That person was experiencing progressive corruption because of desires that appeal to the physical senses. Lusts are deceitful because they promise real joy but fail to deliver it.

4:23 This verse is not primarily a command. The verb is not an imperative but an infinitive in the Greek text. The verse is a description of what has already happened in the life of every believer (cf. Col. 3:9-10). However the verse does make an appeal to the reader even though its main point is revelation.¹¹⁷

Rather than being futile, darkened, and ignorant (vv. 18-19) the Christian has taken on a new attitude (cf. Rom. 6:2-10; 2 Cor. 5:17). This renewing is an ongoing process in the life of the Christian (i.e., progressive sanctification). The verb is passive, which emphasizes that it is God at work in us (cf. Rom. 12:2).

4:24 Paul identified our responsibility in this verse. We are to put on the new self as a garment. The new self (or man) is the person the Christian is after he or she experiences regeneration. We put on the new man as we pursue the things of Christ rather than the desires of the flesh. God has created the new self (the Christian) in regeneration after the image of our spiritual parent, God Himself. Righteousness and holiness mark our new life rather than sensuality, impurity, and greed (vv. 18-19). Moreover it is a life based on the truth rather than on ignorance (v. 18).¹¹⁸

4:25 As the practice of the old man follows his condition (vv. 17-19), so the practice of the new man (vv. 25-32) should follow his condition (vv. 20-24). In verses 25-32 we find five exhortations to Christians regarding our conduct. Each one has three parts: a negative command, a positive command, and the reason for the positive command.

The first exhortation is to stop deceiving. Deception is a mask that false teachers (v. 14) and the old man (v. 22) wear. Instead the Christian should speak truth, namely what is in harmony with reality (cf. Col. 3:8-9; Zech. 8:16). The reason is the Christian belongs to and must function honestly in a group, the church. Truthful speech is essential to unity in the body. Obviously it is important for other reasons also.

¹¹⁷Bock, "The New . . .," pp. 162-63, took the infinitive as having imperative force. See also idem, "A Theology . . .," p. 316, n. 10.

¹¹⁸For a good explanation of proper Christian self-esteem, see Don Matzat, *Christ-Esteem*.

"Lying may be an accepted weapon in the warfare waged by the worldly, but it has no place in the life of the Christian."¹¹⁹

- 4:26 The second exhortation is to avoid sinning when angry and to deal with sin quickly if it does accompany anger. Anger is not sinful in itself (cf. John 2:13-16). There is such a thing as righteous indignation. Still it is easy to lose control of our anger, to let it control us instead of controlling it. Anger becomes sinful when it is inappropriate. The way to deal with sinful anger is to confess it as sin (1 John 1:9). If apologies to other people are necessary, we should offer them quickly as well. Letting the sun go down on one's wrath is a figure of speech that emphasizes the need to deal with sin soon. That we need not take it literally should be clear since the sun does not literally set on one's anger since anger is not a physical object.
- 4:27 It is important to deal with anger appropriately because if we do not do so Satan will have an opportunity to lead us into further sin.
- "Horace was right when he said, 'Anger is momentary insanity.' . . .
- "Anyone can become angry,' wrote Aristotle. 'But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.'"¹²⁰
- 4:28 The third exhortation is to refrain from stealing but to work so we will have something to share with the needy. Paul did not mention other benefits of work here such as providing for one's own needs and doing something useful. He emphasized the most noble of motives here. Stealing (Gr. *klepton*) covers all forms of misappropriation. This verse is a reaffirmation of the teaching of the seventh commandment (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19).
- 4:29 The fourth exhortation is to speak good things as well as to do good things (v. 28). Anything that injures others or causes dissension in the body is unwholesome (Gr. *sapros*, rotten, defiling). Christians should use words to build up people rather than to tear them down. Words can give grace (help) in the sense that they communicate encouragement and direction and thus help the hearer to do right.

¹¹⁹Morris, p. 142.

¹²⁰Wiersbe, 2:41.

"It is said that a man once came to Mohammed and asked how he could make amends for falsely accusing a friend. Mohammed told him to put a feather on every doorstep in the village. Next day he told the man to collect them. 'But that is impossible,' said the man, 'the wind has scattered them beyond recall!' The prophet replied, 'So is it with your reckless words.'"¹²¹

4:30 "And" connects this verse with the former one. We can grieve (bring sorrow or pain to) the Holy Spirit by our speech. It is inappropriate for us to do so because it is He who is our seal (1:13-14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5). He is the pledge of God's final redemption of us that will happen at our resurrection (Phil. 3:20-21). Grieving the Holy Spirit amounts to rejecting a priceless gift from God.¹²²

4:31 The fifth exhortation is to get rid of five vices and to adopt three virtues. Bitterness is the opposite of sweetness and kindness (cf. Col. 3:19). It harbors resentment and keeps score of wrongs (1 Cor. 13:5). Wrath or rage flows from bitterness and refers to outbursts of uncontrolled passionate frustration. Anger is inappropriate noisy assertiveness and abuse. Clamor or brawling describes shouting. Slander refers to words that hurt another person. Malice is bad feelings and is the source of the other four vices.

This verse may seem to contradict verse 26. There Paul permitted anger, but here he seems to condemn it (cf. James 1:19-20). Two explanations are possible. First, we may view the command in verse 26 as governing angry behavior even though anger is never God's will (v. 31). Similarly God gave instructions concerning whom divorced Israelites could remarry even though divorce was never God's will (Deut. 24:1-4; Mal. 2:16). A second possibility is that verse 26 means anger is proper in certain circumstances, but we should normally avoid it. This seems to me to be a better explanation. Jesus Himself was angry occasionally (cf. Mark 3:5). Anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires so as a rule we should avoid it (James 1:20).

4:32 We are kind when we say or do what is suitable or fitting to a need with a sweet and generous disposition. We are tender-hearted or compassionate when we feel affection for someone else. We are forgiving when we let offenses and grievances go freely and graciously. The reason we should be forgiving that underlies all the commands in this verse is that God has forgiven us freely in Jesus Christ.

¹²¹Morris, p. 146.

¹²²See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 82-104, for further explanation of grieving the Spirit.

Demonstrating an attitude of constant forgiveness will greatly enrich a marriage. It enables us to develop transparency and oneness with our mates. To resolve conflict there must be a willingness to forgive. We need to seek forgiveness when we wrong our mate and to communicate understanding to that person. Try restating how your mate feels to him or her and ask for forgiveness. Say, "I was wrong; I'm sorry; will you forgive me?" It is important to be specific in this process.

3. Walking in love 5:1-6

In addition to calling his readers to walk in unity (4:1) and holiness (4:17), Paul urged them to walk in love (5:2). He first advocated positive love (vv. 1-2) and then negatively warned to abstain from evil (vv. 3-6).

- 5:1 "Therefore" does not introduce a conclusion to what has preceded, but it gives a reason for what follows. It is only normal and natural for children to imitate their parents. So too should the children of God imitate their heavenly Father (cf. Matt. 5:48; Luke 6:36).
- 5:2 This verse explains how we are to imitate God, namely by loving. The measure and model of our love should be Christ's love for us. He loved us to the extent of dying for us. His self-sacrifice was pleasing and acceptable to God as a sweet aroma. Jesus' death was both an offering of worship to God as the burnt and meal offerings in Judaism and a sacrifice of expiation as the sin and trespass offerings. We also express our love most when we lay down our lives for those we love, particularly God (1 John 3:16).
- 5:3 The self-centered practices introduced here are the opposite of love. There should be no hint of them in the believer's life. Sexual immorality was common among unsaved Gentiles, but it is totally inappropriate for saints. Impurity is a broader term that includes all types of uncleanness (cf. 4:19). Greed is the lust for more and is essentially idolatry (v. 5).
- 5:4 The Christian's speech should also demonstrate love (cf. 4:29). Filthiness or obscenity refers to dirty speech. Silly or foolish talk (lit. stupid words) probably describes talk that just wastes time, not necessarily "small talk." Coarse jesting does not mean joking necessarily but vulgar joking that relies on clever word plays such as double entendres. This type of speech is inappropriate for saints who should be full of thanksgiving since we have received so much. Thanksgiving is also edifying.
- 5:5 Paul warned his readers against improper conduct by reminding them that people who practice such things sacrifice an inheritance in the kingdom to

come, namely the millennial kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21).¹²³ The AV, NKJV, and NIV have "any inheritance," and the NASB has "an inheritance," but the Greek text omits the article: "does not have inheritance." Since Paul had already said that all believers have an inheritance in Christ (1:3-14), he was evidently contrasting unbelievers with believers (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:21; Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18).

Interpreters who take this verse as evidence that a truly saved person cannot and will not practice these vices overlook the fact that some genuine believers live carnal lives (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4).¹²⁴

- 5:6 This verse further stresses the urgency of living lives of love rather than selfishness. The empty words in view would be words teaching that living a moral Christian life is unimportant. They are empty because they are void of content, containing no truth. If the wrath of God is presently coming on the sons of disobedience (cf. 2:2), certainly His own sons can expect His discipline when they practice the same things. Since God is holy He deals with sin wherever He finds it, in unbelievers and in believers alike.

4. Walking in light 5:7-14

The resumptive inferential particle translated "Therefore" marks the beginning of a new paragraph in Paul's thought (cf. 4:1, 17; 5:1, 15). He related three commands concerning walking (living) in the light in these verses and added reasons and explanations to motivate and to assist his readers.

- 5:7 It is inconsistent for the objects of God's love (v. 2) to become fellow partakers (3:6) with the objects of God's wrath (v. 6) by joining in selfish, immoral, impure conduct. This verse contains the first command.
- 5:8 The reason Christians should not partake with unbelievers in their evil deeds is that we were formerly darkness (cf. 4:17-19) but are now light having trusted Jesus Christ (2:1-3; 3:17-24; cf. Matt. 5:14; Col. 12:1-13). The second command is to walk as children of light. Obviously it is possible for the children of light not to walk (live) as children of light. Otherwise the command would be unnecessary.
- 5:9 The fruit of the light is those qualities that characterize God's life (i.e., the fruit that the Spirit produces). The three qualities mentioned here are the opposite of the fruit of darkness (4:18-19). If the child of light does not

¹²³J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 283, took this and similar passages as referring to "the present form of the kingdom" and salvation. I think it involves both present and future blessings.

¹²⁴For further study, see Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 109-20; idem, *Grace in Eclipse*, pp. 76-77; and Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, pp. 59-65.

walk in the light, he will not bear much of the fruit of the light (cf. John 15:1-6). He might even be outwardly indistinguishable from a child of darkness (cf. Matt. 13:24-30).

- 5:10 As the child of light walks as a child of light (v. 8b), he will continually try to discover what the will of God is so he can do it and please God.
- 5:11 Children of light should also abstain from joining the sons of disobedience in their deeds but should rather reprove their deeds because they are unfruitful (cf. v. 9). This is Paul's third command in this section. It is the deeds that Christians must shun, not the people who do them. We reprove these deeds as we bring the light (v. 9) next to them. This exposes them for what they are.
- 5:12 Believers should not even discuss the secret dark deeds of unbelievers in normal conversation. Discussing these things will just draw attention to them and may make them attractive to the carnal minded. It is better to keep what they do in the dark in the dark.
- 5:13 On the other hand, when light shines on evil deeds, other people see them for what they are, namely evil. This verse is not contradicting the previous one. Paul was assuring his readers that God will bring evil to the light one day and show it to be what it is. He Himself will bring all evil to the light eventually. Everything that becomes visible "is light" in the sense that it becomes obvious, not that it is good.
- 5:14 Since God will bring all things into the light (v. 13), it is important that believers wake up and rise from the deadness of their former unsaved lifestyles. If they do, Christ will shine on them in blessing as the sun warms what its rays touch. The source from which Paul quoted seems to have been an early Christian poem or hymn based on Isaiah 60:1.¹²⁵

5. Walking in wisdom 5:15—6:9

Paul introduced a new thought with the repetition of "Therefore" and "walk" for the fifth time. We can walk (live) wisely by letting the Holy Spirit control our lives.

"For Paul, the Christian faith was not an abstract exercise in theological discourse. Instead it called for a different way to relate to others."¹²⁶

¹²⁵Wood, p. 71.

¹²⁶Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 317.

The basic admonition 5:15-21

Paul began this section with a basic admonition (vv. 15-21). Then he applied this instruction to various groups of Christians (5:22—6:9).

- 5:15 The word order and usage in the Greek text suggest that "careful" modifies "walk" rather than "be." We could translate the clause "See to it that you walk (live) carefully." Careful living is essential to being wise (skillful) and to pleasing the Lord (v. 10). The wise person is one who views and sees things the way God does.
- 5:16 We live wisely when we use every opportunity to please and glorify the Lord. Every day and every hour provide opportunities, and we should seize them for these purposes. This is important because we live in days that evil influences and evil individuals dominate.
- 5:17 The unwise (v. 15) simply lack wisdom, but the foolish (v. 17) behave contrary to what they know to be right. To be wise we must comprehend intellectually (Gr. *syniete*, understand) what God's will is. Only after we do that can we please God (v. 10). The Lord's will should be the Christian's primary blueprint since He is the Head of the body. God's will includes allowing Him to control (fill) us, being thankful always, and being subject to one another, as the following verses clarify.
- 5:18 Specifically we should not let wine control us but God's Holy Spirit. Both forces are internal. "Be filled" is a passive command. It amounts to letting the Holy Spirit who indwells us control us completely. The wine that fills a person controls every area of his life as long as that person consumes it. Drunkenness results in incorrigible behavior. Likewise the believer who allows the Spirit to influence and direct his thinking and behavior will experience His control as long as he maintains that relationship to the Spirit (cf. Luke 1:15; Acts 2:12-21). Another translation of the command is, "Be being kept filled by the Spirit."¹²⁷
- "The baptism of the Spirit means that I belong to Christ's body. The filling of the Spirit means that my body belongs to Christ."¹²⁸
- 5:19 Paul referred to four of the many results of Spirit filling. He set them forth as participles, but they virtually amount to imperatives in their force. All

¹²⁷See Chafer, *He That . . .*, pp. 39-81. See also Randall Gleason, "B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):241-56; and Andreas J. K sttenberger, "What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):229-40.

¹²⁸Wiersbe, 2:48. He also noted some helpful contrasts between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit on 2:49.

four deal with praise, and all are public rather than private activities. "Psalms" refers to the Old Testament psalms that the Christians as well as the Jews used in their worship. Hymns were songs that eulogized some person or god in Greek culture and the true God in Christian worship (v. 14). Spiritual songs is a general term that probably covers all other kinds of vocal praise. When God controls us, we are joyful.

In addition to communicating with one another using the means already described, Christians should also use these means to communicate with the Lord. Praise should spring from the heart, not just the lips. "Singing" refers to vocal praise, and "making melody with your heart" implies inaudible praise.

5:20 Third, we should thank God the Father for all things (cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Christians can engage in thanksgiving even when they are not offering praise corporately. Praying in the name of Jesus Christ means praying because of His merits and work and in harmony with His will (cf. John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; 1 John 5:14-15). It is possible to be thankful in all things when we recognize that God is at work in our lives for His glory and our good (Rom. 8:28). When God controls us, we are thankful.

5:21 The fourth result of fullness with (control by) the Spirit is willingness to submit to other people, specifically believers. The opposite would be dominating others and exalting oneself over them. This attitude is only reasonable and carries over from reverence for (fear of) Christ. When God controls us, we have submissive (supportive) spirits.

Having explained the basic admonition to be filled with the Spirit (vv. 15-21) Paul next applied the implication of this exhortation to various groups of Christians. He addressed six groups: wives and husbands (5:22-33), children and parents (6:1-4), and slaves and masters (6:5-9). In each of the three pairings, the first partner is responsible to be submissive or obedient (5:22; 6:1, 5). However the second partner is also to show a submissive spirit. All are to relate to one another as unto the Lord.

When God controls us, we experience harmony in the home and in the workplace.

The duty of wives 5:22-24

"After centuries of Christian teaching, we scarcely appreciate the revolutionary nature of Paul's views on family life set forth in this passage. Among the Jews of his day, as also among the Romans and the Greeks, women were seen as secondary citizens with few or no rights. The pious male Jew daily said a prayer in which he thanked God for not making him a woman. And he could divorce his wife by simply writing 'a bill of

divorcement' (which must include the provision that she was then free to marry whomever she wanted). The wife had no such right."¹²⁹

5:22 Paul addressed wives first. Christian wives are to be subject (v. 21) to their own husbands as an expression of their submission to the Lord Jesus. Paul did not say they were to be subject to their own husbands in proportion as they are submissive to the Lord. In submitting to her husband, the wife is obeying the Lord who has commanded her to do so. In this section Paul was speaking of relationships in marriage as the context clarifies (vv. 22-33). He was not saying all women are to be subject to all men, nor was he saying that women are inferior to men (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7).

People often misunderstand submission. It does not indicate inferiority or involve losing one's identity and becoming a non-person. Some women fear that submission will lead to abuse and or a feeling of being used. Submission does not mean blind obedience or passivity. It means giving oneself up to someone else.

We live in an ordered universe in which there is authority and submission to authority everywhere (cf. Rom. 13:1). Authority and submission relationships are therefore natural and necessary to maintain order. God has authority over man (James 4:5). Man has authority over nature (Gen. 1:28). Husbands have authority over their wives (Eph. 5:22). Parents have authority over their children (Eph. 6:1). Governors have authority over those they govern (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Employers have authority over their employees (1 Pet. 2:18). Spiritual leaders have authority over those they lead spiritually (1 Pet. 5:2).

Submission means organizing voluntarily to fill out a pattern that constitutes a complete whole. The word "support" is a good synonym for the biblical concept of "submit." A wife submits to her husband when she voluntarily organizes herself so she can complete her husband. A good example of this is her cooperating with him when they run a three-legged race. They have to work together to succeed. Submission is essential to achieve oneness in marriage.¹³⁰

Submission involves four responsibilities. It begins with an attitude of entrusting oneself to God. The focus of life must be on Jesus Christ. The ability to submit comes from Him (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24). He is similar to the cables that enable a suspension bridge to carry out its purpose. Second, submission requires respectful behavior (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-2). This rules out nagging. Nagging is similar to having a duck nibble you to death. Third, submission means developing a godly character (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3-5). Fourth,

¹²⁹Morris, pp. 180-81.

¹³⁰*Family Life Conference*, pp. 104-6.

submission involves doing what is right (cf. 1 Pet. 3:6). Submission should not involve participating in conduct that is contrary to Scripture. Every Christian's primary responsibility is to do God's will.

5:23

The reason for the wife's willing submission is that God has placed wives in a position of authority under their husbands (cf. 1 Cor. 11:12). Likewise He has chosen to place Jesus Christ in authority over the church. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the church and similarly the husband is the deliverer of his wife. The husband's headship involves loving, serving, caring for, and leading his wife. These are all things that Jesus Christ does for the church.

"To speak in terms of functional equality for husband and wife erroneously removes the complementary quality of the relationship and invalidates the comparison to Christ and the church, who are not functionally equal."¹³¹

Leadership should involve a recognition that God has placed the husband in a position of responsibility. The husband occupies his role by divine placement. Assuming this role does not mean that the husband must execute all of his responsibilities perfectly since that would be impossible. It does mean that he is accountable to God for his wife and children. Even though Eve ate the fruit first, God approached Adam first to question him about what he and Eve had done (Gen. 3:9). The husband's leadership makes the wife's submission reasonable. It requires taking the initiative, integrity, and serving the wife (i.e., lightening the load of those who follow; cf. Matt. 11:28-30; Mark 10:42-45). Leadership also involves managing the home, not dominating it. A good manager creates an environment in which each person can achieve his or her maximum potential. A responsible father also keeps his children under control (1 Tim. 3:4). Leading is one of the husband's primary responsibilities in marriage.¹³²

"Those who are busy undermining the chastity of wedlock to-day are the worst enemies of the commonweal [the public good]. Its inviolability is not a question to be settled on grounds of expediency. The corner-stone of society is at stake in the matter."¹³³

5:24

This verse continues the comparison. Submission is the proper response to sovereignly designated authority in the church-Christ relationship and in the wife-husband relationship. "In everything" means in everything within

¹³¹Bock, "A Theology . . .," pp. 317-18.

¹³²*Family Life* . . . , pp. 118-19.

¹³³Simpson, p. 128.

the wife-husband relationship, the context within which the apostle was speaking. Paul probably did not mean in absolutely everything since the wife has a higher responsibility to obey the Lord. When she encounters conflicting authorities, the Lord, through His Word, telling her to do one thing and her husband telling her to do a contradictory thing, she should obey the Lord.¹³⁴

"The Scripture is the guide for faith and life in the Christian home. A husband's authority in the home is derivative: as a servant of God, his authority comes from God. He is, therefore, subject to Scripture in all that he does, and has no freedom to guide his family in ways which contradict it. Should he clearly do so, individual members must follow God before man. The example of Sapphira's willing sin and personal accountability makes this clear (Acts 5:9)."¹³⁵

What about a Christian wife whose unsaved husband beats or otherwise abuses her? Is she to be submissive to him in everything? Peter addressed such a situation in 1 Peter 3:1-3 and commanded wives in those situations to "be submissive." He did not add "in everything." I would counsel such a woman to maintain a submissive attitude but to take measures to protect herself from danger. In commanding submission neither Paul nor Peter was saying wives must submit to situations in which they are in danger. They wanted them to submit to their husbands as God's appointed head over them.

"The final addition *in every thing* might seem more than can be accepted as God's purpose by this present generation with its stress on emancipation of womanhood, and the place of woman outside the home in every sphere of life that man occupies. Has not a woman equal rights with a man to self-determination? May not a married woman make herself a career as well as her husband? The answer that the New Testament would give is that she may do so, provided that it does not mean the sacrifice of the divine pattern for home life, for family relationships and for the whole Christian community. She may fulfill any function and any responsibility in society, but if she has accepted before God the responsibility of marriage and of a family these must be her first concern, and this is expressed here in terms of her relationship to her husband as head of the home."¹³⁶

¹³⁴See Eadie, p. 413.

¹³⁵James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, pp. 150-51.

¹³⁶Foulkes, pp. 156-57.

The duty of husbands 5:25-33

5:25 In the Greco-Roman world in which Paul lived, people recognized that wives had responsibilities to their husbands but not vice versa.¹³⁷ Paul summarized the wife's duty as submission and the husband's duty as love. The word he used for love (*agapate*) means much more than sexual passion (*eros*) or even family affection (*philia*). It means seeking the highest good for another person (cf. 2:4). Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church. The extent to which He went for her welfare was giving Himself up in death to provide salvation for her (cf. v. 2; Phil. 2:5-11). He gave up His rights yet maintained His responsibilities.

Love requires an attitude of unconditional acceptance of an imperfect person not based on her performance but on her intrinsic worth as God's gift to her husband. The verbalization of this acceptance is part of loving. Love also requires sacrificial action. It involves doing something, specifically placing the wife's needs before his own, such as doing something for her that she hates to do. It also involves self-denial, such as giving up something he would enjoy doing to do something she would like to do. This kind of love arises out of a commitment of the will, not just passing feelings.

5:26 The purpose Jesus Christ had in mind when He sacrificed Himself for His bride, the church, was to set her apart (sanctify, make her holy) for Himself as His own forever (cf. Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12). Logically cleansing comes before setting apart, but in reality these things occur simultaneously when a person trusts in Christ. The cleansing here is spiritual rather than physical. The Word of God cleanses us in the sense that when we believe the gospel it washes our sins away as water washes dirt away (cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11).

5:27 What was Jesus Christ's ultimate purpose in giving Himself for the church (v. 25)? It was to present her to Himself in all her glory finally, namely without any blemishes, effects of sin (wrinkles), or anything that would diminish her glory. Positively God will eventually present the church to His Son as exclusively His and spotless (cf. 1:4). This will happen at the Rapture when all Christians will experience full sanctification (i.e., glorification) and will join our Lord forever (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).

"Spots are caused by defilement on the outside, while wrinkles are caused by decay on the inside."¹³⁸

¹³⁷Wood, p. 76.

¹³⁸Wiersbe, 2:51.

5:28 This verse and the following two verses apply the truth just stated in verses 25-27. Since in marriage two people become one flesh (Gen. 2:24), in a figurative sense a man's wife becomes part of his own body. Consequently the husband should love and treat her as he does his own body (cf. Lev. 19:18). When he does, he is in this sense loving his own body.

5:29-30 The truth that no normal person hates his own body is clear because everyone maintains his physical body. Christ also feeds and cares for His body, the church. The implication is that husbands should likewise care for their wives since the wife is a "member" of his body.

Nourishing involves providing security. Cherishing involves protecting by watching out for and caring for. Here are some basic needs that most wives feel. They need to feel wanted, to have their husbands acknowledge their equality, to feel secure, and to feel fulfilled. They also need to enjoy sex without feeling like an object, to bear and love children with their husbands, and to enjoy companionship with their husbands.

5:31 Adam acknowledged that Eve was part of himself: "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). When a man and a woman unite in marriage, they become part of one another in as close a unity as the one that existed before God separated Eve physically from Adam. The Scriptures regard this tie as more fundamental than any other tie that unites any other two human beings including parent and child.¹³⁹ It is because of this high view of marriage that Christianity has traditionally taken a strong stand for the indissolubility of the marriage bond and against polygamy, adultery, and divorce.

"This statement from the creation story is the most profound and fundamental statement in the whole of Scripture concerning God's plan for marriage."¹⁴⁰

5:32 The mystery in view is the truth previously hidden but now brought to light. The relationship that exists between a husband and his wife is the same as the one that exists between Christ and His church. The church has as close a tie to Christ spiritually as a wife has to her husband spiritually. Paul revealed that Genesis 2:24 contains a more profound truth than people previously realized. The mystery is great because it has far-reaching implications.

¹³⁹Hoehner, p. 641.

¹⁴⁰Foulkes, p. 161.

One of the purposes of marriage is to model Jesus Christ's relationship with the church. He leads, loves, and serves the church. The church reverently submits and is subject to Him. When husbands and wives fulfill these responsibilities to one another, their marriage models the relationship between Christ and His bride.

5:33 Even if Paul's original readers did not grasp the significance of Christ's intimate relationship to the church fully, every individual Christian husband was responsible to love his wife as himself. Likewise every Christian wife should respect (*phobetai*, fear, reverence) her husband (vv. 21-22). Paul did not instruct wives to love their husbands because submission is the primary expression of love that God requires. If the husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church, the wife will love her husband.

Respecting means voluntarily lifting up another person for special consideration, treatment, and obedience. It involves having consideration for his responsibilities and needs and praying for him. Words of encouragement that have a positive focus and build him up show respect for a husband as does doing things that please him. Probably most men have a poor self-image.¹⁴¹ A man must have the respect of his wife to feel successful as a man.

The duty of children 6:1-3

The next basic human relationship that needs affecting by the filling of the Spirit (5:15-21) is that of children and parents.

6:1 Children express their submission by obeying their parents (plural). "In the Lord" modifies "obey," not "parents." Children should not obey their parents if their parents tell them to disobey the Lord.¹⁴² Obedience is right in the sense that it is in harmony with God's will for children (cf. Col. 3:20). Children should obey their parents as long as they are children living under their parents' authority. When a child becomes an adult, he or she no longer has to obey parents but should continue to honor them.¹⁴³

6:2 Even though as Christians we are no longer under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 7:6; 10:4; et. al.), Paul quoted the fifth commandment (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) to stress the importance of children obeying their parents. Honoring (v. 2) is a larger concept than obeying (v. 1). It involves a proper attitude as well as appropriate behavior.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹See Walter Trobisch, *All a Man Can Be & What a Woman Should Know*.

¹⁴²Morris, p. 190.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴See Mollie Ann Frye, "How to Honor Your Parents When They've Hurt You," *Psychology for Living* 28:6 (June 1986):12-14.

The first commandment in the Decalogue with a promise was really the second commandment. Evidently Paul meant that for children the fifth was the primary commandment, and it contained a promise.

6:3 When he restated the promise connected with obeying the fifth commandment, Paul changed it. God promised obedient Jewish children long life in the Promised Land (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Since He has not promised Christians a particular piece of land Paul stated the more general promise that lay behind the specific promise, namely longer physical life on earth. Normally children who obey their parents avoid the perils that would shorten their lives.

The duty of fathers 6:4

Paul addressed fathers because they are God's ordained family heads on whom the primary responsibility for child training rests. When a father is absent in a family, the mother usually assumes this responsibility. In Greco-Roman society the father's authority over his children was absolute.

"This idea would have been revolutionary in its day; in the first-century Roman Empire, fathers could do pretty much what they liked in their families. They could even sentence family members to death . . ."145

Christianity introduced consideration for the feelings of the children into parental responsibility.

Essentially this command forbids making unreasonable demands on children in the everyday course of family life. "Provoke" (Gr. *parorgizete*) means to exasperate (cf. Rom. 10:19; Col. 3:21). This kind of provocation can enflame the child's anger unnecessarily (cf. 4:31). Studies indicate that the factor that causes rage in teenagers more than any other is having to face life without adequate direction from their parents. Instead fathers should provide for the physical and spiritual needs of their children (cf. 5:29). "Discipline" or "training" refers to directing and correcting the child (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 12:8). "Instruction" denotes correction by word of mouth including advice and encouragement (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Titus 3:10). Fathers are to do all this with the Lord at the center of the relationship and training.

"Responsible authority does not wield power; it serves with it."146

". . . too many parents nowadays foster the latent mischief by a policy of *laissez faire*, pampering their pert urchins like pet monkeys whose escapades furnish a fund of amusement as irresponsible freaks of no

¹⁴⁵Morris, p. 191. Cf. Gen. 22:1-14; 38:24; Deut. 21:18-21.

¹⁴⁶Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 318.

serious import. Such unbridled young scamps, for lack of correction, develop too often into headstrong, peevish, self-seeking characters, menaces to the community where they dwell, and the blame rests with their supine and duty-shirking seniors."¹⁴⁷

The duty of slaves 6:5-8

The third group that Paul addressed was slaves and masters (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24). Most slaves served in the home in Paul's day so this section fits in well with what precedes about other household relationships. Some students of Roman history have estimated that about one-third of the population in the Roman Empire was slaves, approximately 60 million individuals.¹⁴⁸ Many of these people were Christians. Most ancient Greeks and Romans regarded slaves as little more than living tools.

"Aristotle lays it down that there can never be friendship between master and slave, for master and slave have nothing in common; 'for a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.' A slave was nothing better, and had no more rights, than a tool. Varro, writing on agriculture, divided agricultural instruments into three classes—the articulate, the inarticulate and the mute. The articulate comprises the slaves; the inarticulate the cattle; and the mute the vehicles. The slave is no better than a beast who happens to be able to talk. Cato gives advice to a man taking over a farm. He must go over it and throw out everything that is past its work; and old slaves too must be thrown out on the scrap heap to starve. When a slave is ill it is sheer extravagance to issue him with normal rations. The old and sick slave is only a broken and inefficient tool."¹⁴⁹

6:5 Paul contrasted masters according to the flesh with the Master of the human spirit, namely Jesus Christ. Christian slaves owed their earthly masters obedience. Obedience demonstrated their submission to Christ (cf. 5:22).

Seven qualifications describe proper obedience. Service was to be respectful (with fear, reverence; cf. 5:33). Second, it was to be with "trembling" or "fear," that is, with care that the slave not make a mistake. Third, it was to be sincere, without hypocrisy or duplicity. Fourth, service should be as to the Lord.

6:6 Fifth, service was to be consistent, whether the master was watching or not. Paul may have also had in mind doing work that the human master could not check on. Sixth, it needed to arise from proper motives, not to please men only but, what is more important, to please the Lord.

¹⁴⁷Simpson, p. 136. See also Wiersbe, 2:54-55.

¹⁴⁸Wood, p. 83.

¹⁴⁹Barclay, p. 213.

- 6:7 Seventh, the slave should have an attitude of good will toward his or her master. He should serve for the master's welfare. Such good will "does not wait to be compelled."¹⁵⁰ This kind of service is to be done as to the Lord, not as if to the Lord. The Lord is the One whom the slave really serves as well as the earthly master.
- 6:8 Paul reminded faithful slaves that they would receive a reward from Jesus Christ in the future whether their masters on earth acknowledged their good service or not. This reward would come at the judgment seat of Christ if not earlier.

"Like Jesus himself, Paul does not shrink from referring to rewards."¹⁵¹

This principle applies to all who serve the Lord whether slave or free.

The duty of masters 6:9

Masters should seek to please the Lord in their dealings with their slaves even as slaves should try to please Christ as they serve their masters. They should not threaten because our heavenly Master does not threaten us. Threatening means warning that punishment will come immediately (cf. Acts 4:17; 29; 9:1). The opposite of threatening is gracious, just, and fair treatment (cf. Col. 4:1; James 5:4). Masters should also remember that their Master in heaven will not show favoritism to them because of their social or economic status. He will evaluate them by the same standard that they have used to judge others (Matt. 7:1-5).

"This is a gentle reminder that earthly rank has no relevance in heaven."¹⁵²

As we review this section of duties, we need to remind ourselves that only a Spirit-filled believer will be able to fulfill them (5:15-20). Essentially what Paul urged was humility that expresses itself in submissiveness to others rather than arrogant self-assertiveness.

So ends Paul's commands concerning how the Christian is to walk (live; 4:1—6:9): in unity, in holiness, in love, in light, and in wisdom.

B. SPIRITUAL WARFARE 6:10-20

That this section is distinct from the five that precede it is evident from two facts. Paul introduced it differently, and the emphasis in it is on God's resources. Earlier Paul urged

¹⁵⁰J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 211.

¹⁵¹Wood, p. 84.

¹⁵²Morris, p. 198.

the strengthening and growth of the body of Christ (4:12, 16). Now he explained the need for this. The body is at war with a spiritual enemy. We do not just walk, but we also war.

"Sooner or later every believer discovers that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground, and that he faces an enemy who is much stronger than he is—apart from the Lord."¹⁵³

"The image of the cosmic struggle or confrontation with evil is frequent in the book, but it hits its high point here (1:19-23; 2:1-7; 4:7-10; 5:7-14, 17)."¹⁵⁴

6:10 "Finally" means "For the rest" and introduces what remains for the readers to do. "Be strong" is a passive or middle imperative in the Greek text. It probably meant both "allow the Lord to strengthen you" (passive) and "strengthen yourself in the Lord" (middle; cf. 1 Sam. 30:6). It is the Lord who provides the power in both cases. The theme of power introduced earlier in this epistle recurs here (cf. 1:19-20; 2:1; 3:16-21). Three different words for power in this verse, all of which appear in 1:19, remind us that the Lord's might is available to us in our spiritual warfare.

"'The strength of his power' is a striking use of two words for might. There is probably no great difference in meaning here, but the combination puts emphasis on the importance of the divine power at work in believers."¹⁵⁵

This may be a figure of speech meaning powerful strength.¹⁵⁶

6:11 To be strong in the Lord (v. 10) the Christian must "put on" (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8) the full armor that is God's. He supplies it for the believer (cf. Isa. 11:5; 59:17).

The purpose of accepting the equipment that God provides for waging spiritual warfare is essentially to withstand all of Satan's attacks. In the context of this epistle the aim of Satan in view primarily has been the disunity of the body of Christ. However what Paul said here doubtless applies to all of Satan's aims and attacks. These offensives come to us from a very intelligent and experienced strategist, and they are frequently deceptive (cf. 4:14).

¹⁵³Wiersbe, 2:56.

¹⁵⁴Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 318.

¹⁵⁵Morris, p. 201.

¹⁵⁶A hendiadys is the expression of a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive. Another example of this figure is "the sacrifice and service of your faith" (Phil. 2:17), which means the sacrificial service of your faith.

From other Scripture we know that Satan is behind all of our temptations having received permission to assail us from God (e.g., Job 1—2). He uses the world system and our flesh (sinful nature) as his tools. He also attacks us directly himself and through his angelic emissaries. God has given us specific instruction in Scripture about how to combat these attacks. We are to resist the devil (1 Peter 5:8-9), flee the temptations of the world system (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22), and deny the flesh (Rom. 6:12-13; 7:18-24; 8:13). How do we know the source of a given temptation so we can respond to it appropriately?

Satan has consistently aimed his personal attacks at getting people to doubt, to deny, to disregard, and to disobey the revealed will of God (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4). The world system seeks to get people to believe that they do not need God but can get along very well without Him (1 John 2). The flesh tempts us to think that we can find satisfaction, joy, and fulfillment on the physical, material level of life alone (Rom. 7).¹⁵⁷

6:12 If we want to obey God and resist the devil, we are in for a struggle. It is not easy to become a mature Christian nor is it automatic. It takes diligent, sustained effort. This is part of our human responsibility in progressive sanctification.

This struggle does not take place on the physical level primarily, though saying no to certain temptations may involve certain physical behavior. It is essentially warfare on the spiritual level with an enemy that we cannot see. This enemy is Satan and his hosts as well as the philosophies he promotes that people implement.

Some commentators believe that Paul described four different orders of angelic beings here. Probably the four terms used of our spiritual enemies in this verse do not identify four separate kinds of adversaries as much as they point out four characteristics of all of them. "Rulers" stresses their authority and "powers" or "authorities" their strength. "World forces of this darkness" or "powers of this dark world" point to their wide influence in the world and forces "of wickedness" or "spiritual forces of evil" to their evil character. They operate in the heavenly realms (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10). Presently Satan and his hosts have access to God in the sense that they can communicate with Him but not in the sense that they can coexist in fellowship with Him (cf. Job 1—2).

"Nowhere in the NT do we find a territorial view of demons. Jesus never casts out a territorial demon or attributes the resistance of Nazareth or Jerusalem to such

¹⁵⁷See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Your Adversary the Devil*, and C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, for further insight into the devil's strategies.

entities. Paul never refers to territorial spirits, nor does he attribute power to them—despite the paganism of cities where he established churches."¹⁵⁸

"In the face of growing citizen militia groups, committed to arming themselves in order to defend personal freedoms, it seems ironic that the church has forgotten that she is spiritually armed for an entirely different battle. As the church, in response to various culture wars, increasingly turns to numerous battles 'with flesh and blood' rather than to the primary battle with 'the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12), one must wonder if we have forgotten the teaching of the New Testament itself."¹⁵⁹

- 6:13 This verse summarizes what has just preceded. It does not describe the Christian standing in victory after his or her conflict, as is clear from verses 14-18. Probably Paul repeated himself here because of the urgency of our taking up God's provisions in view of the serious struggle we face.

The evil day in view probably describes any day in which the evil forces attack. A less likely possibility is that it is some day yet future that is more evil than the rest, such as the day of the Lord. Every day of temptation is an evil day in this sense for the Christian.

- 6:14 This verse begins the eighth long sentence in this epistle, and it runs through verse 20 (cf. 1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:1-13, 14-19; 4:1-7, 11-16). The main verbs in this sentence are "stand" (v. 14) and "take" (v. 17). They are imperatives denoting urgency (cf. vv. 11, 13). Four participles follow in verses 14-16 that describe how to stand.

Isaiah described God as a soldier (cf. Isa. 11:5; 59:17; 52:7; 49:2). Paul may have had these descriptions in mind, but he probably used this figure to describe God's protection because armored Roman infantrymen were commonplace throughout the empire. One was probably guarding Paul

¹⁵⁸Gerry Breshears, "The Body of Christ: Prophet, Priest, or King?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):15. See also Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti," *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 13:1 (Spring 1991):33-64. The idea that certain demons have special authority over specific territories comes from Daniel 10:13 where we read that the "prince [Heb. *sar*, head, official, captain] of Persia" withstood Michael, one of the "chief princes [same Hebrew word]." It is impossible to know whether all demons have territorial authority and whether all territories have demonic heads because we do not have sufficient revelation. Clearly some demons have territorial assignments, but it seems unwarranted to conclude that all of them do.

¹⁵⁹John H. Armstrong, "How Shall We Wage Our Warfare?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 227. This is an excellent essay that refutes from Scripture many of the teachings of many modern deliverance ministries.

when he wrote this epistle (cf. Act 28:16). Everyone knew what they looked like.

Paul described the items that the Roman infantryman wore in the order in which he would have put them on. He first put on, over his short tunic, a belt that would hold both the breastplate and scabbard in place. The "truth" could refer to both God's revealed truth that the Christian has believed and the Christian's own truthfulness, specifically a lifestyle that reflects the truth. Full truth is the only adequate basis for a defense against Satan.

"A man of integrity, with a clear conscience, can face the enemy without fear. The girdle also held the sword. Unless we practice the truth, we cannot use the Word of truth. Once a lie gets into the life of a believer, everything begins to fall apart. For over a year, King David lied about his sin with Bathsheba, and nothing went right."¹⁶⁰

"People of that time did not normally wear a belt in the house, but when they faced some vigorous action such as running, or when a soldier was preparing for battle, they raised their loose robes above the knees and fastened them in place with a belt . . . Thus the 'girding' of the loins meant preparation for physical activity or, as here, for engaging in conflict."¹⁶¹

Likewise righteous conduct seems to be in view as well as the righteousness of Christ that becomes ours at regeneration. The breastplate covered the soldier's body from the neck to the thighs. It was usually bronze or chain mail.¹⁶² It had a back piece, but it was the front part that gave it its name.

6:15 Roman infantrymen wore tough sandals studded with sharp thick nails on the bottoms to increase traction.¹⁶³ The gospel that has brought peace to the Christian enables him or her to stand firmly against temptation. Likewise the gospel is what enables us to move forward against our enemies (cf. Isa. 52:7). The preparation of the gospel of peace probably refers to the gospel the Christian soldier has believed that enables him to stand his ground when attacked. We must be so familiar with the gospel that we can share it with others (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). That grip on the gospel will enable us to hold our ground and even advance when tempted.

¹⁶⁰Wiersbe, 2:58.

¹⁶¹Morris, p. 205.

¹⁶²Wood, p. 87.

¹⁶³Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6:1:8.

". . . protection comes from reflecting the unity that the gospel provides within the community ('shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel,' 6:16 [sic, 6:15], looks back to 2:11-22; it is not a reference to evangelism)."¹⁶⁴

6:16 The Roman soldier's shield was wood covered with leather to make it flame retardant. It was oval in shape and about two and one-half feet wide by four feet long. With it the soldier could protect his whole body. The faith that provides such a defense for the Christian in his or her spiritual warfare is two-fold. It is trust in all that God has revealed and active application of that trust at the moment of spiritual attack.

The first three participles that explain how to stand fast are "having girded" or "buckled" (v. 14), "having put on" or "in place" (v. 14), and "having shod" or "fitted" (v. 15). The fourth participle is "taking up" or "take up" (v. 16).

6:17 The second main verb in this long sentence (vv. 14-20) is "take" or, better, "receive" or "accept" (Gr. *dexasthe*). In addition to standing firm, having received and having already put on four pieces of armor, we also need to receive and put on two more.

Since Christians are to put this salvation on, the salvation or deliverance in view seems to refer to the present and future deliverance we need when under attack by Satan (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8). We have already received salvation from condemnation. We receive this present salvation (deliverance) as we receive all salvation, namely by calling on God and requesting it (cf. 1:15-23; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13).

This salvation is evidently similar to a helmet because deliverance involves a mental choice, namely trust in God rather than self, and obedience to Him. Confidence in God becomes our salvation and so protects our thinking when we are under attack.

The sword carried by the Roman infantryman (Gr. *machaira*) was short and two-edged. Soldiers used it to thrust and to cut in hand-to-hand combat. In Paul's description it is the soldier's only offensive weapon. Infantrymen usually also carried a long spear, but Paul did not mention that in his analogy. The word of God is similar to this short sword for the Christian. "Word" (Gr. *rhema*) refers to the utterance of God rather than to the written Word or the living Word of God (Gr. *logos*). It seems most likely to refer to the words of Scripture that we use to counteract the particular temptation we face. It is the appropriate Scripture spoken or put

¹⁶⁴Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 318.

to use by the Christian in a given instance of temptation that is in view (e.g., Matt. 4:4, 6, 10).

"As Jesus used the words of Scripture to repulse the tempter, so must the Christian the words the Spirit has inspired to drive away Satan."¹⁶⁵

The Holy Spirit both gives the word and empowers it as we use it. It is His sword (cf. Isa. 49:2).

6:18 Prayer and alertness (two participles in the Greek text) describe how we should "receive" present salvation and the word appropriate to our trial. We should be in constant prayer in preparation for our spiritual battles and as we engage our enemy. The Spirit prays for us (Rom. 8:26) and enables us to pray, as He enables us to do everything else.

"Prayer" refers to our communication with God generally and "petition" to our supplications specifically. The antecedent of "this" is the first clause of the verse ("With . . . Spirit"). In addition to praying for our own needs we should also, as good soldiers, keep alert to the needs of other fellow soldiers, namely all the saints. We must not fail them but pray for them persistently. The great need for prayer that exists is obvious in Paul's use of the word "all" four times in this verse (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1).

"Prayer is an engine wieldable by every believer, mightier than all the embattled artillery of hell."¹⁶⁶

6:19-20 Paul sensed his own great need for the prayer support of his readers. It was incongruous that an ambassador of Christ should be in chains. He was in heavenly places, but he was also in an earthly dungeon. An encounter with spiritual enemies awaited him when he would make his defense before Caesar. He needed bold utterance in all of his ministry opportunities but especially in the defense he anticipated in the imperial court (cf. Acts 28:30-31).¹⁶⁷

"The word for 'boldness' is made up of two words meaning 'all' and 'speech.' It signifies the attitude when one is completely at home and the words flow freely. Thus it may mean 'outspokenness,' or 'frankness.' When a person is speaking in this way, he or she is not in the least afraid, and thus the expression comes to signify 'boldly.'"¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵John A. Allen, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 138. Compare Matt. 4:1-11.

¹⁶⁶Simpson, p. 153.

¹⁶⁷There are nine references in Acts alone to various people witnessing boldly (Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27, 29; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 13:46) plus others elsewhere in the New Testament. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:12.

¹⁶⁸Morris, p. 211.

"Note that Paul did not ask them to pray for his comfort or safety, but for the effectiveness of his witness and ministry."¹⁶⁹

The mystery of the gospel (i.e., the uniqueness of the church, 2:11—3:11) needed defending in Rome because the Romans viewed Christianity as simply a sect within Judaism (cf. Acts 18:12-17). The Jews saw it as a heretical religion (cf. Acts 21:27-28).

IV. CONCLUSION 6:21-24

Paul's anticipation of his defense before Nero brought him back to the present in his thinking. His exposition of the mystery of the church to his readers had ended. He had also explained their proper conduct in view of their calling. All that remained was to share with them some personal information and to pray God's blessing on them.

6:21-22 Tychicus (lit. Chance) accompanied this letter to Ephesus and may have carried it. What Paul wrote about Tychicus and his purpose in sending Tychicus to Ephesus was almost identical with what he wrote in Colossians 4:7-8. Tychicus' mission was to give the Ephesian Christians further information about Paul and to comfort and encourage them (cf. Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7; Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:12).

6:23 Peace, love, and faith are all important communal virtues in the Christian life. Peace was necessary because of the Jewish Gentile problems Paul wrote Ephesians to ameliorate (2:14-16; 3:15, 19; 4:3). Mutual love is the key to peace (1:15; 3:17-18; 4:2, 16). Mutual love rests on a common faith (1:15; 3:17; cf. Gal. 5:6). The ultimate source of all three of these essential qualities is God and Jesus Christ, united here in perfect equality.

6:24 As the apostle opened his epistle by referring to God's grace, so he ended it (1:2). God's grace was the key to the creation of the church and the calling of the Christian. It is also essential to the conduct of the Christian (cf. 1:7; 2:5, 7-8; 3:2, 8; 4:7). Paul wished God's unmerited favor and divine enablement on all who love Jesus Christ purely, without wrong motives or secret disloyalties (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22). As God has poured out His grace to us in all purity, so we should pour out our love to Him in purity.

"Ephesians is ultimately about how God has powerfully equipped the church to experience blessing in Christ, by creating a new community that is able to honor God and resist the forces of evil. No longer does one's Jewish or Gentile identity dominate. They are part of a new, reconciled

¹⁶⁹Wiersbe, 2:60.

community, a reconciliation that involves not only God but also one another. All enablement in this new sacred community is rooted in what the exalted Christ has provided for His people. That is why believers can have hope, since they have begun participation in a wealth of benefits distributed from heaven. The church's members are citizens raised and seated with Jesus in a heavenly citizenship, though they represent Him now as light on the earth, fully enabled for the task. In all of this, God is taking steps toward the ultimate summation of all things in Christ."¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 319.

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