



EQUIPPING CHURCH LEADERS
• EAST AFRICA •

EPHESIANS

by

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Ephesians is an epistle of the apostle Paul, probably written in AD 60-61 while he was imprisoned in Rome. It is likely that it was a “circular letter” to be distributed to the churches in the Roman province of Asia (the western part of modern Turkey). The book is both theologically deep and very practical. It deals with: who Christ is and our blessings in Christ; the nature, means, and purpose of salvation and the nature of the church; and the oneness of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. The second half of the book emphasizes our Christian walk: how we are to demonstrate unity and maturity; the characteristics of being filled with the Holy Spirit; our responsibilities in marriage, the family, and at work; and how we should stand with each other and against the devil and his minions in spiritual warfare.

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I. Introduction

A. Author, date, and recipients

The book of Ephesians was written by *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus*” (**Eph 1:1**). Although a number of contemporary scholars doubt that Paul was the author, it was accepted as Pauline by Marcion and early church fathers Polycarp, Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Hermas, and others. In fact, “No one seems to have queried Pauline authorship until the modern period” (Carson and Moo 2005: 480).

The book probably was written at about the same time as the book of Colossians, with which it has a number of similarities. Ephesians was written from prison (**3:1; 4:1**), probably Rome, probably around AD 60-61 (see Carson and Moo 2005: 486-87, 503-7; *New American* 1995: 1114).

Eph 1:1 says that Paul was writing “*to the saints who are at Ephesus.*” That is the wording in the majority of manuscripts, but some of the earliest and best manuscripts do not contain the words “*at Ephesus.*” This may be explained in that the book likely was a “circular letter,” i.e., copies were intended to be distributed by Tychicus (see **6:21-22**) to churches in a number of different cities in the Roman province of Asia (the western part of modern Turkey), including but not limited to Ephesus. This is likely because Paul had started the church at Ephesus and had spent considerable time there (**Acts 19:8-10; 20:31**). He knew the people well, and his affection for them was obvious at the time of his last farewell (**Acts 20:17-38**). The fact that the letter was not limited to Ephesus explains its somewhat impersonal tone and certain comments that indicate that the writer was not personally familiar with the readers (see **1:15; 3:2; 4:21**). It is hard to believe that Paul would have made such comments if he were writing to close friends (see Carson and Moo 2005: 488-90; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 164-65). Regardless of that, there is no record of anyone in the early church raising any question concerning its authenticity or canonical status.

B. Structure and focus of the book

The idea that Ephesians was a “circular letter” receives some additional support given this fact: most of Paul’s letters are “occasional” letters, i.e., they were written to a specific church or individual to deal with a specific problem or issue on a specific occasion. In Ephesians, however, no such specific occasion appears obvious. The overall theme is Christ and his church. The letter deals with a number of related matters that go to the person and work of Christ (particularly his cosmic nature and what he has done for us individually in salvation and in reconciling Jews and Gentiles), the heart of the gospel, the church (particularly the unity of the church), and how the Christian life should be lived.

The overall structure of the book divides into two halves: chapters 1-3 are more theological, dealing with principles and our position in Christ; chapters 4-6 are more practical, showing how those principles should be worked out in our walk with Christ. Chapter 1 addresses the two most diverse beings in the universe, God and people, and how to bring them together. Chapter 2 addresses the only two types of human beings in the world that had any theological significance, Jews and Gentiles, and how they are brought together. Chapter 3 addresses the fact that Paul is so moved by this that he (a Jew) devotes his life to being an apostle to the Gentiles. Chapter 4:1 introduces the implications of this (which he elaborates throughout the rest of the book), that we “*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.*”

There are a number of recurrent phrases and themes throughout the book, including:

- “*In Christ*” (**1:1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 20; 2:1, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15, 21; 3:6, 11, 12, 21; 4:15, 21, 32; 5:8, 20; 6:1, 10, 21**, see also **1:5**)
- *God as “Father”* (**1:2, 3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23**)
- “*The mystery*” (**1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19**)
- “*In the heavenly places*” (**1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12**)
- “*Love*” (*agapē*) (**1:4, 15; 2:4; 3:17, 19; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23-24**). *Agapē* is used here more than in any of Paul’s other epistles.

There are also a number of parallels between Ephesians and Paul’s other epistles, particularly Romans and Colossians:

Ephesians	Romans
Eph 1-2:10	Romans 1-8
Eph 2:11-3:21	Romans 9-11
Eph 4:1-6:24	Romans 12-16
Ephesians	Colossians
Eph 1:4	Col 1:22
Eph 1:7	Col 1:14, 20
Eph 1:15-16	Col 1:4, 9
Eph 3:1-5	Col 1:25-27
Eph 3:9	Col 1:26
Eph 4:2	Col 3:12
Eph 4:31-32	Col 3:8, 12
Eph 5:19	Col 3:16
Eph 6:21-22	Col 4:7-8

C. Outline

The book may be outlined as follows:

1:1-2—Salutation

1:3-14—God’s blessings on us in Christ

- v. 3—God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ
- v. 4—He chose us in Him to be holy and blameless
- vv. 5-6—He predestined us to adoption as sons
- vv. 7-8—We have redemption and forgiveness
- vv. 9-10—He made known the mystery of his will; all things will be summed up in Christ
- vv. 11-12—We have obtained an inheritance
- vv. 13-14—We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as a pledge of our inheritance

1:15-23—Paul’s prayer that the Ephesians may know all that Christ is and has for believers

- vv. 15-19a—May God give wisdom to know the hope of his calling, the riches of the glory of his inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of his power
- vv. 19b-23—Christ has been raised and seated far above everything as head of the church

2:1-10—The nature, means, and purpose of salvation

- vv. 1-3—We were dead in our sins and demonstrated that in our behavior
- vv. 4-7—God made us alive and raised us up with him
- vv. 8-9—We are saved by grace through faith
- v. 10—We are saved for good works which God prepared for us to do

2:11-22—The nature of the church

- vv. 11-12—Before Christ came, the Gentiles were without God
- vv. 13-22—Christ abolished the enmity between Jews and Gentiles and made both into one new man, a living temple

3:1-13—The mystery of the oneness of Gentiles and Jews in Christ

3:14-21—Paul’s prayer for the church

- vv. 14-19—May God grant that you be strengthened in the inner man, that you may know the love of Christ and be filled to the fullness of God
- vv. 20-21—To God be the glory

4:1-16—The church should demonstrate unity and maturity

- vv. 1-6—Walk in a manner worthy of your calling, preserving unity in peace
- vv. 7-10—Christ’s descended to the earth and ascended to heaven to give grace to each of us

- vv. 11-16—Christ gave different roles in the body to equip the saints so that we would all become like Christ and the body would grow and build itself up in love

4:17–5:21—The Christian walk

- vv. 4:17-24—Put off the old man, and put on the new man
- vv. 4:25-32—Specifics of how to live and what not to do
- vv. 5:1-17—Walk as children of the Lord and of the Light
- vv. 5:18-21—Be filled with the Spirit (and what characterizes that)

5:22–6:9—Responsibilities in the family and work

- vv. 5:22-24—Responsibilities of wives
- vv. 5:25-33—Responsibilities of husbands
- vv. 6:1-3—Responsibilities of children
- v. 6:4—Responsibilities of fathers
- vv. 6:5-8—Responsibilities of slaves
- v. 6:9—Responsibilities of masters

6:10–20—Standing with the saints and against the devil

- vv. 10-17—Put on the full armor of God
- v. 18-20—Pray for the saints and ambassadors of the gospel

6:21–24—Closing

- vv. 21-22—A personal word from Paul
- vv. 23-24—Benediction

II. Commentary on Ephesians

A. Eph 1:1-2—Salutation

1:1-2: ¹*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus:* ²*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

When Paul was writing, the conventional way of beginning a letter was for the writer first to identify himself (v. 1a), second to identify his recipients (v. 1b), and third to extend a greeting to the recipients (v. 2). Paul does this here and in all of his other epistles.

The word “apostle” refers to someone who has been commissioned and sent out with authority for a specific purpose. It is the noun form of the Greek word *apostellō* (“to send”). The essential meaning of “apostle” is conveyed by such terms as “ambassador,” “delegate,” or “messenger.”

The NT recognizes two basic types of apostles: (A) *foundational* apostles; and (B) *church-commissioned* apostles. “Foundational” apostles were those apostles who were companions of Jesus, witnesses to the resurrection, and were specifically called to be apostles and witnesses by Jesus (see **Matt 10:1-5; Mark 6:7, 30; Luke 6:13; John 15:27; Acts 1:21-22**). They dedicated themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (**Acts 1:14; 6:4**); chose replacement apostles (**Acts 1:21-26**); taught and preached (**Acts 2:42; 4:31, 33; 5:19-21; 6:4; 8:25; 10:42**); performed signs, wonders, and healed (**Matt 10:1-8; Mark 6:7; Acts 2:43; 3:7; 5:15-16; 2 Cor 12:12**); called and held a congregational meeting (**Acts 6:2**); commissioned deacons (**Acts 6:6**); sent apostles and church planters to the mission field (**Acts 8:14; 11:22**); prayed for and laid hands on converts, who received the Holy Spirit (**Acts 8:15-17**); related visions to the church from a position of authority (**Acts 11:1-18**); wrote letters to the churches (**Matthew, John, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Revelation**); and were the final authority for all theological disputes (**Acts 15:1-29; 16:4**). Foundational apostles were the leaders of the early church and the “foundation” of the church itself (**Eph 2:19-20**). As such, those with the authority of foundational apostles have not existed since the original apostles died (only one foundation can be laid for a building). Paul was a foundational apostle. Although he had not been a companion of Jesus (but, in fact, had persecuted the church), Christ had specifically appeared to him (**Acts 9:3-6, 17, 27; 1 Cor 9:1**), he had specifically been called by God for his ministry (**Acts 13:2; Gal 2:2**), Christ had given him the gospel by special, divine revelation (**Gal 1:12**), and his authority had been recognized by the leaders of the church in

Jerusalem (**Gal 2:9**). By calling himself “*An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,*” Paul is saying that this writing is authoritative—it is the very word of God.

“Church-commissioned” apostles are those men and women who have been delegated by a church to go out and preach the gospel, plant new churches, and build up the church (see **Acts 13:1-3; 14:14; Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 9:5-6; 12:28; 1 Thess 1:1; 2:6**). The *purpose* for which Christ gave some people certain gifts and position as leaders (e.g., apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers) is “*for equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ*” (**Eph 4:12**). In other words, those who are apostles (as well as prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers) are to be involved with the members of the church, and are to train up and equip the church members so that they also can be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. This means that, while the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts “*to each one individually just as He wills*” (**1 Cor 12:11**), and not all are apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. (**1 Cor 12:29**), the gifts and abilities of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers can be taught and learned and should be desired (see **1 Cor 12:31; 14:1**). Church-commissioned apostles can have no greater authority than being commissioned by the church. The church is the body of Christ on the earth (**1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col 1:18**). The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 3:16-17**). Christ has ordained the church and given it His authority (**Matt 16:18-19**). Consequently, Christ can be expected to act through His church, not independently of it. By commissioning apostles, the church also provides them with credibility and accountability, both with respect to the church itself and in the eyes of the world.¹

Both types of apostle are united in a man like Paul (see **Acts 9:1-16; 13:1-3; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:6-10; Gal 1:11-17; 1 Tim 2:7**). Although Paul was an apostle (**Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 9:1**), the NT (and Paul himself) recognizes a distinction between the apostleship of Paul and “the Twelve” (see **Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5, 8**). This may have to do with the fact that Paul’s ministry primarily was to the Gentiles (**Acts 9:15; 13:46; 18:6; Rom 11:13; Gal 1:16; 2:7**), whereas Peter, the evident leader and spokesman of the Twelve, primarily was an apostle to Jews (see **Gal 2:7-8**). Paul had not been a companion of Jesus (and, in fact, had persecuted the church). Paul recognized that his conversion and his apostleship were acts of divine grace; hence, in **v. 1** he specifies that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus “*by the will of God.*” Because Christ had appeared to him and called him even though he had been persecuting the church, Paul called himself an apostle “*untimely born*” (**1 Cor 15:8**) and “*the least of the apostles*” (**1 Cor 15:9**).

The Greek word for “saints” is the plural of *hagios*. It is often translated as “holy” (see **v. 4**) and also conveys the meaning of people who have been “set apart from a common to a sacred use” (Zodhiates 1993: *hagios*, 40). This latter concept is known as “sanctification.” It is God who sets us apart, since he is the one who has chosen and called us (see **v. 4**). Paul always uses the word “saints” in the plural, never in the singular. The significance is that we are saved into a body greater than ourselves—the body of Christ. He will emphasize this in **v. 5** when he talks about our adoption into the family of God. It is therefore a mistake to think of our salvation in strictly individualistic ways.

Sanctification is related to justification. Christopher Yuan explains, “Justification is the act of God in which believers are *declared* righteous; sanctification is the act of God in which believers are *being made* righteous” (Yuan 2018: 143). Whereas justification happens at a moment in time, there is a past, present, and future aspect to our sanctification. **Heb 10:10** tells us that “*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.*” However, we all sin and struggle with temptation. Consequently, God has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to live righteous lives here in the body, “*resulting in sanctification*”

¹ The church needs to test people who call themselves “apostles” to determine whether they are true or false apostles (**1 John 4:1-6**; see also **2 Cor 11:3-4, 13; Rev 2:2**). Many people today like to appoint themselves as “apostles.” That is contrary to the NT pattern (NT apostles were not self-appointed). Many of these self-appointed “apostles” claim to work miracles. However, even the working of miracles is *not* necessarily a sign that a person is called by God or even saved (**Matt 7:15-23; 2 Tim 3:1-9** [see **Exod 7:10-12, 20-22; 8:6-7, 16-19**]). In Africa, “the emergence of African prophets and apostles allowed for the proclamation of the equality of blacks and whites in faith and ministry (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). It also established the principle of separation of the Christian faith from all colonial political connections.” (Ouedraogo 2006: 1434) Unfortunately, however, “many African prophets and apostles do not take the Bible as the basis for their faith and conduct. . . . They regard [what they claim to be direct revelations from God] as additions to the Bible. However, the Bible warns against making the slightest addition to the word (Rev 22:18-19). . . . Many African prophets and apostles also indulge in a personality cult. . . . Some even claim to be Christ’s successors or even another Christ. Such claims make them objects of worship. Sadly, many of them gain almost total control of the minds of their followers. The NT warns us against such people (Matt 24:11; Jude 4-16).” (Ouedraogo 2006: 1434) Modern “apostles” need to be judged by their teaching (see **Acts 17:11; 1 Tim 6:3-5**) and their lifestyle (see **Matt 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:12-17; Acts 18:3; 1 Cor 9:11-18; 2 Cor 11:7; 12:13**). Principles for judging prophets and apostles and how to deal with false prophets and apostles are discussed in Menn 2021b: 40-42.

(**Rom 6:19, 22**; see also **1 Thess 5:23**; **Heb 10:14**). Our sanctification will be complete when we are fully transformed into Christlikeness at the consummation (see **2 Cor 3:18**; **1 Thess 5:23**; **1 John 3:2**; **Rev 21:5**).

“Faithful” essentially means “trustworthy,” “of true fidelity” (Zodhiates 1993: *pistos*, 1164). The key phrase in v. 1 and in the entire book is “*in Christ Jesus*” (see also vv. **3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 20**; **2:1, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15, 21**; **3:6, 11, 12, 21**; **4:15, 21, 32**; **5:8, 20**; **6:1, 10, 21**). It signifies the essential union between the believer and Christ. It is only by first being set apart in Christ that we can be faithful.

In v. 2, “grace” is the *cause* of our salvation and “peace” is the *result* of our salvation. Just as we can only exercise faith by first being set apart by God, so we can only have peace by first experiencing God’s grace. In the reference to the “*Lord Jesus Christ*,” the Greek word for “Lord” is *Kurios*, which is the Greek equivalent of the OT Hebrew *Yahweh*. Thus, we see the deity of Christ in this verse.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the two types of “apostles” in the Bible and what are their functions?
2. Many people today call themselves “apostles.” In what ways do some of these modern “apostles” differ from the biblical idea of apostleship?
3. What is “grace”?
4. Discuss the relationship between justification and sanctification.

B. 1:3-14—God’s blessings on us in Christ

This section reveals that God planned to have a relationship with us from before the foundation of the world (vv. **4-5**). He paid the price for that relationship (v. **7**), and then sustained that relationship, making it active, living, and guaranteeing its future (vv. **13-14**). Paul emphasizes at least 11 times that what God has done for us has been done “*in Christ*” (or “*through Christ*” or “*in Him*” or similar expressions). Nowhere does this passage say or imply that any action on our part was a condition for his choosing or blessing us. In this section we see the Trinity. Although there is a certain overlap, the focus primarily is as follows: God the Father who chose us (vv. **3-6**); God the Son who redeemed us (vv. **7-12**); and God the Holy Spirit who has sealed us (vv. **13-14**). These verses also show us God’s plan, and our part in it, from its foundation in eternity past (v. **4**) to its everlasting future realization (v. **14**).

- ***1:3: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ***

After the salutation of vv. **1-2**, Paul begins the substance of this epistle by blessing God “*who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*.” He then mentions some, but not all, of those spiritual blessings in the rest of this section: he chose us in him (v. **4**); he predestined us to adoption as sons (v. **5**); he redeemed us through his blood (v. **7**); he forgave our trespasses (v. **7**); he lavished his grace on us (v. **8**); he made known to us the mystery of his will (v. **9**); he gave us an inheritance (v. **11**); he sealed us with the Holy Spirit (v. **13**). Our two obligations, which flow from these blessings, are “*that we would be holy and blameless before him*” (v. **4**), and that we “*would be to the praise of his glory*” (v. **12**). These two obligations will be fully consummated in eternity, but the clear implication is that we should be living like that now.

These blessings are “spiritual” blessings because they are “*in the heavenly places*” and are communicated to us and secured for us by the Holy Spirit (see vv. **9, 13-14**). As such, these New Covenant blessings are unlike the Old Covenant blessings, which were material and related to the things of this world (see **Deut 28:1-14**).

Verse 3 is the first reference to “*in the heavenly places*.” That same phrase reveals that that is where: Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father (**1:20**); we are raised up and seated with Christ (**2:6**); the wisdom of God is being made known through the church to the rulers and authorities (**3:10**); and our struggle is against spiritual forces of wickedness (**6:12**). Interestingly, while this phrase occurs five times in Ephesians, it is not found in the rest of the NT.

The sphere of activity in which the blessings are given and received is “*in Christ*.” Not only this verse but the rest of vv. **3-14** stresses our union with Christ. The blessings he has bestowed on us are all “in him” and “through him.”

- **1:4: just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.**

“Just as” (Greek = *kathōs*) here has a causal sense of “inasmuch as” or “because” (Zodhiates 1993: *kathōs*, 801; Hodge 1994: 29). The word “chose” signifies “giving favor to the chosen subject, keeping in view a relationship between the one choosing and the object chosen. It involves preference and selection from among many choices.” (Zodhiates 1993: *eklegō*, 544). Our being chosen is the cause or source of all the subsequent blessings.

Three aspects of God’s choosing us should be noted. First, he chose us “*in Him [i.e., in Christ].*” Charles Hodge explains, “There is a federal union with Christ which is antecedent to all actual union., and is the very source of it. God gave a people to his Son in the covenant of redemption. Those included in that covenant, and because they are included in it—in other words, because they are in Christ as their head and representative—receive in time the gift of the Holy Spirit and all other benefits of redemption. Their voluntary union with Christ by faith, is not the ground of their federal union, but, on the contrary, their federal union is the ground of their voluntary union.” (Hodge 1994: 31)

Second, we were chosen in Christ “*before the foundation of the world.*” Our being “*chosen in him*” (v. 4) and being “*sealed in him*” (v. 13) were not based on anything we did and are not subject to our own faulty natures. Instead, they are sure and certain and have been predestined by *him* and *his will* (vv. 5, 11). This shows that our own works played no part whatsoever in our salvation. We have been chosen and saved purely by his grace; all we can do is accept what we have been given. The fact that we are part of God’s pre-existing, eternal plan should give us great confidence and comfort.

Third, we have been chosen for a purpose, “*that we would be holy and blameless before him.*” The word “holy” (*hagios*) is the same word as “saints” in v. 1. It shows the purpose of our being set apart (see comment above at vv. 1-2). It goes along with God’s unconditional election of us, i.e., our conduct, our holiness, is the *purpose* and *result* for which God chose us, *not* the reason or basis upon which God chose us. As Rom 5:8 says, “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” “Blameless” means “spotless, without blemish” (Zodhiates 1994: *amōmos*, 139. It is the same word used for the OT sacrifices (see Exod 29:1, LXX) and for Christ and his sacrifice on our behalf (1 Pet 1:19). This is in keeping with the fact that we are “*living and holy sacrifices*” (Rom 12:1). As Ehetu Abate says, “We are not called to be physically perfect, but to be morally perfect. If God chose us in Christ to that we can be blameless before him, all of our life should be dedicated to him.” (Abate 2006: 1426-27)

Just as being chosen in him before the foundation of the world should give us great confidence and comfort, so being chosen to be holy and blameless should cause us to be humble. The two concepts walk hand-in-hand. Our election (i.e., being chosen) is not an excuse for inaction, but is the very ground and motive for our actively “*walking in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called*” (4:1) and “*laying aside the old self. . . and putting on the new self*” (4:22, 24). Since we are chosen for the purpose of being holy, living holy and blameless lives is evidence that we have, in fact, been chosen. Continuing to live in sin would, therefore, be a sign of nonelection. Paul expresses a similar thought in 2:8-10, where again he states that our salvation is first and foremost God’s work, not ours, but that we have been saved for a purpose.

The words “*in love*” at the end of v. 4 are seen by some translators as completing the thought of v. 4, i.e., he chose us “*that we would be holy and blameless before him in love.*” Other translators see “*in love*” as beginning the thought of v. 5, i.e., “*In love he predestined us to adoption as sons . . . according to the kind intention of his will.*” Although the NASB and ESV (probably two of the most accurate English translations of the Bible) adopt the latter view, the former view is probably correct, for three reasons: First, every other time the phrase “*in love*” is used in Ephesians (3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2), it refers to human love, not God’s love. Second, every other time the phrase “*in love*” is used in Ephesians, it qualifies and explains what is said immediately before that phrase, not what comes after that phrase. Third, to make “*in love*” part of v. 5 would render the thought of v. 5 essentially redundant, i.e., “*he predestined us in love . . . according to the kind intention of his will.*”

- **1:5-6: ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**

God’s adopting us as his sons through Jesus Christ is one of the most momentous, but probably least talked about, aspects of our salvation and relationship with him. The word for “adoption,” *huiiothesisa*, “is

unique to the writings of the apostle Paul, occurring five times in three of his letters (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). No other author of the New Testament employs this expression. Further, *huiiothesia* and the verbal form *huiiotheteō* are not found in the Old Testament (including the received text of the LXX), and *huiiothesia* is also conspicuously absent from the corpus of classical Greek writers and from other Jewish literature of the period (e.g. Philo and Josephus).” (Burke 2006: 22)

The logical plan of salvation is: regeneration—justification—adoption—sanctification—glorification. Adoption “denotes a legal act or *transfer* from an alien family (cf. Eph. 2:2, lit. ‘sons of disobedience’) into the family of God” (Burke 2006: 27). Thus, adoption is probably the most intensely *relational* aspect of salvation and emphasizes the depth of our relationship with God that is not present in the other aspects of our salvation. It demonstrates God’s desire and love for us and shows that we truly belong to him and are integral members of his family—and will remain so forever.

The significance of adoption can be seen in at least four ways. First, the importance of our adoption to God is seen in the fact that it was “predestined” and effected only “*through Jesus Christ.*” This indicates that our adoption was not an “after thought,” but was at the heart of God’s plan from all eternity. Second, our adoption as sons into the family of God shows that we are not children of God by nature. Adoption—like our salvation in general—is not something a person can earn. It is initiated by the Father “*according to the kind intention of his will.*” It—like our salvation in general—is a matter of pure grace according to his will, not ours. He did not choose us because we first believed in him; rather, we believe in him because he first chose us. Our belief in him is proof that he chose us. Both of these aspects of adoption are highlighted in **v. 6**, which says that the purpose and result of our adoption is “*to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*” The glory of his grace is that, in adoption, God takes people who are his enemies and makes them his sons through Jesus Christ who is, of course, the Beloved.

Third, Paul’s use of the language of adoption probably has its background in his own (Roman) society. In that society, the family was “regarded as the primary context of social, religious, political and economic security and fulfillment” (Burke 2006: 63-64). Adoption was of great importance in Roman society. It acted as a safeguard against the demise of a family line and gave the adoptee benefits and opportunities that would not otherwise have existed. Unlike the situation with adoption today, most of those adopted in ancient Roman society were not infants or children, but were adults. Further, although females could be adopted as daughters, adoption was almost exclusively of young men who were adopted as sons, not of girls as daughters. When a young man was adopted, all his debts were cancelled and he received the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a biological son. The same is true of us, since we have been adopted by the Father through Jesus Christ: we have been redeemed, and our debt of sin has been forgiven (**v. 7**); we also have obtained an inheritance (**v. 11**)—we are not only “*heirs of God [the Father]*” but are “*fellow heirs with Christ [the ‘natural Son]’*” (**Rom 8:17**).

In Christ, adoption applies equally to males and females. This is where the words “*adoption as sons*” are particularly important: females are equally adopted “*as sons*” as are males. Although in ancient society, daughters were looked down on and not valued as highly as sons, particularly first-born sons, in Christ, females are accorded the same status that first-born sons had in ancient society. The radical nature of Christianity is stated in **Gal 3:28**, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (see also **Col 3:11**). Paul is stating very clearly that there are no racial, ethnic, tribal, gender, or socio-economic limits in God’s family or barriers or divisions within God’s family. In Christ all are equal, regardless of sex, ethnic background, economic status, language, or other physical characteristics (**1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Rev 5:9; 7:9**). There is no evidence in ancient Roman society that women were ever adopted to ensure their access to inheritance (see Burke 2006: 73n.3). However, in Christ, women are *fellow heirs* with men. In **1 Pet 3:7**, Peter says that a husband is to show his wife honor, precisely because she is “*a fellow heir of the grace of life.*” In other words, she has the status as an *equal* to the husband and an everlasting *similarity* to her husband. This essential similarity and equality is indicated by the use of the phrase “*fellow heirs*” in **Rom 8:17, Eph 3:6** and **Heb 11:9**, which shows the equal inheritance and participation together of all of the promises and benefits that come with being members of Christ’s family.

Fourth, our adoption reflects the “already, but not yet” nature of the kingdom. Christ’s first coming *inaugurated* his kingdom (the “already” of the kingdom), but it will be *consummated* when he comes again (the “not yet” of the kingdom). In other words, the kingdom of God and reign of Christ have been inaugurated, realized in principle, and are present now but await a future consummation in all their glory when they will be fully manifested and all sin, sorrow, strife, suffering, and death will be ended. While we have been adopted and are heirs now (**Rom 8:15, 17**), we are “*waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*” (**Rom 8:23**). When Christ comes again, we will be transformed and resurrected with new, glorious bodies and

be like Christ (**Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:35-57; 1 John 3:2**) and will receive a new name (**Rev 2:17**). All of this reflects our consummated status as adopted sons of God in his family.

- **1:7-8:** ⁷ *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace* ⁸ *which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight*

Observe the extravagant nature of God’s grace, which demonstrates his great love for us. He has “freely bestowed” it on us (**v. 6**); it is “riches” which he has “lavished on us” (**vv. 7-8**). “Redemption” has to do with the emancipation of slaves or prisoners. We were both. We were all “*slaves of sin*” (**John 8:34; Rom 6:6, 16-20**). We were also all “*prisoner[s] of the law of sin which is in my members*” (**Rom 7:23**). We were actually slaves and prisoners in a deeper way. Everyone lives for something. That something may be money, success, family, our spouse, our job, status, or anything else. What we live for becomes our master; it controls us. Yet if what we are living for is anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ, it will end up destroying us. The reason is that nothing except Jesus can give us the meaning, purpose, fulfillment, and peace that Jesus gives us. And nothing else will die for us.

Redemption also implies the payment of a ransom price. In this case, the price was the blood of Jesus, i.e., his life on the cross. He paid the price for our sin we never could have paid. The judgment of sin is eternal separation from God, otherwise known as hell. Hell is described in various places in the Bible as “*outer darkness*” (**Matt 25:30**). **Matt 27:45** tells us that when Jesus was on the cross, “*from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.*” The darkness of the sky when Jesus was on the cross was a sign of God’s judgment on the sin that Jesus was bearing. That darkness was symbolizing the outer darkness of hell itself. Since the essence of hell is separation from God, when Jesus cried out from the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (**Mat 27:46**), he was actually experiencing hell. By definition, hell lasts forever. Jesus did not just bear one eternity in hell, but millions of eternities in hell, all compressed onto him in the time he was on the cross. That is beyond our ability to comprehend. It reveals that what Jesus experienced on the cross is unimaginable. But that is what it took to redeem us from the penalty of our sin.

“*Forgiveness of our trespasses*” is also significant. Forgiveness is freeing someone from what binds him. Just as we were slaves to sin and prisoners of sin, so we were bound by our sins. A. Skevington Wood explains that the word for forgiveness “stems from a verb meaning to send away (John 20:23). When God deals with our sin, it is dispatched into the wilderness like the scapegoat (Lev. 16:20-22). Here, however, the reference is not to sin (*hamartia*) as in Colossians 1:14, but to sins (*paraptōma*) or deviations from the right path. The first term denotes a sinful condition; the second, sinful acts. Forgiveness deals with both. The magnanimity of God displayed in redemption and remission of sins is in proportion to the rich abundance of his grace.” (Wood 1978: 25)

As was true with the phrase “*in love*” (**v. 4**), the phrase “*in all wisdom and insight*” at the end of **v. 8** may be connected with what came before or with what follows. Again, both the NASB and the ESV punctuate **vv. 8-9** with the view that “*in all wisdom and insight*” is connected with what follows in **v. 9**. The other issue is whether the “*wisdom and insight*” are purely God’s or are among the gifts he gives us. Thus, the phrase has been seen as meaning: “*the grace which he, the possessor of all wisdom and insight, lavished upon us*” or “*he has lavished his grace on us, along with all wisdom and understanding*” or “*in all wisdom and insight he made known to us the mystery of his will.*” At first glance, “*all wisdom and insight*” appear to be God’s attributes. However, one reason why this may be referring to an attribute of God given by him to us as a blessing is that the word “*insight*” (Greek = *phronesis*) does not ordinarily refer to God but to something possessed by people; in its only other use in the NT (**Luke 1:17**) it refers to the attitude (*phronēsis*) of the disobedient being turned to that of the righteous as a result of the ministry of John the Baptist.

- **1:9-10:** ⁹ *He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him* ¹⁰ *with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him*

“*The mystery*” is a recurrent theme in Ephesians (**1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19**). It refers to a truth that previously had been hidden but now has been revealed. The mystery has different aspects. Here, it is that all of creation will be summed up—will find its full explanation, meaning, and purpose—in Christ and under his headship. The “*all things*” in **v. 10** “expresses absolute universality” (Foulkes 1989: 62). As mentioned in the introduction, here we see the cosmic dimensions of Christ: his mission extends beyond the human race to include everything (see **Rom 8:18-23**). With respect to the word “*administration*,” “Three ideas are present in

the word here—restoration, unity, and the headship of Christ” (Foulkes 1989: 61). When he is preeminent, the original harmony in the universe not only will be restored, but made even more glorious than it otherwise would have been.

An important aspect of this is the fact that Christ brings harmony and unity to those creatures who have been created in the image and likeness of God, i.e., the human race (see **Gal 3:28; Col 3:11**). In Christ, the division between Jews and Gentiles—which is the only division between different tribes, races, or types of people that has any theological significance—has been eliminated; the two have been made “*one new man*” (**Eph 2:11–3:6**).

These verses show that the so-called distinction between the “sacred” and the “secular” is not true. Christ is Lord over all aspects of life. On the other hand, although all things will be summed up in Christ, this does not mean or imply that all people will be saved in the end. The Bible, and Christ himself, makes clear that that is not the case (e.g., **Matt 7:13-14, 21-23; 24:37-41; 25:31-46**). In the end, everything and everyone will be under his authority. Those who have responded to the gospel are willingly and joyfully under his authority; those who have rejected the gospel will acknowledge him as Lord but will be cast into outer darkness because they did not receive him as their Lord during their life on the earth. Thus, if anything, **v. 10** should be an encouragement to believers but a warning to unbelievers.

As was true with the phrase “*in love*” at the end of **v. 4** and the phrase “*in all wisdom and insight*” at the end of **v. 8**, the phrase “*In Him*” at the end of **v. 10** has been somewhat problematic in terms of translation. Most translations end **v. 10** with “*things in the heavens and things on the earth.*” They then see “*In Him*” as beginning the thought of **v. 11**, i.e., “*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance.*” That certainly would be correct, but for the fact that the Greek actually has two phrases: “*in Him*” at the end of **v. 10** and “*in whom*” at the beginning of **v. 11**. This in part arises from the fact that **vv. 3-14** are actually one very long sentence in the Greek! Virtually all translators add the punctuation of commas, dashes, semi-colons, and full stops to try to make the meaning clearer. The actual punctuation expressing the thought of the end of **v. 10** and beginning of **v. 11** would probably most accurately be: “*the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth—in Him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance.*” Even here, however, there is a redundancy in **v. 10**, since it speaks of summing up all things “*in Christ*” and then again “*in Him.*” There is even a redundancy of saying “*all things*” and then saying “*things in the heavens and things on the earth.*” The reason for this must be to highlight how *everything* is summed up in Christ; Christ is Lord of all and is greater than all—both things individually and everything combined. Paul is doing what he can grammatically to drive this point home to us. We need to reflect on this, particularly when things are going badly for us. There is absolutely nothing that compares to Christ, and if we are his, we will have him and everything else besides!

- **1:11-12:** ¹¹ *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,* ¹² *to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.*

The phrase “*we have obtained an inheritance*” can also be translated “*we were made a heritage*” or “*we have been chosen to [be] an inheritance.*” OT Israel had been called God’s “inheritance” (**Deut 32:9; Ps 28:9; 33:12; Isa 19:25; Jer 51:19**). Now, all those united to Jesus Christ by faith, Jews and Gentiles together—i.e., the church—are the new, true, spiritual Israel. As such, we are God’s inheritance (**Rom 8:17; Gal 3:29; Col 1:12**; see also **Rom 11:24; Eph 2:11-22**).² The idea that we are God’s inheritance is also indicated in **Eph 1:14, 18**. Regardless of whether that or the translation “*we have obtained an inheritance*” is correct, the fact that we are God’s adopted children makes us his heirs and fellow heirs with Christ (**Rom 8:17; Col 1:12; 3:24; Titus 3:7**). Our inheritance in Christ is beyond our ability to fully grasp or appreciate. **1 Cor 2:9** says, “*THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.*” Our inheritance includes being heirs of the kingdom of God (**Matt 25:34; Jas 2:5**), inheriting the earth itself, i.e., the new heaven and the new earth (**Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; Rev 21:1-2**), living forever with God and Christ on the glorious new earth and seeing him as he is (**John 14:2-3; 1 John 3:2; Rev 21:22–22:5**), being transformed and resurrected with new, glorious bodies and being like Christ (**Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:35-57; 1 John 3:2**) receiving a new name (**Rev 2:17; 22:4**), being in charge of and having authority over everything in existence (**Matt 19:28; 24:46-47; 25:20-23; Luke 12:43-44; 22:30; 1 Cor 6:2; Rev 20:4**).

The first part of **v. 11** regarding our obtaining an inheritance, like **vv. 3-14** as a whole, concerns the

² The church as the new, true, spiritual Israel is discussed at length in Menn 2021a: 26-93.

blessings of our salvation. Our inheritance, like our being chosen, adopted, and redeemed, is not based on any foreseen deeds or merit on our part, but is based solely on God’s own will, his own purpose and plan, and his own grace. The second part of **v. 11** (“*who works all things after the counsel of his will*”) is “extending his point about predestination according to God’s purpose to explain that God handles everything this way” (Feinberg 2001: 681). It is showing that God’s will applies to everything and he is sovereign over everything. This is in accord with the rest of the Bible, which depicts God as sovereign over everything and actively involved in all aspects of the life of the world; his plan is absolute and comprehensive, and he decrees and acts to bring that plan to completion (e.g., **1 Chron 29:11-12; Job 12:13-25; 42:2; Ps 103:19; 135:6; Isa 14:27; 40:21-24; 44:24; 46:9-11; Dan 4:35; Acts 4:27-28; Rom 9:14-24; Eph 1:11; Rev 17:14-17**). This is known as the doctrine of God’s *providence*, i.e., “that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end” (Berkhof 1949: 181).

In working out his will, God does some things directly, but he does most things through the agency of his creatures. With respect to the latter, Louis Berkhof explains, “There is not a single moment that the creature works independently of the will and the power of God. It is in Him that we live *and move* and have our being, Acts 17:28. This divine activity accompanies the action of man at every point, but without robbing man in any way of his freedom. The action remains the free act of man, an act for which he is held responsible. This simultaneous concurrence does not result in an identification of the *causa prima* [primary cause] and the *causa secunda* [secondary cause]. In a very real sense the operation is the product of both causes. Man is and remains the real subject of the action. Bavinck illustrates this by pointing to the fact that wood burns, that God only causes it to burn, but that formally this burning cannot be ascribed to God but only to the wood as subject.” (Berkhof 1949: 189) That is why the Bible repeatedly presents a *dual explanation* for events: God is sovereign and has ordained all events (that, in one sense, is a full explanation for all events); yet that is compatible with and does not in any way diminish people’s responsibility for the choices they make and the things they do (that, in another sense, is also a full explanation for all events). Hence, some passages ascribe a particular act to God, while other passages ascribe that same act to secondary agents (see, e.g., **Gen 37:25-28; 45:4-5, 7-8; 50:20; Isa 53:10; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28**). In keeping with this dual explanation of events, the Bible’s writers “do not shy away from making Yahweh himself in some mysterious way (the mysteriousness of which safeguards him from being himself charged with evil) the ‘ultimate’ cause of many evils. . . . God does not stand behind evil action in precisely the same way that he stands behind good action. . . . A certain distance is preserved between God and his people when they sin. . . . In short, although we may lack the categories needed for full exposition of the problem, *nevertheless we must insist that divine ultimacy stands behind good and evil asymmetrically.*” (Carson 1994: 28, 36-37) Further in keeping with this dual explanation of events, Paul tells Christians to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (**Phil 2:12-13**).³

Paul’s use of “we” in **v. 11** is inclusive, i.e., it includes all who are “*in Christ*,” both Jews and Gentiles. His use of “we” in **v. 12** is referring to Jews (“*we who were the first to hope in Christ*”). This is indicated by his contrasting use of “*you also*,” i.e., Gentiles, in **v. 13**. All aspects of God’s plan of salvation shows that we are the means of causing God’s excellence to be praised, i.e., the purpose of all of this, for all of his people, is “*to the praise of his glory*” (**vv. 6, 11, 14**).

- **1:13-14:** ¹³ *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

As noted earlier, **vv. 3-14** actually is one long sentence. Thus, the actual wording of **v. 12** reads, “*to the end that we who would be to the praise of His glory were the first to hope in Christ*,” and **v. 13** actually begins, “*in whom*” rather than “*In Him*.” The meaning is the same.

This is the first use of the term “gospel” in Ephesians (it is also found in **3:6; 6:15, 19**). It is “*the message of truth*” and “*the gospel of your salvation.*” The gospel is the heart and essence of Christianity and is what makes Christianity unlike any other religion in the world. In essence, the gospel is that God is holy, just, righteous, and good (**Gen 18:25; Exod 34:6-7; Lev 11:44; Job 34:10-12; Ps 5:4; 136:1; 145:17; Hab 1:13; Rom 1:18; Jas 1:13**). Although the first human beings (Adam and Eve) were created without sin, they chose to follow Satan and disobey God and therefore became sinful (**Gen 3:1-19**). As a result, every human being since

³ The concepts discussed in this paragraph are elaborated in detail in Menn 2021a: 116-32.

Adam and Eve has been born in a state of moral corruption known as indwelling sin; this indwelling sin is a “law” or power that is actively working inside every person (**Rom 7:5, 8-11, 14-24; Gal 5:17; Heb 3:12-13**). It leads to universal actualized sins as people go through lives (**Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; 143:1-2; Jer 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; Rom 3:9-18, 23; 5:12-14; 7:14-24**). The Bible correctly tells us the result of this: “*the wages of sin is death*” (**Rom 6:23**; see also **Gen 2:17; Ezek 18:4, 20; Rom 5:12**). God’s holiness is foundational. Sin is incompatible with his holiness. Closely related to God’s holiness is his wrath. God’s wrath “is in fact his holy reaction to evil. . . . What is common to the biblical concepts of the holiness and the wrath of God is the truth that they cannot coexist with sin. God’s holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it. So sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate sin.” (Stott 1986: 102, 103, 106; see **Hab 1:13; Rom 1:18**)

The issue is how can a holy God accept and dwell with unholy people? Although there are many religions in the world, there are only two *kinds* of religion: Christianity and everything else. Every religion except Christianity is based on the principle that, ultimately, each person must save him- or herself: by “trying harder,” doing enough “good deeds,” making enough sacrifices, or denying oneself enough things. They think, “If my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, I’m in!” However, that approach to salvation is doomed to fail because we cannot even meet our own standards, let alone God’s. We all know that we have a fundamental problem deep within us that we cannot eradicate. That is where the gospel and Christianity are different. Christianity alone recognizes and takes seriously the “fallenness” of human beings, the gravity of sin, the holiness and perfection of God, the incompatibility of God and sin coexisting together, the fact that all humans have earned and deserve judgment for their sins, and the inability of people by their own efforts to save themselves. The difference of Christianity is Jesus; the difference of Christianity is the cross. Timothy Keller points out, “All other major faiths have founders who are teachers that show the way to salvation. Only Jesus claimed to actually *be* the way of salvation himself.” (Keller 2008: 174)

So what is the gospel? The word “gospel” is a Greek word (*euaggelion*) which means “good news” (Danker 2000: *euaggelion*, 402; Green and McKnight 1992: 282). “The Greek term ‘gospel’ (ev-angelion) distinguished the Christian message from that of other religions. An ‘ev-angel’ was news of a great historical event, such as a victory in war or the ascension of a new king, that changed the listeners’ condition and required a response from the listener. So the gospel is news of what God has done to reach us. It is not advice about what we must do to reach God.” (Keller n.d.: 1) The gospel is the good news that God has done for us what we never could do for ourselves. God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived the life we should have lived *as a man*; he perfectly obeyed God the Father in everything; he was “*tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (**Heb 4:15**). That qualified him to be our representative, to take upon himself our sin and pay the penalty that otherwise we would have to pay but never could (**Rom 8:1-4; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Col 2:13-14; 1 Tim 2:5-6; 1 Pet 2:24**). At the same time, Jesus Christ was God. “God did not, then, inflict pain on someone else, but rather on the Cross absorbed the pain, violence, and evil of the world into himself. . . . This is a God who becomes human and offers his own lifeblood in order to honor moral justice and merciful love so that he can destroy all evil without destroying us. . . . Why did Jesus *have* to die in order to forgive us? There was a debt to be paid—God himself paid it. There was a penalty to be borne—God himself bore it. . . . On the cross neither justice nor mercy loses out—both are fulfilled at once. Jesus’s death was necessary if God was going to take justice seriously and still love us.” (Keller 2008: 192-93, 197)

Jesus’ rising from the dead and ascending back to the Father validated who Jesus is and demonstrated that the Father accepted Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross for us. Consequently, who Jesus is and what he has done is the heart of the gospel (see **John 20:30-31; Acts 10:36-43; 16:30-31; Rom 1:1-4, 16-17; 3:23-28; 10:8-13; 1 Cor 2:2; 15:1-5; 1 Pet 3:18**). Because the gospel—and people’s salvation—is based on what Christ has done, salvation cannot be “earned” by doing “good deeds.” Rather, salvation is *given* by God to people as a *gift* of his *grace*; it is *received* by people solely by *faith* in Christ. To be saved means to repent of our sins, accept by faith what Christ has done for us, and turn to Christ as the Lord of our life (**Matt 11:28; Mark 1:14-15; John 1:12; 3:16; 17:3; Acts 26:20; 1 John 1:8-9**).

When we believe the gospel and turn to Christ as our Lord, all aspects of our lives are affected: (1) All those who are united to Christ by faith have assurance of their salvation. If salvation depended even in part on our own efforts, we could never have the assurance that we had “done enough” to merit salvation. However, because God-in-Christ did for us what we could not do, Christians can and do have assurance that they are and forever will remain saved (**John 3:36; 6:37, 47; 11:25; 1 John 5:11-12**). (2) Being saved and united with Christ changes the legal status of Christians. “The cross liberates from the power of sin, propitiates God’s wrath, washes away the guilt and stain of sin, reconciles believers to God, and achieves cosmic victory over deadly spiritual foes” (Demarest 1997: 196). (3) Being saved and united with Christ changes Christians on the inside. When one comes to Christ, he or she receives a new heart (**Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3**), the mind of Christ (**1 Cor**

2:16), and the Spirit from Christ (**Ezek 36:26; John 14:17**). (4) Being saved and united with Christ gives Christians an intimate, personal relationship with God through Christ. Christians can “*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace*” (**Heb 4:16**; see also **Heb 7:19**). (5) Being saved and united with Christ creates a new humanity (**John 3:3; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15**); as already discussed, believers are adopted into God’s family as his children (**John 1:12; Rom 8:14-17, 23; 9:4; Gal 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph 1:5; 2:19; 1 John 3:1**) and become deeply related to each other as brothers and sisters (e.g., **Matt 12:50; Acts 1:16; 6:3; 11:29; 12:17; 16:40; 18:18; 21:7, 17; Rom 14:10; 1 Tim 5:1-2**). (6) One day, Christ will return and renew the entire world and all of creation (**Rom 8:18-23; 2 Pet 3:3-13; Rev 21:1-11**). In short, the gospel is our salvation, it is our hope, it is the only hope for the world, it is the greatest thing in the world.

Verse 13 goes on to tell us an important aspect of the gospel, namely, when we believe and receive Christ as our Lord, we are “*sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit*.” We receive Christ—and the righteousness he imputes to us—by faith. But Christ knew that even faith on its own does not give us the transforming power we need to live holy lives. Consequently, he told the disciples to wait to receive the “*power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*” (**Acts 1:8**). When the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, our “redemption from slavery” truly became complete. The OT Law was external, written on tablets of stone. Now, **Gal 4:6** says, “*God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts*.” The Holy Spirit lives inside us (**Ezek 36:26-27; John 14:16-17**), the law of Christ is written on our heart (**Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10**), and we ourselves are “*a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*” (**2 Cor 3:3**). Consequently, with “the coming of faith in Christ, the Law’s function as guardian and custodian ceases and the Spirit becomes the internal guiding principle.” (Belleville 1986: 70)

A seal has various functions: it authenticates something as genuine; it marks something as being approved; it indicates ownership which also signifies security and protection, i.e., the seal marks us as God’s own possession (see **Rev 7:3**). Further, the seal itself implies the authority of the one doing the sealing. In **v. 14**, Paul gives us another important aspect of being “*sealed with the Holy Spirit*,” namely, the Spirit “*is given as a pledge of our inheritance*.” A pledge is the “first fruits,” like an earnest deposit or a downpayment that guarantees the full redemption later (see **Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5**). We know that will come to fruition because we have been “*sealed for the day of redemption*” (**Eph 4:30**). In the age to come, God will redeem his pledge and open the full treasures of the new heaven and the new earth to all who are his in Christ. He is “*the Holy Spirit of promise*” because he had been promised in the past, first in the OT (**Ezek 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29**) and then by Christ (**Luke 24:49; John 14:16-17, 26; 16:1-14; Acts 1:4-5**), but primarily because his presence carries with it the promise of great things to come.

We can know that we have been sealed with the Spirit, because: all who repent and believe in Jesus as their Lord have been promised the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38-39**); all who love Jesus have the Spirit, Jesus will disclose himself to his people, and those who love Jesus will obey him (**John 14:15-24**); all who have Jesus as their Lord are being led by the Holy Spirit and receive assurance from the Spirit that we are the children of God (**Rom 8:13-17**); those who have the Spirit bear the fruit of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22-23**); and those who confess Jesus as Lord receive a gift or gifts of the Spirit (**1 Cor 12:1-31**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the spiritual blessings we have in Christ?
 - In light of those blessings, what obligations do we have?
2. When did God choose us?
3. Did God choose us for a purpose?
 - If so, what is that purpose?
 - How do we manifest and fulfill that purpose in our lives?
4. What does being “adopted” mean and imply for our lives?
 - Why is being “adopted as sons” particularly significant for women?

5. What does “redemption” mean?
6. What does the “summing up of all things in Christ” imply?
7. What does our “inheritance” involve?
8. What is the “gospel”?
9. Discuss what being “sealed with the Holy Spirit” means.

C. 1:15-23—Paul’s prayer that the Ephesians may know all that Christ is and has for believers

In this section Paul gives thanks for the believers and prays that God will give them wisdom, revelation, and knowledge of Him. He specifically prays that they will know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of his power which is available for them. He closes this section by focusing on Christ, who is the greatest demonstration of that power, namely, he has been raised and seated in the heavenly places, far above all other powers and authorities, as head of the church. As was true with **vv. 3-14**, **vv. 15-23** forms one very long sentence in the original Greek.

- **1:15-19a:** ¹⁵ *For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,* ¹⁶ *do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;* ¹⁷ *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.* ¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,* ¹⁹ *and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.*

This section sets forth Paul’s thanksgiving for, and his general and specific requests for, the believers. The beginning of **v. 15**, “*For this reason*,” indicates that his prayer for the saints is based on the wealth of spiritual blessings in Christ that God, by his grace, has poured out on them. **Verse 15** highlights that, as believers, we are not isolated individuals, but are part of a body. Thus, he stresses that has “*heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints.*” Three early manuscripts do not contain the words “*your love*” in **v. 15**. If that is the case in the original, then “his meaning must be that their faith was evident, not only in their inward spiritual lives but in their relationships with all their fellow Christians as well” (Foulkes 1989: 67). The meaning is essentially the same whether or not “*your love*” is present, since faith must be expressed practically and relationally. As Paul says in **Gal 5:6**, it is to be “*faith working through love.*”

Paul’s example in **v. 16**, of “*giving thanks*” and praying for the believers, should be an example for us. We are all members of God’s family. Therefore, we are a family; we are now all related to each other. Families should give thanks and pray for each other. We should “*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*” (**Rom 12:15**). Since it is God who has adopted us into his family, our attitude and actions toward our brothers and sisters ultimately reveals what we really think of God himself!

In our prayers for others, many of us concentrate on physical things, e.g., healing for those who are sick, help for those who are going through hard times, safety and deliverance for those who are persecuted or may otherwise be in danger. Interestingly, Paul does not pray for any of those things. Instead, the main thing he prays for is that God will do even more work in the believers. He prays that the believers acquire a personal knowledge of God himself and the truths of the gospel—who Jesus is, what he has, what he is doing. When that takes root in their hearts in a deep and transformative way, believers will not be tossed to-and-fro by their circumstances but will be able to handle all situations, whether good or bad, with grace, strength, wisdom, and peace (see **Phil 4:12-13**).

In **v. 17**, Paul prays for three related things: (1) “*the spirit of wisdom*”; (2) *revelation*; and (3) all to be “*in the knowledge of Him.*” It is “*the knowledge of Him*” that is the primary, most vital and fundamental aspect of all knowledge; wisdom and revelation are what are necessary to acquire such knowledge. With respect to the “knowledge” of God, the typical Greek word for knowledge is *gnosis*. Here, however, Paul uses an intensified form of that word, *epignōsis*. Zodhiates explains the difference: *gnōsis* is “present and fragmentary knowledge as contrasted with *epignōsis*, clear and exact knowledge which expresses a more thorough participation in the object or knowledge on the part of the knowledgeable subject” (Zodhiates 1993: *gnōsis*, 378). With respect to *epignōsis*, he adds that “in the NT, it often refers to knowledge which very powerfully influences the form of religious life, a knowledge laying claim to personal involvement” (Zodhiates 1993: *epignōsis*, 624). Perhaps

most important is the fact that, in the Bible, God’s “knowledge” of us and our “knowledge” of him always connote more than just cognitive knowledge but is personal, experiential, and “expresses a relationship,” one of “special intimacy” (Clifford 2002: 41 [relationship]; Peterson and Richards 1992: 97 [intimacy]; see **John 10:14-15, 27; 17:3; Eph 4:13; Phil 1:9; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:19**). Such knowledge represents the full experience of life “*in Christ*.”

With respect to the “*spirit of wisdom and of revelation*,” Ralph Martin states, “Both terms are to be understood in an OT background (e.g. Jb. 28:12ff.; Je. 9:23ff.) and underline the biblical teaching that *wisdom* does not come by human ingenuity and cleverness in excogitating divine truth from man’s mind but is the gift of God (cf. Lk. 10:21); and that *revelation* is the name for this gracious self-disclosure of God who always takes the initiative in this action” (Martin 1970: 1109). All believers already have the Holy Spirit. The word “spirit” sometimes can refer to a person’s own mental state or act (e.g., **1 Cor 4:21** [*“spirit of gentleness”*]; **2 Cor 4:13** [*“spirit of faith”*]). However, here “spirit” is referring to the Holy Spirit. Paul is praying that the Holy Spirit would give the believers wisdom and revelation, since only the Holy Spirit can enable people to know God, experience spiritual empowerment, and exercise spiritual wisdom, insight, and discernment.

In **vv. 18-19a**, the three things Paul specifically prays for are that, through knowing God in a deep and personal way, the believers may be enlightened to know: (1) “*the hope of His calling*”; (2) “*the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*”; and (3) “*the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe*.” In his prayer, Paul emphasizes that God is primary in everything: it is “*His calling*”; “*His inheritance*”; and “*His power*.” He has called us to an everlasting relationship with himself. The hope of his calling is not just a vague “hope against hope,” but is assured, because all the work to effect that calling was done by God himself, working through Christ, who lived the life we should have lived and paid the price for our sin that otherwise we never could have paid, and by the Holy Spirit, who regenerated our hearts so that we could believe in Christ and then sealed us to guarantee the outcome. That outcome—the consummation of our calling—is our eternal transformation into Christlikeness, and our new life with God on the new heavens and new earth.

With respect to “*the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe*” (**v. 19a**), that power is past, present, and future. Our conversion from death to life, from being slaves of sin to freedom in Christ, from being citizens of Satan’s kingdom to citizens of heaven, is nothing less than our spiritual resurrection. This was not a work of any human power, but was entirely effected by Christ. That power is with us today and will be with us always, since he will “*never leave us nor forsake us*” (**Heb 13:5**). When we rest in the assurance of our hope, understand the riches of the glory of our inheritance, and appreciate the surpassing greatness of his power toward us, that enables and empowers us to be most faithful and obedient to our calling here on earth and to not turn aside to the left or right in pursuit of lesser, earthly glories and riches, but to lay all aside for him.

- **1:19b-23**: *These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

Everything that Paul has been talking about throughout chapter 1—all the blessings that we have in Christ—has been made possible and guaranteed by Christ’s resurrection and ascension (**v. 20**). Being seated “*at His right hand*” symbolically describes the place of honor, authority, and power. The nature of Christ’s authority and power is described in **vv. 21-22a**: it is universal and everlasting. He has authority over everything physical and everything spiritual. The reference to God’s raising Christ from the dead “*and seated Him at His right hand*” (**v. 20**) is an allusion to **Ps 110:1**. **Ps 110:1** became a key text in the NT (there are 21 quotations or allusions to it in most of the NT writings). The reference to all things being in subjection under his feet in **v. 22a** is a quotation from **Ps 8:6**. The reference to “*this age*” and the “*age to come*” is a reference to the Bible’s eschatological structure, the “two ages”: “*this age*,” and the “*age to come*.” The two ages comprehend all of time. We are in this age now. It is the age of sin and death. When Christ comes again, he will inaugurate the age to come in all its fullness. In the age to come, there will no longer be any sin or death. The age to come will last forever.⁴

Christ is reigning now as Lord. Christ’s reign began with his resurrection and ascension (see **Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:22-36; 7:55-56; Rom 1:4; 8:34; Eph 1:20-22; Phil 2:9-10; 3:20-21; Col 1:13; 3:1;**

⁴ The two ages are discussed in detail in Menn 2022: 19-26.

Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 1:5). Although Christ is “*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named . . . all things [are] in subjection under His feet*” and he is “*head over all things,*” Satan is still active and humans are still in rebellion against him. **Ps 110:1** says, “*The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’*” In other words, Christ’s reign in this age is a reign of conquest. Death is “*the last enemy that will be abolished*” (**1 Cor 15:26**). Death will be abolished at the second coming of Christ (**1 Cor 15:23-26, 52-54**).

All of this is for the church. He is the head of the church and we, the church, are the body. This shows the essential unity between Christ and the church. Jesus himself expressed this essential unity when he said to Paul (then known as Saul), “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” (**Acts 9:4**) He did not just say, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting my people?*” This head-body relationship also means that the church is Christ’s instrument to effect his purposes in the world. **Verse 23** indicates that the church is the fullness of Christ because: (1) Christ fills the church like God filled the OT temple, and (2) the body complements the head. All that Christ has he gives to the church so that we may continue the work that he began when he was with us incarnate on the earth and bring that work to completion.

The centrality and significance of the church is seen throughout the epistle to the Ephesians through the many and varied metaphors or descriptions Paul uses for the church. There are body metaphors: the church is the body of Christ (**Eph 1:22-23**); political metaphors: the church is the commonwealth of Israel (**Eph 2:12, 19**); architectural metaphors: the church is God’s building and temple (**Eph 2:21-22**); relational and family metaphors: the church is the household or family of God (**Eph 2:19**) and the wife of Christ (**Eph 5: 22-32**). Each of these metaphors is relational and reinforces the unity between Christ and his people and, consequently, the unity of Christ’s people with each other. Just as Christ is not divided (**1 Cor 1:13**), so a body is united with its head, the members of a body are united with each other, a husband is intimately united with his wife, and “living stones” are all perfectly fitted into a holy temple. They stress our supreme love and devotion to and our intimate unity with God and Christ (**Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37-38; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 10:27-28**) and with each other (**Lev 19:18; Matt 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27-28; Gal 5:14**). The result of this relational emphasis is that we are to become like Jesus (**Rom 8:29**) and “*be holy, for I [God] am holy*” (**Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Pet 1:15-16**). The reason for this is that the heart of God’s covenant with his people has always been “*I will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (**Gen 17:8; Exod 6:7; 29:45; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek 11:19-20; 14:10-11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Hos 2:23; Zech 8:8; 13:9; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10; Rev 21:3**).

All of the metaphors and descriptions of the church have practical implications: “The fact that the church is like a family should increase our love and fellowship with one another. The thought that the church is like the bride of Christ should stimulate us to strive for greater purity and holiness, and also greater love for Christ and submission to him. The image of the church as branches in a vine should cause us to rest in him more fully. The idea of an agricultural crop should encourage us to continue growing in the Christian life and obtaining for ourselves and others the proper nutrients to grow. The picture of the church as God’s new temple should increase our awareness of God’s very presence dwelling in our midst as we meet. The concept of the church as a priesthood should help us to see more clearly the delight God has in the sacrifices of praise and good deeds that we offer to him (see Heb. 13:15-16). The metaphor of the church as the body of Christ should increase our interdependence on one another and our appreciation of the diversity of gifts within the body.” (Grudem 1994: 859)

Francis Foulkes expresses the great importance of the church by saying, “The church has the authority and power to overcome all opposition because her leader and head is Lord of all” (Foulkes 1989: 74). To do this, the church needs be the full expression of Christ, i.e., we need to be united like a body is to the head, we need to express his values, his priorities, his love, his compassion, etc. Since we have been given his heart (**Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3**), his mind (**1 Cor 2:16**), his Spirit (**Ezek 36:26; John 14:17**), and his word (**Matt 24:35; John 14:26**), we need to draw on and use these all of these things. Then Jesus will truly be alive in the church and “*the gates of Hades will not overpower it*” (**Matt 16:18**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the main things Paul prays for the church?

- How, if at all, does his prayer for the church differ from the way we typically pray?
- If there is a difference, what can we learn from this?

2. What does “knowing” God involve?

- How can we increase our “knowledge” of God?

3. Discuss the implications of the different metaphors or descriptions Paul uses for the church.

4. What are some implications of the essential unity and head-body relationship between Christ and the church?

5. What should the church be doing to manifest the fullness of Christ?

D. 2:1-10—The nature, means, and purpose of salvation

In this section, Paul discusses the deep nature, means and purpose of our salvation. Our salvation is nothing less than our passing from death to life. In **vv. 1-6** he points out that our salvation is 100% caused by God, who has done this out of his great love, mercy, and grace toward us. We have gone from a state of being walking dead people who by nature were under God’s wrath to being made alive, raised, and seated with Christ in the heavenly places. **Verse 7** reveals that God has done this so that in the ages to come he might show us “*the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*” The means by which we appropriate this salvation is through faith (**vv. 8-9**). The practical outworking of our salvation is that we now walk in the good works God has prepared for us to do (**v. 10**).

- **2:1-3:** ¹ *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,* ² *in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.* ³ *Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

These verses describe the natural, unregenerate state of mankind. The comprehensiveness of our lost and helpless condition, and our estrangement from God, is emphasized throughout these verses. First, we were all born “dead,” not merely “sick.” The spiritually dead can no more give themselves spiritual life than can the physically dead give themselves physical life. Second, our spiritual death is not merely a passive state, but is an active state of rebellion against God. Thus, our state was one whereby we “walked” (i.e., lived) in our “*trespasses and sins.*” Not only that, but we willingly lived “*according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air*” and lived “*in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.*” Thus, we willingly attached ourselves to the three great enemies of God and destroyers of godliness: the world; the flesh; and the devil. Our degradation in sin encompassed all of us, since we indulged “*the desires of the flesh and of the mind.*” In such a state, we were “*by nature children of wrath.*”

“*The course of this world*” (**v. 2**) refers to the ways of culture and society that oppose the Lord. Ungodly trends in the world, including materialism, naturalism, the desire for instant gratification, self-glorification, self-indulgence, the desire for power, manipulation, and control of others, all stand as worldly attitudes and forces that are opposed to God and godliness. James could not be clearer or more pointed concerning the seriousness of this when he says, “*Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (**Jas 4:4**). John puts it like this, “*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*” (**1 John 2:15-16**) **Gal 4:3** tells us that, before we were rescued by Christ, we were “*held in bondage under the elemental things of the world*” and were “*under a curse*” (**Gal 3:10**), because we were “*under sin*” (**Gal 3:22**) and therefore “*slaves of sin*” (**John 8:34; Rom 6:16-17, 20**).

In unredeemed people, Satan is actively at work. The devil is called “*the ruler of this world*” (**John 12:31**) and “*the god of this world [or ‘this age’]*” (**2 Cor 4:4**). That is why our walking “*according to the course of this world*” is, in fact, “*according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience*” (**v. 2**). Since Satan is the ruler and god of this world, everyone who is not part of God’s kingdom is under the power and authority of the devil (**Acts 26:18**). Satan is here called “*the prince of the power of the air*” because in ancient times, the term air often referred to the spiritual realm of angels and demons.

The term “flesh” is used in different ways in different contexts. Sometimes it refers to our humanness, sometimes to our physical body. In this context, the first use of “*our flesh*” (**v. 3a**) denotes “a human being’s innate and natural capacities, tendencies, and realities. In other words, my ‘flesh’ is just who I am as a human

creature apart from any changes that might be effected in me through divine intervention or re-creation. Since I am innately a rebellious sinner, hostile to God and to everything He is and values, the concept of ‘flesh’ will usually have a negative connotation. It denotes my innate wickedness, evil, and rebelliousness. We could accurately paraphrase Paul’s concept of the ‘flesh’ in this context as ‘innate human sinfulness.’” (Crabtree 2001: n.p.) In v. 3b, Paul’s contrasting use of “the flesh” and “the mind” suggests that, there, the “flesh” refers to our bodily appetites.

With respect to the “lusts” of our flesh, the word for “lusts” of the flesh in Greek is the noun *epithumia*. Although the word “lust” often has a sexual meaning, that is not its primary meaning here. *Epithumia* basically means to “desire greatly, strong desire, longing”; particularly when used in a bad sense it means “irregular and inordinate desire, appetite, lust” (Zodhiates 1993: “*epithumia*,” 627). The use of this term is consistent with the active, powerful nature of indwelling sin. Just as “*faith working through love*” (Gal 5:6) is evidence that a person has been born again and is in Christ, so a life characterized by “*the lusts of our flesh*” is evidence that the person has not been born again and is not in Christ. That is why, in Romans 8, Paul said, “*The mind set on the flesh is death . . . because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God*” (Rom 8:6-8).

All of these things are telling us that everyone either is a lover of the world or a lover of God, is under the kingdom and authority of the devil or the kingdom and authority of God, is a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. This same fact is repeatedly stressed throughout the book of Revelation. In Revelation, all of humanity (“*every tribe and people and tongue and nation*”) is seen as being a member of one of two, mutually opposing, camps: the world (Rev 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; see also 17:15), or the church (Rev 5:9; 7:9); those who dwell on the earth (Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8), or those who are citizens of heaven (Rev 6:9, 11; 7:9-10; 11:12; 12:10; 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:1-9, 14; 20:4-6); those who worship the beast (Rev 13:3, 4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 19:20), or those who worship the Lamb (Rev 4:8-11; 5:9-14; 6:9; 7:9-17; 11:15-18; 12:11, 17; 14:4, 12; 15:2-4; 17:14; 19:5-9; 20:4; 21:9; 22:3); those who bear the mark of the beast (Rev 13:16-17; 14:9, 11; 19:20), or those who are sealed by God (Rev 7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4); those whose names have not been written in the book of life (Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:15), or those whose names have been written in the book of life (Rev 3:5; 21:27); those who are part of the “great city” (Rev 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21), or those who are part of the “beloved city” (Rev 20:9). There is no neutral or third alternative.

Many people have difficulty accepting the fact that we are “*by nature children of wrath*” (v. 3). Every person knows in his or her heart that we have a fundamental problem deep within us that we cannot eradicate. Many people tend to downplay the seriousness of this by saying something like “to err is human.” However, we must consider what we are like in relation to God. God’s holiness is foundational. Sin is incompatible with his holiness. Closely related to God’s holiness is his wrath. Many people also tend to downplay or even be offended at the idea of God’s wrath. God’s wrath “is in fact his holy reaction to evil. . . . What is common to the biblical concepts of the holiness and the wrath of God is the truth that they cannot coexist with sin. God’s holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it. So sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate sin.” (Stott 1986: 102, 103, 106; see Hab 1:13; Rom 1:18)

- **2:4-7:** ⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Humanity’s rebellion against God, its enslavement to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and its utter helplessness to save itself is highlighted by strong contrasting beginning of v. 4, “*But God.*” Note that it is He who “*made us alive*” (v. 5), “*raised us up*” (v. 6a), and “*seated us . . . in the heavenly places*” (v. 6b). Those actions correspond to his having chosen us (1:4), predestined us (1:5), redeemed us (1:7), and sealed us (1:13). All of that was done in, through, and with Christ. They also correspond to Col 1:13 which says that God “*rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son*” and to Phil 3:20 which says that now “*our citizenship is in heaven.*” Again, this emphasizes that our salvation is 100% the work of God in Christ. It is purely by his grace as a result of his love and mercy toward us.

Our being made alive in Christ is the counterpart to our dying in Adam (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22). God told Adam that “*in the day you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die*” (Gen 2:17). When Adam ate, at that moment he began being separated from God (see Isa 59:2), and the seeds were sown that inevitably resulted in physical and eternal spiritual death. Here, Paul is telling us that the

moment we are united with Christ, the seeds are sown that result in our eventual physical resurrection and eternal togetherness with God in righteousness, conforming to his image (**Rom 8:29**) and being like him (**1 John 3:2**). In Christ, God and humanity meet and are at peace.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of our salvation is that it, like our being sealed by the Holy Spirit, is simply the pledge, downpayment, or guarantee of greater things to come throughout all of eternity! Thus, **v. 7** tells us that God has made us alive, raised us up, and seated us in the heavenly places “*so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*” It is beyond our comprehension to know how “*the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*” will be manifested in the ages to come. But if we take this promise deep into our hearts and lives, there are at least two implications for us. First, even the worst things that happen to us in this life are nothing compared to what God has guaranteed for us. Therefore, we should be able to endure everything we face in this life with a confidence, hope, and peace that is simply not available to anyone who does not know Christ. Second, since God has shown such love, grace, and kindness to us, promises us infinitely more love, grace, and kindness for all of eternity, we should begin to show that same kind of love, grace, and kindness to others, even (or especially) to those who are unlovable or even are our enemies. The reason, of course, is that God poured out his love, grace, and kindness to us when we were his enemies.

- **2:8-10:** ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;* ⁹ *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* ¹⁰ *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

Faith is the means by which the gift of God’s grace—our salvation—is received. When **v. 8b** says “*and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,*” both “that” and “it” are referring to our faith, not to God’s grace or to our salvation. This is so for the following reasons: (1) If “that” and “it” were referring to God’s grace or salvation, the passage would be redundant and tautological; (2) Referring to “faith” maintains the biblical antithesis between faith and works; (3) The whole sense of the passage is best maintained by reading “that” and “it” as referring to our faith; (4) This is in keeping with what has been emphasized in both chapters 1 and 2 that our salvation is 100% the work of God; and (5) Several analogous passages make the same point (see **John 1:12-13; 10:25-29; Acts 13:48; 16:14; Rom 6:23; 12:3; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:3-7; Phil 1:29; Heb 12:2**). In other words, our faith is the result of our regeneration, not the cause of it. The point of **vv. 8-9** is that we are not saved by anything we *have*, anything we *are*, or anything we *have done*; our entire salvation is a gift of God’s grace to us—it is neither earned by us or deserved by us.

This is confirmed in **v. 10** which says that “*we are His workmanship*”; we are “*created in Christ Jesus.*” Thus, as Paul says in **2 Cor 5:17**, “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.*” We are his workmanship in multiple ways. His choosing us, predestining us, adopting us, redeeming us, sealing us, making us alive, raising us up, and seating us in the heavenly places are what he has done for us. His work (i.e., “*It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure,*” **Phil 2:13**) is what he does in us. The “*good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them*” (**v. 10**) are what he does through us.

We are saved in the condition we are, i.e., sinners against God (**Rom 5:8**), but God does not leave us in that state. he saves us for a purpose, i.e., “*for good works*” (**v. 10**). However, as with our initially coming to saving faith in Christ, which was all God’s doing, so even the “good works” God has saved us to do, “*God prepared beforehand.*” Thus, our entire life in Christ—past, present, and future—is all in his hands.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are we basically good but go wrong because of bad and unjust environments and social structures? Why or why not?
2. Is God unjust in sentencing anyone to hell? Why or why not?
3. Why is God’s love for us “great” (v. 4)?
4. How does the gospel of salvation by grace alone distinguish Christianity from every other religion in the world?

5. Why is the truth that we are saved without regards to our works so offensive to some people, even those within the church?

6. What are we to make of those in the church who manifest no good works? What should be our response to them?

E. 2:11-22—The nature of the church

- **2:11-12:** ¹¹ *Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—* ¹² *remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

These two verses specifically reveal the natural state of all Gentiles before the coming of Christ. However, they also summarize the state of everyone in his or her natural state. “*Separate from Christ*” = unredeemed and without a redeemer. “*Excluded from the commonwealth of Israel*” includes both physical Israel (insofar as the Gentiles are concerned) and spiritual Israel (insofar as all people in their natural state are concerned). “*Strangers to the covenants of promise*” = the Mosaic Covenant (insofar as the Gentiles are concerned) and the covenants of blessing God promised, i.e., the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants, which pointed to and find their fulfillment in Christ (insofar as all people in their natural state are concerned).⁵ “*Having no hope,*” i.e., no hope of salvation and eternal life “*Without God*” = God does not indwell anyone in his or her natural state; even for OT Israel, the Shekinah Glory of God had left the temple before the exile into Babylon and never returned; and all people (including Israel which rejected Christ as their Messiah), in effect, “*worship in ignorance*” (**Acts 17:23**). “*In the world*” = although this phrase probably modifies “*without God,*” it also describes the natural state of all of humanity: all people naturally “ *dwell on the earth*” (**Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8**), i.e., their hearts and minds, as well as their bodies, find their true home on earth, not in heaven with God; they are “*of the world*” (**John 17:16**), not merely in the world. All of this shows the complete inability of the natural person to save him- or herself, even if they had the inclination to do so (which they do not). This reinforces and corroborates what has already been said in **1:4-14** and **2:1-10** about the primacy of God in salvation.

Paul calls Israel the “*so-called circumcision*” to point out that circumcision was merely a ritual “*performed in the flesh by human hands*” but lacked any spiritual significance and, therefore, was worth nothing in the eyes of God unless one’s heart is circumcised, which results in faith and obedience to God (see **Rom 2:25-29**). The purpose of circumcision was as a seal or sign of “*the righteousness of faith*” (**Rom 4:9-12**). The ritual of circumcision itself “*is nothing*” if not accompanied by faith and obedience (see **1 Cor 7:18-19; Phil 3:2-3**). God himself had called on Israel to “*circumcise your heart*” and show justice and love for the orphan, the widow, and the alien (**Deut 10:12-19**). However, it did not do so; therefore, God said that “*all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart*” (**Jer 9:25-26**).

It is that attitude of arrogance, superiority, and exclusivity that Israel had to Gentiles that Paul is addressing here. That attitude was demonstrated in **Acts 21:27-30** and even by Peter in **Gal 2:11-13**. The irony is that Israel was supposed to be “*a light to the nations*” (**Isa 42:6; 49:6**), but failed. However, the true “*light to the nations*” is Jesus Christ. Consequently, when Jesus was brought to the Temple to be circumcised, the Holy Spirit came upon Simeon who held Jesus in his arms and then quoted or alluded to **Isa 9:2; 42:6; 49:6** as referring to Jesus, saying, “*A light of revelation to the Gentiles*” (**Luke 2:32**). Jesus Himself alluded to that passage when He said that “*I am the light of the world*” (**John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46**).

Because the church is Christ’s body here on earth, **Isa 42:6; 49:6** was also quoted by Paul and Barnabas in **Acts 13:47** as applying to the church and as being fulfilled through the salvation of the Gentiles in response to the gospel. Similarly, in **Matt 5:14** Jesus told his disciples, “*You are the light of the world.*” In **Acts 1:7-8** Jesus commissioned his disciples to go “*to the remotest part of the earth.*” That alludes to **Isa 49:6**, where the Servant likewise is commissioned to be a “*light of [or to] the nations*” and bring salvation “*to the end of the earth.*” Further, when speaking to Agrippa in **Acts 26:16-18**, Paul recounts that he has been commissioned to go to the Gentiles “*to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to*

⁵ See Menn 2021a at 30-40 for how Christ and the church are the fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants.

God.” That alludes to **Isa 42:6-7**, where the Servant is sent as a light to the nations “*to open blind eyes*” and to bring “*those who dwell in darkness from the prison.*” Consequently, Paul is implying that we need to remember that we were formerly far from God and without hope but, solely because of God’s grace to us, we have been brought near. Therefore, we can and should never look down on anyone or have the attitudes of arrogance, superiority, and exclusivity that Israel had. Instead, we are to reach out to others and be God’s instruments to bring them to the light of salvation, just as God graciously brought us to the light of salvation.

- **2:13-22:** ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* ¹⁴ *For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,* ¹⁵ *by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,* ¹⁶ *and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.* ¹⁷ *AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;* ¹⁸ *for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.* ¹⁹ *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,* ²⁰ *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,* ²¹ *in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,* ²² *in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*

The phrase “*But now,*” which begins **v. 13**, marks a huge transition, similar to that in **2:4**. These verses describe what is so radical about the gospel and Christianity, especially to Jews. The Jews had been God’s “chosen people”—but no longer. Now the “chosen people” are all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, who have been chosen by God *in Christ*. We have been “*brought near*” to God by Christ (**v. 13**).

Verses 14-16 reveal how Christ and the gospel have brought about a redefinition of Israel and the people of God. Under the Old Covenant, the only division between different ethnic groups of people that had any theological significance was the division between Jews and Gentiles. In the physical Temple, there was an actual wall separating Jews from Gentiles. **Verse 14** says that Christ “*broke down the barrier of the dividing wall*” which separated Jews from Gentiles. **Verse 15** goes further; it says that Christ not only “*broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,*” but he also “*made the two into one new man.*” What Christ has done affects relationships both “horizontally” (relationships between people) and “vertically” (the relationship between people and God). Without Christ, there is enmity between people because they emphasize their differences from each other. Now, in Christ, the enmity is eliminated because the people become one; the result is peace (**vv. 14-15**). Similarly, without Christ, there is enmity between people and God because sin has separated people from God; but in Christ, people’s sin has been atoned for, the enmity has been done away with, and they have been reconciled to God (**v. 16**).

Verse 15 says that the “enmity” between Jews and Gentiles was “*the Law of commandments contained in ordinances.*” **Verse 16** says that, by the cross, Christ “*put to death the enmity*” (see also **Col 1:19-23**). The reference to the Law is important and again reveals the radical nature of what Christ has done. The Jews had used the Law of Moses to set themselves apart from, and higher than, the Gentiles. However, Jesus came to fulfill the Law (**Matt 5:17**). The word “fulfill” (Greek = *plēroō*) normally means “to bring to its intended meaning” (Hays 2001: 29), or to “bring something to completion” (Poythress 1991: 368). In Matthew’s Gospel, which is the context of **Matt 5:17**, the vast majority of all uses of *plēroō* “clearly refer to fulfillment of prophecy in the life and passion of Christ” (Meier 1976: 80). When Jesus said that He came to “fulfill” the Law, he was saying that the Law pointed to Him. It was incomplete in itself but anticipated him. As **Gal 3:24** says, “*The Law has become our tutor [or guardian] to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.*” The word for “tutor” (or “guardian”) is pedagogue (Greek = *paidagōgos*). A pedagogue “was a domestic slave within the household, whose task was to oversee the activities of the children in the family from infancy to puberty. . . . Like the elementary principles of the world [**Gal 4:3, 9**], the Law orders the daily affairs of its wards until sonship is realized. It was established as a temporary but necessary expedient given the operative principle of sin and functions as a ‘bridle’ for a people that are prone to sin, bringing to light the defined will of God as a basis for covenant obligation. With the coming of faith in Christ, the Law’s function as guardian and custodian ceases and the Spirit becomes the internal guiding principle.” (Belleville 1986: 59, 70) **Gal 3:23** and **3:25** show the contrast: “*Before faith came in, we were kept in custody under the law,*” but “*Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a pedagogue.*” Jesus and his teaching completed and fulfilled what the Law hinted at and began. Jesus perfectly obeyed the Law and thereby fulfilled it and satisfied its claims. Further, on

the cross he paid, on our behalf, the penalty the Law required; hence, all who are in him are no longer under the Law but are now under grace and the law of Christ (see **Rom 6:14; 7:4-6; Gal 3:13-14; 4:4-5**). In all these ways, Christ brought the *purpose* and the *binding nature* of OT (Mosaic) Law to an end.

Not only was the Mosaic Law superseded by Christ, but he has done something unique in making “*one new man*” out of Jews and Gentiles. The uniqueness of what Christ has done is emphasized in **2 Cor 5:17** which says that “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature [or creation]*” (see also **Gal 6:15**). The newness and uniqueness of what Christ has done is made clear by the repeated statements that we are his “workmanship” (**v. 10**), we have been “created” in Christ Jesus (**v. 10**), he “made” or “makes” the two groups into one (**vv. 14-15**). This is revealing that, not only was our salvation 100% the work of God, but our salvation is deeper and involves more than we might imagine. What God is doing through Christ is fundamentally remaking humanity. When we understand this, it is designed to affect our attitudes, relationships, and actions.

What Christ did was even more radical than making “*one new man*” out of Jews and Gentiles. In the Temple, there also were separate areas for men and women, Jews and Gentiles, priests and lay people. Now, in the new, true temple of the church, the division between Jews and Gentiles has been eliminated. Together as “*one new man*” the church is “*growing into a holy temple in the Lord*” (**v. 21**; see also **Rom 3:22; Gal 2:11-14**).⁶ In Christ all are equal, regardless of sex, ethnic background, economic status, language, or other physical characteristics (**1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Rev 5:9; 7:9**). And all Christians are now considered to be priests (**1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6**). This idea of the oneness and equality of all people was unprecedented in all of history. It is not merely that all Christians, regardless of background, are equal, Paul’s point also is that we have been *joined together* as one, i.e., Christ “*made the two into one new man.*”

This point is reinforced in the remaining verses of this chapter. **Verse 17** quotes from **Isa 57:19**. That text also is probably behind Paul’s use of “far” and “near” in **v. 13**. This is part of the greater context of Isaiah in which Isaiah redefines the “people of God” contrary to the limitations of the Mosaic Covenant (see **Deut 23:1-8**). **Isa 56:3-8** prophesied that there would be a new people of God, including foreigners (Gentiles) and eunuchs, both of which had been prohibited by the Mosaic law from entering the temple (see also **Isa 55:5**). We see this new people of God prophesied by Isaiah fulfilled in **Acts 8:26-38** when the Ethiopian eunuch converted to Christ and was baptized and with the coming of the Gentiles to faith in Christ. All believers in Christ, regardless of physical defects or ethnic background, are now “priests” in the new, true, temple of God (**Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10**). Several passages in **Isaiah 56-58** prophesy this redefined people of God. Ekhard Schnabel discusses this, “Isaiah announces that in the last days, when God will reveal his righteousness, biological descent or bodily mutilation [i.e., eunuchs] will no longer determine membership in his people. Foreigners will ‘join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants’ (56:7). . . . The criterion for being a part of YHWH’s future restoration and establishment of his kingdom is not ethnic descent but a contrite spirit and a contrite heart [57:15] and a righteous response to God’s will on the part of those individuals who belong to the remnant for whom God has compassion (58:7-14)—those who ‘take refuge’ in YHWH ‘shall possess the land and inherit my holy mountain’ [57:13], both ‘the far and the near’ [57:19]. This means that in the Isaianic prophecies the criteria for membership in the eschatological people of God have changed in a fundamental way: when YHWH restores the earth, both repentant Jews and repentant Gentiles will constitute the covenant people.” (Schnabel 2002: 41)

In short, God’s plan of uniting all the different peoples of the world as one in Christ had been prophesied by Isaiah over 700 years before Paul wrote Ephesians. Indeed, this had been God’s plan from his covenant with Abraham, where he had promised to bless “*all the families of the earth*” through the seed of Abraham (**Gen 12:3; 22:18**). In **Galatians 3**, Paul points out that the true “seed of Abraham” is Christ (**Gal 3:116**) and that anyone, regardless of background, who belongs to Christ is “Abraham’s seed” (**Gal 3:29**). The fact that this plan was central to God is indicated in **Eph 2:18** which reveals that is the work of every member of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This has important implications for the church. Since Christ eliminated the only distinction between different people that had any theological significance, i.e., the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, then any “lesser” distinctions *among Gentiles* (differences based on tribe, ethnicity, nationality, etc.) have also been eliminated in Christ. They should not be resurrected under the guise of preserving or promoting one’s culture. Does “culture” trump Christ? It was cultural/tribal/ethnic exclusivism that was the source of discord in **Acts 6:1** and **Gal 2:11-14**. In **Acts 6**, the Greek or Hellenistic widows had been discriminated against in favor of the native Hebrews in the daily distribution of food. The apostles recognized this as sin, and had the church choose

⁶ Approximately 11 times in the NT the church is explicitly called “*the temple of God.*” See Menn 2021a: 63-67 for more detail on the church as God’s temple on the earth.

seven men to be in charge of the distribution. The church chose seven, all of whom had *Greek* names (**Acts 6:5**). In doing this, the church was publicly recognizing that a wrong had been done to the Greeks and, by choosing seven Greeks to be in charge, the church was putting the minority party in charge and thereby forcefully acting to right the wrong. In **Galatians 2**, Paul realized that Peter’s not eating with Gentiles in his private life was directly contrary to “*the truth of the gospel*.” Therefore, he did not go to Peter privately, but publicly rebuked Peter “*in the presence of all*” (**Gal 2:14**). When we organize churches along tribal or ethnic lines, we are placing our physical distinctions over our unity, oneness, and equality in Christ. We have lost something of great value, namely, the uniqueness and trans-nationality of Christ, the gospel, and the church, which alone have the power to unite all kinds of people. This was a problem in the first century, and it is still a problem today. Do we have the discernment and courage the early church had to forcefully and effectively deal with this problem and right this wrong?

In **vv. 19-22** the focus is the joining together of God’s people—the relational aspect of the church. These verses show the inclusion of Gentiles into the same body of Christ with Jewish believers by using three metaphors: kingdom; household or family; and building/temple. In the kingdom metaphor, **v. 19** picks up on what **v. 12** had said about Gentiles being “*excluded from the commonwealth of Israel*” and being “*strangers to the covenants of promise*.” Now, in Christ, Gentiles “*are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints*.” We formerly had been strangers and aliens to God and his kingdom and at home in the world; but now, in Christ, we are strangers and aliens to the world (**Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11**) and at home in God and his kingdom.

In the household or family metaphor, **v. 19** says that now, in Christ, “*you are of God’s household*.” This household or family metaphor is one of the richest descriptions of the church in the NT. The church is called the bride or wife of Christ (**2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-32; Rev 21:2, 9**); sons or children of God (**Rom 8:14, 16; 9:26; Gal 3:26; 1 John 3:1-2**); people of God (**Rom 9:25; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9-10**); and household or family of God (**Matt 12:49-50; 2 Cor 6:18; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 5:1-2**). Dharti Lewis points out, “Of all the word pictures and metaphors used to describe the church, one stands out above the rest: family. In fact, it is so much of the essence of the church that it cannot even properly be called a metaphor. Metaphors describe what the church is like or similar to—light, flock, field, building—but family is not metaphorical; it is a literal description of the phenomena we know as church.” (Lewis 2015: n.p.) The description of the church as a family is reinforced elsewhere in the NT by statements that God has adopted believers into God’s family as his children (**John 1:12; Rom 8:14-17, 23; 9:4; Gal 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph 1:5; 2:19; 1 John 3:1**). Consequently, we all become deeply related to each other as brothers and sisters (e.g., **Matt 12:50; Acts 1:16; 6:3; 11:29; 12:17; 16:40; 18:18; 21:7, 17; Rom 14:10; 1 Tim 5:1-2**). This is yet another reason why any ethnic, tribal, or national discrimination by some believers against others is so wrong—it amounts to discrimination against members of our own family!

The building/temple metaphor of the church is found in **vv. 20-22**. Christ is the cornerstone, which determines the direction and “lie” of the entire building. The cornerstone image is taken from **Ps 118:22** (“*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone*”). That verse was repeatedly applied to Jesus (see **Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7**). The cornerstone image also is taken from **Isa 28:16** (“*Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.*”) and **Isa 8:14** (“*Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem*”), which are applied to Jesus in **Rom 9:33** and **1 Pet 2:8**. The apostles as the foundation are also seen in **Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 3:10; and Rev 21:14**. Verses **21-22** stress the relational aspect of the church by stating that we are being “*fitted together*” and are being “*built together*.” These statements also highlight the present, ongoing, and active work of Christ in the church. The “togetherness” that the church should demonstrate complements the “*one new man*” nature of the church.

Common to all three metaphors or descriptions is a fundamental unity: there is one kingdom; one family; one building. Each of the three entities manifests an overall unity despite the diversity of its component parts. Each citizen, family member, or building component is an integral part of the whole. Additionally, each entity has certain goals and dynamic characteristics that result in a good and successful kingdom, household, or building. Those goals and characteristics include the following:

Kingdom	Household	Building
Life; Liberty; Prosperity; Security; Peace; Justice; Trust in and submission to leaders; Meets needs; Sacrifice of individuals for wellbeing of the whole	Health; Growth; Maturity; Love; Security; Intimacy; Meets needs; Care for individual members; Education; Trust in and submission to parents	Functional; Practical; Meets needs; Design; Beauty; Well-adapted for its specific purpose; Protection; Strength

These metaphors were not chosen at random but because of the goals and characteristics that epitomize good

and successful kingdoms, households, and buildings. This is similar to the way Paul discussed spiritual gifts in the context of the body of Christ in **1 Corinthians 12**. There he said that “*even as the body is one and yet there are many members, and all the members of the body, though there are many, are one body, so also is Christ*” (**1 Cor 12:12**). The issue is how can the church demonstrate love and acceptance of each of its members and cause each of its members to utilize his or her gifts and thrive and thereby lead to the health, strength, and wellbeing of the church as a whole?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is it helpful to “remember” (vv. 11-12) what our former lives were like apart from Christ? Is it ever helpful *not* to remember that?
2. In vv. 11-12, Paul attacks Israel’s attitudes of arrogance, superiority, and exclusivity toward the Gentiles by calling Israel the “*so-called circumcision*.” Do we, the church, ever exhibit similar attitudes toward others? If so, how and toward whom? What can and should we do to correct this?
3. To what extent is the church as a whole, and our church in particular, meeting or failing to meet the “*one new man*” concept of unity and the absence of ethnic, tribal, and national divisions that Paul has emphasized in vv. 11-22? What should we do about this?
4. By comparing the church to a kingdom, household, and building, what goals and characteristics is Paul suggesting the church should have or be doing? How might that affect or change the way we operate our church?
5. How can the church demonstrate love and acceptance of each of its members and cause each of its members to utilize his or her gifts and thrive and thereby lead to the health, strength, and wellbeing of the church as a whole? What changes do we need to make for that to happen?

F. 3:1-13—The mystery of the oneness of Gentiles and Jews in Christ

3:1-13: ¹For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; ³that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, ⁷of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. ⁸To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; ¹⁰so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. ¹³Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

In v. 1, Paul begins by saying, “*For this reason*.” He returns to that thought in v. 14, “*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father*.” In vv. 2-13, Paul discusses the “*mystery of Christ*,” which is the fact that the Gentiles are one with the Jews as members of the body of Christ and heirs of the promises, and his ministry to the Gentiles. That mystery of the oneness of Jews and Gentiles is the reason he bows his knees before the Father. Interestingly, however, in its form, vv. 2-13 actually is a lengthy parenthetical comment. This section stresses the centrality of Christ: the oneness of Jews and Gentiles is “*the mystery of Christ*” (vv. 4, 6); the gospel is “*the unfathomable riches of Christ*” (v. 8); God’s eternal purpose is “*carried out in Christ*” (v. 11); we only have “*boldness and confidence*” through faith in Christ (v. 12).

In v. 1, Paul calls himself “*the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles*.” He probably wrote this epistle during his imprisonment in Rome. It was his mission to the Gentiles that brought about his arrest in Jerusalem (**Acts 21:21, 28**) and his eventual transfer to Rome. His calling himself the “*prisoner of Christ Jesus*” probably also is implying that he is Christ’s servant/slave/prisoner.

Verses 3-6 specify the “mystery” of the oneness of Gentiles and Jews in Christ through the gospel (see also **Col 1:24-28; 4:3**). Paul received knowledge of this mystery “*by revelation*” (v. 3). In **2:13, 17** Paul had quoted and alluded to Isaiah about the fact that Gentiles would be included in the people of God. In **Rom 9:6-33**, Paul quotes at length from the OT to prove that the calling of the Gentiles was in accord with OT prophecy. However, the “mystery” that was given to Paul by “revelation” and “*which in other generations was not made known*” was that the Gentiles would occupy a place of complete equality with Jews as the true people of God. In other words, as Paul indicates in v. 6, and as he discussed in **2:11-22**, Gentiles are not made one with the Jews by Judaizing or becoming like the Jews. Instead, both Gentiles and Jews become “*one new man*” (**Eph 2:15**) and a “*new creature*” (**2 Cor 5:17**) in Christ. **Acts 15** and the book of **Galatians** further demonstrate that.

In **vv. 7-10** Paul discusses his own ministry. He calls himself “*the very least of all the saints*” (v. 8). Similarly, in **1 Cor 15:9** he called himself “*the least of the apostles and not fit to be called an apostle,*” and in **1 Tim 1:15-16** he called himself the “foremost” of sinners. The reason, of course, is that he had led the persecution of the church.

The importance of the church is highlighted in v. 10, which states that it is only through the church, that “*the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known . . . to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*” Satan and the evil spirits had not been aware of God’s plan of salvation, and therefore they persuaded men to crucify Christ (**1 Cor 2:8**). Angels long to look into the things of the gospel (**1 Pet 1:10-12**), but it is only now, through the church, that they receive such understanding. Consequently, the church needs to remember that the world and heavenly creatures are paying attention to what the church is saying and doing (v. 10). It needs to remember that it and what it has been commissioned by God to do are part of God’s eternal purposes (v. 11). It should act with boldness and confidence because it is in Christ (v. 12). And it should remember that its tribulations and suffering have meaning and purpose (v. 13).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the “mystery of Christ”?
2. Why did Paul call himself the “least of the saints”?
3. How is Christ revealed as central?
4. What does this section reveal about the church?

G. 3:14-21—Paul’s prayer for the church

- **3:14-19:** ¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,* ¹⁶ *that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,* ¹⁷ *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* ¹⁸ *may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,* ¹⁹ *and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*

In **1:3-14** Paul emphasized at least 11 times what God has done for us has been done “*in Christ.*” In **1:18-19** Paul again pointed believers to God, praying that they would know “*the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.*” The surpassing authority and power of Christ were described in **1:20-23** God’s sovereignty, mercy, and love in raising us from death to new life were emphasized in **2:1-10**. Christ’s work in uniting Jews and Gentiles and forming the church was stressed in **2:11–3:6**. Now, in his prayer for the church, Paul again focuses on the Lord—his glory and love.

Paul’s prayer for the church in **vv. 14-19** may be seen as a follow-up or continuation of his prayer for the church in **1:15-19a**. In fact, both passages begin with “*For this reason.*” His prayer builds step-by-step to a glorious conclusion: (1) v. 16—that we be “*strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man*”; (2) v. 17a—so that “*Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*”; (3) **vv. 17b-19a**--so that “*you . . . may be able to comprehend . . . and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge*”; (4) v. 19b—so that “*you may*

be filled up to all the fullness of God.”⁷

We see the Trinity in **vv. 14-17** and the comprehensiveness of what God has for those who are his. **Verse 15** makes clear that every type of creature in heaven and on earth, and every family, tribe, and race of human beings are from God. This is in accord with the fact that Christ has redeemed people from “*every tribe and tongue and people and nation*” in the world (**Rev 5:9; 7:9**). While most people pray for protection and help for their physical problems and circumstances, Paul does not focus on that. Instead, he prays that the church be strengthened “*in the inner man*” (**v. 16**), that the church would be “*rooted and grounded in love*” (**v. 17**), that it would “*know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge*” (**v. 19**), and that it would be “*filled up to all the fullness of God*” (**v. 19**). In all probability, if Christians today prayed this way and experienced such inner fullness, our concerns regarding our physical problems and circumstances would shrink in significance.

The unsurpassable nature of the love of Christ is indicated in **vv. 17b-19a**. First, we are to be “*rooted and grounded in love*” (**v. 17b**). Then, with that grounding, he prays that we may be able to “comprehend” (**v. 18**) and “know” (**v. 19a**) “*the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge*” (**v. 19a**). “Comprehend” indicates to grasp or perceive something, whereas “know” indicates more experiential knowledge (Hodge 1994: 189 [“knowledge united with appropriate feeling, may well be included”]). The fact that Christ’s love “surpasses knowledge” is indicated in **v. 18** where Paul prays that we may comprehend “*what is the breadth and length and height and depth*” of that love. These spatial terms suggest infinity. Breadth suggests that Christ’s love extends to all people and nations, including both Jews and Gentiles who had been enemies. Length suggests that his love extends through all ages, having been planned from before the foundation of the world, from everlasting to everlasting. Height suggests that it is beyond man’s ability to attain on his own and that, therefore, no one can ever pluck us away from it, since this love seats us on the throne with Christ. Depth suggests that it is so deep it can never be exhausted, since it overcomes even the utter depths of sin (i.e., our killing Christ, who himself descended to hell to pay the price we otherwise would have had to pay). All of these together denote the infinite perfection of Christ’s love and our absolute security in it. Paul’s closing request in **v. 19** is that we “*may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*” This anticipates his discussion in **4:11-13** of the calling of the church leaders, who are to equip the saints “*until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*” (**4:13**).

- **3:20-21:**²⁰ *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,*²¹ *to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

The conclusion of Paul’s prayer for the church is a doxology (a hymn or statement praising and glorifying God). It brings to a close the first half of the book. In fact, it forms the spiritual high point of the entire book, since the remainder of the book concentrates on practical outworkings for the Christians’ lives. This doxology reveals Paul’s absolute confidence in God: God is able to do far more abundantly beyond everything we ask; he is able to do far more abundantly beyond everything we think. There are no limits on what he can do. Hence, to him alone belongs all the glory forever and ever.

Interestingly, in **v. 21** the church is mentioned before Christ. This is in accord with the central role of the church Paul mentioned in **3:10**. It also shows the unity between the body and Christ. Christ himself expressed this unity between himself and the church in **Acts 9:4** when he said, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*” This doxology should cause us to wonder why we do not see God regularly doing “*more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.*” Perhaps we do not see these things because the condition of the church for which Paul prayed in **vv. 16-19**—strength in the “inner man” through the Holy Spirit, being rooted and grounded in love, deep comprehension of the surpassing love of Christ, and being filled with the fullness of God—is not the condition in which many of us find ourselves today.

⁷ Each clause in the prayer begins with the Greek word *hina*, which is typically translated that or so that and indicates “for the purpose of” or “in order that” (Zodhiates 1993: *hina*, 774). I have underlined the words “so that” in the text above to show where *hina* appears. Although the translation we are using has the word “and” at the beginning of **v. 17b**, which suggests that our being strengthened in the inner man has the dual purposes of Christ’s dwelling in our hearts through faith *and* our being rooted and grounded in love, the word “and” is not in the original Greek. Consequently, our being rooted and grounded in love should be seen as the result of Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith. It is our being rooted and grounded in love because Christ dwells in our hearts through faith that enables us to comprehend and know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Put Paul's prayer in 1:15-19a together with his prayer in 3:14-19.

- What is most important to him in his concern for the church?
- What might we do to help his requests be realized in our own lives and church?

2. In v. 16 Paul prays that we be strengthened in the "inner man." He does not pray for our outer, physical protection.

- Why do you think this is?
- Is the focus of Paul's prayer different from the focus of most of our requests to God? If so, what results do you think we might experience if our prayers were more in line with Paul's

3. Verses 17-19 Paul emphasizes the comprehensiveness of the love of Christ.

- Why do we need to be reminded of this and be rooted and grounded in it?
- Are there practical ways we can comprehend and know the love of Christ more deeply?
- If we did comprehend and know the love of Christ more deeply, how might this affect our lives?

4. In vv. 20-21 Paul emphasizes that God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or even imagine.

- Why do you think he emphasizes this?
- Do you see God doing such things in your own life and church? If not, why not, and what can we do about this?

H. 4:1-16—The church should demonstrate unity and maturity

Chapter 4 marks the beginning of a new section of the book and moves from emphasizing doctrine to emphasizing application. The statement in v. 1, "*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,*" is the theme not only of the chapter but of the rest of the book.

- **4:1-6:** ¹ *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,* ² *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,* ³ *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* ⁶ *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

We are all implored to "*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called*" (v. 1). Each individual Christian has his or her own specific calling to do the "*good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*" (Eph 2:10). Each has been called to his or her own specific vocation; each has been given his or her own spiritual gifts, according to the will of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:11); some Christians are called to be single, others to be married, etc. However, all Christians have been called to be "*holy and blameless before Him*" (Eph 1:4) and to be "*rooted and grounded in love*" (Eph 3:17). In vv. 2-3, Paul describes how to "*walk in a manner worthy*" of our calling, namely, "*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (see also Gal 5:22-25). The focus of v. 2 is our individual lives; v. 3 focuses on our corporate life as the church. Humility and gentleness should naturally follow if we truly realize the fact that we have *undeservedly* been raised from a state of spiritual death to new and everlasting life (Eph 2:1-6).

Patience and showing tolerance for one another in love should naturally follow if we truly are "*rooted and grounded in love*" (Eph 3:17). Patience and showing tolerance for one another in love are not necessarily easy. A. Skevington Wood points out that this "is a characteristic of God himself. It can mean steadfastness in

the endurance of suffering but more often in the NT it describes reluctance to avenge wrongs. It is to be displayed to other Christians and to everyone else (Rom 12:10, 18). Patience finds its expression in loving forbearance (Col 3:18). To bear with another (literally, ‘hold him up’) is to put up with his faults and idiosyncrasies, knowing that we have our own.” (Wood 1978: 55)

The “*unity of the Spirit*” is the unity of which the Holy Spirit is the author. The bases for Christian unity and peace are set forth in **vv. 4-6**: one body; one Spirit; one hope; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; and one God the Father who is over all and through all and in all. In these verses we again see the Trinity. The context of “*over all and through all and in all*” (**v. 6**) is the church, not humanity as a whole or creation as a whole. Each of the bases of unity and peace in **vv. 4-6** are universal and apply to all members of the universal church. This is reflected in the “one baptism,” which is through the “one Spirit,” which unites all people in Christ, regardless of their ethnic, social, or gender background (see **1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-28**). These are the primary matters; denominational differences should be seen as secondary. These universal bases of Christian unity and peace should, therefore, serve as bases for the different local churches to work together to deal with common needs and problems in their respective communities.

- **4:7-10:**⁷ *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*⁸ *Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”*⁹ (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

Paul has been speaking of the church as a whole; now he turns to “*each one of us*” individually who constitute the church. The “grace” of which he speaks in **v. 7** is that grace which enables or equips us to “*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called*” (**4:1**), as also was the case in **3:2, 7-8**. Thus, the grace he gives us enables or equips us to carry out the specific spiritual gifts (e.g., **1 Cor 12:7-10**) and ministries (e.g., **Eph 4:11**) he gives us. That is indicated by the context, particularly what follows in **vv. 11-16**, but also by the word “But” (Greek = *de*) which, although typically translated as “but,” frequently denotes a transition, continuation, or explanation of what has come before (see Zodhiates 1993: *de*, 399). Christ’s ultimate “gift” (**v. 7**) is our salvation, which is exemplified by our receiving the Holy Spirit (see **John 7:38-39; Acts 2:33; Gal 3:14**). It is the Holy Spirit who, in turn, gives us the specific spiritual gifts we have (**1 Cor 12:11**). We are expected to use the gifts he has given us. If we do not, it indicates that we really do not believe that he has given us any gifts. In short, our use or non-use of the gifts he has given us reflect our belief in, obedience to, and worship of God himself.

Paul substantiates his statement about Christ giving us the gift of his grace by quoting from **Ps 68:18**. He is thereby saying that **Psalm 68** was a prophecy of Christ and what he would do, and that it has been fulfilled by Christ in giving us his grace. As Joshua Greever points out, “The theme of Psalm 68 is that God fights and wins his people’s battles in order that he might dwell with his people as king” (Greever 2020: 257). Throughout the psalm there is a pattern of victory=>ascension=>temple gifts (Greever 2020: 259). In his quotation of the psalm, Paul changed the psalm’s wording of “*received gifts among men*” to “*gave gifts to men.*” This actually is in accord with the Aramaic Targum (paraphrase of the OT text) and the Syriac Peshitta (early translation of the OT, and later the NT, into Syriac). It is also consistent with the context and “the overall theological direction of the psalm” (Thielman 2007: 823). The psalm mentions only God, but it is typological of Christ and points forward to an eschatological fulfillment. In the psalm, God is the victor who ascended on high (**Ps 68:18**) and received gifts among men only to pour out to his people the gifts of victory over his enemies (**Ps 68:1-2, 21-23, 30**), gladness (**Ps 68:3**), a new family and home (**Ps 68:5-6**), prosperity (**Ps 68:6, 9-10**), protection (**Ps 68:13**), salvation (**Ps 68:19**), escape from death (**Ps 68:20**), strength and power (**Ps 68:35**). As in the psalm, Christ has ascended to the ultimate height of heaven (**Eph 1:20-23**), is conqueror of all his enemies (e.g., sin, Satan, and death), and “leading captives in triumph, and laden with spoils which he distributes to his followers” (Hodge 1994: 213-14).⁸ Joshua Greever concludes, “Given Paul’s emphases in Ephesians on Christ’s victory and ascension over the principalities and powers as well as Christ’s building of the eschatological temple in himself by means of his powerful word, Psalm 68:18 provided an apt window through which Paul could appropriate and apply the typological framework of the entire psalm to Christ and his people in Ephesians 4:7-16” (Greever

⁸ Some people interpret the statement “*he led captive a host of captives*” as referring, not to Christ’s enemies, but to Christ’s own people. The former view better fits the context of the psalm and such similar NT passages as **Luke 11:21-22; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-15**. Nevertheless, it is also true that, when we were his enemies, Christ died for us, redeemed us from our captivity to sin, Satan, and death, so that now we are his “captives” (see **Luke 4:18; 2 Cor 10:5; 2 Tim 2:26**).

2020: 279).

In vv. 9-10, Jesus' ascent clearly refers to his ascent back to the Father after his resurrection (see **Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9**). There is controversy concerning what his descent refers to. The words "ascended" and "descended" are in the same tense and same verbal form. Thus, the above translation ("*had descended*") is incorrect. Further, although some translations say that Jesus "first" descended, the word "first" is not in the oldest manuscripts. The main views are that Jesus' "descent" into "*the lower parts of the earth*" is referring to: (1) the earth itself (which is "lower" in comparison with heaven from which he came, see **Isa 44:23**), i.e., the reference is to his incarnation, and his leading captive a host of captives refers to his leading us out of our captivity to sin (see also **Ps 139:15** where "*the depths of the earth*" is a poetical designation of the womb); (2) the fact that he suffered death itself and thereby descended to the depths of the earth (see **Ps 63:10; 69:15; Ezek 32:24; Jonah 2:6; Rom 10:7; Phil 2:8**); (3) his proclaiming the gospel to those in Hades after his death (see **1 Pet 3:19; 4:6**); (4) his "descent" back to the earth in the form of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The first two options are probably the best (option 2, Jesus' death, can be seen as an aspect of option 1, his incarnation). The reasons are that vv. 9-10 are a commentary on v. 8. Jesus' descending to Hades is entirely foreign to the meaning of **Psalm 68**, which Paul had quoted in v. 8 and on which he is commenting. Thus, option 3 is probably not correct. Further, in vv. 9-10, earth and heaven are set in opposition to each other. That same opposition had been stated by Paul in **Eph 1:20** and by Jesus in such passages as **John 3:13; 6:38; 8:14, 23; 16:28**. Consequently, option 4, which does not include the opposition of heaven and earth, is probably not correct. In v. 10, his ascending "*far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things,*" refers to filling all things, i.e., both heaven and earth, with his presence and power. That is in accord with **Eph 1:20-23** (see also **Matt 28:18; Phil 2:9-11**).

- **4:11-16:** ¹¹ *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,* ¹² *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* ¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* ¹⁴ *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;* ¹⁵ *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,* ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Church leadership is to be *active* and is concerned with the leader's *responsibility*, not his position. The mission and purpose of the church is found in equipping the saints for the work of the ministry—in other words, producing mature disciples who will actively serve others. With respect to the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers mentioned in v. 11, the nature and function of apostles has already been discussed at **1:1-2**, above. The church needs to test people who call themselves apostles—by their teaching and their lifestyle—to determine whether they are true or false apostles (**1 John 4:1-6**; see also **2 Cor 11:3-4, 13; Rev 2:2**; and discussion at n.1, above).

There is a similarity between prophets and apostles, i.e., there were *foundational* prophets (**Eph 2:20**), and there are what Grudem calls *congregational* prophets (Grudem 1994: 1055; see **Acts 21:9; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 11:5; 12:28-29; 14:29-33, 37-38; 1 Thess 5:19-21; 1 Tim 4:14**). Although there has been dispute concerning the nature of contemporary prophets and prophecy (see Grudem 1994: 1049; Hodge 1993: 388-89; Kell 2006: 11-13), "prophecy throughout the Scriptures normally is specific and purposeful" (Kell 2006: 46). The purposefulness of prophecy is stated in **1 Cor 14:3** which says that "*one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation*" (see also **Acts 15:32** which says that Judas and Silas, who were prophets, "*encouraged [or exhorted] and strengthened the brethren*"; and **1 Cor 14:31** [*For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted*]). Perhaps the best definition of a contemporary prophet and contemporary prophecy is given by Charles Hodge: "The gift of which Paul here speaks, is not, therefore, the faculty of predicting future events, but that of immediate occasional inspiration, leading the recipient to deliver, as the mouth of God, the particular communication which he had received, whether designed for instruction, exhortation, or comfort." (Hodge 1993: 389-90; see also Kell 2006: 53 [prophets are "messengers who receive inspired truths from God for the benefit of those who hear"]; Grudem 1994: 1057-58 ["prophecy occurs when a revelation from God is reported in the prophet's own (merely human) words. . . . Unless a person receives a spontaneous 'revelation' from God, there is no prophecy"]).

Perhaps to discourage people from proclaiming themselves as "prophets" in order to assert undue

control over people (or take their money), the NT repeatedly warns against “false prophets” (**Matt 7:15; 24:11; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; Acts 13:6; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 2:18; 4:1; Rev 2:20**). The Bible indicates that “the inspiration of the prophets was occasional and transient” (Hodge 1993: 389) and says that the prophet and his or her prophetic message is to be *judged* by the congregation (**1 Cor 14:29-33; 1 Thess 5:20-21; 1 John 4:1**).⁹

An evangelist is one who makes known the gospel, particularly where it had not been previously known. The word evangelist is derived from the Greek word for the “gospel” (i.e., *evangelion*). Evangelism—making known the gospel—implies more than simply proclaiming who Jesus is, that he died for sins and rose from the dead, and that people need to repent and turn to him as Savior and Lord. The gospel is designed to affect all areas of life. Consequently, the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization described “evangelism” this way: “To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.” (“Lausanne” 1974: n.p.) Many people who call themselves evangelists have little “presence in the world,” do not “dialogue” or “listen sensitively in order to understand,” conceal “the cost of discipleship,” and do not call people “to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community.” Such “evangelism” is contrary to how Christ himself proclaimed the gospel: he emphasized “counting the cost” and single-minded devotion to himself (see **Matt 10:37-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; 14:26-33**).

The word “pastor” appears only once in the NT, in **Eph 4:11** which says, “*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.*” Grudem notes that “the verse is probably better translated as ‘pastor-teachers’ (one group) rather than ‘pastors and teachers’ (suggesting two groups) because of the Greek construction” (Grudem 1994: 913). Specifically, each group mentioned in the verse is preceded by “some as,” but there is no “some as” preceding “teachers”; instead, pastors and teachers are grouped as one. Further, “pastors and teachers” has “one definite article in front of two nouns joined by *kai* (‘and’), a construction that always in Greek indicates that the two nouns are viewed by the writer as united in some way” (Grudem 1994: 913n.13). Grudem concludes, “The connection with teaching suggests that these pastors were some (or perhaps all) of the elders who carried on the work of teaching, for one qualification for an elder is that he be ‘able to teach’ (1 Tim. 3:2)” (Grudem 1994: 913).

The pastor-teacher has many roles. He must preach, teach, be involved in administration of the church and of the sacraments, discipline, counsel, visit the sick, comfort the bereaved, perform marriage ceremonies and burials, and a host of other functions. This multi-faceted calling is indicated by the Greek word for “pastor” (*poimēn*) used in **Eph 4:11**. *Poimēn* normally is translated as “shepherd.” The verbal form of *poimēn* (*poimainō*) is applied to elders in **Acts 20:28** (“*shepherd the church of God*”) and **1 Pet 5:2** (“*shepherd the flock of God*”). All of this suggests that, in the NT, a “pastor” is equivalent to an “elder.” Jesus is the ultimate shepherd. He said, “*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . . My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*” (**John 10:11, 27**) Like Jesus, a pastor has to “know” his congregation—he has to spend time with them; he is their servant, laying down his life for them, not lording it over them (see **Matt 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:5-15**).

Many churches are run so that the pastor is in charge of everything—he is the ultimate authority and decides what can be done and what cannot be done. The people are passive—they simply come and “worship” on Sundays. Such a model of doing church is unbiblical. The main Greek word for “ministry” in the NT is *diakonia* which means “service” (see **Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 12:25; 20:24; 21:19; Rom 11:13; 12:7; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 4:1; 6:3; 8:4; 9:1; Eph 4:12; Col 4:17; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 11**). The main Greek words in the NT for “ministers” are *diakonos*, which means “servant” (see **Matt 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 12:26; Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; Eph 3:7; 6:21; Col 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Thess 3:2; 1 Tim 4:6**), and *doulos*, which means “slave” (see **Matt 24:45, 46, 48, 50; 25:14, 19, 21, 23, 26, 30; Mark 10:44; Luke 17:10; John 13:16; 15:20; Acts 2:18; 4:29; Rom 1:1; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; Eph 6:6; Phil 1:12; 1 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:1; Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 2:16; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 1:1; Rev 1:1**). The importance of these words for leaders in the church is

⁹ The issue of judging those who claim to be prophets, including the need for such judgment, the standard for judgment, and dealing with false prophets is discussed in detail at Menn 2021b: 40-41.

twofold: (1) The NT specifically avoids giving titles to the leaders of the church which imply power, dignity, and the performance of “priestly” functions; (2) Christ emphasized that the leaders of the church, including his own apostles, were to serve the body (**Matt 18:1-4; 20:25-28; 23:8-12; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27**). In short, all believers are the servants or slaves of Christ, all believers are “ministers,” and all believers have a “ministry” of service in the kingdom. While individual Bible study is important, because the church is a body, Christians cannot be equipped and grow into maturity on their own, apart from the body.

The “*equipping of the saints*” involves several aspects:

- Identifying the gifts, talents, and abilities of the members of the body, and facilitating the use of those gifts, talents, and abilities (see **Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:7-31; 14:12; 1 Pet 4:10-11**).
- Teaching, instructing, exhorting, comforting, and warning the body from the Word of God concerning the essentials of Christian doctrine and life—in short, turning church members into *mature disciples* (see **Acts 2:42; 5:42; 1 Cor 14:19; 2 Cor 1:34; 4:5; 10:8; 1 Thess 4:1; 5:12-14; 1 Tim 4:1-6, 11, 13, 16; 6:2b; 2 Tim 2:2; 3:16-17; 4:1-4; Titus 2:1**).
- Identifying and raising up new leaders in the church (see **Exod 18:17-26; Deut 34:9; 2 Kgs 2:1-15; John 17:18; Acts 1:15-25; 6:1-7; 14:23; 2 Cor 8:16-22; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5**). This requires that existing leaders know their people well and spend time with potential new leaders, teaching and modeling Christian leadership.
- Disciplining those who cause division, teach heresy, or are engaged in scandalous immorality (see **Matt 18:15-17; Rom 16:17-20; 1 Cor 5:1-8, 12-13; 1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 2:14-18**). The church board, and the church as a body, needs to be involved in church discipline (see **2 Cor 2:6**). Discipline is done for the good of the offender (**1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20**) and for the good of the church itself. If the church is involved in the disciplinary process, the people feel that they have a share in the life of the church, take their responsibilities as Christians more seriously, and are drawn closer to the church.
- Restoring to fellowship those who have been subject to church discipline, have repented, and changed their ways (see **2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:8-12; Gal 6:1**).

The ultimate goal of the “*equipping of the saints*” is that they “*all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*” (**v. 13**). In **Matt 5:48**, Jesus said, “*You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” The word translated “perfect” is *teleios*, which means “finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing” (Zodhiates 1993: *teleios*, 1372). It is the same word Paul uses in **v. 13** which is translated “mature.” In short, we are to be just like Christ. Hence, we are to learn of him and look to him, so as to be like him. Bible study is not simply an end in itself; rather, it should help us to know Jesus better so that we would be like him.

In **v. 13** “faith” is coupled with “knowledge,” and in **v. 15** “truth” is coupled with “love.” in other words, simply having knowledge of the truth is insufficient. The demons have knowledge of the truth but tremble (**Jas 2:19**). Instead, our knowledge of the truth must result in faith, i.e., a “firm persuasion, conviction, belief in truth, veracity, reality or faithfulness” (Zodhiates 1993: *pistis*, 1162). It is that firm persuasion of the truth that leads to a personal surrender to Christ and a life based on such surrender. That life of surrender is manifested by our love for God and for others.

Even here, however, the focus is not just on the Christlikeness of the individual believers. Rather, the focus is on the well-being of the church *as a body*. **Verses 15-16** show us the ultimate end result: “*We are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*” Here we see the centrality of love: it is on that basis that the body is built up.

The Greek word for “love” here is *agapē*. *Agapē* essentially is a warm regard for and interest in another; it is a disposition of the will finding one’s joy in putting the other first (see Danker 2000: *agape*, 6; Zodhiates 1993: *agape*, 66; see also **Rom 13:8-10; 1 Cor 13:1-13; Gal 5:22-23**). The KJV often translated *agape* as “charity,” which brings out its active, others-centered nature. It goes against people’s natural inclinations. It is demonstrated by God, who “*so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*” (**John 3:16**), and by Christ, who died for us “*while we were yet sinners*” (**Rom 5:8**). Because such love is contrary to our natural inclinations, it can only be lived by Christ empowering us. In other words, *agapē* is a love for God and for others that is the result of God’s love for us which has been poured into our hearts. That is why Christ gave this as the one sign by which people will know that we are his disciples (**John 13:34-35**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” What is the “calling with which we have been called”?
2. What are the bases for Christian unity?
3. Which spiritual gifts have you been given? How have you used those gifts?
4. Discuss the roles and functions of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.
5. What are the goals of “equipping the saints”?
6. What does “equipping the saints” involve?
7. Why can’t Christian maturity be achieved simply through self-study?
8. Why do you think Jesus made love the one sign by which people will know we are his disciples, and how can it be demonstrated in our lives?

I. 4:17–5:21—The Christian walk

Beginning with **4:17** and continuing until almost the end of the book, Paul discusses the specifics of how we can “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

- **4:17-24:** ¹⁷ So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹ and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

In order to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,” the first thing we need to do is to “lay aside” (or, “put off”) our “old self.” We are no longer to “walk as the Gentiles walk.” This means that we should no longer think of ourselves primarily as whites or blacks, Americans or Africans. Our tribe, occupation, or any other “external” characteristic is simply that: it is “external” to us. Our primary identity is found in Christ—we are Christians first and foremost. These verses are telling us that every basis other than Christ by which we find our identity results in futility of mind (v. 17), darkens our understanding (v. 18), excludes us from the life of God (v. 18), causes us to be ignorant (v. 18), hardens our heart (v. 18), makes us callous (v. 19), gives us over to sensuality (v. 19), causes us to practice every kind of impurity (v. 19), makes us greedy (v. 19), corrupts us (v. 22), and is deceitful (v. 22). These are very strong admonitions. We need to pay attention to them, because the natural state of our hearts is to draw our identity from these “external” considerations.

The above verses show us what our “old self” is really like. The order of these things shows that the futility of our mind, our lack of understanding, our ignorance, and the hardness of our heart first affect our relationship with God then affect our relationship with everyone and everything else. Without Christ, every aspect of our lives is corrupt. That corruption is progressive. As we act out of the futility of our mind, our lack of understanding, our ignorance, and the hardness of our heart, we become callused, i.e., the twinge of our conscience disappears. We then deliberately, not just accidentally, sin. Sensuality pertains not only to eroticism but to all things having to do with the senses, the physical, and the worldly (as opposed to the things of the Spirit). As a result, we practice “every kind of impurity,” and our greediness is not merely an inordinate desire but becomes insatiable (see **2 Pet 2:14**). This is all confirmed in v. 22 by the phrase that we are “being corrupted.” That indicates a continuous process. As Wood summarizes, “Moral degeneration has set in and the road to perdition lies ahead” (Wood 1978: 92).

In **vv. 23-24**, Paul then gives us the antidote to living corrupt, futile lives. We not only are to put off the old self, but we also are to “*put on the new self*” (see also **Rom 12:1-2**). This is not merely refurbishing our old nature but is a “*new self . . . in the likeness of God*” which has been “*created*.” As Paul summarizes in **2 Cor 5:17**, “*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come*” (see also **Gal 6:15**). The new self is the regenerate self, in which Christ is present and is being formed (see **Rom 6:6-8; Gal 2:20; 4:19; Col 1:27; 3:3-4, 10; 1 John 4:12**). Just as “*being corrupted*” (**v. 22**; present passive participle) implied a continuous process of corruption, so “*be renewed*” (**v. 23**; present passive infinitive) likewise implies a continuous process of renewal in Christ.

- **4:25-32:** ²⁵ *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.* ²⁶ *BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,* ²⁷ *and do not give the devil an opportunity.* ²⁸ *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.* ²⁹ *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.* ³⁰ *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

These verses begin the specifics of how we are to “*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called*.” They are generally arranged as a series of couplets: things we should not do and things we should do. The themes of speech (**4:25, 29-31**) and anger (**4:26-27, 31**) recur.

In the context of **v. 25**, “neighbor” means a fellow believer. Paul is saying that, since we are all members of one another in one body, for one Christian to lie to another is as unthinkable as for a nerve in the body to deliberately send a false message to the brain. The theme of our speech is picked up and extended in **vv. 29, 31**. Where **v. 25** dealt with truthful speech instead of falsehood, **v. 29** speaks of not using “unwholesome” speech but, instead, speak words of “edification” that “*will give grace to those who hear*.” Similarly, **v. 31** exhorts us to put away clamor and slanderous speech. The things Paul mentions in **vv. 29, 31** provide the context as things which “*grieve the Holy Spirit*” (**v. 30**). Indeed, the fact that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit (**v. 30**) is the reason why we should *not* sin in thought, word, or deed. Paul returns to the nature of our speech in **5:4, 6** where he tells us that we should not speak in a filthy way, or use “*silly talk*,” “*course jesting*,” or speak deceitfully with “*empty words*.” Silly talk is the talk of fools—frivolous, senseless, beyond the bounds of good taste. Empty words are words which try to justify or excuse immorality, impurity, and greed, i.e., they are false and deceitful, without meaning.

There is a close connection between sinful speech and anger. Hence, anger in **v. 26** immediately follows Paul’s exhortations regarding speech in **v. 25**; anger again is connected with speech in **vv. 29-31**. Thus, in context, sinful anger helps to provide the context for grieving the Holy Spirit. One reason it does that is that unconfessed anger, or anger that is held onto (**v. 26**) is the context that “*gives the devil an opportunity*” (**v. 27**). In **v. 26**, Paul quotes the Septuagint (Greek translation) of **Psalm 4**. **Ps 4:4-5** helps to explain **vv. 26-27**. Since **v. 26** begins by saying, “*Be angry and yet do not sin*,” that indicates that anger, in and of itself, is not necessarily sinful. Jesus himself became angry from time to time (see **Mark 3:1-5** [when he healed a man in the synagogue]; **10:13-16** [when his disciples rebuked people who were bringing children to him]; **Matt 21:12-13**; **Mark 11:15-17**; **Luke 19:45-46**; **John 2:13-16** [when he drove out the money changers from the temple]; **John 11:33, 38** [when his friend Lazarus died]). These examples are instructive. “Jesus was angry with the religious establishment (Sadducees), the primary teachers of the law (Pharisees), and his own disciples—and all for the same reason: they were keeping vulnerable people away from God.” (Moore 2022: n.p.) In the example of Lazarus, Jesus was angry with death itself.¹⁰ Mark Moore concludes, “Jesus cares for people more than anything else. We can therefore see that anyone [or anything, including death itself] who comes between Jesus and the people he loves will experience his wrath.” (Moore 2022: n.p.) This means that, for us to be angry and yet not sin, we need to be angry about the right thing, for the right reason, at the right time, to the right degree, and in

¹⁰ Timothy Keller points out that in **John 11:33**, “when Jesus saw Mary and the others weeping, it says, ‘He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.’ But the original Greek word means ‘to quake with rage.’ In verse 38, as Jesus came to the tomb, it says he was ‘deeply moved.’ The original Greek word there means ‘to roar or snort with anger like a lion or a bull.’ So the best translation would be, ‘Bellowing with anger, he came to the tomb.’ This must at least mean that his nostrils flared with fury. It may mean that he was actually yelling out in anger.” (Keller 2021: The Anger of Jesus)

the right way.

Verse 28 shows an important purpose of work: work and earning money is not just for our own benefit but is for the purpose of having something to share with those in need. **Verse 32** summarizes all of the exhortations and admonitions. All of the specifics detailing how we should walk in the manner worthy of our calling stress the relational nature of our behavior. In sum, these verses are telling us that we should strive to: be truthful (v. 25); properly control and exercise our anger (vv. 26-27); be productive and unselfish (v. 28); be pure and graceful in our speech (v. 29); cooperate with and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit (v. 30); have the right attitude toward others (v. 31); and be compassionate and forgiving (v. 32).

- **5:1-17:** ¹ *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;* ² *and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*

³ *But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;* ⁴ *and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.* ⁵ *For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

⁶ *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* ⁷ *Therefore do not be partakers with them;* ⁸ *for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light* ⁹ *(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),* ¹⁰ *trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.* ¹¹ *Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;* ¹² *for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.* ¹³ *But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.* ¹⁴ *For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

¹⁵ *Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,* ¹⁶ *making the most of your time, because the days are evil.* ¹⁷ *So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

There is no clear break between **4:32** and **5:1**. Thus, “Therefore” that begins v. 1 is seen by some as referring back to and summarizing what has just been said. The specific context of what has just been said—and how we are to imitate God—is forgiveness (**4:32**). Interestingly, the necessity for forgiveness was the only part of the “Lord’s Prayer” that Jesus specifically emphasized and commented on (see **Matt 6:14-15**). “Therefore” may also be viewed as a synopsis of what Paul has been arguing in general and is not limited to forgiveness. In this view, the next statement, “*be imitators of God,*” summarizes the totality of the ethical demands of Christianity in one imperative “mimic” (Greek = *mimētēs*), i.e., imitate God. The fact that we are to imitate God “*as beloved children*” reminds us of what Paul had said in **1:5**, that God “*predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.*” To imitate God means to think, feel, speak, and act like he does, because we now have his values and his priorities. All of this indicates that we are being “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (**Rom 8:29**). In **3:16-19** Paul has already discussed how God has enabled this to happen by giving us the “*power through His Spirit in the inner man*” to know him and be “*filled up to all the fullness of God.*”

On the other hand, some see **5:1-2** as marking “the introduction of a new theme, as it does more than once in Ephesians (4:1, 17; 5:15)” (Wood 1978: 66). That new emphasis is walking as children of the Light and of the Lord. “*Walk in love*” (v. 2) fleshes out what imitating God looks like, particularly since “*God is love*” (**1 John 4:8**). The rest of v. 2 fleshes out what “walking in love” means, i.e., “*walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*” Christ is “*the exact representation of [God’s] nature*” (**Heb 1:3**), and “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends*” (**John 15:13**). Hence, the apostle John concludes, “*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (**1 John 3:16**). In v. 2, Paul describes what Christ has done for us in the language of OT sacrifices, i.e., “*an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*” As his imitators, we likewise are to “*present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*” (**Rom 12:1**). Note that sacrifice (particularly sacrifice of self) is intimately tied to love, because you cannot have selfishness and at the same time exhibit love or the character of Christ.

Verse 1 begins with the vertical dimension (our relationship with God), which then translates, in v. 2, to the horizontal dimension (our relationship with other people). The horizontal is always the outworking of the vertical. The horizontal also reveals the nature of the vertical (see **1 John 4:20**). This order is necessary: if we do not have God, then we cannot have real love, since God is love. It is also consistent with how Jesus defined

the greatest commandment(s): the first is “*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.*’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘*YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*’” (**Matt 22:37-39**)

While **vv. 1-2** spoke of our moral and ethical obligations in general terms, **vv. 3-5** discuss specifics; **vv. 6-17** then return to the general. Both **vv. 3** and **5** refer to the sins of immorality, impurity, and greed (covetousness). Sexual sin is particularly bad because it is not done alone but always drags someone else into the sin. Greed and covetousness are explicitly said to be forms of idolatry (see also **Col 3:5**). Since that is the case, the 10 Commandments of the OT, in effect, both begin and end with idolatry (**Exod 20:3, 17; Deut 5:7, 21**). Greed and covetousness are idolatry because they amount to worshiping the creature rather than the creator (**Rom 1:25**); and greedy/covetous people demonstrate that their “*god is their appetite*” (**Phil 3:19**). As in **vv. 3** and **5**, Paul had earlier linked sensuality (i.e., immorality and impurity) with greed in **4:19**. The seriousness of this is indicated at the end of **v. 5**, which says that “*no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*” The linking of the kingdom of Christ and God is an assertion of the deity of Christ (see also **Titus 2:13**).¹¹

These verses bracket the sins of filthiness and impure speech in **v. 4**. The term translated as “filthiness” actually denotes impropriety or “improper conduct whether in action or word or even thought and intent; indecorum of any kind; conduct which when exposed by the light makes the person ashamed of himself; ugly, shameful conduct of any kind; conduct which is contrary to a person who follows after God (only in Eph. 5:4)” (Zodhiates 1993: *aischrotēs*, 102). Zodhiates concludes, “Attachment and conformity to God requires conduct of which God is not ashamed and which could not bring shame to the person when it is brought to light” (Zodhiates 1993: *aischrotēs*, 102). “Silly talk” is the kind of talk that betrays a person as a fool (Zodhiates 1993: *mōrologia*, 1001). All of these admonitions reveal that our lives are holistic: sins do not only affect one part of us, but all of us. Our sins demonstrate a fundamental separation from God, which amounts to idolatry, since everyone lives for something. That “something” is either the Lord or something or someone else. But if that “something” is anything or anyone other than the Lord, it is an idol. **Verses 6-7** therefore warn us not to be deceived or be partakers with the “*sons of disobedience*” because these things bring with them the wrath of God (see also **Col 3:6**).

Verses 8-17 expand on **vv. 6-7** by explaining why we should not be deceived by or partake in the activities of the “*sons of disobedience.*” **Verse 8** says that formerly we “were darkness” but now “*are Light in the Lord,*” not just that we were “in” darkness. It is as if we were or are darkness or light personified: we are the outward and visible sign of our inward and spiritual darkness or light. Because we are “*Light in the Lord,*” we also are the “*light of the world*” (**Matt 5:14**). Consequently, we are to “*walk as children of Light*” (**v. 8**; see also **Matt 5:16; 1 John 1:6-7**). Light is known by its effects. **Verse 9** specifies those effects by saying that the “*fruit of the Light*” is “*all goodness and righteousness and truth.*” Christianity is not a long list of things we are commanded to do and things we are commanded not to do. Instead, we are to “*work out our salvation*” (**Phil 2:12**) by endeavoring to be pleasing to the Lord in everything we do (**v. 10**).

Our Christian ethic is a positive one to please the Lord with whom we are in a close, loving relationship: his character we long to share and his will to understand (**5:1, 17**). Because we are the light, we are not merely to refrain from evil but are positively to do good by exposing the deeds of darkness (**vv. 11-13**), walking wisely (**v. 15**), and redeeming our time (**v. 16**; see also **Col 4:5**). The word translated “expose” (**v. 11**; Greek = *elenchō*) typically is translated as “reprove.” It means “to rebuke another with the truth so that the person confesses, or at least is convicted, of his sin” (Trench 1989: 29). To do this, we need the Holy Spirit (see **John 16:8**). **Verse 14** is a paraphrase of **Isa 60:1-2**. Paul’s argument in the section is that turning from a life of darkness to light is like awakening from sleep or arising from the dead. Being alive and awake implies being conscious of what we are now doing and living an intentional life of goodness, righteousness, and truth, pleasing to the Lord. This is reinforced in **vv. 15-16** where he speaks of redeeming our time, which indicates that we are to make the most of every opportunity, turning each one to our best advantage and to the advantage of the gospel, since none can be recalled if missed. This whole section has contrasted darkness and light, being awake versus being asleep, being alive versus being dead. Those contrasts are concluded in **v. 17** where Paul points out that the “foolish” person is the one who does not “*understand what the will of the Lord is.*”

¹¹ E. W. Bullinger points out that the reference to “*the kingdom of Christ and God*” is an example of the figure of speech known as *hendiadys*, in which “two words are employed, but only one thing, or idea, intended,” i.e., “the kingdom of Christ, yes—of Christ who is truly God” (Bullinger 1968: 657, 667).

- **5:18-21:** ¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,* ¹⁹ *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;* ²⁰ *always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;* ²¹ *and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*

This section is the capstone of Paul’s discussion of how we are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (4:1), “no longer just as the Gentiles also walk” (4:17), but instead we are to “lay aside the old self” (4:22), “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (4:23), “put on the new self” (4:24), “be imitators of God” (5:1), and “walk as children of Light” (5:8). Specifically, in order to live this kind of life, we are to “be filled with the Spirit” (5:18). There are four aspects of v. 18 we should be aware of: (1) “be filled with the Spirit” is an imperative—a command; (2) it is in the present tense, i.e., it is ongoing, something that should continually occur; (3) it applies to all Christians, not just a select few; (4) it is in the passive voice, i.e., we do not fill ourselves with the Spirit, but the active agent who fills us is God. Hence, we are to continually come to him in faith, trusting him to fill us. John Piper puts it this way, “What we should seek (and this applies to all Christians) is that God pour His Spirit out upon us so completely that we are filled with joy, victorious over sin, and bold to witness. And the ways he brings us to that fullness are probably as varied as people are. It may come in a tumultuous experience of ecstasy and tongues. It may come through a crisis of suffering when you abandon yourself totally to God. Or it may come through a steady diet of God’s word and prayer and fellowship and worship and service. However it comes, our first experience with the fullness of the Spirit is only the beginning of a life-long battle to stay filled with the Spirit.” (Piper 1981: “Pentecostal Theology”)

Being “filled with the Spirit” is characterized by four participles: “speaking” in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (v. 19); “singing” and making melody with your heart to the Lord (v. 19); “giving thanks” for all things to God (v. 20); and “being subject [submitting] to one another” (v. 21). Psalms are the inspired psalms of the OT; hymns are direct addresses of praise and glory to the true and living God; spiritual songs have to do with things pertaining to the Spirit of God (Bullinger 1968: 333-34). Although many translations of v. 19 say “speaking to one another,” the Greek word being translated (*heautois*) typically means “of or to oneself” (see Zodhiates 1993: *heautou*, 494; Bullinger 1968: 334-35; *New American* 1995: Eph 5:19n.1). Hence, the reference to speaking in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs “to yourself” emphasizes “the true inward and spiritual occupation of the heart with Christ, which is at once the result of being ‘filled with the Spirit’ (verse 18), and the test or the measure of being so filled” (Bullinger 1968: 333).

If that is correct, then the first three marks of being filled with the Spirit all relate to the inner attitude and life of the person who is filled with the Spirit and our relationship with God; only the fourth mark of being filled with the Spirit relates to one’s relation with other people. That fourth mark of being filled with the Spirit reveals that being filled with the Spirit causes the person not to have an attitude of superiority to others, but an attitude of deference, humility, and love to others. That follows from the first three marks of being filled with the Spirit. The reason is that, by being filled with the Spirit, the person experiences him- or herself in relation to the Spirit, i.e., the person experiences the greatness of God the Spirit and, thereby, sees how small he or she is in relation to God; at the same time, the person knows that he or she has been shown a special grace by God. With that understanding, how can a person have an attitude of superiority toward anyone else? In short, being filled with the Spirit relates to and enables us to fulfill the two “Great Commandments”: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself (Matt 22:36-40).

Giving thanks for “all things” (including cancer? divorce? the death of a child?) can be difficult and is counter-intuitive (see also 1 Thess 5:18). We can only do this as we remember the following:

- who God is,
- he has proven himself to be trustworthy,
- everything that happens is part of his good plan,
- Jesus has assured us “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb 13:5),
- “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor 10:13),
- “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28), and
- he is using everything that happens to help us “become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29).

Verse 21, which says that being subject (submitting) to one another in the fear of Christ, concludes the list of four things that characterize being filled with the Holy Spirit; it also begins the next section which applies this principle (and being filled with the Spirit) to the context of marriage. The principle Paul states in **v. 21** is not unique to this verse, but has been stated in different ways in several books of the NT: **Rom 12:10**—“*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor*”; **Phil 2:3**—“*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves*”; **1 Pet 5:5**—“*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” This principle of mutual submission applies to all believers. As Terry Fullam states, “Where it talks about husbands and wives and so forth, and talks about wives being submitted to their husbands and so on, somehow everybody talks about that passage without reading the first verse, which applies to everyone: ‘Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.’ That applies to all . . . and whoever talks about husbands and wives and their relationship must see that there is a prior relationship of submission to one another. This prior relationship consists of a willingness to be taught by each other and a recognition that God is likely to work in our midst through free interchange together. In other words, God does not lead by telling the leader what to do—whether it’s the leader of a family or the leader of a group of Christians.” (quoted in Slosser 1979: 116)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What characterized our “old man” or “old self”?
 - What does it mean to “put off” the old man? How do we do this?
2. What is to characterize our “new man” or “new self”?
 - What does it mean to “put on” the new man? How do we do this?
3. 4:26 says, “Be angry, and yet do not sin.” What are the proper circumstances and ways in which we can (or should) be angry?
4. How do we “grieve the Holy Spirit”?
5. 5:3-5 show a connection between immorality and impurity and covetousness and greed.
 - How are sensuality and greed related?
 - Why is a covetous/greedy person an idolater?
6. 5:8-9 talk about walking as children of “light.” What are the properties of light that would cause Paul to use it as a metaphor for how we are to live?
7. How do we “expose” the “deeds of darkness” while maintaining our credibility and relationships with ungodly and non-Christian people?
8. 5:18-21 list four things that are to characterize being filled with the Holy Spirit. What are they?
 - When most people talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit, they usually talk about speaking in tongues, miracles, or other things, which are not even mentioned here, not what Paul says here that should characterize being filled with the Spirit. Why do you think what Paul says here about being filled with the Spirit is usually ignored?
 - Do the things Paul lists here about being filled with the Holy Spirit characterize how we really are and relate to each other? If not, why not? What can we do to make these verses the way our own lives are?
9. How should the mutual submission of 5:21 look and play out in our lives? What changes do you think need to be made to make that a reality?

J. 5:22–6:9—Responsibilities in the family and work

In **4:17-5:21**, Paul discussed the Christian walk, ending with his description of being filled with the Holy Spirit and how that is characterized. Now, in this section, he applies what he has said to specific circumstances involving the family and work, as follows: **5:22-24**—responsibilities of wives; **5:25-33**—responsibilities of husbands; **6:1-3**—responsibilities of children; **6:4**—responsibilities of fathers; **6:5-8**—responsibilities of slaves; **6:9**—responsibilities of masters. The historical and cultural context of Paul’s remarks in this section are important, as we will see. This is particularly true since Paul’s culture was considerably different from most cultures today.

- **5:22-24:** ²² *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.* ²⁴ *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

Women in classical Greek culture led a completely secluded life. They took no part in public life, never appeared on the streets alone, and never even appeared at meals or social occasions. A woman had her own apartments, and none but her husband could enter them. It was the aim of the Greek that she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible, and ask as little as possible. Women were kept in subordination because they were considered less rational than men. The virtue of women was silence (see Gombis 2005: 326). In Hebrew society, “although within the confine of the Hebrew home the wife and mother had a place of honor and love assigned to her, and one that was no doubt higher than that in the surrounding paganism at any period of Israel’s history, nonetheless there was never any thought of equality between her and her husband.” The wife was considered distinctly inferior (Bowman 1947: 442).

In Roman society, women had a higher status. They tended to have greater financial independence, and were able to have greater social interaction and engage in public and civic life in more ways than in classical Greek and Hebrew societies. Nevertheless, there were different sexual and legal rights for men and husbands compared to women and wives. Further, “heads of some households could hold total sway over their wives, making them subject to their husband’s domination and their position vulnerable to exploitation” (Winter 2003: 18). At the same time in Roman society at the time of the NT, there was a countervailing trend, the emergence of the so-called “new Roman woman”—i.e., “a woman in high position, who nevertheless claim[ed] for herself the indulgence in sexuality of a woman of pleasure” (Winter 2003: 21). That was reflected in different modes of dress and promiscuous sexual behavior. That trend was so pronounced that Emperor Augustus promulgated new laws which “prescribed moral conduct, financial disadvantages in remaining single, the procreation of children with resulting career advantages, and dress codes for wives; it proscribed marriage between certain classes, and punished inactivity on the part of husbands who ignored their wife’s extramarital liaisons” (Winter 2003: 39).

In contrast to both the inferiority of women in traditional Greek, Hebrew, and Roman societies, **Eph 5:22-33** “is a manifesto for a radically new society. Because the household was a microcosm of the entire believing community, it provides a concrete model for how Paul’s readers can carry out the command in Eph. 5:18-21 to be ‘the household of God’ . . . While Paul does not here call for the overthrow of patriarchy, he does indeed call for the relationship between husbands and wives to be oriented according to the New Humanity” (Gombis 2005: 322, 328). Consequently, the household is no longer for the benefit of the patriarch, and wives are no longer considered inferior; headship is based on self-giving and the cross, and authority is to be used for the good of those in subordinate positions; husbands are not to dominate their wives, but to love them (a command that appears in no other ancient household code); those in positions of subordination are to be subordinate “from the heart,” again, based on the cross; the entire passage is patterned on the relationship of Christ and the church, which radically reorients how marriage is to be understood, making it theologically rich and meaningful” (Gombis 2005: 324-28).

Eph 5:22-33 is Paul’s most extensive discussion of the roles of husbands and wives. Other major texts dealing with wives are **Gen 2:15-18, 24-25; 1 Tim 5:14-15; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-6; and Prov 31:10-31**. **Eph 5:22** relates back to **v. 21** (and thereby back to **v. 18**) because there is no verb in **v. 22**. Although most translations of **v. 22** say something like “*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord,*” the words “*be subject*” are actually not in the Greek of **v. 22**; they are only found in **v. 21**. In other words, **v. 22** actually says, “*Wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*” In contrast to non-Christian household codes which were directed only to men to indicate how they were to control their wives for their own benefit, “Paul addresses wives directly, exhorting them to participate fully and willingly in the New Humanity” (Gombis 2005: 326).

We need to consider the nature of biblical submission. First, what submission is not:

- (1) Submission is not inferiority. Jesus the Son is not inferior to God the Father, although he is

subordinate to the Father (**1 Cor 11:3**). While on earth Jesus did nothing on his own initiative, but only did what he saw and heard from the Father (**Matt 26:39; John 4:34; 5:17-20, 30; 6:38; 8:28-29; 10:18; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24, 31**). Even in heaven he continues to be subordinate to the Father (**1 Cor 15:24-28**). Similarly, by God’s design husbands and wives have different roles within the marriage; the wife is not inferior to her husband, although she has a subordinate role. In **Eph 6:1** and **5**, Paul says that children should “obey” their parents and slaves “obey” their masters. Wives are *not* told to “obey” their husbands. In **Eph 5:21** (implicit in **5:22**), **5:24**, and **Col 3:18**, Paul uses another Greek word, which is translated “be subject to.” This indicates that there is a significant difference in the status of a wife and in the nature of her relationship with her husband, compared with the status of children and their relationship with their parents and the status of slaves and their relationship with their masters.

(2) Submission is not suppression or oppression. Many men, even many Christian men, have suppressed and/or oppressed their wives throughout the centuries. They have suppressed their wives’ talents and potential and have neglected the wisdom and full companionship God has given them through their wives. Such suppression not only is sin, it is the exact opposite of love—the exact opposite of how Christ “*loved the church and gave himself up for her*” (which is how husbands are commanded to love their wives).

(3) Submission does not mean that a wife cannot have her own opinions and express them freely, have talents and potential and use them fully, and have righteous dreams and desires and pursue them as she is able. A wife is a separate individual from her husband. Her opinions, talents, abilities, dreams, and desires add, as fully as the husband’s, to the richness of what married life is designed to be.

(4) Submission does not mean that the wife has a right to feel resentment. **Eph 5:33** says that the wife is to “*respect her husband.*” There is no respect in the kind of submission that is done only out of fear of reprisal or with gritted teeth.

Second, what submission is:

(1) The idea behind “submission” or “being subject to” is of placing oneself under someone—being subordinate, not inferior. Paul reinforces this thought in **Col 3:18** (“*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*”), which is virtually identical to **Eph 5:22**.

(2) Biblical submission is voluntary. The Greek verb for “submission” (“be subject to”) used in **v. 24** and implied in **v. 22** is *hupotasso*. That verb “is here and elsewhere in like contexts in the New Testament always in the middle (reflexive) voice, and the implication is that the one ‘submitting himself’ does so through an act of his sovereign will and that he could equally have elected to have done otherwise. . . . It’s normal usage is for the relationship between equals, or at all events for the act of submission to duly constituted authority on the part of one who voluntarily submits to the same. It is the act of a free person in a democratic society in which he wishes to see the principles of law and order maintained, and for which end he is prepared to sacrifice somewhat of his liberties to the common good of all. In a word, the verb in question is one which gives expression to the principle of liberty as opposed to license, of order in place of anarchy” (Bowman 1947: 443-44, *emph. in orig.*). Nowhere in this passage or anywhere else in the Bible are husbands told to “make,” “force,” or “manipulate” their wives to “submit” or “be subject” to them, or even to “make sure” that they submit. Submission is an act of free choice on the part of the wife, not something that is to be coerced by the husband, and ultimately is an issue between her and God. Hence, Paul’s instructions to wives to submit to their husbands are instructions to the wives, not to the husbands.

(3) Submission is from the heart. This fact follows from the fact that submission is a voluntary act of the wife. Although external “submission” might be coerced, internal submission (the only kind of submission that is pleasing to God) cannot be coerced. Submission “from the heart” is Christ-like and cross-based. It is not a form of “passive-aggressive” survival strategy or form of manipulation to enable the wife to control her husband or get what she wants. Instead, submission has the good of the marriage, the family and, ultimately, the glorification of God as its object.

(4) Submission is to the Lord. The reason why submission can be both voluntary and from the heart is that, ultimately, submission is an act of love and obedience to the Lord. That is indicated both in **vv. 22** and **24**. A wife’s submission to her husband, at its heart, is an act of faith and trust in Christ—a way of saying, “I will choose to give up some of my liberty to this man because I love you, Lord, more than him; I am trusting that you will protect and build up me, my husband, and our marriage, and will be glorified by my obedience to your word.”

In addition to the above explanation of biblical submission, two other comments are important. First, wives are not told to submit to every man; they are not told to submit to someone else’s husband. Submission simply is to one’s own husband in recognition of his position in God’s ordained family structure. This includes submitting to difficult, even non-believing husbands (**1 Pet 3:1**). Second, to be subject to one’s husband “*as to*

the Lord” does not mean that the husband is equal to the Lord, as if he is Christ’s infallible representative on earth. It does mean that submission is based on the wife’s love for and obedience to Christ. Her love for Christ sets her free, regardless of the response of her husband, because she knows she is pleasing the Lord.

Verse 23 then says, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.*” The term “head” can have two meanings: it can refer to “the authority over” or “the source of.” In this case, it seems to primarily refer to “the source of” (see **Gen 2:21-23; 1 Cor 11:1-12**). On the other hand, marriage is designed to reflect Christ and the church (**Eph 5:32**). In the case of Christ and the church, the final authority is Christ. If there is no head, or if there is more than one, the result is the same: confusion, indecision, power struggle, and anarchy. Consequently, God designed both marriage and the church to have one head.

Verse 24 concludes Paul’s discussion of the responsibilities of wives by saying, “*But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*” In **v. 24** we are told that just as the church is subject to Christ, wives need to be subject to their husbands, but in **v. 21** Christians are to submit to one another. These verses may be reconciled in this way: Even though there is this mutual submission to one another, husbands and wives do not submit to each other in the same way. The key is that the relationship between Christ and his church is the pattern for the relationship between husband and wife. Are Christ and his church mutually submitted? “No” if it means that Christ lines himself up under the authority of the church; but “yes” if it means that Christ submitted Himself to suffering and death for the good of the church, and that the church gratefully and willingly submits to Christ by affirming his authority and following his lead. Christ’s example is how a husband submits to his wife. He makes decisions with her best interest in mind. He sacrifices himself for her. He willingly foregoes focusing on himself and demanding what he wants for the sake of his wife and the marriage. A wife who knows that her husband has her best interest at heart, and is even willing to die for her, if necessary, as Christ died for His bride, the church—such a wife will almost always happily and willingly submit to such selfless headship.

When Paul says that “*as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands*” (**v. 24**), he is presenting the ideal. In reality, the church is often sinful and rebellious. Just as the church struggles to achieve perfect submission to Christ, so wives struggle to achieve perfect submission to their husbands, especially if their husbands are not fulfilling their God-given roles. However, failure to submit has negative consequences for church and marriage. Unbelievers judge the genuineness of our faith by how seriously we follow what we say we believe. If they see that we don’t obey the very Scriptures we claim to believe, they will reject and ridicule the Scriptures, the Lord, and our claim to be followers of Christ. Thus, the name of Christ will be dishonored.

The command to submit, and the struggle to do so, applies “in everything.” That is an all-inclusive term which is to be obeyed not just when convenient, comfortable, pleasurable, or preferred. If married to a difficult man or an unbeliever (**1 Pet 3:1**), a wife should let her conduct—her gentle and quiet spirit, her loving and gracious attitude—win her husband over. Her conduct and attitude should say, “I want to submit to your leadership; please help me to do that.” That makes the gospel attractive to her husband. The exception to “in everything” is if a wife is asked or commanded to sin by her husband. As the apostles said, “*we must obey God rather than man*” (**Acts 5: 29**; see also **Exod 1: 17; Dan 3:18; 6:6-13**).

5:25-33: ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,* ²⁶ *so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷ *that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.* ²⁸ *So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;* ²⁹ *for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,* ³⁰ *because we are members of His body.* ³¹ **FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.** ³² *This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.* ³³ *Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.*

This is Paul’s most extensive discussion of the role of husbands. Other major texts dealing with husbands are **Gen 2:24-25; Col 3:19; and 1 Pet 3:7**. The emphasis of the passage is on the husband’s responsibility, not his position as “*head of the wife.*” Husbands are accountable to Christ for what they do or fail to do in meeting their responsibilities as husbands, not for what our wives do or fail to do in meeting their responsibilities as wives. Indeed, the responsibility of husbands is probably greater (and, consequently, their

accountability to God is greater) because their position is that of “head” (see **Luke 12:48b**, “*And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more*”). This is also indicated in that Paul’s instructions to husbands are considerably longer than his instructions to wives.

Loving one’s wife is a command, not an option. Husbands are to love their wives despite the pressures of culture and problems in the relationship. The importance of this is emphasized by the fact that it is repeated three times (**vv. 25, 28, 33**). Husbands are to love “your” wife (**v. 25**), your “own wife” (**vv. 28, 33**), not someone else’s wife. Greek had at least three verbs for “love”: *eros*—“ardor, fondness,” often indicating sexual passion; *phileo*—“affection, to like, friendship,” often indicating the affection of close friends, siblings, etc.; and *agapaō*—“to have warm regard for and take interest in, cherish, have high esteem for or satisfaction with, take pleasure in” (Danker 2000: 395, 1056, 5). Paul uses *agapaō* in **vv. 25, 28, and 33**. It is a very rich term. It implies putting someone or something first in your life; working for, serving, and making time for the object of your love. Thus, it implies an act of the will, proving and demonstrating such love, as well as “feelings” of love, affection, or esteem. Putting someone or something else first and serving them as an aspect of *agapaō* is seen in several verses in the NT where this is the verb used for “love,” e.g., God’s love for lost mankind—“*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (**John 3:16**); Christ’s command to his disciples—“*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*” (**John 13:34**); the impossibility of serving two mutually incompatible masters—“*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon*” (**Matt 6:24**).

Verse 25 goes on to describe the nature of the love the husband is to show his wife by saying, “*Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*” How did Christ love the church? Among other things, Christ loved the church: (1) Uniquely—Christ is the good shepherd for the particular sheep that the Father gave to him (**John 6: 37; 10:14-17; 17:6-9**). They have been chosen before the foundation of the world (**Eph 1:3-4**). In a special way, Christ’s love for his bride is unlike his love for anyone or anything else. Our love for our bride must therefore also be an exclusive love, deeper, more intimate, and unlike our love for anyone or anything else. (2) Sacrificially—This is the heart of the passage as it pertains to the husband’s responsibility to his wife. Recall earlier, in connection with **5:2**, we noted that sacrifice (particularly sacrifice of self) is intimately tied to love, because you cannot have selfishness and at the same time exhibit love or the character of Christ. Consider the different ways in which Christ loved us sacrificially: (A) He humbled himself and set aside his own glory in heaven and equality with the Father in order to take the form of a bond-servant, all for the sake of his bride (see **Phil 2:5-7**); (B) He resisted temptation for the sake of his bride (**Luke 4:1-13**); (C) He suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually for the sake of his bride; (D) He bore his bride’s grief, pain, and, ultimately, her sin; (E) He gave his time, possessions, thoughts, emotions, and ultimately his very life—all that he had—for his bride.

Consider the manner in which Christ loved us sacrificially. He took the initiative to love us sacrificially when we were rebellious and unlovable (**Rom 5:8; Phil 2:5-7; 1 Tim 1:15**). This means that husbands should love their wives in spite of their faults, failures, and sins. Husbands can do this by: overlooking her sins and bad habits most of the time; seeking her happiness, welfare, and best interest; not pointing out her faults in front of the children or in public, but, when necessary, offering constructive criticism privately, with respect and humility, and with the pure motive of desiring to help her; not using her as an example in sermons without her express permission; never leaving or forsaking her (and not threatening to do so), because Christ never leaves or forsakes us and does not threaten to do so (**Heb 13:5**).

Although husbands frequently point to their position as “head of the family” or “head of the wife” to try to “lord it over” their wife or family and coerce compliance with their wishes, Christ dealt with this attitude in **Matt 20:25-28**, when he told his disciples, “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” In **John 13:5, 12-15** Christ then gave a specific demonstration of what it means to be a “servant leader”—and coupled it with a command to his followers to do likewise: “⁵*Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. . . .*¹²*So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”*”

Did Christ lose his power, position, or authority because he humbled himself and served his disciples (washing feet was something that the lowest slave in that society would do)? No. Did Christ somehow become “less of a man” for doing what he did? No—if anything he became “more” of a man, because it takes a man of uncommon strength and character to humble himself and serve those who are lower in rank, position, or authority than he is. Did Christ lose the respect of the disciples—or of us—because he did what he did? No. Since Christ did not lose his power, position, authority, manhood, or respect by serving his disciples, and since he specifically told his followers (including husbands) to do as he did and emulate his style of leadership, why do not husbands demonstrate sacrificial love toward their own wives who are closer to them (“one flesh”) than even Christ’s disciples were to Christ? Although the wording of Paul’s instructions to wives and husbands are different, what he is doing is applying the concept of “mutual submission” (found in **v. 21**). To wives he simply asserts implicitly in **vv. 22** and **24** that wives are to be subject to their own husbands. For husbands, his use of *agapaō* and his specific statement of Christ’s example of sacrificial love (Christ “*loved the church and gave Himself up for her*”) reveal the nature of what the husband’s “submission” of himself to his wife involves and what it should look like.

Christ had a purpose in sacrificially loving his bride, “*So that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless*” (**vv. 26-27**). To sanctify her indicates to separate her from others, for His divine ends. To cleanse her indicates to make her fit for divine intimacy. That He might present her to Himself in all her glory indicates that he wanted her to be worthy of glory, to radiate with the glow of divine goodness, of godlikeness. Not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and without blemish indicates that his bride should be like Him. Just as Christ sanctifies and cleanses his bride through the gospel, his word, influence, example, and Spirit, so a husband is to set the spiritual tone in the household. He is to model Christ, and thereby help his wife become more like Christ herself.

Verses 28-30 add, “*So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.*” Paul is adding a new metaphor here to show the depth of intimacy and oneness that should characterize marriage—a husband should love his wife as much as he loves, nourishes, and cherishes his own body. Paul is implying the original metaphor for marriage, that “*the two shall be one flesh*” (**Gen 2:24**). When he says that “*no one ever hated his own flesh,*” one implication is that since a man does not beat himself, he cannot beat his wife. Indeed, to be a wife-beater makes him unqualified to be a leader in the church since, by definition, a wife-beater is not “above reproach, temperate, prudent, or respectable” (as are required in **1 Tim 3:2**), is “pugnacious” and is neither “gentle” nor “uncontentious” (in violation of the requirements of **1 Tim 3:3**), and does not “manage his household well” (in violation of the requirement of **1 Tim 3:4**). To “nourish” is to nourish up to maturity. The root idea is to feed. A man nourishes his body so that it will live and grow: not merely continue to live or exist, but to thrive, live well, be healthy and strong. Similarly, a husband should nourish his wife so that the marriage will thrive, grow, be healthy and strong. To “cherish” is to foster with tender care. The root idea is to warm or keep warm; men keep their bodies warm and well cared for because they value them. Likewise, husbands need to value their wives, care for them and warm them physically, emotionally, spiritually, and in all other ways.

When Paul says, “*just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body,*” he is raising the “body” metaphor to a higher level by referring to Christ’s body. He is linking the “body” metaphor back to Christ and the church (with which he began this passage). Paul’s “body” metaphor, particularly his reference to Christ’s body also highlights the “oneness” that is to characterize the relationship between husband and wife in a Christian marriage. In **1 Cor 1:13** Paul rhetorically asked, “*Has Christ been divided?*” The answer, of course, is “No.” Therefore, Christians—most especially Christian husbands and wives—are not to be divided among themselves. Indeed, in **John 17:22-23** Christ prayed that we would be one, just as Christ and the Father are one. If such oneness should be seen anywhere or between anyone, it should be seen in that most intimate of all relationships, that of husband and wife. In fact, when Christian husbands and wives are divided, they are misrepresenting Christ to the world. Marital discord and division are forms of separating what God has joined together (**Matt 19:6**) and are a dividing of the body of Christ. Consequently, marital disunity among Christians has serious spiritual implications. Therefore, Christian husbands need to have, and demonstrate, a high regard for their wives because they have a high regard for their own bodies which, in turn, is related to Christ’s high regard for the members of his own body the church. In short, both physically and mystically, there is a unity between husbands and wives analogous to the unity existing between Christ and the church.

Paul concludes in **vv. 31-32** with, “**FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND**

MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” This explicitly links **Gen 2:24** with Christ and the church. By linking the “oneness” of husband and wife with Christ and the church, Paul is making clear that the husband is not to be independent of his wife. Many men think that they are free to live their lives however they choose to, independent of the thoughts, feelings, concerns, input, or wishes of their wives. A Christian husband does not have the right to do that. His is a special relationship with his wife, as integrally related as are a head with a body, or Christ and the church: the two cannot be separated. The statement that marriage really is about Christ and the church demonstrates that, at its root, marriage is spiritual—it is a spiritual institution. Since, Paul’s entire discussion in **vv. 21-32** ultimately refers to Christ and the church, this means that his discussion goes beyond the roles of husband and wives and has implications for the church. Among other things, from what Paul has said, is that the people in the church are to be mutually submissive to each other (**v. 21**), be loving to each other, be thoroughly washed in the “*water of the word*” (**v. 26**), i.e., well taught and transformed into Christlikeness by the sound teaching of God’s word, be “*holy and blameless*” (**v. 27**), and be united as “*one flesh*” with each other (**v. 31**).

In **v. 33**, Paul then gives a brief summary coda, “*Nevertheless, each individual among you is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.*” This can be viewed as a summary of a husband’s and wife’s responsibilities to each other, i.e., summarizing what Paul has said in **vv. 22-32**. This summary statement again shows the mutual responsibility that both the husband and wife have to each other. Even here, it shows that the husband’s responsibilities are rather greater than the wife’s. The reason is that, in order for a wife to respect her husband, the husband needs to be worthy of that respect.

- **6:1-3:** ¹ *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ² **HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise),** ³ **SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.**

Paul now discusses the responsibilities of children in the family. The word for “children” is not limited to young children, but to all offspring. However, **6:4** indicates that Paul is dealing only with children still under their parents’ care. To “obey” means that children are to listen with attentiveness and respond positively to what is heard. Thus, children are to put themselves under the words and authority of their parents. Children are to obey their parents “*in the Lord.*” This qualification is consistent with the qualification that wives are to be subject to their husbands “*as to the Lord*” (**5:22**). This would mean that children should not obey any command from a parent that is contrary to Scripture. Children are responsible to obey their parents because it is a command of God, it is right to do so, and “*so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.*” Obedience is based on honoring one’s parents. In a sense, the principle of honoring one’s parents is the key (or prime) principle behind all right human relationships in society. A person who grows up with a sense of respect for and obedience to his parents will have the foundation for respecting the authority of other leaders and of the rights of other people in general.

Paul quotes the Septuagint’s translation of the Fifth of the Ten Commandments (**Exod 20:12** see also **Deut 5:16**). However, in the latter part of the quotation he changes the wording of **Exod 20:12** which had talked about prolonging one’s days “*in the land.*” This is consistent with the fact that the church is no longer located in the nation of Israel, but is composed of people “*from every tribe and tongue and people and nation*” in the entire world (**Rev 5:9**).

- **6:4:** *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Fathers are addressed here, probably because they are considered to be the head of the household (see **Num 1:4**); however, the instructions stated in this verse would apply to both parents. A negative command (“*fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath*”) is followed by a positive command (“*but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*”). Not provoking children to anger suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment. Such action gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment which usually boils over in outward hostility. Bringing up children in the training and admonition of the Lord can include keeping God’s Word, God’s perspective, and God’s ways before our children all the time (see **Deut 6:6; Prov 22:6**). That can be done by family devotions and prayer; ensuring that they have a good church experience; walking the talk (modeling Christlikeness); teaching them the Bible and how the Bible applies to real-life situations; and praying for your children. The dual responsibilities not to “*provoke your children to anger*” and to “*bring them up in the*

discipline and instruction of the Lord” are the reciprocal duties to the children’s duty to obey their parents and honor their fathers and mothers.

In Roman society mutual love among family members was not practiced frequently, or at all; fathers did not generally demonstrate love or affection. By the Roman law of *patria potestas*, a father had virtual life and death power, not only over his slaves, but over his entire household. There was nothing in the ancient world that imposed responsibilities on a husband and father analogous to what Paul says in **5:25-33** and **6:4**. Unlike in Roman society, **Eph 6:4** “is a demand for fathers to act with a view to the best interests of their children. Further, it demands that the dignity and desires of the children be considered, for provocation to anger would result from fathers frustrating the goals and desires of their children, acting only in the perceived best interest of family honor and exploiting the weaker position of their children [as typically was done in Roman society]. Instead of taking advantage of their powerful position, fathers must train their children in the way of the Lord, another reminder of the stewardship given to fathers and of their accountability to the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Gombis 2005: 328-29) Consequently, “The gospel introduced a fresh element into parental responsibility by insisting that the feelings of the child must be taken into consideration. In a society where the father’s authority (*patria potestas*) was absolute, this represented a revolutionary concept.” (Wood 1978: 81)

These ideas had a profound effect in changing culture. Sue Bohlin reports, “The Christian ethic declared equal worth and value for both men and women. Husbands were commanded to love their wives and not exasperate their children. These principles were in direct conflict with the Roman institution of *patria potestas*, which gave absolute power of life and death over a man’s family, including his wife. When *patria potestas* was finally repealed by an emperor who was moved by high biblical standards, what a tremendous effect that had on the culture! Women were also granted basically the same control over their property as men, and, for the first time, mothers were allowed to be guardians of their children. . . . As a result of Jesus Christ and His teachings, women in much of the world today, especially in the West, enjoy more privileges and rights than at any other time in history. It takes only a cursory trip to an Arab nation or to a Third World country to see how little freedom women have in countries where Christianity has had little or no presence. It’s the best thing that ever happened to women.” (Bohlin 2023: “Effects of Christianity on Culture”)

6:5-8: ⁵ *Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;* ⁶ *not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.* ⁷ *With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,* ⁸ *knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.*

This is a passage which we must apply by “analogy” today (see also **Col 3:22-25**; **1 Pet 2:18-20**). This paragraph talks about “slaves” and “masters.” The economy of the Roman Empire was based on slavery. A large percentage of the population were slaves. Slaves worked in all kinds of occupations: in the fields; mines; homes; in businesses; as teachers, etc. Sometimes they could even purchase their freedom (see **Acts 22:25-28**; **1 Cor 7:21**). Today slavery has been eliminated throughout much of the world. However, in some important respects there is an analogy (i.e., a significant similarity) between slavery and modern employment: in each case someone (slave/employee) is working for someone else (master/employer).¹²

Every analogy breaks down at some point. For example, slaves had no rights and could not leave their employment if they didn’t like their jobs or if they didn’t like how they were treated. On the other hand, employees have legal rights and can leave their jobs if they want to. Consequently, when the Bible discusses situations that are not identical to contemporary situations, we can still look for the transcultural principles that exist and apply such principles by analogy. When doing this we must be careful not to stretch the analogy too far (i.e., we must be aware of the *differences* between the biblical situation as well as the similarities). We must account for the differences between *ownership* of the employee by the employer (slavery) and *contractual relationships* between employee and employer (modern employment). The principle of honoring God in the way one relates to authority/management in the modern workplace might be expressed along the following lines: “Fulfill the terms of your contract to the best of your ability, that is, in a manner that glorifies God and brings unbelievers closer to the kingdom” (Webb 2001: 54).

In this passage, Paul is pointing out that, since the obedience of slaves (employees) is “*as to Christ*” and “*as to the Lord*,” it is no longer absolute. Similar qualifications were made with respect to wives (**5:22**) and children (**6:1**). Paul’s emphasis is that the service rendered by slaves to their earthly masters (employers) should

¹² Applying biblical passages and principles by analogy is discussed in Menn 2017: 39-56.

be from the heart (**vv. 5-6**), sincere, not merely eyeservice (i.e., when the master is watching), but with good will. His argument is that, as he said in **Col 3:17**, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*” He is pointing out that, although in this world such workers may be slaves of man, they are really “*slaves of Christ*” (**v. 6**). As such, their service is spiritual, and Christ will reward them (**v. 8**).

- **6:9:** *And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.*

Once again, Paul gives reciprocal instructions and obligations to masters (employers). As was true with respect to husbands and wives and parents and children, these obligations on the masters were unprecedented and were highly counter-cultural. The obligations of the master served to elevate the status of the slave and decrease the authority of the master. Just as Paul reminded slaves that they really were “*slaves of Christ*” (**v. 6**), so he reminds masters that they, as well as their slaves, have a true “*Master . . . in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.*” This places both slaves and masters on the same plane—as brothers and sisters in Christ. He makes that explicit in **Gal 3:28**, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (see also **Col 3:11; Philemon 16**).

When Paul says, “*masters, do the same things to them,*” he is saying that, just as slaves are to treat their masters as if they were Christ (i.e., rendering them service “*as to Christ*” and “*as to the Lord*”), so masters should treat their slaves as if they were Christ! This is in accord with other Scriptural commands that, likewise, would have circumscribed a master’s authority, i.e., “*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (**Matt 22:39**) and “*treat others the same way you want them to treat you*” (**Luke 6:31**). All of this served as a revolution by indirection against the root of the sin of slavery. Although the abolition of slavery around the world took time, it is because of this Christian ethic—that in Christ Jesus there is neither slave nor free, but we are all one as brothers and sisters—that Christians led the fight against slavery until it was abolished.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How should 5:22-24 be lived out in practical terms?
2. Even though Paul’s instructions to husbands are considerably longer and more detailed than his instructions to wives, and the sacrificial responsibilities of husbands is greater, most churches spend little time teaching about this, but instead tend to emphasize that “wives must submit to their husbands.” Why do you think this is the case?
 - What are ways in which husbands can demonstrate sacrificial love to their wives?
 - How should a husband’s love for his wife be characterized and differ from how non-Christian husbands love and relate to their wives?
3. What implications does this passage have with respect to your view of the church (see v. 32)?
4. What are things parents do to provoke their children to anger?
5. What should parents do to bring their children up in “the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (6:4)?
6. How can employees honor the Lord in their work?
7. How should employers treat their employees?

K. 6:10-20—Standing with the saints and against the devil

This last substantive section of the epistle to the Ephesians raises the issue of spiritual warfare and how to fight it. This is in keeping with what Paul has been saying, to the effect that all of life, whether marriage, the family, employment, or another other area of life, ultimately is spiritual. Our lives are played out in the physical realm of relationships, work, politics, economics, etc. Nevertheless, all of these things are the outward and visible manifestations of spiritual issues and forces behind the scenes. We need to be aware that, even though we

may not be able to see or otherwise sense them, demonic forces are real and are active and are trying to adversely affect our lives and stop the spread of the gospel.

- **6:10-17:** ¹⁰ *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.* ¹¹ *Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.* ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.* ¹³ *Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.* ¹⁴ *Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,* ¹⁵ *and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;* ¹⁶ *in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* ¹⁷ *And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

In this section, Paul draws on the imagery of Isaiah. He quotes or alludes to Isaiah in **vv. 14 (Isa 11:5; 59:17)**, **15 (Isa 52:7)**, and **17 (Isa 59:17)**. Frank Thielman observes, “Paul transfers ‘the whole armor of God’ from God himself, or from his Messiah [i.e., in Isaiah], to God’s people in this passage because, despite 1:20-23; 2:6, he knows that the victory of God’s people over the devil is not yet complete. God certainly has struck a fatal blow against the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of ‘this present darkness’ (6:12), but the flaming arrows of the doomed regime continue to assail God’s people. Between the time of Christ’s victory and the consummation of God’s purposes in Christ, therefore, believers themselves must imitate God in his role of divine warrior.” (Thielman 2007: 832) In short, we are to imitate Christ and God both in showing love and forgiveness to others (**4:32; 5:1**) and also by standing firm in truth, righteousness, and faith.

The rulers, powers, world forces of this darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (**v. 12**) against which we struggle operate through and use human beings, human institutions, cultures, and societies, and other created things to do their bidding in the great cosmic and spiritual struggle in which we are engaged. The fact that the forces against which we struggle are spiritual should cause us to be aware of two things. The first thing we need to be aware of is that “the fact that our conflict is *spiritual*, . . . Satan’s sphere of operation is not immorality or crime, but religion. See all the references to him in Scripture, and note how opposed they are to popular Satan-myth of the world and of Christendom.” (Bullinger 1968: 204) If one looks up “Satan” or the “devil” in a concordance, one will see that the vast preponderance of references are to Satan’s tempting Jesus to abandon his mission, and his tempting and use of Peter, Judas, Ananias, and others in spiritual ways; there are relatively few references to Satan’s leading people to violence or even immorality. Even when he tempts people to violence, immorality, or other sins, however, the underlying issue is still spiritual. The reason is that an idol is “anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give” (Keller 2009: xvii). Timothy Keller goes on to point out, “We think idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes. Anything can serve as a counterfeit god, especially the very best things in life.” (Keller 2009: xvii) Money, family, success, sex, power, our own selves—anything—can be used by Satan and the rulers, powers, world forces of darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places to lead us away from God. It all amounts to idolatry. That is why Ezekiel speaks about “idols in the heart” (**Ezek 14:3**). It is all part of the great spiritual battle in which we are engaged.

Second, when we realize that all of life is spiritual, or the manifestation of the spiritual, it should change our perception and evaluation of people, the earthly issues we deal with, and our earthly enemies. People are the “battlefield”—and the prize—in a great, cosmic war. They are *not* the enemy. They are what we are fighting *for*, not against. That is why Jesus said, ⁴³ “*You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’*” ⁴⁴ *But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* ⁴⁵ *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* ⁴⁶ *For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* ⁴⁷ *If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”* (**Matt 5:43-47**)

Paul reinforces Christ’s words when he says in **v. 11** that we “*stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*” The word translated as “schemes” (*methodeia*) appears only one other time in the NT, when Paul says in **Eph 4:14** that, since we are no longer to be children, we are not to be “*tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.*” Paul’s

point, particularly when **4:14** is put alongside **6:11**, is that our “methods” of combating the evil forces arrayed against us must not imitate the methods of the world and the evil one. This includes not only not hating our enemies, but also not using such methods as emotional manipulation of people, focusing on ourselves, motives of greed, self-promotion, etc. There is, indeed, real evil in the world that must be resisted. We do have real enemies. However, what Paul is forcing us to do in this passage, just as Jesus is forcing us to do in **Matthew 5**, is to look at our enemies and evil forces in the world primarily from a spiritual perspective. The ultimate solution to the issues and problems we face is not found in the political, economic, or military realms. The answer is the gospel.

Since this is a spiritual battle that is played out on the earth, Paul uses the military imagery of armor, such as a soldier in his day would have worn. There are a number of things we should note about this armor. First, it is the *armor of God*” (**vv. 11, 13**). He is the one on whom we are to draw and in whom we are to be strong (**v. 10**). As Paul previously said in **1:19**, we are to know “*the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe [and] the strength of His might.*” Second, two times Paul tells us to “*put on the full armor of God*” (**vv. 11, 13**) Since we are engaged in spiritual warfare of the highest order, against powerful foes, we cannot hope to prevail if we are not properly equipped. Third, note that all of the pieces of armor to which Paul refers are defensive, except the last one, “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (**v. 17**). This highlights the power of the enemy but also the importance of knowing the word of God well. Fourth, the purpose of the full armor of God, i.e., what it enables us to do, is emphasized three times in the passage, namely, “*stand firm*” (**vv. 11, 13, 14**). To stand firm means to resist the devil (“*and he will flee from you,*” **Jas 4:7**) and to remain faithful all the way to the end. Mark Owens summarizes, to “*put on the full armor of God*” as Paul outlines it in **vv. 10-17**, “involves more than a defensive engagement against the ‘wiles of the devil’ (v. 11). It also involves the aggressive use of the gospel as the means of combating evil and thereby expanding the influence of the new creation instituted by Christ’s death and resurrection.” (Owens 2016: 103)

Each of the pieces of the armor Paul lists represents an important Christian doctrine or essential aspect of Christianity. One could summarize what putting on the “*full armor of God*” is by saying that it amounts to “putting on Christ” or “putting on Christlikeness.” Our loins are to be girded with truth (**v. 14**); Christ is the truth (**John 14:6**). The breastplate is righteousness (**v. 14**); Jesus is the righteous one, he is our righteousness, and he brings righteousness (**Matt 6:33; 27:19; John 16:8-10; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 17:31; 22:14; Rom 5:18, 21; 10:4; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 1:11; 3:9; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 John 2:1; 3:7; Rev 19:11**). Our feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (**v. 15**). With respect to the “gospel,” the gospel is the “*gospel of Christ*” (**Mark 1:1; Rom 1:9; 15:19; 2 Cor 4:4; 9:13; 10:14; Gal 1:7; 2 Thess 1:8**). The gospel is all about who Jesus is and what he has done. It is the good news that God has done for us what we never could do for ourselves. God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived the life we should have lived: he perfectly obeyed God the Father in everything; he was “*tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (**Heb 4:15**). That qualified him to be our representative, to take upon himself our sin and pay the penalty that otherwise we would have to pay but never could (**Rom 8:1-4; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Col 2:13-14; 1 Tim 2:5-6; 1 Pet 2:24**). Jesus’ rising from the dead and ascending back to the Father validated who Jesus is and demonstrated that the Father accepted Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross for us. Consequently, who Jesus is and what he has done is the heart of the gospel. With respect to “peace,” Jesus is the prince of peace (**Isa 9:6**), he is the king of peace (**Heb 7:2**), he is our peace (**Eph 2:14**), and he brings and establishes peace (**Luke 24:36; John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26; Eph 2:15, 17; Rev 1:4**). The shield of faith (**v. 16**) and the helmet of salvation (**v. 17**) likewise are all about Jesus. Our salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus (**John 3:16; 6:47; Acts 2:38-39; 4:10-12; Rom 3:21-22; 10:9-10; Gal 2:16, 20; Eph 2:8**). With respect to the sword of the Spirit, *which is the word of God*” (**v. 17**), Jesus is the word of God (**John 1:1, 14; Rev 19:13**).

A few other things about this passage should be noted. **Verse 15** talks about our “feet” being shod with the gospel of peace. Paul probably mentions feet because “feet” indicate our “walk,” and he has been emphasizing our walk since **4:1** (see also **4:17**). Further, the reference to “*the gospel of peace*” in connection with the “feet” calls to mind **Rom 10:14-15** where Paul makes a similar connection, “*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”* In **Rom 10:15**, Paul freely translates from **Isa 52:7** to say “*bring good news of good things.*” However, **Isa 52:7** itself and several manuscripts of **Rom 10:15** say, “*preach the gospel of peace.*” The point is that, although the “*full armor of God*” is a war metaphor, we are to manifest and bring peace. In **v. 16**, the “*shield of faith*” enables us “*to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*” However, that will only happen when we use our faith. When we do not use our faith, we will not be able to defeat what the evil one does. In other words, our faith only has practical effects when we

put it into action. In v. 17, the word “take,” regarding the “*helmet of salvation*,” is a different word from “take up” in vv. 13 and 16. In vv. 13 and 16 the word essentially means “take up and bear” (Zodhiates 1993: *analambanō*, 153). In v. 17, the word used means “To accept an offer deliberately and readily. To take to oneself what is presented or brought by another, to receive.” (Zodhiates 1993: *dechomai*, 409-10) Paul is again pointing out that our salvation is God’s doing; we do not merit it and did not earn it but can only receive it. The Greek for “word” of God is *rhēma*, which here refers to “the doctrines and promises of God revealed and taught in the Bible” (Zodhiates 1993: *rhema*, 1263). In this context, Paul is saying that we need to know and apply the doctrines and promises of God revealed and taught in the Bible that are relevant to any particular circumstance in which we find ourselves.

- **6:18-20:** ¹⁸ *With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,* ¹⁹ *and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,* ²⁰ *for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Paul concludes the substance of his epistle by stressing the importance of prayer. This immediately follows his discussion of spiritual warfare and putting on the “*whole armor of God*.” This is not surprising. Following the Transfiguration, the disciples had been unable to cast out a demon who was causing a boy to have convulsions. When Jesus arrived, he cast out the demon and healed the boy. The disciples asked him why they had been unable to cast it out, and Jesus replied, “*This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer*” (**Mark 9:26**; see also **Matt 17:21**). Thus, prayer is an important component in our battle “*against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (v. 12).

Prayer essentially is communication with God. It is based on our faith and trust in him. While it certainly includes making requests to him, it also involves listening to him. Several passages outline what makes for effective prayer. Those passages include:

- **John 15:7**—*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* “Abiding in Jesus” is the first condition for prayers to be answered. This concept is discussed by D. A. Carson, “*If you remain in me* is teased out in vv. 9ff., and is there equivalent to doing all that Jesus commands; *If . . . my words remain in you* is another way of getting at the same truth. Jesus’ *words* (*rhēmata*) are all the individual utterances that together constitute Jesus’ “word” (v. 3; *logos*). Such words must so lodge in the disciple’s mind and heart that conformity to Christ, obedience to Christ, is the most natural (supernatural?) thing in the world. . . . Conformity in one area ensures conformity in the other; a test in the observable area of obedience to Christ is a test of the unseen area of genuine spiritual vitality. All this is equivalent to remaining in the vine; that is the union out of which fruit is produced. To cast it in terms of prayer, such a truly obedient believer proves effective in prayer, since all he or she asks for conforms to the will of God.” (Carson 1991: 517-18)
- **Jas 4:3**—*You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.* Our motives for praying must be right. Desire for money and things to spend on ourselves is a wrong motive. The focus of our prayers should not be self-centered.
- **Jas 5:16b**—*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.* To be effective, the one praying is to be “righteous.” That means that he or she has been saved, has “*the mind of Christ*” (**1 Cor 2:16**), and is being conformed to the image of Christ (**Rom 8:29**).
- **1 John 3:22**—*Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.* Receiving what we ask is conditioned on obeying Christ’s commands and doing the things that are pleasing to him.
- **1 John 5:14-15**—*This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.* Answered prayer is conditioned on asking “*according to his will*” (not according to our own will).

In vv. 18-20, Paul gives the following specifics for our prayers:

- We are to pray “*at all times*” (see also **1 Thess 5:17**). This indicates that “the believer will be in constant prayer in preparation for the battle as well as in the engagement itself. But it is in the critical hour of encounter that such support is most required [i.e., *in the evil day*, v. 13].” (Wood 1978: 89)
- We are to pray “*in the Spirit*.” Yusufu Turaki points out, “Praying in the Spirit means far more than

praying in tongues. It means praying in communion with the Holy Spirit, that is, in the presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27; 1 Cor 2:6-16). Our wisdom and power come from the Holy Spirit, and to obtain them we must be in constant communion with him, which is why we are told to pray *on all occasions* and at all time (1 Thess 5:17).” (Turaki 2006: 1438)

- We are to “*be on the alert*” (see also **Mark 13:33, 37**). This phrase ties into what Paul has said regarding spiritual warfare. It effectively rounds off that discussion by reminding us that we are constantly in a spiritual battle with unseen forces, even when (as will be true most of the time) we do not see or otherwise perceive either the battle or the unseen forces.
- We are to pray “*with all perseverance*.” This is brought home particularly in the book of Revelation. Revelation itself explains to the church how God is dealing with the world. It therefore calls believers to persevere in the struggle with the powers of evil, just as Paul is doing here. Revelation adds the comfort and encouragement we need to persevere, because it tells us the end of the story of God’s plan and of history and shows us that Christ is victor over “*the schemes of the devil*” (v. 11) and “*against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (v. 12). R. Fowler White concludes, “Perseverance in faith despite persecution is victory for the church in history” (White 2000: 168).
- We are to pray “*for all the saints*, including for Paul himself. Specifically, we are to pray that he and, therefore, all the saints (including us) may be given utterance to proclaim the gospel “*with boldness*.” Twice he prays that he may speak with “boldness” (vv. 19-20). This echoes the very first recorded prayer of the church in **Acts 4**. The ESV translates **Acts 4:29** as “*look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness*.”¹³ The word us in **Acts 4:29** is the same word Paul uses here in v. 19. It means freedom in speaking all that one thinks or pleases, confidence or boldness, particularly in speaking, plainness or exactness of speech, openness, speaking publicly, and confidence which is experienced with such things as faith in communion with God, fulfilling the duties of the evangelist, holding fast our hope, and acts which entail a special exercise of faith (Zodhiates 1993: *parrēsia*, 1124).

Paul’s ending the substantive part of his epistle with this discussion of prayer should challenge us. How does our prayer life compare with how he says we should be praying? The forces of spiritual warfare that we face are just as present and active in our lives and our circumstances as they were in Paul’s. In particular, how many of us pray for boldness? In the context of **Acts 4**, it was Peter’s and John’s boldness that got them arrested. Yet, after Peter and John were threatened and then released from prison, the church prayed, in essence, “*Lord, ramp up our boldness, because now we are facing explicit threats. The natural inclination when we are threatened is to go into defensive mode. Don’t let that happen! Please, grant us boldness in the face of these threats*.” They were recognizing that God was there, he was active, and he would work in them “*both to will and to do*” as **Phil 2:13** says.

The same thing is true of us. We often pray for someone we know, “God, please cause such-and-such a person to become a Christian.” Instead, why not pray, “God, please grant that *I* would be bold and would be your instrument to lead that person to Christ” and “God, please start showing me opportunities where I can talk to people about you and model you to others.” If we start praying that way, we will start seeing opportunities to talk to people about Jesus. We will start seeing opportunities to model Jesus to others. And we will begin taking advantage of those opportunities. More than that, we will begin *making* opportunities to talk to people and model Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus will become much more dynamic. None of this means that we are praying to become obnoxious for Jesus. It means that we will now have confidence in Jesus and boldness to speak and act in his name.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Speak about the “idols in the heart” you recognize in yourselves and others. How can they be overthrown?
2. Have you ever consciously “put on the full armor of God”? If so, how did you do this and what effect did it have?
3. How does this passage affect or change your attitude toward and evaluation of people, especially your enemies?

¹³ The NASB, which I am using in this book, says “*take note of their threats, and grant that Your bondservants may speak Your word with all confidence*.”

4. What is the “gospel”?
5. What are some of the things that make for effective prayer?
6. How and in what manner should we pray?
 - What should we pray for?
 - What hindrances are there to prayer?
7. Have you ever prayed for boldness? What were the circumstances and what happened?

L. 6:21-24—Closing

- **6:21-22:** ²¹ *But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. ²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.*

These two verses are virtually identical to **Col 4:7-8**. This suggests that they were written about the same time and supports the idea that Ephesians was a “circular letter” (as discussed in the Introduction, above). Since the letter probably was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (see **3:1; 4:1**), it is natural that he would want the recipients to know his circumstances and how he was doing. That Tychicus “*may comfort your hearts*” reveals Paul’s pastoral concern for the church he had started. Since the church is a family (see discussions above in connection with chapter 1), family members should be interested in each other’s welfare.

- **6:23-24:** ²³ *Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.*

Paul ends all of his epistles except **Romans** with “grace” (or grace and love in **1-2 Corinthians**). Here, he begins with peace, love, and faith, which have figured so prominently in this epistle. He clearly seems to desire the entire Ephesian church—Jew and Gentile alike—to be reconciled into one fellowship. He ends with grace. Grace takes place through “*love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” In the final phrase, “*incorruptible love,*” the word “love” is not actually present in the Greek. Hence, more literally, the last sentence may be translated “*Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptibility [or, in sincerity (KJV); or undecayingly (YLT)].*” The meaning is essentially the same. The focus is on the surpassing, sincere, and unchanging love for our Lord Jesus Christ. In a sense, he is ending the same way he began. He began the epistle by blessing God “*who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*” (**1:3**). He ends with the grace which our Lord Jesus Christ bestows on those who love him, his adopted sons and daughters, whom he has redeemed through his blood and sealed with his Spirit. In light of all that, how can we not love him with incorruptibility, in sincerity, undecayingly?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we show familial closeness and concern for each other, such as Paul is doing in vv. 21-22?
2. How can we demonstrate incorruptible and sincere love for the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives?

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