

EPHESIANS STUDY NOTES

Ephesians 12

Ephesians 2 16

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Ephesians 1

1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus,”

Paul begins his letter in a way that affirms the basis of his apostleship. The authority of that office was not something he had grabbed for himself. Paul did not gain apostleship from a church council or gain it by doing the work and moving up through the ranks. He did not pursue it as a title of recognition. He was laid hold of by God for it. He will express later in the letter his unique mission as an apostle. The important thing here is to note that this greeting is more than just a way to say, “Hi.” It reveals Paul’s understanding that he was not a sent one because the other apostles accepted him as one. He was an apostle because he had been commissioned as one by God himself.

In the second part of this verse Paul marks where the recipients of this letter live physically and spiritually. They live in the town of Ephesus physically. While living there they also live in the sphere of the will of God—true to this leading.

In the naming of Ephesus that occurs in our English texts and which leads the epistle to bear this name, we should note that the Greek text itself is in doubt. There is significant evidence in the manuscripts that this was not in the original. In the letter to the Colossians Paul mentioned that he had also written a letter to the church at Laodicea (Col 4:16). He orders the letters to be interchanged and read to both congregations. Colossae, Ephesus, and Laodicea were in proximity, and the two letters certainly would have circulated to all three congregations. Some have suggested that Ephesians is really the letter originally sent to Laodicea. That is not out of the realm of possibilities. It may be that a copy came of that letter to Ephesus and that Church adopted it as their own and put their name in it. There would have been nothing unscrupulous or out of the ordinary in that. This controversy matters little in terms of the authority of the text but is of interest.

1:2 “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is a characteristic greeting of Paul’s and it is a good one. What could be a better gift to wish to impart to someone than the grace and peace of God. It is His grace that motivates so many of His actions toward us. It is this grace that we must understand if we are to know Him and understand His heart. It is this grace that we must know if we are to have and feel peace in our relationship with Him.

In the world of religious thought, grace and peace from God are illusive. God had asked in the OT times, “Ask around. Whoever heard of a god choosing for himself a people for His own possession?” (Deuteronomy 4:32ff) The choice by God to choose a people and relate Himself to them is the story of grace and peace. This is a mark of Yahweh that makes Him unique. In a sense this is the goal of all Paul’s writings, to impart precise understanding of the grace of God, so as to encourage right thinking regarding both divine and human relationships resulting in peace.

1:3a “Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The God we worship, and the one whom Christ, the God/man, worshiped is blest here by Paul. It is a statement of praise, the word “bless” being εὐλογεω meaning to bestow a blessing on or to praise. In our language it means to endorse or speak well of.

Jesus embraced as His Father the God we recognize as the ultimate source of our beings, our heavenly Father. In becoming a man Jesus embraced the worship of the Godhead of which He was a part, a real mind boggler! He became the ultimate Christian!

1:3b “who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

God is blessed by Paul because God has blessed us (same word). It is a remarkable thing and a key point of this writing by Paul that God has so honored us. It is His grace that allows Him to commend us instead of condemn us. He has bestowed on us every spiritual blessing that is Christ’s in the heavenly realm. Nothing is withheld. He whose right it is to be blessed by us, has blessed us.

Spiritual blessing are of remarkable importance to our quality of life in the present. Spiritual blessings involve knowledge of the unseen, particularly the Creator, but also the innermost part of our own being. A spiritual blessing is an inner capacity for the spiritual dimension of reality. It is an ability to sense that part of life and that part of our lives. It is a capacity for a fuller experience of all things physical. All things were made for our enjoyment, but they are truly enjoyed as we learn to participate in them in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Spiritual blessings include capacity for the more fundamental, the essence of an idea, a person, or a thing. It is capacity to understand contexts and purposes. Spiritual blessing amounts to the privilege of completeness and fullness of being and existence. They bless us in both quality of life and length of life and they greatly increase our capacity for significance.

A blessing is a spiritual blessing if it has the ability to help draw one into deeper fellowship with God. Spiritual blessings include those things that govern the relationships that go on within the trinity. If a blessing exists in the person of Christ, it is ours through Christ. When we receive Christ we can then begin to seek and develop all those things. The intimate prayers and communication Christ had with the Father is possible for us. The moment-by-moment understanding of the heart of God in a matter is available to us. The understanding of the Scriptures Christ developed is possible for us. Without a doubt our experience of these things is limited by our sinfulness, but we probably too easily dismiss the low ebb of our spiritual lives as being the best we can do in this sinful state. There is much we could attain through the great grace given us in the realm of the spiritual were we to strive for it more. At the same time it is certain that more awaits us when our redemption is complete.

The English prepositions “with” and “in” are all the translations of our Greek word “ἐν,” used in three different ways. The first is to introduce an indirect object, to give more information about the nature of the blessing, and so it is translated by “with.” The second usage of “ἐν” is to describe the location of these blessings because that communicates something about their greatness. The third usage is to describe through whom this blessing was made possible. So we learn what the context of the blessing is, every spiritual blessing, we learn that the blessing includes every blessing

in heaven, not just on earth. We learn that the blessing happens through Christ. When we receive Him and because we receive Him these things are ours. Variants of the short phrase “in Christ” will occur ten times in the immediate context. Paul is wanting to be sure we understand that Christ is the foremost and central reason God’s blessing of us has re-occurred.

1:4 “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,”

It is “in Christ” that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. In this verse Paul begins to launch into a lengthy explanation of how this state of blessedness that has been bestowed on us by God has been brought about, the blessings along the way to the blessing. The phrase begins with καθως, “just as.” The word connotes the degree to which something is true. What follows is a series of examples from God’s past dealings with us, that will illustrate the degree to which the word “every” in the phrase “every spiritual blessing” is true. We could render the phrase “just as” with the words, “to the extent that” and so catch their significance. Yahweh’s blessing of us extended to eternity past and his choice of us occurred before we or our world was formed. So God’s choosing of us and the timing of that action are cited here as indicating the extent of our blessedness.

This verse pinpoints the time of God’s gracious action toward us. We were chosen through Christ to be in Christ before we appeared on earth, and before the earth appeared. This is the second of many “in Christ” statements that will be given in this chapter.

1:4 “that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”

The end for which God chose us and marked us out is that we should be set apart from all other creation, dedicated especially to Him and for a particular use. Those are the ideas behind the word holy. It carries the idea of purity as a result of being set aside for a particular use. We are holy to God by virtue of being marked out for a purpose and yet that we be holy is itself the purpose.

We are also blameless before Him, insulated against all accusation. We are both holy and blameless before Him, which is a remarkable thing. It is one thing to be so in men’s eyes, quite another before Him. On the other hand, if we are holy and blameless before Him what does anyone else’s opinion matter?

1:5 “In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”

God’s choosing of us was followed by His design of circumstances that would bring about His will in our lives. The thought begins in verse four with the words, “In love,” and it ends with “the kind intention of His will.” God’s love and kindness the very things in Him that brought about the choice of us, work to make His choice a reality in our lives. These shape the circumstances and life events that He uses to bring us to faith in Him. It results in our being adopted as sons. That is an amazing position, to be chosen as one who will receive freely the same privilege as His real son, Jesus Christ. This is our destiny.

1:6 “to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

What is brought out and manifested in these actions by God toward us is His grace. There is a great glory to His grace and its degree is unique. The kindness of men can at times be very commendable. The kindness of God goes to that length then continues on and on. As we view salvation, and as it is viewed by those in the heavens, and as it will be viewed through eternity, the result is that forever this glorious grace manifested by God will be praised. It will not be the “strength of the human spirit” nor the “inherent worth of man” that will be lauded, but the grace of God which will be shown to be glorious.

It is the nature of grace that it is “freely bestowed.” There is grace in the eyes of some, that is not bestowed freely. We term certain favors as “gracious” because the price we pay is so small. But the favor of God is freely bestowed, that means it is grace in the purest sense. It comes in a “bundle” that meets every need that could ever arise in our lives of any sort, because God gives us Himself in His beloved son, Jesus.

1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace.” Literally; “In which one we have this through His blood redemption.”

The word used for redemption here is aÓpolu/trwsin. It is formed by prefixing the preposition that means “away from” to a noun meaning something that loosens. It came to be used of a ransom paid. Redemption is the paying of a price to satisfy a claim or judgment against someone. In the culture of the ancient world it freed a slave. In our culture it satisfies a lien. In ancient culture it released an encumbrance against property, in our culture it does the same. It satisfies debt and releases one from obligation in regard to some specific judgment.

The only redemption there is for the human race is that which comes in Jesus. There is no other plan that will work, except the through-the-blood-plan. In Christ the plan has been made ours. It is our greatest treasure. God is to be praised and exalted because He has, in placing us in Christ, provided for our redemption. In this case the blood of Christ releases us from judgment pronounced by God with regard to our sin, against us. Our obligation is met by the One who is our creditor and the judge. He has become our Savior. Jesus is a remarkable provision made by Yahweh to which we can only respond by saying He is blessed!

Again, the One who as judge pronounced judgment against us and condemned us is the very One who acts as our Savior, providing payment for our debt with His own blood. Then, once again as our judge, He pronounces us forgiven, free of judgment in regard to our sins. This reveals the riches of His grace. He has been driven along by graciousness toward us that has shaped His entire response to our rebellion.

1:8-9a “which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight he made known to us the mystery of His will,”

Speaking of God’s grace the original could be expressed in this way; “which overflowed with respect to us.” The grace provided is more than what was required or needed for forgiveness. It was abundantly provided with respect to our ongoing need. It is a remarkable picture. God behaved graciously toward us so that He did what was

necessary to save us and then kept going. Our portion of grace is not simply an adequate one, but an overflowing one. It goes beyond simply meeting the standard of justice. The debt is paid and spending money given on top of it!

Revelation is governed by the wisdom and might of God. It also is accompanied by wisdom and insight provided by God. He has revealed just the right amount at just the right time in order to accomplish the objective in our lives. We know enough of His plan so that what is going on is no longer a mystery to us. A mystery is that for which there is no explanation. What God has revealed solves the mystery, though it is still proper and fitting to call it all a mystery.

What had been and would still be a mystery to the human race, God has made known. That is a great definition of revelation. It is the unveiling of the past, present and future by God so that it can be explained. Revelation is according to God's wisdom and insight in that enough is revealed to produce faith and enough remains unrevealed to require faith. It is revealed in such a way that as it produces faith, the understanding of it grows. Enough is revealed so that God is known, and yet the remaining is a mystery. Enough of His actions can be explained so that we can truly say we know Him, and yet enough remains out of our reach that it is accurate to say he is unknowable. This is because revelation is shaped by His wisdom with respect to life and His insight with respect to the nature of man, and also with respect to good and evil.

1:9b-10 “according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.”

The term, “kind intention,” describes God's will. His will came about because he knew before time our need and He had “kind intentions” with regard to us in our plight. It is one word *εὐδοκίαν*, which means good will, pleasure or favor. It also is a word that conveys emotion. Paul used it to describe the yearning in his heart for the salvation of Israelites (Romans 10:1). He also uses it to describe noble and good motives (Philippians 1:15). Revelation was made with wisdom and insight and it revealed God's good pleasure in regard to us. His thought toward humanity is loving and noble. These noble intentions are “set forth” in Christ.

In the aftermath of the fall of Adam and Eve Yahweh promised this Christ that would crush the head of the evil one. In the blessing of Jacob that he gave to his sons God revealed that through the family of Judah would come One whose right would be to rule (Genesis 49:10). He is seen in the priesthood/kingship of Melchizedek, as a prophet like Moses, a king like David, a shepherd, a savior, a servant, and a sacrifice for sin. The allusions to Him are numerous and they all point to the fact that Yahweh longs to save humanity and had the most noble and kind intentions toward them. Christ was continually set forth by God as a demonstration of His kind intentions.

The last phrase of verse nine describes in a nutshell special revelation's context. Special revelation is about God's favor toward us in Jesus Christ with a certain end in mind. The end is the completion of God's work in us, the good ending which He intends to bring about in us and for us. Verse 10 describe the result that Yahweh's plan will achieve.

Paul describes this result as a dispensation or an administration. An administration refers to a way of governing in order to achieve certain objectives. It is used much like it is in current American politics, where we refer to the executive branch as “the

administration.” We mean not just the people but their policies, philosophies, agendas and methods. There have been many “administrations” in American government, under its single constitution. God has always been the earth’s sovereign, but the way His sovereignty is carried out has varied. For example there was a brief administration of God that was operating in the garden of Eden before the fall of humanity. That administration changed at the fall. God exercised sovereignty over the earth before He gave the Law. But He did it differently once the Law was given. His administration changed once Christ atoned for sin and the Holy Spirit was given. Certain things never have changed such as salvation from sin. Other things have changed. Paul describes the present (3:2,9) and here the future as being different administrations or dispensations. Covenants are key elements of these dispensations, but dispensation is a term used by God to describe the various eras His people have experienced as they lived at various times in History.

This dispensation towards which God is moving us is described in the NASB as one that is “suitable to the fullness of time.” The translators have made a syntactical declaration regarding the language which is valid and correct. The term here is πληρωματος, describing that which is complete or full-grown. The verb form is used by Luke (1:1) to describe things that had been fully carried out and completed, fulfilled. In Christ we are moving toward an era in which all things will have been carried out. Every promised action of God will be completed and done. The era will be appropriate to that which revelation has revealed God intends to do in the years remaining in time.

The next phrase defines more of what is to be expected in that era. It is “the summing up of all things in Christ.” Christ is the summing up of all revelation. In Him all truth about God is resident because He is God made visible. But what is being referred to here is more than that. It is a future dispensation in which all things in heaven and earth, whether people, processes and events, entities and powers will have run their course to serve their ultimate end, which is to exalt and bring glory to Christ. A long word is used by Paul to describe this great end that this dispensation will bring about. The word is ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι. It describes a reorganization. It is the re-ordering of things under the main point. Paul is describing the time when all things will be returned to the state than once was, when everything was subjected to Yahweh. Every knee will bow to Christ and all things will be placed in subjection to Him, and thus all things will serve Him. In that dispensation both He and the things will achieve their greatest glory.

Interestingly, the original text includes the words “in Him” at the end of this phrase. It says, “that might be once again ordered all the things under the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth in Him.” It emphasizes the idea that in the future dispensation all the things that are in Christ would be added to each other and brought together in Him. The implication is that all things are summed up for the advantage or benefit of those in Him.

1:11 “also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,”

In the Greek New Testament his verse begins with the expression “in whom,” referring back to Christ. It is introducing yet another statement of something that is true of us simply because we are “in Him.” So the previous verse ends with this phrase, “in Him,” and this verse begins with the phrase “in whom” in the Greek New Testament. These mark the fifth and sixth time thus far in the book this idea has been expressed.

Here we are told that through Jesus Christ we have obtained an inheritance. Literally, we have been chosen as heirs. When we believed in Christ we became His siblings, recognized as such by God the Father. So we became joint-heirs with Jesus of all that is God's. It is a staggering thought that we could be qualified for such a blessing.

We are told that it is to this that we have been predestined. The decision that we be heirs is not dependent on the ability of a benefactor who is himself subject to the whims of the times. It is a destiny marked out for us, predetermined by no less a one than the One who shapes and molds all events so that they bring about the purposes He has designed. So our inheritance is a certain one, certain because it comes from the One to whom all things belong, and for whom all things exist and work.

1:12 “to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

We have obtained an inheritance according to the workings of God's sovereign plan with this purpose in mind, that we might produce in all of creation praise directed at God for His glorious acts of goodness. This is the end to which His plan is working. This is where we fit in His plan. Our role and contribution to Him is praise.

This comes about we are told for those who “first to hope in Christ.” The phrase “first to hope” is προηλπικотας, a single word meaning to hope before hand, or hope first. If it has reference to those who responded early in Christian history, it is only a statement of a fact. It is not a teaching that they alone are somehow unique in this blessing. It is more likely that it refers not to the time of one's hope in terms of history, but to the priority of one's hope in Christ. That is, to all whose hope for salvation and for eternity rests in Christ first and foremost.

1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,”

There are two “in Him” statements in the verse, the seventh and eighth time the idea occurs thus far in the book. The point of this verse is concisely stated in the words, “In Him you also were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.” The “you” is emphatic—you yourselves.

This verse is a very significant and a very important statement with regard to the issue of our eternal security. In Him, you were officially placed in the sphere of His family. We see that being “in Him” is not just a matter of being on a list as an official member. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. His presence makes our standing official. He is both the seal and the sealer. A seal is a mark of authority. Its purpose and aim is security. It is a mark of ownership and jurisdiction that sends a message to all. It is a boundary that is engraved. It argues against all practical occurrences of a seal to set forth the idea that this sealing done by God of us can be trifled with or in some way reversed. If it is not done in the human realm how much more in the divine realm? If it is not done when the seal is simply an impress of a logo and of a mechanical nature, how much more when the seal is none less than the very Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is a personal, living being. He is a part of the triune God, so that there is that within us that unites our innermost being with God Himself and thus to all other believers who are so united to God as well. “Family” is the best way we have of

understanding our bond with God and with each other and even it is a good picture only if one has in mind the family as God designed it to be, apart from the dysfunction of sin.

This verse, then, lays before us the practical and appropriate nature of the term “in Him” which Paul is using to designate our relationship to God. No other term better describes the work God has done through Christ in and for us.

In this verse is also set forth our part in appropriating that work. We must listen to the message of truth. We are dependent on revelation. Apart from it we have no way of getting our spiritual bearings. It is the truth that sets us free. It is the light which leads us out of darkness. And we must believe the truth as it is presented in the Gospel. The act of belief starts a chain reaction that reverberates into eternity. It makes our entry into Him, which then guarantees, as the next verse describes, all that follows.

1:14 “Who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

The words “of God’s own” are added in the NASB to clarify the message. The idea of this verse builds on the statement of the previous verse, in particular the idea that we are sealed in the Holy Spirit, who is described as the Holy Spirit of promise. He is the Holy Spirit promised by OT Scripture and again by Christ. He is also the Spirit of Promise in the sense which this verse develops, that He is the collateral put up by God as a guarantee that we will receive in full from God that which He has obligated Himself to do. When God promised us an inheritance, He put up Himself as collateral, the guarantee that it would be given to us.

This has always been God’s way, He has sworn by Himself since there is none greater. It was his way with Abraham when He alone passed between the cut animals and it is His way in Christ. The pledge of the Holy Spirit then is given with a grander transaction in mind, the redemption of an inheritance. Man’s destiny was to rule with God over creation. He lost that standing when he became a slave to sin. It is God’s intention and His plan to redeem men, to buy him back out of slavery to sin. The debt has been paid, not to Satan, but to the demands of God’s justice. The event that redeemed us has occurred. The full realization of this has not yet occurred. But redeemed men will carry out God’s rule and that will be attributable only to God’s great goodness. It will result in praise and great glory being given to Him.

1:15 “For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which is among you, and your love for all the saints,”

Paul is about to state an action that has come about in His life with respect to those he is addressing. Having spoken of the great process which began before creation, the fact that this has been realized in the present, and will endure through eternity, he now turns to what that means to Him and what it does to him when he hears of that process at work in the lives of his readers.

1:16 “do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers.”

When people come to faith there is really only one response we can have, that of thanksgiving to God. It is a great work that only He could have done. It is a reminder of the deliberate and certain progress of His plan. It is a reminder of why we have not received our inheritance yet, and that we are one soul or one heir closer.

Because Paul realizes what has gone into a conversion and what it will eventually lead to, He always gives thanks for it as he thinks of believers. Whatever the problems and tribulations, they are greatly and deeply blessed in Christ and rich in eternal things because they have been adopted as sons by God.

1:17 “that the God of our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

It is common and easy, due to the weakness of our flesh, to be both unwise and arrogant in our faith. Both the disclosure of God and His ways and the wisdom of how to live in light of them are available. But these are apprehended by Christians with the right spirit. They gradually become the possession of those who are becoming poor in spirit, the humble ones, those who are crucifying their own will, those with reverence for the things of God, those with an increasing appetite for righteousness. This is a spirit that is developed in us by the Holy Spirit. It is not a magical force that through prayer and ceremony, is strengthened in us.

Paul is praying for the transformation of their own spirits, their innermost beings, by the Holy Spirit. His prayer is for a process of change that God the Father would produce in them through His Spirit. It is the creation of a new innermost self, who in accord with the knowledge of Christ, will produce thoughts and actions that are in harmony with truth. This would lead to real-life decisions that would accord with the implications of the knowledge of Christ.

Revelation has been given by God. The truth has been unveiled so that it shines like light in a room. The revelation Paul prays for is not new information. It is personal and practical enlightenment with regard to the personal and practical implications of the truth as it has been made plain by Christ. Wisdom and revelation as to the application of the truth are at our fingertips. Through the indwelling of the Spirit these are freely accessible to us. But they are apprehended by those whose own spirits are ruled and shaped by the Holy Spirit. Revelation is final in terms of the information being made available. It is ongoing in terms of its practical application. Paul's prayer is answered as God orchestrates events that lead to the submission of our spirits to the Holy Spirit. The fruit of that process is the opening of the heart of God to us. “Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled.”

1:18 “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of the inheritance in the saints,”

In the Greek grammar of this verse we find an accusative absolute (enlightened is an accusative participle, eyes is an accusative). Therefore it can be read this way: “the eyes of your heart being enlightened.” It is a description of a condition that has come about. Interestingly Paul actually uses the perfect tense here, indicating that the eyes of our hearts have been enlightened and continue so. So that our hearts might be

enlightened is not the request. It is presented as a reality. The request will come in the next phrase.

In this verse Paul is beginning to develop further what he meant in the previous verse by the “spirit of wisdom and revelation.” He uses a figure of speech for our inner being that is common to Scripture, referring to it as “our heart.” He makes his use in the previous verse of the term “revelation” very plain by referring here to the “eyes of our heart.” Now it is obvious that our heart, the organ, does not have eyes, nor does our inner person have physical eyes. However, the inner being makes decisions about things not perceivable to the eye. It does things like believe in something invisible. It produces things like love and affection. Paul is asking that a course of action be inspired somewhere in our inner being. Who can explain exactly how such a thing works? Paul chooses to speak of it as if our inner-being had sight. What he is referring to is the work of God’s Spirit that shapes us from within.

The revelation that Paul prays for the Ephesians is not the unveiling of truth. That has been done. Rather it is a result that they themselves can now enter into, because they have been joined to the Spirit. He gives them capacity to process truth and draw appropriate conclusions about the truth. He applies the truth from within them as they meditate on it. Life change of the sort that is appropriate to knowing the truth is the result.

The second phrase of this verse states one such result that flows from this capacity we have through the Holy Spirit to see the implication or application of the truth. One such result is hope. Where there was hopelessness, there is now hope and more significantly a journey of increasing hope.

When we accept the truth of the Gospel we know it is good news. It is an amazing thing that we can be made right with God through Jesus Christ, apart from our own performance. At that point we have renewed hope, but we have not begun to understand the fullness of that hope. We have likely only begun to understand God’s calling of us, where it will lead in this life and most importantly, what He has called us to in the next life. This is Paul’s desire for all Christians, expressed here with regard to those in Ephesus. So he has prayed regarding the change in their innermost being that has occurred, that it would have a result, result, a result expressed by one word, hope.

Hope is a potent force that Paul knows can lead to life instead of death. To renewal rather than fatigue, to conquest rather than defeat, to buoyancy rather than depression, to endurance in the race rather than dropping out. Christians who have come to grasp the implications of God’s calling of them, specifically, how blessed they will be in eternity, are Christians who will prevail against the gates of Hell.

Paul wants the Ephesians to comprehend their inheritance. It is an inheritance that belongs to Christ. The phrase “in the saints” is likely a “dative of advantage” meaning it should be understood as saying “for the saints.” It conveys the idea of “for the benefit or advantage of the saints.” So there is an intention that Christ has. The inheritance already belongs to Him, rightfully His because of His faithfulness to His calling and simply because this was His appointed lot. This inheritance will be shared by Him with us. It is for us—for our benefit and advantage.

Paul prays that they, and we, will understand the richness of that inheritance and its glory. It is rich in that it is plenteous and inexhaustible. In evaluating inheritances that is the key thing one wants to know, is it rich or simply an inheritance of some amount. Our inheritance in Christ is rich. It is also glorious. As we understand inheritances this

too is important. What sort of lifestyle will this inheritance allow? What degree of “glory” does it have. The term glory evokes no negative image. Its most basic meaning is that of weightiness or significance. Our inheritance is not only rich but it is glorious. It involves what is weighty and significant. Earthly inheritances might guarantee goods, but they may not contribute an ounce of what is significant, what a soul hungers for. The inheritance of Christ is plenteous and inexhaustible, and it meets the need of our souls as well. Knowing of the riches of this inheritance, the thing Paul is praying for here, brings about a deep shift in values and priorities which in turn dramatically changes behavior.

1:19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might

This is the third thing which Paul prays will be accomplished in the lives of the Ephesians as a result of their hearts being enlightened. It is a desire for us to know the extent of God’s power directed into the lives of us who believe. He describes the power as being of “surpassing greatness.” It seems that Paul wants the readers to understand that God’s power is always great in respect to all men. But in the case of the lives of believers it is surpassingly great. That is, God’s power is especially active toward and displayed with regard to believers. We are objects of His power for the world to see. The word rendered surpassing is *υπερβαλλον*, which is rendered immeasurable in the ESV.

That Paul is requesting for believers that they know the greatness of the power available to them means that it is possible for them not to know this power of God toward them. It is possible not to know about it if the eyes of our hearts are not enlightened, and if one does not read various descriptions of God’s power in the Scriptures. And if we do not know about it, we will probably never know it in terms of our experience.

The power that God demonstrates toward us in matters of salvation is immeasurable. His works are invisible with respect to our perseverance and our growth in Him, yet they are mighty beyond measure. This power is also available in ministry, to accomplish those deeds that relate to kingdom objectives that have been entrusted to us. Ours is a unique relationship with respect to God’s power. The power of God, by His mercy, works in behalf of all men. But to the children it is directed in ways that far exceed the normal working.

The words “these are” are added in the NSAB. The translators are suggesting by this that the phrase that is in the original, “according to the working of the might of the strength of His,” reaches back to modify all three things Paul wants us to know: The hope of His calling, the riches of the inheritance, and the surprising greatness of His power. The translators are saying that Paul is conveying that all three come to us in a certain way, which will be expressed in verse 20. This is both a possible conjecture in their part and a reasonable one.

The message is very simple. God’s calling of us, the inheritance He has prepared for us, and His power directed in our behalf, all extend to us to the degree that is made possible when the strength of His might, what we might call His greatest degree of strength, is brought to bear on them. It is a way of saying that these things are given to us to the limitless degree allowed by God’s limitless strength. It is a way of saying that when it comes to carrying out these things on our behalf, God spares nothing and unleashes all the power. So *κατα των ενεργιαν* (“in accordance with the working...”) is an

adverbial accusative of measure describing how far the actions of God in our behalf extend. In this case their extent is without limit.

We could phrase the whole thought of Paul in this way, reaching back to verse 18, “so that you might know what is 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. These are available to us beyond measure, extended to us according to His limitless power!”

1:20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly places.” or which power He worked (same word as in the previous phrase) in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

There is this strong tie in the language of the statement about power in the previous phrase and this one in verse 20. Our calling, our inheritance, and God’s power come to us to the limitless degree that His unlimited power allows. An example of His power extended toward us is His resurrection of Christ from the dead and His exaltation of Him, as the following statements Paul makes will attest. The same power that Christ experienced in the resurrection and exaltation is working God’s plan for us. We must understand that all of the power of Hell was focused on thwarting the exaltation of Christ. All the power of evil men was focused against it as well. His exaltation proves Yahweh’s surpassing greatness, His incomparable strength, and His absolute sovereignty.

It is this that is true of God that will result in a new life for us. There is not only the blessing of escape from death but all that goes with our redemption from the curse. It is a resurrection in every sense to new life. It is worthy of the word awesome because of the power of the One that is bringing it all about.

God’s power did not simply bring Christ back to life. It raised Him to a new life and bestowed on Him this eternal role. It will do the same to us. Because we are in Christ, we are seated there with Him (verse 3) in the sense that His great privilege flows through Himself to us who are His body. We will not just be brought back to life, but be given a new life where we physically experience that same privilege toward God that Christ has and where we enter into the experience of our eternal role and calling.

1:21 “for above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in the one to come.”

There is no ruler like God. There is no authority in any person, force, or kingdom that is not sourced and permitted by Him. There is no power that can compare to His. Because of these things, there is no rival to God for absolute dominion over all. This is the power of God that has caused the greatness of the name of Christ to grow, where the names of others have faded. Paul could not have given a more prophetic statement than this, nor could he have imagined that the name of Christ would so proliferate this age’s history. All other people come and go, and they scarcely make a mark. Few names are recognized beyond the time span of their own era, though some do achieve a place in the historical record. Compare that with Jesus, who was known in only a small area of the globe during His life on earth. He died a shameful death and by all human standards that should have ended it and would have if the power of God had not been at work in the event. Two millennia later the world celebrates His birthday each year. Though it is done largely in ignorance of the implication of His life,

most recognize it as a celebration of His birth. His name divides history and defines time within the present age. It is recognized by a majority of those presently on the earth and worshipped by millions. I can think of no other name that comes close to the acclaim of the name of Jesus Christ. It is a remarkable testimony to the power of God, that same power that is being brought to bear with regard to our lives. And all of this is only a taste of the greatness that will be His throughout eternity.

1:22 “and He put all things in subjection under this feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the Church.”

The power of God that Paul wants the Ephesians to come to know since the eyes of their heart have become enlightened is the same power that has subjected all things to Christ. All things are “under His feet.” It is the divine essence of Christ, the God-man, that allows for one whose appearance is human, to have control of all things. This incarnation is the work of God, a great manifestation of power that One who is truly human could demonstrate that all things are subjected to Him. Then, having initiated this great act of incarnation, its beauty and impact was enhanced by the fact that this God-man became God’s gift to the Church.

The church’s welfare, speaking now of the universal church not necessarily specific local churches, does not depend for its survival and advance on the individual human leadership that may emerge. Rather, this universal church is always on the move, always advancing, and this movement gives birth to local churches that do the same. The death of a particular local church happens by the choice of Christ, or perhaps when Christ is no longer its head, when He is no longer allowed to bless it with direction and coordination.

It is a wonderful thing to be assured that the one who is leading us has unlimited power, is head of all things. Success in mission is to a large degree about leadership and there is no better leader of human affairs than our Creator. He is inspiring and He is wise, intentional and responsive, directive and flexible. And He is God’s gift to the church. So the one who must bear the burden and care of the work is not us in the final analysis, but He who has been given the power and authority commensurate with the mission. It is popular to think a church dies because of its outdated methods. It dies only because it loses touch with its head and it is probably accurate to say that all other troubles with respect to its methods follow. Our head has been given authority and power over all things. There is no method that in and of itself limits Him. There is that which is simply not His will for the moment, which is deftly avoided when He is allowed to be the head. The One who is head over all things has been given to the church, it is an amazing thought that we have as a leader with such a plan and such ability and power.

1:23 “which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

The church is Christ’s body. It is His body in the sense that He controls it and coordinates its life functions. It becomes just a lifeless institution without Him. With Him it is a living organism, purposeful and coordinated in its efforts. There is movement and the achieving of milestones. There is eating and drinking, growth and nourishment. Life-signs are everywhere.

Not only is the church His body in this sense, but it is the visible manifestation of Christ in the present world. Even as He manifested himself through a human body, He is now revealed to the world through the Church collectively. It is certain that no one individual Christian properly reveals Christ. No one is adequate for that task. It is the Christian community as a whole thorough whom Christ reveals himself to the world. If they should wish to know Christ, they should look not to an individual who may at best represent a part of Christ's body, but to the Church as a whole. In them they will see Christ.

The Church is not simply Christ's body in some loosely related and symbolic way. The entire community of Christians from all ages and times express a full revelation of God. That is an amazing idea. We are told (I Kings 8:27) that the heavens and the highest heaven cannot contain God, yet here we learn that the Church is His fullness. The Church may be criticized and ridiculed by the skeptic, but to see it collectively, in all its locations and through its eras and times is to gaze on the fullest revelation of God that has been given to us. This is truth which in itself is mind-boggling but particularly so in light of the very next phrase.

Ephesians 2

2:1 “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.”

We who are together a full revelation of God were not always such. In fact we were the opposite. Spiritually we were dead. God has not expressed Himself fully through creating good people, but through regenerating bad people. Grace allows people who were spiritually dead a new life in which they are blessed with every spiritual blessing there is and through which they come to express together the very fullness of God.

This is an amazing journey and an amazing transformation of fortunes. The Church expresses things that the highest heaven could not express, but is made up entirely of those who formerly expressed all that is contrary to God's nature and all that is offensive and abominable to Him. The Church is the fullness of Him who fills all in all, but all who are a part of it were dead. That's Paul's message to the Ephesians.

By saying we were dead Paul is speaking of being spiritually dead. Our Spirit's were separated from Yahweh. That is what Spiritually dead means. As spiritually dead people our minds, emotions, and wills focus only on our own desires and needs. Our bodies contribute impulses that our minds and emotions move to gratify. There was nothing in us that empowered righteousness as a life goal or as a sustainable life-pattern. In terms of re-uniting ourselves with God, we had no capacity to save ourselves through good works. That changes the moment Yahweh's Spirit is joined to ours through the gospel that He has initiated. But apart from the gospel we are dead spiritually.

2:2 “In which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”

Having spent most of the first chapter telling the Ephesians who they are and what is theirs in Christ, Paul continues in the second chapter to explain where they once were. It makes where they are all the more meaningful and miraculous and more importantly to Paul's purposes, it brings praise to the glory of Yahweh's grace (1:6).

Because we were spiritually dead we lived as spiritually dead people, and in this condition we use to drift along, living a lifestyle that shaped us to be like everyone else who is spiritually dead. That is the course marked out by the world, behavior expected from the spiritually dead. It's a mindless way. It comes very naturally.

But Paul reveals here the power behind the lure of it all, the persona behind what appears to be just a natural way of doing things. In these two statements about Satan we can learn significant detail about his work. He is called the prince of the power of the air, literally, “the ruler of the authorities of the air.” He is royally in the realm of the authorities of what we would call earth's atmosphere. Among those spiritual beings that inhabit earth and its atmosphere Satan is the ruler.

Whether this is true in the plain-literal sense, that there are beings in regions beyond us over whom Satan is the ruler, or whether Paul is expressing the truth as he and people of that time understood it is unknown. We must remember it is not a text that is dealing in a didactic way with Satan, but with the humanity. Satan is being mentioned in connection with humanity to show his influence on them. It is very

possible that the Spirit of God in directing the writing, would choose to identify the persona behind the age in terms familiar to the readers. The key thing to gain from this passage is not so much where Satan's abode is, or to where it extends, but that he is a ruler with a kingdom of followers who influence humanity. All outside the family of God follow the course, literally the αἰών or age of the world. We are in a time phase of God's plan, an age, when humanity is morally adrift from the Creator. The result is not pure self-determination, but what could be called fate. By fate we mean becoming the victim of the natural forces of time which unknown to the fallen human race, include demons under Satan's direction. In that sense, there is no such thing as secular humanism. It is in the end very spiritual and is shaped by forces way beyond those of humanity.

Having spoken of Satan as the guiding force behind the way of life of those outside of God's family, Paul now makes another statement about him that affirms the first. Satan is the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience. When people live outside the bounds of truth they are subjected to the realm of Satan. He is a spiritual being who can function outside the realm of our physical senses, and so is very dangerous. His work and influence are always associated with disobedience. Living by the truth, what John called "walking in the light," moves one outside the realm of Satan's control. To choose disobedience is to subject oneself to deception and to relinquish control to the realm of evil. It is where all of humanity lives before they are regenerated, born again, and bonded to God through the Holy Spirit.

We have come far enough in Ephesians now to make Chapter one amazing! of. These verses are the hard reality, the nasty truth that makes the good news of chapter one and the reminder of chapter 2 so glorious. And verse three continues the bleak description that was our lives before we find relief and good news in verse four.

2:3 "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lust of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

This statement by Paul reflects what the Gospel teaches about all people, whether devout Jews like Paul or gentiles as many of the Ephesian were. All were together under the rule of Satan.

The "we" at the beginning of the statement is emphatic, Paul including himself in company with the Ephesians. And in the moral predicament it is not the devil that is the only problem. He may indeed not even be the main problem. Something Paul calls "our flesh" and its desires is the thing which gives Satan an ally in the matter.

Our flesh is that portion of our being with both a mental and physical dimension that desires to function independent of God. Paul calls it "the flesh" because it is a part of earthly life in these mortal bodies. It functions within us in such a way that it seeks to get those things which gratify desires that have to do with the body and the "look good, feel good" method of life. So the term "flesh" is appropriate. It is the "flesh" that causes us to focus on what is self-serving, and what is immediately gratifying.

Both the flesh and the mind are mentioned here because they are intertwined and act together. This is, since the time of Adam's sin, the nature of people and it is our nature. So it was our plight by birth that we were children of wrath, that is we were destined to experience the wrathful judgment of Yahweh. The language of the original is intentional, stating that we were (imperfect) children by nature of wrath." We were

children characterized by wrath, meaning that the wrath of God, insofar as it is manifested now, was our constant companion. It was also our future destiny at the time when God's wrath will be fully poured out against ungodliness. Paul is saying, "God's wrath was both our life and our destiny."

2:4 "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

The most wondrous news of all time is expressed in the first two words of verse four. Having reminded us of our former life and destiny, Paul is now ready to return to our present blessed reality. What was true would still be true except for God. "But God" is a perfect summary of salvation history, the greatest story ever told. One can read the historic account of the human race since Adam and see predicament after predicament unfolding for men, "But God" always provides hope and an eventual solution. These two words express concisely the fact that God has intervened in our behalf and nothing is the same, Paul will go on to tell the story in some detail.

God is introduced into his scene by Paul as one who is rich in mercy. This was our only hope, His mercy. We had no hope of appealing to the sense of fairness or justice because we had lived a life of willfully indulging the flesh. We were deservedly children of wrath by every legitimate standards of justice. In God there is richness of mercy. It flows out of the great love that He has for us. It is the logical outgrowth of that great love, and the greatness of that love is demonstrated by the height, length, depth and breadth of God's mercy.

2:5 "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

The depth of the greatness of God's love cannot be fully comprehended by us. But we get a glimpse of its extent in verses like this that speak of God's love extending to us at our worst. It isn't just that He loves us because He sees what we'll become. He loved us in eternity past, then continued on to extend that love to us when we were estranged from Him. It was in our estrangement that He reached out to us.

The phrase "made us alive together" is one word in the Greek συνεζωοποιτησεν, from a preposition συν (with), prefixed to ζωον meaning life or a living thing, and ποιεω meaning to do or to make. The three are combined here to express this important act of love carried out by God. He made us alive together with Christ.

When Christ was raised from the dead it demonstrated that spiritual life was now provided for all whom God had chosen. Christ was the means by which we were made alive, and He is our companion in the state of life. It is in being joined to Christ that we are able to enter into life as it was designed by God the Creator to be lived. Through this grace of God, and this grace alone, we go from the spiritual cemetery to being indwelt by the living God. And there is much more to our position.

2:6 "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

From the morgue to the White House, from the mausoleum to the palace, that's how dramatic the transformation is that God's love grants to us. The idea of being raised up and seated with Him is a continuation of the thought of the previous verse, broken for a moment by the parenthetical phrase "by grace you have been saved." These

thoughts add to the idea of the previous verse, that of being made alive together with Christ. They are expressed in the same way. Each of them is one word in Greek prefixed with the preposition “with.” Together, reaching back to the previous verse the complete thought is this; “we have been made alive with, raised up with, and seated with Christ in the heavenly places.”

These are the two great thoughts being conveyed through this letter to the Ephesians church. First, there is the great act of redemption carried out by God with respect to us. Second, redemption results in this great position or status being accorded to us. The act of redemption as been entered into by all Christians. The position or status they have been accorded is not fully comprehended by many of them. We understand it all in terms of future events. That is, we learn we will be raised from the dead to live with Christ in heaven. But the present reality of that position is what eludes us. We understand we will be seated with Christ in the heavens, but we have considerable difficulty understanding the implications of the fact that we are seated with Him presently.

2:7—In order that in eyes to come He might show the suppressing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The kindness is “toward us.” Literally it is “for our benefit,” (accusative of relationship). It is free to us, but comes to us through the agony of Christ.

We are certainly recipients of God’s kindness in the present age. But that is not what is being referred to here. The time statement of this verse relates to the future ages, the time as yet unknown to man. So what the verse is referring to is not just the sense in which we today are objects of His kindness. That is not plainly obvious to the onlookers of this world. They are not conscious enough of God to be looking for anything He is doing. And the fact is that all humanity are recipients of His kindness. This is referring to something in the future that will come about in God’s plan whereby His extraordinary kindness is revealed to onlookers who will learn of it by watching us. We will be clearly set apart from the rest of humanity by the degree of kindness extended to us. It is a privileged position to the “enth degree” to be chosen as those through whom the almighty and all powerful God chooses to demonstrate and prove His kindness.

2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Having spoken of what is to happen to us in future ages, that we will display for all to see the great magnitude of God’s grace, Paul now speaks of our beginnings in terms of our walk with God. It is grace that has saved us. God’s favor explains our salvation. No matter what merit we may have as individuals, it falls short. It is absolutely true to say that the grace of God is the only thing that explains our salvation.

Now the grammar of this passage links the “and that not of yourselves” back to our being saved by faith. The word this is *τοῦτο*, “this thing” referring back to the entire first phrase, to the thing being spoken of—our salvation by faith. We surmise from the testimony of other Scripture that strictly speaking, God has a role in our having faith, but this Scripture cannot be used as proof of that view. The simple message of this verse is that salvation comes to us by grace through faith.

2:9 “not as a result of works that no one should boast.”

Boasting is the great human pastime. It is obvious to us when openly engaged in, but perfectly acceptable when carried on subtly. It has many disguises. It is the great ambition of the flesh. God’s plan in the matter of our salvation is that there should be no boasting on the part of anyone. His plan, for this reason, calls for our works to play no role. Human nature being as it is, it is important that this situation be absolute, for if there is any even supposed grounds, any that we can even imagine, we will boast. So God has removed all human merit from the salvation process and revelation has made that fact perfectly obvious.

It is a testimony to our love of boasting that schemes of salvation by human merit persist, for they have no basis whatever in truth as revealed by God. Each is a testimony to the depth of human pride, rebellion, and stubbornness, monumental to our habitual refusal to acknowledge our fallen state. God’s plan is moving us toward an eternal state in which there will be no boasting by anyone of their personal spiritual achievement, but that all the saved be testimonies to the surpassing riches of His grace.

2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

No one will be saved by good works. Paul has made that as clear as language allows. The fact remains that people do works that are genuinely good in God’s eyes. This verse explains why these works are not a cause for boasting. We are His workmanship, the result of God’s efforts. What we are and therefore what we rise to do is a result of His work and effort. So in reality, the works we do are His works. Our impetus to do them is a result of His work. Our ability to carry them out is the result of His work. So though the works are carried out by us and in that sense are “ours,” it is true that they are His as well.

The verse literally reads, “We are the work of Him in (or by) Christ Jesus, in the interest of good works which have been prepared beforehand by God in order that we might walk in them.” It would appear that the good deeds were planned first, before we begin our physical lives. We are raised up both physically and then spiritually so as to carry those deeds out in the interest of His plan. Our purpose is found in doing the good works delegated to us in the plan and foreknowledge of God.

2:11 “Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘uncircumcision’ by the so called ‘circumcision’ which is performed in the flesh by human hands –“

Paul addresses the Ephesians as “Gentiles” though we know that the Church most likely started with Jews (Acts 18:28-19:19). There were apparently a large number of gentiles who had come to faith through this original group, so much so that Paul viewed it as a Gentile Church (see Acts 19:17-20). Paul alludes to one of the labels that they were most certainly aware of, used by the Jews with regard to them. No doubt such labels had some sting to them.

It was important to the movement of the Church that Paul, himself a Jew, give clarity to the issue of the relative status of Jews and Gentiles in the Church. If nature was simply to take its course in this matter, prejudice and legalistic thought would bring about major inequities within the body of Christ. Paul begins to articulate a position

that would provide argument against such barriers whenever they sprung up within the church.

The “therefore” that precedes Paul’s thoughts in this verse shows that all that has gone before, too much to concisely restate, all the statements of these Gentiles’ position in Christ, argue for and lead to the conclusions Paul is about to draw about the “labels” of the past. The verse ends in mid thought and that thought does not get picked up again until verse 13. The next verse is a parenthetical thought, developing further the Gentiles position in former times.

2:12 “remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

The walls and divisions that existed between and Gentile were not artificial. They were present in the law. That is not to condone all the particulars of Jewish thought and action toward Gentiles, but it is to say that there were genuine differences in their standing with God. We know that these differences did not apply to the case of every individual Jew or every individual Gentile. But they were generally true of the two groups as a whole.

The Gentiles as a group were on the outside looking in at the Jews. Christ was the countryman of the Jews, one to whom they were joined in theory by their faith and their Scriptures. The Jews were under the covenant of promise, and where there is promise, there is hope. The promise was the Messiah, and so they were at least joined to Christ by this common ethnicity. The Gentiles had no hope, no promises having been addressed specifically to them except such as might come to them through the Jews. As a group the Gentiles had no relationship to God, having never been called out as a people by Him.

None of this is to suppose that the Jew was saved by their ethnicity, or that the Gentiles were not by their ethnicity saved. Salvation was still a matter of individual faith. But the fact was that truth of Yahweh was posited with the Jews, and apart from them the Gentiles had no access to it. Belief among them was rare. This was in general the position of the average Gentile up until just a few years before Paul writes these words. The gospel, and its movement by the sovereign moving of the Holy Spirit, had changed all that. The gospel rendered such thinking archaic. It was based on old administration of Yahweh.

2:13 “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Returning to the thought of verse 11 that there was something Gentile Christians were to remember, Paul states concisely the truth they are to hold forever in their minds. In Christ, or by Him, and specifically by His blood, their relationship to God had been forever changed. The before and after description is both accurate and moving. They were formerly far off. That’s an awful thought. To be far from Yahweh the Creator and Sovereign is the worst of plights. Being “in Christ” makes the dramatic difference. Christ addressed this worst of plights by giving His life as payment for sin. Now all who believe Jesus died for their sins are forgiven. They are baptized into Him—forever united with Him through the Holy Spirit. God views all such people, regardless of ethnicity, as simply “in Christ.”

2:14 “For He himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.”

Paul is not talking here about peace with God, though in Christ these statements are certainly true of that relationship. He is speaking of the fact that Jesus Christ brings peace between Jews and Gentiles. Peace between the two groups comes not by human design, and not only by the historic act of Christ but in the person of Christ. All who believe are together in Him, drawn to and forever united together to Him through the Holy Spirit. There is in the people of God only one group. It is a relationship that transcends all ethnic lines.

The dividing wall, both the actual physical barriers that existed in synagogues, and the invisible cultural walls are gone in God's plan and will for us. There is no basis upon which to draw boundaries and maintain the separations of the old covenant.

In the next verse Paul will describe the specific thing done by Christ, so that these barriers, whether actual physical ones, or the more complex and formidable cultural ones could be forever cast aside.

2:15 “by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,”

The life that Christ lived as God in human flesh, was a life of perfect obedience to the demands of the law. He fulfilled the law in the sense of obeying it but also in the sense of being the reality of which it was only a symbol. When He gave His body to be punished for our sins, He became the sacrifice to which the ceremony of the Law pointed, hence there was no longer any purpose served by its illustrations. God set it aside when Christ died. That administration ended.

Christ met both the personal demand of the Law for righteous conduct, and its public demand for substitutionary blood sacrifice for sin, and for separation from the unclean. Therefore the Law, the instrument that demanded separation between Israel and the Gentiles, between the holy and the profane, was abolished.

In Christ then, the two groups could be merged into one and be at peace. Nothing was now viewed as unclean in and of itself. It was viewed as its nature could be in the plan and purpose of God, whether an object or a person. There was no longer a need to maintain this separation to carry out the will of God. It could be completely let go of in clear conscience. The instrument that demanded that Jews be aloof from Gentiles was gone.

2:16 “And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to you who were near;”

Quoting from the Psalmist and from Isaiah, Paul speaks of the need of both Jew and Gentile for the gospel of Christ and in doing so demonstrates that this was not some new scheme Paul had concocted. Rather, it was part of the thought and plan of God, proclaimed centuries earlier in the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

Christianity is not in this sense a new faith birthed after Christ died. Faith, through the blood of “the Anointed One” (which is the meaning of the term “messiah” and its Greek equivalent “Christ”) was always the basis of reconciliation with God. So in that

sense, Christianity is tied to the first promise of this anointed one, or Christ, in Genesis 3:15, though it was not called Christianity at that point.

The Jews, because they had revelation, were nearer to being reconciled. They had the truth, they simply had to act on it individually. The gentiles did not have such truth, except through watching and learning from the Jews. So they were in that sense farther away. However the reality was that both groups needed to be reconciled. Both groups were lost in the sense of individual salvation. Individual faith, to which a Jew was closer because he had more facts, was still essential. Both groups needed Christ's proclamation of peace. In Ephesus both groups were receiving it through Christ's work in Paul.

2:18 “for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

Both Jews and Gentiles are dependent on Christ for their legal right to access to God. Both are dependent on the Holy Spirit for their practical communication with God. Despite vastly different histories, both groups now find that they have had the same experience. They have been saved by Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They are forgiven by Christ and filled with spiritual life by the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The Jew, never a stranger to the person and work of Yahweh, finds His peace with Yahweh through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. He senses that peace through the presence of the Holy Spirit, moving in the practical matters of his day-to-day life. The Gentile, ignorant of God, having worshiped false gods and having embraced superstition and lies as the truth, learned of the one true God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus he arrived at that same point of peace with God as did the Jew. What is the result? In both cases salvation through Christ, fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit, and now fellowship with each other because of their mutual faith.

2:19 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household,”

Stranger and aliens, non-citizens, those were the terms that characterized the Gentile under the Law. They were not simply derogatory titles assigned by man. They were the divine thought on the matter expressed in the Law. That era is over. The Gentiles, through faith, are in God's household.

Whereas under the law they could not enter the house of God, gentiles are now a part of the family. Whereas they were aliens in the land of Palestine, they are now citizens, with all the rights and privileges, of heaven, the better country sought by Abraham. Where they were strangers, unknown to God's people and unknowing with regard to God's ways, they are now saints.

2:20 “having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,”

This household, or family of God, includes all who hold to faith in Christ in line with what the prophets of the OT and the hand-picked apostles of Christ embraced. In Paul's imagery, the household is being described as the house. It has a foundation which is the teachings of the Apostles and prophets. That truth is the basis of the

family's existence. Remove that truth and you simply have building materials, there is no house.

Within that foundation, there is the cornerstone, that which makes the whole foundation plumb and level. It is that from which the rest of the foundation is laid. It is what determines the foundation's direction and orientation. That corner stone is Christ. There are then two elements that bring order and stability to the family of God and to which it depends for its existence. The person of Jesus Christ, and the truth of God as expressed through the apostles and the prophets.

Paul's imagery is perfect. He gives proper importance to the apostles and prophets without placing them on equal footing with Christ. He shows that one's faith in Christ is to be in line with Christ as understood and explained by the apostles and prophets. Saving faith is not simply faith in Christ as one privately interprets Him or understands Him. That kind of faith may indeed be faith. But it is not the faith of the household of God.

In the household of God, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. He is that which provides the standard in all things. He is the one that has determined everything else about it, the one from whom everything else gets its orientation and direction. The apostle and prophets rightly and accurately extend in appropriate directions the truth Christ embodied and the work He established. To be in harmony with them is to be building on the foundation. To be out of harmony with them is to be building off the foundation and to be building something other than the household of God.

Two things then, characterize God's household through the years. Embracing the person of Christ and being in harmony with the teachings of the apostles and prophets.

2:21 "in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;"

All the stones in a building were placed respective to the chief cornerstone. They were moved up, down, north, south, east, or west, according to what the design demanded with respect to the cornerstone. In Christ we are assigned a place in the building, here a figure of speech for the living church. In Him is dictated for us a very precise position in relationship to Him in which we are to live so as to carry out our function in His overall design. As we all are fitted together according to the position defined by Christ there is this ever-growing building which Paul describes as a "holy temple in the Lord."

This building, this group of people being called together and fitted together according to a master design is a holy thing. To criticize it is to tread on holy ground. To help in the placement and adjustment of those stones is demanded of us, and yet to do so in a self-serving way is to trifle with holy things. To move stones so as to rightly orient them to Christ is part of our responsibility and privilege. To do so for any other reason is presumptuous and profane. But the fact here expressed is that the church of God is always "on the grow." It is ever expanding as each and every stone is gathered and comes to be placed in Christ and thus in His Church. It is speaking of the Church universal, that grand "building" whose stones were chosen before the foundation of the world, which are in the course of time "found," shaped and fitted for their role in the Kingdom of God.

2:22 “in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

This is the second of two “in whom” statements. The phrase refers to Christ, identified by name as the chief cornerstone in verse 20. Having identified Christ as the chief cornerstone and spoken of the great building of the Universal Church, Paul shifts to the local level to specifically identify the Ephesians as part of this great construction process that spans centuries of time. He says to them “You also are included in this.” You are all part of this that God is carrying out. You (plural) are being built together, joined together in an appropriate way, collectively shaped and cared for by the Holy Spirit and God resides among you.

So there is the large building, the universal church. There is within that building little ones, rooms if you will, in which God resides and carries out His work in respective communities. These local works are cared for and shaped by Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The phrase “in the Spirit,” is in the original without the definite article, “in spirit.” This could still mean the writer wishes to convey “the Holy Spirit,” or it could be that he wishes to emphasize not identity but qualify here, and is stressing that God is in us in spirit, in which case it is the person of the Holy Spirit who makes this a reality. Hence the translators here opted to use “the spirit” in the NASB, a reasonable choice.

Ephesians 3

3:1 “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles - “

Paul begins to express his prayer and hope for the Ephesians, but is interrupted by a different thought. He proceeds to take off on it for 13 verses. The thought is that his life's work is for the sake of the Gentiles.

Paul makes certain to state immediately that he is a prisoner of Christ Jesus. He is not a prisoner of the Jews. He is not a prisoner of the Romans. This in spite of the fact that he is in a Roman prison chained to a Roman guard by the edict of the Roman government due to the accusations of the Jews. This is a great testimony to Paul's belief in the sovereignty of God.

Paul's perspective here is a great testimony and example. When living for Christ there should be a certain peace and comfort we arrive at with regard to the circumstances that come our way. Ultimately we are so in Christ's care that we can have this confidence and outlook that what happens to us is ultimately a result of His orders. We are his servants dispatched to the places and circumstances where His work needs us. We are where we are because He has needed is there.

In Paul's case, all his circumstances were for the sake of the Gentiles. They are his special calling. He is serving their spiritual welfare in His imprisonment. This is true in several ways. It is he who has articulated in writing their right to be considered children of God on the basis of faith alone. It is he who has staunchly defended that right. It is he that has born the brunt of the Jewish reaction to that idea. He has been abused repeatedly for the sake of the Gentiles. Their conversion and inclusion is that important to God. Paul will take the next 12 verses to explain this calling of his to the gentiles and by that their calling into the family of God.

3:2 “If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you.”

The Ephesians would understand Paul's statement in verse one, that his life's purpose and calling is for the benefit of the gentile church, if they were aware of the specific nature of the work entrusted to Paul by God. This is a profound statement. What Paul was expressing here was apparently well recognized by the early church since he alludes to the fact that the Ephesian Church may have heard about this. It was the well-known line, or scoop on Paul and it was true. To understand this is to understand Paul and to understand much about the New Testament. His was a work of God's grace for Gentile believers of whom the Ephesians were a part. It was for their benefit.

What is observed is that Paul viewed his calling and life's work as a stewardship of God's grace. The word translated “stewardship” is οἰκοναμῶν a word which can be translated as the NASB has, “stewardship,” or by the word “administration” or by the word “dispensation.” It is a word that is used to express the way in which a household is administered, much the same as we refer to our president's term of office as an “administration.” It includes policies and the method of carrying them out. οἰκοναμῶν comes from two words, οἶκος, meaning home, dwelling or household and νόμος, meaning law. House law, or the law of the household are in mind in terms of the etymology of the word. It recalls the practice of entrusting a capable servant with the task of overseeing the affairs of one's household, from the provision for daily needs to

the management of financial matters. That servant or steward's work was to achieve the overall objective, mission and purpose of the head of the house within the boundaries of the laws, rules, and values he had set down. The word conveys that sacred trust or responsibility charged to someone for which they will be held accountable. Logically, though not in the meaning of the word itself, the word implies a time frame of some sort.

Such ideas all perfectly convey Paul's view of his role in the household of God, to establish the give and take principles under which relationships were conducted between people and their God, and under God, between people, for the present period of time. Taken overall then, this verse is saying that God, for the sake of the welfare of the Gentiles, had entrusted Paul with a mission, namely that of revealing and establishing His order by which His gracious work among all the people groups of the world was to be carried out during the period of time that would elapse before Christ returned to earth.

3:3 "That by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief."

In this verse we begin to move into specifics of what the Ephesians may have heard about Paul, a body of knowledge that was increasingly associated with him. We find that what he is becoming known for is having been the recipient of a revelation, an unveiling by God of what had previously been a mystery.

A mystery is something that is not understood. It is to a certain degree known or observed, but it is unknown in terms of things like its origin, its inner workings, its order, and its principles. In the case of a crime, it might be known that a crime has been committed. But as long as the crime remains unsolved, it is a mystery. That the gentiles would be blessed by the Jews was known through the Old Testament. How that would come about and the extent of it was revealed with precise detail to Paul and through his writings to the Gentiles and the Church.

Paul had apparently written briefly to the Ephesians about this revelation in a previous letter which we do not have, but which they apparently had received. When Paul says "briefly," we must remember that the usage of that word does not mean that he didn't say much (See I Peter 5:12).

3:4 "And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ."

It is possible that by "this," Paul is referring to that which he is presently writing. It seems more likely that he is speaking of what he had previously written to the Ephesians. Through that letter, they could come to understand better his message about Christ and how that message came to be entrusted to him.

Paul refers here to the "mystery of Christ." Paul, and more importantly the Holy Spirit, regards the truth of Christ to be a mystery until Paul, as the following verses will indicate.

A mystery is such not because nothing is said of it, but because it is not fully understood. Important pieces are missing though some facts are known. This is the nature of a mystery. Very often the effect or the outcome is very visible though the cause and the process is unknown. As the following verses will show, in this case much remained unknown even about the outcome or result of what God would do in Christ.

3:5 “which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His Holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.”

It is certain that before Christ’s death, both Jews and Gentiles were saved by Him. That seems very certain from the statements of Scripture. It is quite another matter to say that they knew Christ or even that they placed their faith in Him in the sense of our use of those terms. Here Paul states that the mystery of Christ had not been made known to the degree it is presently known until Paul’s time. This must be understood along with Jesus’ own statement that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, saw it, and was glad (John 8:56). It is not necessary to say on the basis of these statements by Paul, that the OT saints knew nothing of Christ, nor is it accurate to say, in lieu of these statements, that they had the knowledge of Christ that we would describe as “saving knowledge.”

3:6 “to be specific (added in NASB) that, the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,”

As noted the words “to be specific” are added by the translators and are a good addition. In this verse Paul is focusing very sharply and precisely on the very essence of what he is describing as a mystery. We find that the mystery is not the person of Christ as some might erroneously conclude. It is not even precise to say it is in the work of Christ, though that is closer to the heart of the matter. Paul puts his finger on the heart of the mystery of Christ and we find that it is in the application of the work of Christ that this great mystery lies.

Three things were a mystery in OT times regarding the Gentiles. First, that they would be fellow heirs with the Jews. They would not simply be eating the leftovers, but seated at the same table. Second that they would be fellow members of the company of God’s children inhabited by the Holy Spirit, energized to represent Yahweh and carry out His mission and work on earth. Third, that they would be fellow partakers of the promise made to Abraham. This would all come about “in Christ,” the term common in this writing to describe one’s spiritual identity and standing. It would happen through the gospel, the story of the truth of Christ’s work and the invitation to believe and embrace it.

So the mystery of Christ is not so much a matter of His existence or His coming work, but in its impact in and application to the entire world, and its power to so profoundly change forever all people’s standing with God. The power of the gospel was the great, unknown, though its effect was promised in general terms to Abraham in God’s words that all nations of the earth would be blessed through him. This statement was the unsolved mystery, explained and understood as the gospel spread.

3:7 “of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.”

The gospel, with its inherent power to change all of those who would believe, was that with which Paul was charged. He was from one standpoint very qualified, as a learned man with command of several languages, knowledgeable of the world’s cultures and customs. But on the other hand, he was an enemy of the gospel and so opposed to the very mission it inherently demanded. In the end, it was God’s power that was brought to bear on Paul so that the gospel would be delivered orally and articulated in written form to the heart of the gentile world. Paul viewed this life he was given to lead us as a gift of God’s grace. He became an illustration of God’s grace and the gospel’s power. As such he would carry it to those who unknowingly waited outside the commonwealth of Israel.

3:8 “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.

Paul viewed himself as the least of all saints, and for good reason from a human point of view. As an apostle he was in pretty heady company. He moved among those men who had been hand-picked by Jesus and who had been his companions in His earthly life. While they faithfully followed Him, Paul made the great human mistake of not only rejecting Christ but aggressively attacking those who followed Him. He was among those who could not see Christ in the Scriptures and who viewed Him as a great imposter.

God could only apprehend Paul by force, and so He did. Paul’s was not a conversion brought about by a subtle wooing, it was violent and demanding yet very gracious. Suddenly he was thrust among the company of those who had “willingly” chosen not only to follow Christ but to suffer for Him. Soon after that he was entrusted with the mission to the Gentiles. He was in this sense the least of them all, and yet grace came calling and it became his privilege to be the agent who delivered to the gentiles the great spiritual wealth made possible by the gospel. Wealth unfathomable, all that belongs to the maker of all things could be theirs through the gospel. It was Paul’s privilege to be the proclaimer of this good news first and then to carry out another important function.

3:9 “and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;”

Paul was God’s instrument not only with respect to the proclamation of the gospel, but with respect to the revelation of the gospel. Specifically, He would be the one who would bring something to light, who would reveal not only the mystery but all the practical implications and applications of that which was now known. He would make known, by God’s direction and bidding, how things between God and man were now being administered.

The word for administration is the same used in verse two and rendered “stewardship.” Through Paul God would set forth the “rules of the house.” The new way of doing things had been hidden for ages. This way of doing things within the family of God is certainly alluded to in the OT. But it is not revealed. It is not hidden because the OT was poorly written. It was hidden because that was God’s plan and Paul’s next statement will reveal the enormity of the secret.

This present age, and God's administration of it, was brought to light by Paul. This was his stewardship. It was prepared in eternity past by the Creator of all things, but kept under wraps. It is amazing that at every turn in articulating it Paul is able to point to OT Scriptures. They themselves were revelation which spoke of Christ, and yet, apart from Paul, the essentials of the times would have remained unknown and not understandable to us. It is plainly there in the OT now that we know it, but it had to be brought to light through Paul.

3:10 "in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."

This verse describes the grand purpose of God which is served by the two chief components of Paul's mission, by his preaching and by his work of revealing. It is a surprising purpose. The end is not simply the salvation of men, though that is important to God. The end is greater than that. Its purpose is to accomplish a work in the heavenlies, among the various powers that be in God's heavenly kingdom. Things are being revealed to them through events on earth.

All that is being revealed to them is unknown, but it could extend to the mystery itself that Paul has spoken of. That mystery may have been such a well-kept secret that not even heaven's insiders knew it all. But the words say that what is being revealed is the many-faceted wisdom of God. Incredibly this is being revealed to these rulers and authorities through Paul's message. So it is possible that they had some knowledge of this age before it came about, but that the multifaceted changes brought about by Christ's work and the gospel message they are learning as events unfold before their eyes.

These are very significant verses to ponder. What we have stated is the bare minimum in terms of what they could be saying, and yet it is hugely significant. We are in essence saying that by God's design very little was known or understood even by the pure and obedient about the age that would follow the work of Christ, and perhaps very little about that work of Christ. It is easy to ask from our vantage point, "why couldn't they see it in the pages of the OT scripture and in the pictures of the OT system of worship?" But to ask that is to ignore these verses and verses like them that indicate that this was not due to ignorance or willfulness on the part of OT saints but was a matter of God's design. These things were hidden. They are all there from our vantage point, but by God's design they were camouflaged so as not to be seen.

Now, why would God do such a thing? At this point we move into speculation. Faith is certainly fostered where sight is limited. But a more significant explanation is probably that these plans needed to be hidden from the evil one in order for the battle plan to be successful. Would the cross have happened, according to the way God wanted it to happen with full Jew and Gentile participation, if the evil one would have known about the age and ages it would lead to? Would he not have fought the cross instead of instigating it?

It appears that the brilliance of God is demonstrated in how He revealed himself and his plan very fully from our perspective as we read the writings of the OT. Yet the work of Christ and the glory to follow were brilliantly concealed so that only when Christ's work was accomplished and explained by the gospel does one see the fullness of the words of the OT.

An important thing needs to be addressed here. What does that say about the plain and obvious meaning of the OT words? What of the talk of kingdoms for Israel and blessing for the Jews? Is the plain meaning to be discarded for the “deeper” meaning that our understanding of Christ brings to light? Is the plain language of the promises “code” that means something other than what it says?

It is the testimony of the NT that the promises of the OT are secure, that the gentiles are co-heirs of them, that the promises will be experienced by all who are of the faith of Abraham. It is also the testimony of the NT, that God has something yet for the ethnic Jew, that at the return of Christ all Israel who are alive at that time will be saved and accept Him as their Messiah, and that He will restore the Kingdom to Israel, though it will be shared by all of faith (Romans 11:25-32).

It is also plain that to speak arrogantly of those who expected an earthly kingdom from Christ at His first coming is probably amiss. Because the mission and the result of it were hidden, and are still being learned even by the authorities in heaven we should not assume that if the leaders of Jesus day would have had “spiritual eyes” they would have not been concerned with an earthly kingdom. Now for sure, such aspirations had been fed and polluted by fleshly desires so that their cravings were earthly and devilish. But the fact is that the plain straightforward message of revelation created that expectation which God, because He is not a deceiver will meet. Veiled apart from the NT was the understanding that another age, the times of the gentile, would occur before the kingdoms of man would become the kingdom of God.

Thus, to speak of the church as existing in the OT is probably not well advised or precise. It is understandable, in that God’s body of redeemed people from all times are in the same family. But the church was a distinctively new work which God brought about, with strikingly new features that the OT saints did not experience. In one sense it is harmless and maybe even helpful to call the elect of all ages the church. But it is more precise in view of the thought of Ephesians to sustain the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the church. The NT church, composed of Jew and gentile, is a new facet to the earthly work, a result of His “manifold or multi-faceted wisdom, unknown even to the commanders of the heavenly host, until they heard it through the words of Paul.

The age we live in is the best-kept secret of all time! We need to understand it in that way.

3:11 “This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The work of God among the Gentiles, the fact that it was a well-kept secret, the fact that Paul was brought onto the scene for the purpose of revealing and proclaiming it, the present administration of God’s grace as it is carried out through the Church, all of this is according to a plan and a purpose established in eternity past and aimed at eternity future. All of it God brought about through Jesus Christ. It was established by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. His work would accomplish God’s purpose and would establish all the things Paul has been speaking of in the letter. All have come about since Christ’s work was finished. They are the immediate result of the present administration of God’s grace.

3:12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

“Boldness and confident access” are key things that are noticeably different between Old Testament saints and New. They were to a Jew, and to one who as a Pharisee had been a custodian of the old, a huge and momentous change. In OT times we know that access to God was still by faith. We also know that sin in that time had not been atoned for, and God’s mercy and love had not been as fully demonstrated. So though there was certainly access through faith it was not the confident access that Christ’s death allows. Christ’s death we know is efficacious, meaning legally effective. It deals completely with our guilt and so we are bold enough to come into God’s presence. Christ’s death is also a demonstration to us of God’s love and favor toward us. We have a new confidence that He desires a relationship with us. There is a new confidence to come into his presence knowing that in Christ He has summoned us to come to Him. It is all so different from how men understood God before Christ.

3:13 “Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are for your glory.”

Selflessness is redefined by Paul’s attitude here. Not only is he willing to endure tribulation for Christ’s sake, but like Christ, he is willing to endure it for God’s people. And not only is he willing to endure, but in the midst of it, it is them he is concerned about. He does not want them to in any way be discouraged by what Paul has to go through. It is all for them, but it is God’s great plan and Paul’s privilege, and it all serves the purposes of God. His work is by this moving forward, so Paul does not want them to grow weary but to persist in their efforts.

3:14 “For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father.”

With this Paul returns to his thought in verse one from which he took a break in order to expound on the reason for his prayers to God. He has explained to the readers that they and the rest of the Gentiles and the house of God they are becoming were the reasons for his prayers.

3:15 “From whom every family in heaven and on earth desires to name,”

Paul is using the term “family” here to describe people groups of the world, and there are many. Their name is derived from the one who ultimately is the Father of them all, God. We must remember that a name to God describes someone’s uniqueness, their place in the plan of God, perhaps even their position and function. We see this in all of the names that Yahweh bestowed. All the people groups of the world derive their uniqueness and certainly their existence from the one who determined their existence, God the Father.

3:16 “That he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”

For these who were in danger of losing heart at Paul’s tribulation, he prays that they will be divinely strengthened. The measure of strength he prays for in them is not according to any mere human standard of measurement. He prays that strength might be measured out to them “according to the riches of His glory.” It is the inner man Paul is concerned with because it is the inner being that has the power to sustain one

through physical trial. He desires for God to pour into them from the riches of His own omnipotent and omniscient being, through the Holy Spirit, the very energy of Himself, He who never grows weary and who never sleeps. It is something which God grants.

I take it that it is in response to faith and a response to our asking that this happens. It shows there are greater works of the Holy Spirit that we should seek, not mere outward experiences of phenomenon that our sensual being might crave, but those profound moments when His power flows to our inner being and we gather strength beyond our own to press ahead in His work.

3:17 “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,”

The Ephesians were in Christ. It was a secure position to be in and guaranteed their eternal life and standing with God. Paul’s prayer transitions them into the reality of the everyday where the challenge is to abide in Christ and thus have Him at any and every moment abiding in, or dwelling in you. It is not that they are in danger of losing the Holy Spirit, who lived in them. Paul was praying here for the moment-by-moment communion that comes with intimacy with Christ. The condition laid down for this to come about is the previous request that they would be strengthened through God’s Spirit in the inner man. Losing the Spirit was not the issue, not being strengthened sufficiently was. That strengthening would result in this, a deeper inner consciousness of Christ’s presence as opposed to losing heart (vs. 13).

There is something more that Paul requests on behalf of the Ephesians. Before he names it he wants to clearly state what is the foundation, stability and strength of a healthy faith. They have been rooted and grounded in love. It is the love of God that drew them to faith, the love of Paul that brought them the Gospel, and love for one another that helped them experience the faith and grow in it. Love was responsible for all that had transpired between themselves and God.

3:18 “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,”

From the viewpoint afforded by their having been rooted and grounded in love, Paul prays for the reader’s comprehension. It is easy to be in the middle of something and not comprehend its true dimension. In the midst of something one can alternately think it is bigger than what it is, or smaller than what it is. Either brings its own difficulties, Perspective, being able to comprehend in a realistic way the true significance of something, will change dramatically how one proceeds. The prayer for comprehension is a prayer for the perspective that the Holy Spirit can lead us into.

3:19 “and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

Having begun this thought with the fact that we are rooted and grounded in love, and having spoken of our need for a greater comprehension of something, Paul travels the full circle as he reveals that thing he wishes us to comprehend more fully—the love of Christ. Just as the love of Christ is that which roots us and grounds us in the faith, so it is that which as it is fully comprehended, draws us along to maturity. Paul is asking that we might know what surpasses knowledge.

As an ant living in a colony under a tree in the midst of a forest, cannot possibly gain perspective on his world and the world, so apart from God we cannot gain perspective on His love though living in the midst of it. It is a view that is beyond human capability, and a comprehension of things otherworldly. Yet it is possible to gain such perspective in the course of our walk with God through the Holy Spirit.

It is in comprehending the love of Christ that it becomes possible to be filled up to all the fullness of God. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. Heaven's storehouses are opened to us but we will only go to the cupboard as we understand the will of the owner, that we should come. We will only learn what tools and treasures are in it, and what tasks they relate to, by the experience of going. Knowing that His love is somehow the answer to every life situation and coming to the cupboard for the exact resource we need is that which changes a life. It is in living life this way that we will find ourselves filled up to all the fullness of God, that is, actually living life not just by the standard of our spiritual poverty but living it full of all the resources of God. There is fullness of what we call "Christian experience" that is found by us as we comprehend and respond to the love of God for us.

3:20 "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,"

As Paul expresses the thought of verse 20-21 it is almost as if he intends to close the letter. It seems more likely that in stating his calling and in a sense his personal story, he is simply overwhelmed with this worshipful thought and so expresses it in the midst of his letter to the Ephesians.

In this statement we have been given one of the most uplifting, encouraging, and profound thoughts we have on God. It speaks to His power—what He is capable of doing. It also speaks to His transcendence, that He deals in transactions that lie beyond our thought. Yet it also speaks to His immanency in that it implies that He is not only able to do these things, but that He does in fact do them as a matter of normal routine, with our welfare in mind. There is the ability and the inclination in God to do these things for us. Both are clear in that we experience and feel His power working within us, both individually and collectively. Paul had experienced the work of God in his personal life to such an extent that he had accomplished works and impact that lay beyond his wildest vision for his life. He knew that the explanation lay not in his own well conceived strategies and plans but in the power of God.

3:21 "to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

So be it! Paul's life had started with the desire to build his own reputation. And so that was what consumed him until his appointment with Christ on the road to Damascus. That event changed everything. In the glory of that and subsequent visions he saw the real significance of a life's work. That knowledge, specifically that God's plan would work to His glory and therefore our significance and welfare is bound up in that plan, gave Paul a new set of values. His ambition became to establish the glory of God, even as God was seeking to do. Thus it is that his own "Amen!" be added to the desire and plan of God.

Paul's life and mission have been revealed in the chapter and no greater summary of his journey could be given than Paul's own "Amen" to the great purpose of God that His glory would fill all in all. This declaration is great because it came from a person who started his journey with the intent of exalting himself.

Ephesians 4

4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

In this verse Paul summarizes the challenge of the Christian life. The call is not the hard part. Our response is. The call begins with faith but then persists, summoning one to a life of greater faith.

Paul gives away his own great progress in the faith when he calls himself “the prisoner of the Lord.” He is in the custody of Rome, on the basis of false charges made by the Jews, and because of a string of decisions by tribunals that lacked the courage to do what was just. But Paul had come to know that no empire was strong enough and no evil powerful enough to bind that which God wishes to be free. And so if he found himself in prison it was because this was the will of his Master. That was good enough for him.

The emotion of Paul in the matter of the Ephesians’ progress in the faith is revealed in his use of the word entreat. What follows is no mere suggestion. It is the plea of one who has seen the glory of the other side and longs for those he loves to lay hold of it. Even if it leads to prison, the way of Christ is a glorious path to be on and even if it makes one for a time a slave to the whims of tyrants, it releases one within. And so Paul implores the readers to walk the path, to live the life to which they have been called.

It is to a manner of living they are being called to. It is not simply to a creed or a certain system of ritual. That is the uniqueness of Christianity. Christ called us to a manner of “walking.” Repeatedly the metaphor of walking is used in Scripture. The life of faith can be understood as walking in a moral, just direction, at a pace, with determination. It is with steps that are moving in the direction of a call, unimpaired by the countless other voices that beckon. The steps are noble because the calling is a summons by One who is a unique person, as Paul had just explained. It comes from the pure, righteous and Holy One and is for the grandest of causes—the glory of the Creator. It affects everything with which one can be occupied. It is a personal life-mission.

It is this walk that is the Christian life. On the one hand it is profound and simple, able to be summarized with such a simple sentence as this. On the other hand it is wholly unattainable, an absurd request to try to live up to by all normal human reasoning. But in the calling itself is the power for the steps of the journey.

4:2 “with all humility and gentleness, with patience showing forbearance to one another in love,”

With these thoughts Paul begins to delineate steps in a worthy walk. It is through a life conducted in humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love that one shows themselves worthy of God’s calling. Our worthiness is not demonstrated in work contributed or tasks completed unless they are carried out with a certain spirit. Later in the context Paul will get into ministry. But it is critical to begin here because godly work flows out of who we are. There must be in us these “soft” things the right spirit if the more tangible deeds are to make the statement God wishes to make through them. Our relationships, specifically how we conduct and maintain them, make for

impact and we must learn how to give ground before we can conquer or occupy strategic ground.

4:3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

The Spirit who is at work within every member of the body of Christ, is prodding, leading and in other ways shaping us individually so as to corporately accomplish a great plan. It is a plan that comprehensively covers every circumstance. That plan is the unity, or oneness toward which this and other Scripture speaks. Where individuals work together according to the single leading of the Spirit, this unity is unbroken and perfect execution occurs. Where various ones begin to follow the leadings of their own flesh, they fall out of the ranks and there begins to be among the ranks movement in conflicting directions.

We do not have to create unity. The Spirit does that. We simply have to preserve what He is doing and we do that through care in listening to and following His leading. The determination to maintain peace among us, to do that which will make sense in terms of the legitimate concerns of others, is the value we must all hold onto. It is the glue that will bind adverse temperaments and agendas together. It is the practical stuff that makes the grand vision of unity attainable.

Paul asks that we be diligent in this matter. Jesus knew the significance of this. It is the final proof to the world that Christ came from God (Jn 17:23). Being a peacemaker is the essence of the worthy walk. None of this is to say Paul is calling us to a peace-at-all-costs mentality. He is calling us to search for and heed the single leading of the Holy Spirit.

4:4 “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.”

Having called for diligence in preserving the unity of the Spirit, Paul launches into a series of “ones.” It is a way of strengthening his command to unite. He wants to show that a failure to preserve unity is really a failure to submit at some level to the prompting of the Lord.

In this string of “ones” Paul will never say “one head.” That will not be mentioned until verse 15. Yet the whole emphasis in the immediate context implies that. There is only one body, not numerous. To be part of Christ is to move with Him. There is a harmony of movement among diverse outlooks and concerns, because it is all coordinated-by-the-Spirit-movement. When His leading is heeded, it ultimately produces a single purpose. If I am not contributing to the movement of the body in this sense, I have ceased to function as a member of it.

It is possible for a person to cease functioning with respect to the body. It is possible for whole churches to cease functioning with respect to the body. The ultimate question that must be asked when such conditions are perceived to exist is the one I must ask of myself. Am I striving toward the purposes of God or have I gotten side-tracked, caught up in that which is not His heart?

There are other lesser but significant questions. Does my niche in the plan of God harmonize with the niche of this particular local church in the plan of God? It is best not to pontificate on whether a particular local church has a niche in the plan of God. It is easy to reach the conclusion they do not, but humility dictates that they likely do, or

they would cease to exist. The issue is usually to determine if your niche and their niche are compatible. There is one body, but there are many cells within it.

No local church is the body of Christ. Statements to that effect are often innocently made within a local church. But it is shortsighted to do so and will only result in later having to build a kingdom-mindedness. There is one body, of which every individual and local assembly is a small part.

Paul says that our common hope to which we were called, which is none other than Christ and all that is His, is further proof of our oneness. All Christians in all places from all times are united by this one experience; they were all called by God to the hope that is in Christ. They were attracted to the simple truth of the gospel message, from which point they are made one by the Holy Spirit.

4:5 “one Lord, one Faith, one baptism.”

Paul continues his exhortation to preserve unity by continuing his string of “ones.” Each of these three are very profound and, have been grounds for great debate within the body of Christ over the years. But the fact remains that there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, and we all believe that. People may seek to take His spot and may be able to do so momentarily, but none has led the church in the end except THE One, Christ Jesus. There are those who have so distorted Christ that they have made a fictitious character their head yet no such head exists and there is really only one Lord.

There is one faith. There are distortions, counterfeits, close replicas, but only one faith in the mind of God. We can be certain that when unity is threatened by the desire of some to teach a different doctrine that contradicts the message of Scripture, that it is not the result of the Holy Spirit’s leading, but of some other spirit.

There is one baptism. Here, Paul is not primarily speaking of method of water baptism as much as he is referring to that baptism which water baptism symbolizes, the baptism of the Holy Spirit (the unity of the Holy Spirit is the subject here). He is referring to that special work of the Spirit that forever seals us and confirms us as part of the body of Christ.

It is on the one hand very unfortunate that there has been such division within the body of Christ on these three subjects. Yet it is also true that since there are those movements outside the body of Christ, as most would readily agree, it would be only logical that they would have conflicting views on these issues. It would also make sense that if these are the hallowed ground of our heritage that our enemy would seek to move us off them and blur their boundaries. But the fact is there is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. Paul makes no statement that indicates that we fully understand all aspects of these, only that they are in fact singular.

4:6 “one God and Father of all, who is overall and through all, and in all.”

The ultimate factor that dictates our diligence in preserving unity is that we worship one God who is the Father (and this title is speaking of His inherent headship not as a progenitor in the sense we normally understand it), of all. We are not following multiple gods, the chief characteristic of the Greek world the Ephesians lived in. There are not multiple agendas and multiple heads who are big enough only to occupy themselves with one concern, i.e., love or war or weather. That is a humanistic concept of God—a committee or board of directors with a chairman. It is to varying degrees common in all man-made religions.

We have one God of such grand dimensions that He is transcendent, that is, He surpasses our ability to comprehend so great is His character, His power, knowledge, wisdom, and so on. Because this is His nature and His essence He is over all, meaning He has supreme authority and control. There is nothing that exists outside the limit of His authority and control. So His sovereignty extends to all things and there is no limit to His domain. He is transcendent.

God is also immanent, that is, He is in His creation in the sense of being personally present and involved in its detail, in orchestrating events and in the case of earth, relating Himself to people. He is not a God who has become disinterested, disillusioned, or disenfranchised. He has not gotten mad and quit. He is working through all that is in its present state just as He has in the past and will in the future.

God's immanence and transcendence meet and have great meaning in His working and revealing Himself through all. His transcendence enables Him to work through all things and His immanence makes Him willing to do so. So He does and because He does we must seek what He is doing. We will find it collectively. For this reason, above all others, we must be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

4:7 “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

From speaking of the commonality of our experience in Christ, Paul begins to speak about the individuality of that experience of grace. These words, introduced by the conjunction “but” that marks the change in focus, begin to address the idea that each one of us uniquely contributes to the community life and mission of the Church. Our experience is common, yet it is individual and that is the genius of the church.

We are told here that grace was given to us. Grace was certainly extended to us in our salutation, and it is certainly extended to us directly in the matter of living the life to which we are called. But Paul is speaking of something else here. It is described by him as “the grace that is according to the *measure* of the gift of Christ.”

The term “measure” occurs three times in this context, in verses seven, thirteen and sixteen. It is the English rendering of the Greek word *metros*. That term refers to an allotted portion of something that is measured out for someone. It is used by Paul not to emphasize a limitation of some sort. Instead it is used to emphasize that it is the privilege of all believers.

Here the thing being measured out is grace. Grace is the favor of God. It includes all He has done to justly forgive us. All He has done to guide us to the truth about Him. And to all this is added here all Jesus has accomplished to empower us to become other than who we instinctively are. So it includes powers of intellect and decision, moral powers over strong temptation toward evil, all made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit. But this grace and the presence in us of the Spirit also includes an individualized power in ministry and special ability to impact the spiritual journey of others.

Grace is measured out for such impact to each person. There is no human being that has not experienced grace in some way from God. Here however, Paul is speaking of “us,” that is, those who have believed as he himself and the Ephesians had. So there is no believer that is left out of this giving of grace. We have all passed through the line and received this that Paul calls “grace.”

This grace is said to be measured out “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” There are several things this phrase, “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” is communicating. First, it is a way of expressing the vast quantity of grace given to each of us. We are told for instance, that He gives the Spirit “without measure” (John 3:34). So it is a very generous helping of grace measured out to us, as He has already done in the cross. Second, this is a way of expressing the free nature of His measuring out of grace to us. Grace is not given based on our ability to pay. It is done freely at no cost to us. Third, it is a way of expressing that we are graciously given capacities useful for strengthening people in their ability to trust God as a way of life. These are Christ-like qualities that are ours through the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. Through listening together to the Spirit’s single leading, we do the very things Christ did, and according to Him, even greater things than those He did (John 14:12).

Paul is introducing to us the idea that God has equipped each of us to equip others in the faith. We each contribute to the overall mission by carrying out the specific work dictated by individual capacities given to us graciously. We each have a giftedness that contributes to the spiritual health of others. Christ the Creator has given us the thinking process, talent, personality and other specific abilities that make up our individual giftedness. As such we become as individuals gifts to Christ’s community.

We can sum up all this that Paul is teaching this way; when Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the Church He graciously gave to each individual in it the growing capacity to carry out their individual giftedness for the corporate good. As such we have become Jesus’ partners in His great work of gathering a people. We can see that through this we have been invited into Adam’s original role of ruling the world with our Creator.

Taken with the previous verses and looking ahead to what follows, we are being told to diligently preserve the unity inherent in the one voice that orchestrates this kind of church life, the voice of the Holy Spirit. As we listen, we enter into a miracle that makes the Church a powerful, relevant, living organism. If we do not listen, the Church becomes just another human organization. We must listen to His voice as we individually contribute something to the life of that organism through the special enablement of God. He will lead all who listen in the what and how of the work of ministry. We do this through the grace measured out to each one of us. This is the special divine favor that energizes our giftedness in a spiritual as opposed to a fleshly way.

4:8 “Therefore it says ‘when He ascended on high He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’”

Paul quotes an Old Testament verse (Psalm 68:18) from the Septuagint. He makes one subtle change. He does this to make his point that grace has been given to us in the form of a strengthening and anointing by God’s own Spirit. That work of grace allows us to use our unique personality and giftedness for the good of God’s community.

The Psalm Paul quotes is speaking of God being present and enthroned in Zion in holiness. In the imagery of that day, God is presented as having come off a big victory and reaping the spoils of that victory. He has ascended on high, taken the exalted position on the throne. He has led captive for his good pleasure a number who had opposed Him. The next phrase is where it gets somewhat tricky. It is rendered by the LXX, “Thou hast received gifts among man.” This would be consistent with the normal imagery of one who is victorious receiving gifts from those conquered.

Paul, however, words it differently by saying “He gave gifts to man.” One finds in the Hebrew sufficient latitude to render the verse “thou hast received gifts in (or with) men” rather than “from men” as the LXX renders it. Therefore we see grammatical justification for the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of Paul’s interpretation of the text of Psalm 68:18.

Though not consistent with the human imagery of the aftermath of victory in the ancient world, where the conqueror received gifts from the subdued, that may just be the point that God is trying to make. He is different in victory, the giver of grace instead of being one who takes spoil in victory. He acts for the strengthening of His subjects. Most earthly subjects would act to keep them weak and vulnerable. God eternally seeks our good. He has eternally determined He would share His rule over creation with us. And He does so from the moment we believe.

So Paul’s point is that because God is thus different, gracious in His rule over His own we can trust Him. We should rightly feel compelled to live in His grace. We CAN live worthy of His calling. Where God could have taken from humanity, He has given to them. We must so give to each other of all He has graced us with.

The great victory won at the cross was brought about by God’s giving. In the aftermath of the cross, which Paul will speak of next, Jesus formed His body on earth by the giving of the Holy Spirit. His giving grace continued. The Holy Spirit is so set in and among us, that each one of us plays some essential role in the overall welfare among the people of Christ. That is all made possible because of the gift given by God, namely Christ, by His gift of the Holy Spirit and by the gifts the Spirit energizes in each one of us each day of our lives. Paul develops this idea of gifts given “in” or “with” men in verses ahead and in other writings. It is a key idea in our understanding of the Church.

4:9 “Now this expression, ‘He ascended; what does it mean except that He also descended into the lower part of the earth?’”

Paul continues his explanation of Psalm 68:18. He makes the point that one can only ascend if they are in a position from which they can go up. Jesus could not ascend to the throne, since He had always occupied it, unless He first left it, descending.

By the lower part of the earth, Paul could be speaking simply of His incarnation, the kenosis (emptying) of Philippians 2. That would be consistent with the Jewish view of the heavens as consisting of three levels. There was the immediate atmosphere of the earth where the birds flew. The next level up by their view, was the abode of Satan and evil angels. Above all there was the abode of God. More likely however the phrase “the lower part of the earth,” is referring to His death, His burial, and His journey into Hades as can be interpreted from Peter’s words (I Peter 3:18-20).

If Peter’s words are so interpreted, this is an action by Christ that we know little about and about which there has been much conjecture. It seems reasonable to interpret Peter’s words in this way. Christ in spirit proclaimed His work on the cross in the temporary abode of the dead. His proclamation was heard by the wicked dead in one part of Hades, and by the OT saints who had died and were in paradise, in the other portion of Hades. The latter were thus set free to enjoy Christ’s presence while awaiting the final resurrection. The wicked dead simply heard affirmed the horrible news that they had refused to accept and believe, that evil would be judged.

The righteous dead of the OT era are thus “in Christ” even as NT saints are. These had all died in faith without seeing Christ. Since one can stand in God’s presence only through faith in Christ they awaited His day in this paradise. At Christ’s death they heard the good news of the gospel delivered by Him, at which time their faith could be placed in His sacrifice, their forgiveness completed and their place in the presence of God more fully taken. Thus those who were held captive by death were taken captive by Christ and led into the presence of God to await the resurrection of their bodies.

After this appearance in Hades, what was the normal experience of death before the cross, Christ proceeded to give all that was associated with the new ministry of the Holy Spirit to those who remained on earth. I believe these are the various transactions Paul is speaking of here and that they are all thus tied together.

4:10 “He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.”

No one has stooped lower than Christ. No one has on the other hand demonstrated greater power nor have they been exalted as high as Christ. He demonstrated great power in overcoming death, marching out of Hades with the righteous dead, freeing them from the vestiges of death. And then in great authority He ascended to the right hand of God, the proof of which is our daily experience of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:29-32).

This all happened so that He “might fill all things.” Several things can be said of this expression filling all things. It is a recurring idea so far in this letter of Paul (1:23, 3:19). It points to God’s immanence and transcendence. He is both the Creator of all things and the end which all things serve. He is that which is their beginning and that which gives them meaning. The world began by His word and it will fulfill His word. He has given life its uncertainties and assigned it its deepest meaning. Every dimension of everything He understands, shapes and maintains. Yet in the end it will fail to explain Him, for nothing contains Him, and no sum of things contain Him. From a small child to an adult, from the Church to the world and beyond into the vastness of the universe, He fills it all. We see His signature in the atom even as we see it in the far-flung reaches of outer space. From the telescope to the microscope, He is the one to whom it all points and for whom it all exists.

4:11 “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

This is a critical passage to understand in terms of ecclesiology—what we believe about the Church. The Church first and foremost is an organism in which the Holy Spirit uses the diversity of people functioning according to His leading to move us together toward maturity in Christ. It teaches the amazing truth that the Spirit does His work in fallen people through fallen people! People grow up in their faith as they are ministered to by a variety of individuals using a variety of skills and gifts. Christ is daily giving gifts “in” or “with” people to His family. These gifted people are God’s ongoing gift to His family, the Church.

In this passage Paul gives examples of spiritually gifted people through whom the Holy Spirit has manifested His presence in the Church from its earliest days. The functions these people had were the very things seen in Jesus. Jesus has now displayed such gifts and ministries in each person who is part of His new creation. In

fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that Jesus' new creation is a community of spiritually gifted people like Himself, being used by His Spirit to bring transformation to each other.

This work of God, what He calls "ministry," is not taken up as one might take up a hobby or athletic activity. Each person's ministry is a product of how their entire being is designed and of how that design is energized by the Holy Spirit in a ministry God marks them out for and burdens them for. No individual is optimally designed for any ministry they may wish to take up, though they may be thrust into service due to a critical need and be strengthened to do it well. But there is that which they are generally charged with and given to do repeatedly in the plan of God no matter where they are located. Their ministry becomes something the Holy Spirit uses to advance the plans and purposes of God in the lives of others.

We are presented here with some examples given by Paul of people who by virtue of their giftedness, their designated ministry and unique working of God in them (1 Corinthians 12:4-6) served vital functions with regard to growing Yahweh's people. These should be understood as ministries, not spiritual gifts. They would have been observed by those in Ephesus. These are not the only examples. But they would serve as clear examples to the readers then and now.

The fact is that all believers are so gifted and empowered for ministry. Their roles are diverse. But it is certain that each person has a role. Again, we should not understand these as a list of spiritual gifts. It is a list of ministries and functions people served that their spiritual gifts enabled them to do in a way that resulted in transformation.

Some people had been gifted and energized so as to minister as apostles—entrepreneurial leaders whose faith and discernment, decisiveness, courage and personal knowledge of Jesus enabled them to be the cutting edge leaders of the movement. They were those who understood the times and the long range mission and challenge of the Church. They who were able to tell the church what it needed to do so as to be in the center of God's will and to do so in such a way that their counsel has proven timeless.

God also continued to gift individuals to the world that ministered as prophets, those who speak the mind of God for the moment. These are able to see situations for what they are and able to project what a course of action will lead to. They are concerned with what is right not primarily with what works or what is expedient. They are compelling, articulate and strong, and are sure to cause reaction.

Some are gifted and energized so as to minister as evangelists. They are those who are used to push back social, cultural, even physical barriers to announce and teach the good news of the gospel. Through them people are introduced to the first steps of the faith and so begin their journey. Evangelists are often extroverted, relationally driven people with a bright outlook, who are trusting and who focus on the opportunity not the obstacles. They have the spiritual gift of what Paul elsewhere called teaching or perhaps the gift of encouraging (Romans 12:1-8).

God has gifted and energized others so as to minister as pastors and teachers, people who provide care, who are concerned with the welfare of others. Their focus becomes helping people of the church to think right so as to behave right over the long haul. They are shepherds whose desire is to draw the flock in for care, to provide those things that make for a healthy and ultimately profitable flock. By gifting they can be teachers, encouragers, leaders, mercy-showers, or prophets.

These are obviously not the only ministries that God needs gifted people to do in His Church. There are others highlighted in other places (See Romans 12:1-8). Here Paul give these examples of some of the most visible ones, the most recognizable to the recipients of the letter and perhaps the most characteristic among the leaders of the church in Ephesus or even the church universal of the day. Such persons exemplify the idea of diverse ministries enabled by spiritual gifts, apptitudes woven into every person. These, when understood and exercised according to the leading of the Spirit, allow them to serve in different ministries that equip the members of the body of Christ. The next verse will affirm this.

4:11 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the Body of Christ.

Literally this verse could be rendered in this way: “for the equipping of the saints for the purpose of work of ministry, resulting in the building up the body of Christ.” This is a very key verse in terms of understanding the ministry as God has designed it. It is essential to building a philosophy of ministry in a particular local church. We see in this expression that the rank and file of God’s people are active in the ministry. It is not something they watch being done. They do it. The work is theirs.

This great work of equipping believers moved forward from day one of the age of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling. The most obvious players in this process, though not the only ones, were the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor/teachers that were very visible in early church life. But many other ministries came about. They were made possible by the spiritual gifts that God wove into the fabric of each believers being.

The great purpose of the Holy Spirit’s leading in every person is that of equipping. The word *katartismo*, rendered “equipping,” expresses the idea of bringing something to perfection or completion. Our colloquial expression “dialed in” captures its meaning well. It is the fine tuning that the Holy Spirit does in us through each other that sharpens our character and imparts the wisdom and skill of experience. This same idea is expressed by several different words, metaphors and the like by the New Testament writers. It was key to their understanding of what was to happen in the hearts of believers. There was to be an ongoing salvation happening in real-life moments within them, so that they were transformed into a people who, like Christ, were more complete image-bearers of God. They would become skilled in detecting and following the Holy Spirit (Heb. 5:11-14), and so in stimulating growth toward spiritual maturity in each other.

What is being taught in this passage is that all the diverse workings of the Spirit through believers, work together so that the church becomes a place where people are having transformational impact in the lives of each other. This IS the work of ministry. People come together exercising their own giftedness, ministry and empowerment (1 Cor. 12:4-6). In doing so they help transform each other. And in being involved in this process they find they are further equipped as well. This process is the key way the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in the church (See 1 Corinthians 12-14 for Paul’s lengthy explanation of the manifestations of the Spirit in the Church).

In this we see the brilliance of the design of the church and its character as a living organism. It was and is the epitome of interactive learning. To be a part of a church that is functioning properly is to have the opportunity to be discipled and truly mentored. It is to be developed and “dialed in” for the ministry and it is you being part of that process in the lives of others at the same time.

To be part of a church is to be part of an organism that is being built up. By that Paul means it is being added to, strengthened, refined, motivated, trained, mobilized and everything else God does in the lives of people. In fact, it is safe to say that whatever God does in people He has designed the church to do. The church is the primary means by which He disciplines people and brings them to maturity.

It is likely that when we look for mentorship or discipleship from a person we will experience a lower grade of it. It may be better than what we otherwise will experience. But it is not ideal. We may even be on dangerous ground if experience teaches anything. We find such mentorship from the body of Christ, a plurality of teachers and mentors. Through these as found in a healthy church we are corporately mentored and disciplined by a large number of individuals and a more collective perspective. So when someone wishes to be mentored the most significant thing they can do if they wish to do it God's way is to get involved in the life of a local church. They will not find all the answers in a single person, but they will find them in the body of believers.

4:13 "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ."

Paul begins to articulate the ends toward which the Spirit is orchestrating the ministry of our diverse giftings and callings. The first of these ends is unity. As faith grows and as knowledge of Christ grows, unity is one of the results. The thought that began this section, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit," is being reinforced here. The diversity we feel and have is designed to produce unity when all is functioning right. If it is not doing so we are going wrong at some point.

A second designed end of church life is maturity. Paul presents maturity as a collective end. We do not arrive at maturity individually in Paul's mind. We mature and grow up and come of age together. This is no pseudo-maturity, an outward conformity so as to make a favorable impression. Maturity in Christ can be faked for a time. This that Paul advocates is the real thing, the spiritual stature that compares favorably to the very fullness of Christ. It is not that which minimizes Christ's fullness of character, but that which measures up to the lofty example He has set for us.

The Church, lived out as God designed it, works. Anything else falls short. Discipleship at the hands of a single "guru" will not produce this, but life within the body of Christ, and the process that happens as the many members exercise their unique giftedness toward one another will produce the fullness of Christ in us.

4:14 "We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming."

A mark of maturity in belief is a theological stability. It is not smug or closed-minded. It is discerning. It contemplates implications rather than jumping on a bandwagon. Maturity is thoughtful rather than impulsive and so it is less vulnerable to the various schemes that come along.

Waves and wind are terms Paul employed which aptly describe what can happen in a local church. Faddishness can mark our teaching and worship. Instability and immaturity can masquerade as responsiveness. The proper relationship to the Holy Spirit will keep a Church on the cutting edge while protecting it from doctrinal dead

ends and hidden personal agendas. Such a church may indeed not be the most stylish or “the first to...” But neither will it waste motion by getting diverted from that which is God’s heart. It will not become the slave of fleshly individuals that would use it to meet their own desired end.

4:15 “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,”

Relating ourselves for the purpose of growth to each other, means we must speak the truth in love. It is the truth that shaped Christ’s life and His words for any moment are found in the truth He affirmed and taught. It is the truth that the Holy Spirit seeks to speak to us from the deepest part of our beings. It is the truth applied that sets us free. It is love that makes such truth acceptable and attractive. As we speak the truth to each other in love we grow up.

It is one thing to speak the truth to someone. It is another matter to have done so in love. It is one thing to love someone; it is another thing to be able to say that you have spoken the truth to them. This short phrase that starts this verse expresses one of the most difficult balancing acts we could ever attempt, the supreme challenge in any and all relationships. And this is not even the main idea in the sentence; it is simply a phrase that describes something we must do along the way in our primary pursuit of growing up in all aspects into Him.

There is no aspect of our life that is to be unlike Christ, nothing is to be held back. Until everything is shaped by the pattern He has left we have not yet finished our course. Our life’s work is not the tasks that our occupational calling lays before us, even if they are faith-related. It is not the achievement of goals related to finance, organization, or even mission. Our life’s work is to grow up in all aspects into Him. It is only fitting to do so since Jesus is the incarnation of the One who is over all, through all and in all (v.6). He is the appointed King and so the owner and master of all that is. He is worthy of this labor of ours, and has called us to it.

It is through our relationship to His church that we will travel toward this impossible standard of transformation. This is what the design of the church allows it to accomplish in the lives of people. If you want to grow up in all aspects into Christ, you must become a part of His church and you will grow not just by virtue of being united to Christ but by being united with other believers. It is through them, and specifically through the work of the Holy Spirit as it is carried out in their diverse giftedness, ministries and empowerments (1 Corinthians 12:4-6) that we will grow. It is important to understand that growth is not something I do, it is something we do. I will not grow simply by seeking to relate myself to God, but by also relating myself rightly to His children. When I do so I will grow and they will grow.

Paul begins to transition to his next thought by stating that in the figure of the body which he is using to illustrate the church, Christ is the head. Paul in himself, with the limited knowledge of the human body that he had in that day, could not have understood the depth of meaning conveyed by this figure in the Holy Spirit’s words as they flowed through him. To be sure he had understanding and the figure had deep meaning to the culture of the day. But it would be a figure that would grow deeper and richer as the years went by.

4:16 “from which the whole body, being filled and held together by that which 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.”

The ancients knew that in some sense the head was the source of life. All that the brain did was a mystery to them. But they knew when the head was cut off life ended! They likely also reasoned that the head governed the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste. They understood the intellect as residing in the heart, the feelings in the kidneys.

Perhaps appropriately, this figure has become more complete to us. We know that the brain governs all reactions and responses, the reasoning, thoughts and decisions, as well as the vital signs and the processes of life. It sustains the life of the whole body and enables each part to perform its specific function. It coordinates all these functions, so that the body then sustains itself. New cells are added when old ones die; the body grows through the years of childhood into that of an adult.

All this means that the figure of Christ being our head is dramatic today. It should stir us in much deeper ways than it does. We should be assured that because He is the head, His body is capable of right function in all its various systems. The body may get sick, but our head never will.

With Christ as head of the church there is that process at work within it that perpetuates itself. It is not that individually we come to Christ and find in Him what we need for growth. It is that we become connected to a process He is sustaining among all who are a part of His Church, one that carries out His work in all. As we are interconnected through Him to each other, His work is done in us through various ones and we grow up together. The Church is God's provision for our growth, His plan for our discipleship. It is the method He has chosen to process people, and like the human body the process is a part of the design.

From a practical standpoint, no local church is the body of Christ. The universal Church is that body, all believers from all times and all places. This is what the term “Catholic Church” means. It is a huge group that we are a part of. However, our experience of this process, like the Ephesians, will come as we are joined to a specific local church, connected relationally with a specific group of people with whom we speak the truth in love.

This verse ends with the words “in love.” Love expressed between Christ and individuals and, flowing from that, love-shaped expressions among people are what makes the growth happen. Love provides the safety necessary to allow truth to be spoken. Truth is essential. But that makes love essential. Without love truth cannot be spoken among fallen humans in a way that is profitable. So without love there is no process of life but a process of decay and distraction. Christ is the source and standard of this love.

There are a couple of other essentials brought out in the verse as well, and it is good to note the overall structure. The main thought is found in shortening the verse to these essential words, “from whom the whole body causes the growth of the body....” “From whom,” refers to Christ. So the person on whom the whole process depends is identified. The power of the church is not love. It is Christ, its head and the source of its love. The other phrases in the verse are important details that give interesting insights into the process that Christ carries out.

The Church is functional by virtue of a meticulous design, a fitting together. That design allows diverse portions to be joined together and for them to supply to each other what will perpetuate the life they share together. So diverse roles are filled and held together through the overall process carried on by Christ. The key is they must function properly, in harmony with the head. When they cease to function properly, others must compensate. This not only means efficiency is lost, but that health has waned. Functioning properly is functioning in love and in submission to the head. The result is always health and growth.

4:17 “This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.”

Because of God’s provision of the Church for our continued growth and our increasing maturity, Paul urges Christians not to continue in their same old rut of ignorance and living by mere instinct. It is not just Paul’s idea. He is only affirming the Lord’s obvious will in the matter.

The Gentiles in general were seen as those with no revelation of truth to guide them. They were guided in their spiritual thinking simply by human ideas and fabrications. Their theology was futile, meaning their religion could do nothing for them in reality, because in reality it was nothing. It was constructed on what they wanted to be true and wished to be true or what they feared was true. It was not based on what was in fact true. The result was it was futile—a house of cards that would deliver nothing. But it was not to be so among those who believed. They were different and they were to live differently. That means we must not believe what we would like to be true nor what we fear might be true. We must believe what God has assured us IS true.

4:18 “being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.”

The gentiles Paul had referred to had been “darkened in their understanding.” The rest of the verse shows that this is more than simply being “out of the loop,” It is not ignorance of the normal sort that is the result of a lack of information. The problem started in their case with “hardness of heart,” a deliberate steeling of oneself against the conviction of the Holy Spirit regarding the truth. They did not want to believe or dare to believe. Faith eluded them. The result is that their ignorance, now willful, leads to that terrible judgment of God whereby their ability to see the truth is taken away.

Paul is referring here to the Holy Spirit’s conviction being removed. It is the condition referred to as “being darkened in their understanding.” All ability to respond to the truth, has abandoned them. It is an awful state to be in, to be excluded from the life of God, and it comes about because of hardness of heart.

4:19 “and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

To set aside truth and to reject it as the thing which will regulate one’s behavior is to embrace sensuality. Sensuality is the choosing of behavior which gratifies the senses. It is deceptive because in some cases it takes on the appearance of great good. For example, it can be the gratification that comes from the praise of others when we live a life of discipline. That is not classic sensuality. But it is one and the same thing when motives are considered. It is gratification of self.

So sensuality does not necessarily equate to a life that lacks order or achievement. It equates with a life that ultimately is self-gratifying, and the word “ultimately” is key here. Whether one chooses to gratify the lower sensual desires so is to live a life of obvious debauchery and excess, or the less obvious sensual desires of self-glorification through discipline and achievement, the result is still impurity with greediness. That is always the end of becoming callous to the truth. There are many kinds of impurity. But it is certain that impurity of some sort is the only possible outcome when the truth is set aside.

4:20 “But you did not learn Christ in this way,”

There is a certain way of living that is associated with being a disciple or a learner of Christ. It is a specific way of life taught by and insisted on by Paul and his company. That way of living had nothing to do with those things formerly done in ignorance and the things done because of hardness of heart. The old and natural way is not the way of Christ.

4:21 “if indeed you have heard Him and hence been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus.”

Paul tells them that if they have been listening to Christ, the old way of life is not what He has been teaching them to live out. If they have been taught His way, they will feel called to a life that is in harmony with the truth as embodied in or resident in Him. He will describe in the next verse this calling that they have heard if they have been listening to Christ.

4:22 “that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.”

The desires that we instinctively serve before we are enlightened with the truth are deceitful. The NASB rendering above is typical of the rendering of most English versions. Interestingly, Paul uses a definite article and refers to this deceit that we were corrupted by as *the* deceit. What corrupted Adam and Eve, that deceit that we are better off apart from God, continues to deceive and corrupt us. Furthermore, this word choice has the effect of personifying deceit, making it the source of our corruption. The lies about what is true become voices that speak from within us and now transgression is in our hearts. Our thoughts have become corrupt and incapable of discerning good from evil.

Eventually these corrupt thoughts break out in damaging and painful behavior. Our desire to be masters of our own lives leads us into lying to God and the choice to live free of Him. Our desire to be well thought of further leads us to cover-up and fabrication of every sort. Our desire to get for ourselves what is not ours leads to everything from manipulation to outright lies. The desire for ease and pleasure does the same. And when we manage to obtain those things that these desires cause us to crave, we find that they do not deliver what we thought they would. It is we who have been deceived. We have been corrupted and have gained nothing in the name of being our own masters and having what we want.

It is this way of thinking and living that we are to lay aside. Worded this way, it doesn't seem like much of a sacrifice, to give up an empty way of life that is the vain pursuit of pure illusion. Though it is empty, this old way of life is instinctive to us. It is still the

natural direction we will drift apart from our conscious submission to the power of the Holy Spirit.

The “laying aside” is not something that naturally happens. The mere fact that Paul must remind believers to do it is a reminder that we can fail in this regard. We can be unfaithful in it. And so we must consciously engage this. It is still by faith that we do it. But we must trust Yahweh sufficiently to engage sin in this way. That surely leads to our submission to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the laying aside of the old manner of life.

4:23 “and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,”

The conscious effort on our part includes adopting a new way of thinking. The deceit has happened in our minds, and we must meet it there. The Holy Spirit, addressing our innermost mind, must be allowed to guide us rather than the deceitful voices of our natural desires. It is a battle waged for our minds and we win the battle for renewal by each choice we make in response to the Holy Spirit’s leading to renounce our flesh.

4:24 “and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

In responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit that happens within our minds we gain direction for our entire beings so that a new person emerges. The old person was a creature of instinct, pursuing deceitful instinctive desires. The new person is shaped by truth which always works to produce holiness and righteousness in us.

The contrast between the process stated in verse 22 and the one stated in 24 could not be more vivid. Whereas, the old self was “being corrupted according to the lust of the deceit (v 22), the new self is “being created by God in righteousness and true holiness of the truth.”

The great thing about this is we need only lay aside the old in favor of the new. It is not a matter of fixing the old outfit up. Just throw it away. If I am not holy it is not because my new self is not yet completely holy. It is because I have not put it on. I have not clothed myself with it but have been content in my former way.

4:25 “Therefore laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”

This is the second time in the context the speaking of truth is mentioned as critical in the carrying out of the new life. In verse 15 we have been told that it is through speaking the truth in love that we grow up in all aspects into Him. Truth must be present for growth to occur. This means that there is not only a moral issue involved in our growth, but a pragmatic issue.

It is a part of the old life that we easily lapse into falsehood. The old life is founded on falsehood. How could it produce anything but that. Falsehood can appear to be quite handy. With it we can legitimize our failures. We can cover our weaknesses. We can make ourselves appear good when we are evil. We can provide a shortcut to acclaim and glory. Falsehood is an attractive “out” for the flesh, an immediate answer to every jam we get in, a means of maximizing our gain and minimizing our sacrifice.

Truthfulness produces pain at times. It can make us look bad. It forces us to take responsibility and ponder the real nature of things. It is, of course, the only reasonable option long term, but it often requires faith in the short term, faith in oneself, in people, in the power of truth, but mostly faith in God. Fear produces falsehood. Self-preservation leads to lies. To lay aside falsehood requires us to pick up faith, because it is trust in God's testimony that enables us to lay aside falsehood.

Here Paul explains his command simply by saying, "for we are members of one another." What is good for one of us is ultimately good for us all. What is unhealthy for one of us is ultimately unhealthy for us all. To manipulate others for my advantage will ultimately bring harm to me. To falsely inflate my value or worth will borrow from the true value of others and that ultimately brings harm back to me because there is a delicate interdependence. We cannot gain an advantage for ourselves without robbing others. When I do so I bring out the drive for self-preservation in others and soon they must rob me to replace what I have taken from them. It leads to the demise of the body of Christ and so for the body to function and be healthy, there must be an unequivocal commitment to truth. It is the truth that sets us free from the downward mobility of sin.

4:26 "Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,"

The emotion of anger is here and in other places in Scripture declared "clean." There is not necessarily sin in feeling anger. When one's conscience toward the things of God or the person of God is offended, that is good. When injustice done to another makes us angry, that is good.

At the same time anger thrives on falsehood. So we must always remember that our anger may be misinformed. The question should always be asked, "Is my understanding of God and the things of God and the actions of people in this matter precise at this point so that I am righteously angry?"

To be angry because one's own agenda has been threatened is a sure way to fall into sin. So anger is a legitimate emotion, here encouraged. But it is easy for that emotion to lead us into a sinful response, even when it itself is legitimate.

We must be constantly on guard against sinful anger. And so we must remind ourselves that in other Scripture we are told it is not good to be easily angered. We are told here are told it is not good to be "long-angered." Anger should be resolved in our hearts and in our relationships by day's end. Anger that is allowed to be nursed along festers into dangerous sin as the next verse implies.

4:27 "and do not give the devil an opportunity."

The devil is always watching and evaluating opportunity, and he rarely misses a moment of weakness in our lives. When a moment of vulnerability comes he is right there to sow the seeds that bring sin. This was true even in the life of our Lord when the devil left him "until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13).

Unresolved anger, or anger that is not carefully processed, allows Satan a great opportunity. So strong is the emotion that if not placed quickly under the Holy Spirit's control, it will lead to sin in almost every case. The simple phrase that makes up this verse is a part of the previous thought, which is to have anger in our hearts and relationships resolved by day's end. Unresolved anger is a great opportunity for Satan.

We create enough of these in our lives accidentally. Avoid doing it deliberately through unresolved anger!

4:28 “Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who is in need.”

The body of Christ includes thieves and not just people who have at one time or another stolen something. There are among Christians, people who steal for survival, career thieves. They apparently will not “automatically” stop when they become believers since Paul, speaking at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, here addresses the issue. This is God’s will in the matter and this is the Holy Spirit’s conviction and direction in the matter as he works in the lives of the children of God.

It should not surprise us if people have to be taught this, nor should it surprise us if some struggle with it. The norm we are called to here is to rightfully earn those things we need through labor that is good, or morally sound. Our goal in our labor, and God’s goal in guiding our career, is that we are able to meet our own needs and have excess that allows us to help meet legitimate needs in the lives of others.

4:29 “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

Solomon had made the observation that he who guards his tongue guards his life. It is our tongue that must confirm our calling and push forward Yahweh’s agenda in the lives of others. This is now the third time in this chapter Paul has said something relating to our speech (see v. 15,25) and it goes beyond the earlier boundary of speaking the truth.

We are to guard ourselves from all that is unwholesome. Paul gives three ideas that define what is wholesome and what should govern our words. The first idea is what we speak must edify. It must serve the purpose of building up some one in the faith. This means it could be a word which tears down initially, but it will achieve the building up of the hearer’s faith.

The second idea that should govern our speech is that it should be according to the need of the moment. Not our need, but the need brought out by the moment itself. The person or persons who constitute the hearers and the welfare of their faith should determine our words.

The third idea is that our words should be chosen and crafted so as to impart grace to the hearers. They should be words that by their very nature bring the hearers closer to God so as to experience to a greater degree His presence and be strengthened by it. Imparting grace means imparting spiritual strength, the practical favor of God that lifts humankind above mere instinctive living. Words that give grace warmly beckon and attract the hearers to higher ground. Wholesome words are words that contribute to the spiritual health of the body of Christ.

4:30 “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Without saying specifically how we cause the Holy Spirit to have pain, Paul commands us not to grieve Him. Earlier in the chapter he has spoken of the importance of preserving the unity of the Spirit. By listening to His prompting and leadings we all remain in perfect position and mindset in terms of the comprehensive plan of God that the Spirit is directing. When we cease listening and simply live by instinct it is certain that we cause Him pain.

It is interesting that we do not cause Him anger or frustration, but pain, the kind associated with grief. It is the kind of reaction we would expect not from a boss, or a superior of some sort, though He is both of those, but from a friend or loved one. This is a relational command. There is a violation of love and trust when we ignore the Holy Spirit's promptings through unbelief or outright rebellion.

The Holy Spirit's favor in our behalf has been immense. He is the instrument of God's love and care for us, the One who marks us out and shepherds us through the eons of time that pass from our conception, through the years of our life on earth, through the years of our intermediate state until the day of the resurrection of our bodies when our redemption is made complete. He is our constant companion and He himself is the brand that identifies us as belonging to God's family. When we ignore Him we revile our very identity of which we should be so grateful and proud and towards which we should reserve our greatest exuberance.

4:31 “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

Any of these responses move us in the opposite direction that the Holy Spirit is trying to move us in, and thus grieve Him. Rather than preserving the unity of the Spirit by listening to Him, they are influences that spring from our flesh, energized by the evil one, and they destroy the unity of the Spirit. They are all forms of malice, the desire to bring harm, pain, or damage to someone else. When we dwell on another's shortcomings and blame them for our plight, without thinking of the purposes of God in the matter we will become bitter rather than forbearing and forgiving.

Paul uses two words for anger. He does so not to say something different in the two since there is a large overlap in meaning, but simply to emphasize the importance of managing anger. There is a time for anger but it must be put away when it becomes malicious. Clamor is a word which means angry shouting, our tendency to verbally lash out and put people in their places and give them a piece of our minds. Slander is a word which means blasphemy. It is saying what is beyond appropriate, that which strikes at the very heart of a person's worth and value to God. It is attributing evil to them that is far beyond a legitimate statement of the offense. We are to recognize these things in ourselves and put them away.

4:32 “And be kind toward one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Malice in its various form, whether outward rage or an inward burning with a view towards getting even, is to give way to grace. We are to be people of grace with respect to each other. As we have received grace so we are to extend it.

This is always the rule for Christians in relationships at all levels. What God has extended to us in Christ, we are to extend to others. That's all!! God's response to us is first and foremost kind, and that kindness of God is experienced by all people, the good and the evil. God is tenderhearted. It is evident in His longsuffering. That the day of the Lord has not burst upon the earth until now is evidence of God's "soft spot," His intense love for His own creation. God extends forgiveness not on the basis of restitution, but on the basis of a change of mind on our part. Our forgiveness should flow as freely, not on the basis of someone having paid sufficiently for their misdeeds but on the basis of their change of heart. These are the principles that should regulate relationships in the Church, and where they do the unity of the Spirit is preserved.

Ephesians 5

5:1 “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved Children;”

As opposed to walking as the Gentiles walk, darkened in understanding, living in ignorance (4:17ff) we are to do this, be imitators of God. As children who are loved imitate their fathers so we are to imitate God. Our standard is always God, which means no matter how much we’ve done there’s always more we could do. This is not to say that our performance affects our status. We are beloved children. Our imitation flows from love, the fact that we are loved and the fact that we then love.

This is the fourth “therefore” in the text since 4:1 (4:17,25). The transition from indicative to imperative, from doctrine to duty has been continued and there is a progression in thought as our duties are delineated. We are to be imitators of God as opposed to what the unregenerate are and do. This reaches far back in the context. We are to be imitators of God in the way He has forgiven us, picking up on the thought of the previous verse, the near context. It is our high calling and privilege to be asked to live in this way and it is our position that makes it a realistic calling, the sealing of the Holy Spirit that makes it a realistic summons.

5:2 “and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

Walk in love. Love is to be the sphere in which all our actions are to be determined. Do our deeds speak the language of love—that is always the question by which a Christian should judge themselves. And the standard of love we must strive toward is not simply a human one. The question is never, “Will this be seen as a loving deed in terms of normal human behavior?” The standard is to love as Christ loved. It is not just a love that is unselfish. It is a love that is selfless. It is not just a love that thinks of others. It is a love that thinks of others first. The sacrifice of Christ was carried out by Him willingly. It was self-sacrifice.

The imagery of our sacrifice of love being a fragrant aroma is rooted in the OT, where a proper and fitting offering is characterized as being like an aroma that soothes an offended and angry party. Now we know that God’s anger is not a fit of rage or loss of temper that can be appeased by a mere potion of some sort. His is a just, righteous and holy anger that can be completely and rightly appeased by satisfying the demands of His perfect justice. The imagery of the OT and this reference to a soothing aroma, is simply to illustrate the depth of our offense toward God, and the complete sufficiency of Christ’s work. It illustrates the transaction. It is not meant to be a precise portrayal of the nature and character of God, making Him out to be whimsical in both His anger and His appeasement. It provides a mental picture of a finished work. It enables us to see Him as a righteous and holy God whose standard has been completely and fully satisfied by the work of Christ. God is such that we can be at peace, and who has peace Himself in the matter.

5:3 “But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints;”

The things listed here are not at all compatible with the calling of God’s children. They are incongruous with what has transpired between us and God. And so using

hyperbole, Paul says that these words should not ever be uttered by the lips of anyone describing us. By using such a device Paul makes his point very emphatically. God's plan in our salvation is to eliminate these things, therefore they do not have any place in our lives. They no longer fit. That they should not be any part of our conduct is not bizarre or strange, it is proper, what would be naturally expected of those who have been so called.

5:4 “and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”

This verse is actually a continuation of the previous thought. There is no verb in the initial phrase. It is a continuation of the things “not to be named” among saints. Filthiness is indecent behavior. It is behavior that brings shame to Christ, to the Church and ultimately to us.

“Silly talk” is a compound word meaning “words of a fool.” Speech without thought, careless words, words that do not reflect the Spirit or the impact of spiritual truth on our thoughts should be left unsaid. To include this and the next term in the same listing as immorality, greed, impurity and indecent behavior make for a powerful statement by Paul. The others spoken of in the previous verse are universally recognized as not fitting among Christians, as is the next term, coarse jesting. But words, ungoverned by the truth, careless words, sneak from us so easily, and who is not guilty? We must remember that such speech is just as incompatible with Christian character as is immorality and impurity.

The thing Paul says should flow freely from us is the giving of thanks. We should be known as thankful people. People who understand God's sovereignty, His purpose in all the events of our lives, His grace, the help He extends without cost to us in all things, should be optimistic and positive. This should be consistently reflected in their words so that they are known as thankful people. Thankfulness is what is proper, what one should expect, from God's chosen ones.

5:5 “For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God.”

This is a truth that can be embraced with great certainty. It is sure and unchanging. It is given to people who are saved, but who are being exhorted to lay aside the old self and put on the new. It is more truth about the futility of an old way of life. It is a statement that indirectly asks a question, “Why would you want to do those things that describe those living a futile, eternally barren way of life?”

There is a distinction some have tried to sustain between entry into the kingdom of God and having an inheritance in the kingdom of God. It is sustainable to a certain degree and the words here distinctly seem to point not to getting INTO the kingdom of God, but having an inheritance in it. We know that it is possible for Christians to be impure, immoral and covetous. The mere fact that Paul has urged these Ephesians against such things indicate that they are at least possible for Christian people to engage in. Paul likely knew that these were present in the behavior of the Ephesians church. It is absurd to think he would so carefully write the material in the fourth chapter if it was impossible for Christians to do these very things.

It is not a matter of whether or not we are capable of doing such things. We are. It is a matter of what we will embrace as fitting or proper behavior. What will we do with such things when we see them in us? What will we embrace as our model and ideal? What will be considered the norm (See 5:3)? I take Paul's words to mean that in the Ephesian church some were not just doing immoral things, but embracing such practices as fitting. By thus they were proving that they are in fact idol worshippers rather than worshipers of God. To allow ourselves to become immoral people is to think completely out of harmony with the truth. It is idolatry not Christianity. It is the mark of those that live outside the kingdom of God, who have part of it. Why would we be deceived by such a lifestyle? Why slip backwards into such fruitless ways?

Paul is not saying by his language here that the Christians of Ephesus would lose their salvation if they committed immorality. He is saying immorality is the way of the unsaved that suck the life of God right out of them. So why go there. It is the expected course of the unsaved and the natural choice for them. It is not proper for saints.

5:6 “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

This is a second statement of the certainty of the truth that such deeds are eternally unprofitable. It is easy to be talked into certain things and so to set truth aside as in the case of Eve in Eden, so that sin and evil sound normal and good. Such words are empty. The promise of such words is a fabrication. There is nothing in the realm of moral reality to support such ideas. The truth is that sin and immorality offended God and are the very things that bring His judgment against the unregenerate. Doing these things has never led to blessing. The practice of such things has never been embraced by God as anything but vile and offensive, to be forever cast aside. Guard against any belief that markets them otherwise, because it is deceit, pure and simple.

5:7 “Therefore do not be partakers with them.”

It is possible for Christians to join in the immoral practices of their culture. Paul plainly teaches against this. It is absurd to believe that such behavior is impossible for Christians because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. It is possible and must be guarded against. Because Paul uses a present imperative it is quite possible that his command is saying, “stop being partakers with them!” He is prohibiting action that is already in progress, confronting a danger they were walking toward. The grammar is such that we can say not only that such activity was a possibility, it was happening. It was a remnant of their old way of life

5:8 “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.”

There was a reason the Ephesians had done these things in the past. There is a reason these habits had been established and now could be broken. The reason was ignorance of truth, That is what darkness represents, life lived apart from the truth. Some live in this way out of ignorance, some out of rebellion. The Ephesians not only had light—truth, they had become light. Now they had to continue the walk as children of light that they had begun and lay aside all remnants of the old way.

5:9 “(For the fruit of light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)”

Light produces three things, the three things Paul has been urging on them since his exhortation in 4:1, to walk worthy of their calling. He has been urging them to put on the goodness, righteousness and all that the truth teaches us.

By using the word “fruit” Paul is not suggesting that such deeds come without effort. He is suggesting that if they apply themselves to what they now know to be true, this is the result they will produce. It is the goal of all the forces of heaven to bring this about in their life. If they give themselves to it, the fruit will be produced.

5:10 “trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.”

The phrase literally means, proving what is pleasing to the Lord. We might understand it as “documenting, publicly testing so as to affirm for all to see, what is pleasing to the Lord.” It calls us to the process by which the things that please the Lord are learned and it implies a clear embrace of the things learned on the part of the learner. The word dokimazontas is an adverbial participle, what is called a telic participle. It states the purpose of the action commanded in verse eight, “walk as children of light.” The phrase “In order to” could be placed in front of this verse and it would capture the thought of the passage. The entire thought reaching back to verse eight would be “walk as children of light in order to publicly test and affirm those things that are pleasing to the Lord.” The idea is that when others examine our lives they will see a process that has produced a very definitive result.

5:11 “And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.”

Again we see the process of simultaneously putting on and putting off. As we are embracing the deeds shaped by the truth we are to separate ourselves from those things that do not please the Lord. Deeds done that are outside the boundaries of truth are fruitless.

By our public documentation of what pleases the Lord we also publicly reveal and expose other things for what they are, those deeds that are rooted in evil’s deceitful urgings. They are deeds that go against all that we can be sure is truth. Done for self, they come to nothing in spite of what they promise.

5:12 “For it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.”

In contrast to the beauty and value of deeds that harmonize with the truth and the service they render to all who are truly watching for truth, are the secret deeds of evil of which it is not even appropriate to speak, much less to imitate or demonstrate. The verse speaks of the disgrace of what remains a secret. This includes actions but also thoughts and more importantly motives. Evil deeds are shocking in their own way to us. But on those occasions when the secrets behind those actions begin to come to light, a whole seedy world begins to emerge that is a disgrace. Paul and the Ephesians knew this dark world of immorality existed. From the private immoral rituals and sacraments of the mystery religions to the depraved thoughts, musings, and fantasies of the average truthless person, there was and is all about the human spirit that is

shameful and disgraceful. Were it not for the restraint of the Holy Spirit, humanity would self-destruct due to their disregard for the light of the truth.

5:13 “But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.”

A literal reading of this verse would be “all things become visible for what they are (elegkw) when by means of light it is revealed (fonerow). For everything being revealed (fonerow) is light.” Truth comes about when the moral nature of a thing is made clear by what the truth says about it. When what is known to be true is brought to bear on something, and that thing is scrutinized by the standard of truth, its true nature becomes known. That then becomes truth that will help bring to light the nature of other things. Known heresy helps shed light on unknown heresy. Immorality once it is known usually brings to light hidden immorality. Truth shows things to be what they really are, and then those things show others to be what they truly are.

This verse shows the importance of not equating light with righteousness in Scripture. Light is simply truth. It may be the truth that something is evil, but it is none-the-less light.

5:14 “For this reason it says, “Awake sleeper, and arise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you.”

Paul is quoting what is most likely a hymn, perhaps based on Isaiah 60:1ff. The motivation for the words is the thought Paul has been expressing in the previous verses, particularly as stated in verse 8 where he commands us to “walk as children of light.” The metaphor is switched from walking to waking from sleep and rising from spiritual death. Then it switches back to the idea of light again. The hymn, if that’s what it is, is about the human decisions required in sanctification. There is that which we must take responsibility for in response to the Holy Spirit’s conviction. To such decisions and prayers in us the Holy Spirit responds more and the result is Christ-likeness in us.

5:15 “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise.”

Christian people should be those who live with care. We must not just live. We must not be without direction, going from event to event in life responding instinctively and allowing our life to be randomly shaped by the events and people we run into along the way. We are to be purposeful in the way we live. We must make intentional decisions. We must not let our life find its own level of spirituality, or discipline, or morality. As stewards we strive to live life as those who seek to achieve a certain specific outcome, not just get through it.

5:16 “making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”

This is an important statement. It is a statement about time management, specifically, how we are to approach the minutes of the day. It is also a statement about the times we find ourselves in, and how to live wisely in them. It is an exhortation, a word of encouragement, with the inference that we can impact our times through our intentional actions in time.

This is also a warning that our times can simply run our lives for us so that in the end we are simply victims of our times rather than shapers of our times. We must rule time well because the days are evil, the days Paul lived in. How much more so today! The times can erode the best of humanity's intentions in every era.

It should be pointed out that this verse does not stand-alone grammatically. It is not even an imperative. What is rendered as a command in English versions to "make the most of our time" is actually a participle. It can be understood in an imperatival way, but can also be understood as a statement of what is to happen simultaneously with the actions previously commanded. It seems best to see it this latter way. Making the most of our time is action we carry out that helps us fulfill the earlier commands to "walk as children of light" (Verse 8), and to walk with care and precision (verse 15). When we make the best possible use of our time and spend our years as wisely as possible we are behaving like children of light.

The phrase "making the most of your time" is the rendering in the NASB of one Greek word. That word is *e'xagorazo/menoi*. It comes from a word that means to go to market, or to buy something. It came to be used of a number of actions, redeem being one of them. The preposition meaning "out of" is prefixed to this word. There is a way of understanding this single word that reflects what the rest of the Scripture says about stewardship. It is to render the sentence in this way; "buying out of the marketplace of time opportunity." The phrase expresses that using time shrewdly by grasping kingdom opportunity is a key part of obeying the earlier commands to walk as children of light and to walk with care and precision.

5:17 "So then, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Because we are to be careful about "how we walk", living with purpose, and because we are to "make the most of every opportunity, wringing the most eternal good out of every situation, it is essential that we grasp firmly God's will and mind in every situation. Because the days are evil we must not fail at this. We must take every pain to not let the times dictate our walk, but to walk constantly in the will of the Lord.

There is much ignorance when it comes to discerning the will of God. People tend to follow their own will and through all kinds of creative thinking seek to pass it off as God's plan even though it goes directly against His revealed will as made plain in the Words of Scripture. They are imagining God's leading, pure and simple. They will find out one day that they have involved themselves in the worst kind of fantasizing. There is much foolishness in formulas that people use to discern God's will. They do not reflect on decisions in light of Scriptural principles, they seek no counsel; they give the matter cursory prayer and then imagine it as the will of God.

Finding the will of God is first intellectual activity. One must know what God has stated already in the Bible on subjects related to the decision at hand. If we do not know that book, then we must ask someone that does. Knowing God's will is also a relational activity. It starts by rightly relating myself to God in the moments in which I know what His will is. I cannot get more guidance from God if I have not responded properly to what I know. Yahweh speaks and leads individually through the Holy Spirit and I must listen for His conviction. But knowing His will also happens through my relationships with trusted and solid believers. Knowledge of God's will happens as I engage these relationships with my own thorough examination of what the Scriptures have to say on the matter at hand.

There are times when by God's design His will is not clear, particularly as our faith grows and He expects us to exercise our trust in Him. But as a general rule the Lord is anxious and ready to reveal His will to us and it plainly unfolds before the obedient as they walk with Him. This verse should be the desire and passion of every child of God, to be in touch with what the will of God is for them at any particular moment. As the moments are lived in harmony with His plan the long term path is never missed.

5:18 "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit."

We must always remember that the problem and challenge we have as Christians is never for us to get more of the Spirit. It is for Him to get more of us. There are numerous things to which we turn for comfort, for joy, or simply to fill our time. This is "dissipation."

The English word dissipation means to expend aimlessly or foolishly. However, something is to be learned by looking at the Greek word used here. Dissipation is the rendering of the Greek word ἀόσῳτῖα. That word is the word σωζω, with the α privative prefixed to it. Σωζω is the word we render with the English word salvation. Salvation means to rescue, or to restore to health or soundness. The prefix reverses its meaning. So ἀόσῳτῖα means unrescued, unhealthy, and unsound. Dissipation means moving in the opposite direction as what God is trying to bring about in and through us. It includes the overuse of those things given by God that are to be used moderately. It includes the setting aside of things we are to be immersed in.

Here Paul singles out excessive use of wine. Wine is not dissipation, the excessive use of it is. Drinking wine is never condemned in Scripture. Drunkenness is always condemned. Excessive use of any control substance works against our salvation. However, here is the important thing to learn from the words Paul chooses here. We must understand that excessive use of nearly anything works against the very thing God is trying to complete. We block and even undo our sanctification by excessive behavior. Moderation in all things is a great principle to live by.

It is to God that we turn to fill our lives. He fills them through the Holy Spirit. He fills us when we make the space available. So it can appear that we get more of the Spirit on occasions. The actual truth is that He is in us always, but we experience His fullness based on our level of yieldedness and our level of participation at that point in the will of God. Our desire should never be to dilute (which is what dissipation is) the power of the Holy Spirit. We do that whenever we allow excesses of any sort, or give something a role in our lives beyond God's design. Our goal is always to enter into the fullness of what God has for us in the moment, not simply to fill our moments.

5:19 "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; "

The Spirit-filled life is placed here in stark contrast to the life expended aimlessly, the life that is lived casually and then gone. The Spirit-filled life is first and foremost a life that brings what is profound into the lives of others. Relationships provide occasion for ministry, not simply for passing the time or getting one's own needs met.

Paul is probably not suggesting that we restate by rote to one another psalms and hymns. He is likely calling us to two things. First, Christianity has always had its music.

The Psalms attest to this. Paul is likely affirming that singing the music of the faith with each other is good for us. The flames of nearly every revival in Christianity have been fanned by the music that came with it. Second, our interaction with each other should be in a psalm/hymn kind of manner. Thoughts of worship, praise and of life with God should pass between us. In the normal course of conversation the lofty things of God should make for a beauty in our words that reflects all the liturgy of the faith. The term – "spiritual songs," captures this idea that there should arise in our speech as a result of the Spirit's work His distinct mark reflected in words that are profoundly gracious, truthful, convicting, and in other ways edifying.

Interaction like this contrasts sharply with the excessive and self-centered social bantering of the unregenerate. Interaction as exhorted here by Paul as the mark of the distinct nature of "fellowship" as opposed to mere social interaction. Fellowship is conversation with a purpose, entered into intentionally.

We must also remember that it is clearly Christians who are commanded to do this. Such fellowship on the one hand, is "natural" in the sense that the Holy Spirit is seeking to produce it in us. On the other hand it was apparently not "naturally" and to some degree deficient in the lives of the Ephesians. It was something they needed to cultivate in a deeper way. That is the way it is with many of the things of the Spirit. They are unnaturally natural. They are not human nature, but they are divine nature and through our response to the Holy Spirit can be brought about. They are instinctive to the Holy Spirit and so we can cultivate and learn them. That is why this instruction was preceded by the command to be filled with the Spirit.

5:20 – "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;- "

Giving thanks for all things to God remains one of the great challenges of the Christian life. It is only possible through faith, and only happens when we rise above instinctive living. It is presented here as the outflow of the life of one filled with the Spirit.

Thanksgiving is everywhere in the Bible presented as an important feature of our interaction with each other, a distinct mark of Christian "fellowship." It can be seen as a description of the general "tone" of any Christian gathering.

Here is a great though humbling test for us to give ourselves after we have been present with other Christians. It consists of one question. Did I express gratitude to God for everything that came up in the course of that conversation? Who can ever say, "Yes!" to that question? It would change so much if we could begin to rise to such a level of thanksgiving as this.

This is likely where Church life first breaks down. Thanksgiving is absent, then all manner of evil begins to fill the vacuum.

5:21 "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

Since 4:1 there have been a number of commands that Paul has given that relate to how we treat one another. Here we are told to subject ourselves to one another. This is one of the great keys to successful relationships, to learn to place the interests of others above those of ourselves. A person who is able to do this will have great spiritual impact.

The motive for subjecting ourselves to one another is respect and reverence of Christ. As He subjected Himself to our needs for our benefit, we are to follow in like manner. If the master did it, the servants should do it as well, or they are showing disrespect for the master. It is the nature of a number of relationships that we engage ourselves in that our subjection to others becomes important. There follows a number of verses, through 6:9, that deal with different relationships in which our willingness and ability to subject ourselves is critical.

5:22 “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

The words, “be subject” are added by the translators and seem to be the logical idea based on what has just been stated in the previous verse and with what follows through 6:9. The impetus for the instructions of this section was the broad command of verse 21 to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ,” or “out of respect for Christ.” The name Christ appears over and over in these verses because Christ-likeness is the ultimate aim. But the absence of the word “submit” is significant and may lend insight into what Paul is calling for.

The verse is saying in effect, “be to your own husband as you are to the Lord.” That is a Christ-centered statement. Husband and wife, children and slaves will be called to fulfill specific obligations with Christ in view. That is the theme in every case, and it is what is to distinguish Christians in their homes and in their churches. They are seeking to be like Christ.

Subjecting ourselves to anyone is a prime challenge for the human heart and it is especially true in certain relationships. And so in the verses ahead Paul will focus on the wife’s need to subject themselves to their husbands, of husbands to subject themselves to the Lord so as to be mastered by love, of children to subject themselves to their parents, and of servants to subject themselves to their masters.

The instructions that begin here for the home must be accepted in their totality. First, wives are told to conduct themselves to their own husbands as they do toward the Lord. Respect and obedience are undeniable elements of this. This is not necessarily a verse about man and women in general, but about the relationship between a husband and a wife. It is addressed first because it is a key relationship, in the home and in the church. If a wife is unable to do this privately in a home she will probably not be able to follow the admonition to subject ourselves to one another in the Church, even as a man is not capable of leading in the church if he has not done so in his own home (1 Tim. 3:4-5). If children do not see the submission of their mother to their father they will not see the need to be subject themselves.

There are two ideas that should be mentioned in connection with this verse. First, the fact that the woman’s response to her husband is addressed first, does not mean it must happen first, though advise elsewhere in Scripture indicates that a wife can set a pace in the home that draws the husband along (1 Peter 3:1-2). Since however the husband is the head he must lead in the relationship and his charge as we will see is a very significant one. Second, the phrase “as to the Lord” should not be construed to be more or less than what it is. It is not a suggestion that the husband is for all practical purposes “the Lord” to his wife—the idea of a “chain of command.” However, it is deeply significant because it says that the degree of submission afforded the Lord is the same, which should be afforded the husband. It should be total.

Now as to the cultural relevance of this verse, some thoughts are appropriate. I believe that in all of the Bible we are given commands that must be applied within the changing boundaries of culture. A wife's subjection to her husband will be reflected differently in America than in a Middle Eastern country and different in America today than it was a hundred years ago. That is true of many commands. However, we must not in this matter suggest that the command is cultural and not for today, or we find ourselves in a position of teaching that God has given us NO directions about marriage, the most basic of all human institutions. We also find ourselves fighting the logic of the text.

A wife relating to her husband as she would to the Lord must be expressed in a way that is culturally appropriate. It must be done in a way that sends the message to all who observe, and the husband, the children, and the church, that this command is being respected and lived out. It is given with the goal in mind of producing order in homes and in society. To lay it aside as cultural, at the very least opens the door to lay aside any practical directives the Bible has to offer on marriage, and for that matter on most of life's day-to-day issues.

This problem with the so-called "cultural argument" has been widely proclaimed and it is real. To what extent do we allow culture to dictate our behavior? It seems to me the answer is that while it never is allowed to dictate behavior since that right belongs only to Christ, it can be allowed to influence the manner in which our obedience is expressed. In Western culture as we know it in the USA in the twenty first century, veils, hats and such attire do not express submission, as they did in culture of Bible times and in some cultures today. Submission is expressed in our culture in words that are said, in attitudes that are demonstrated, apart from any specific symbols of attire. Submission does not require silence, or a one-sided decision-making process. Those things would clearly violate the commands that follow that relate to the husband's responsibility, as well as the earlier command to be subject to one another. Submission implies the acknowledgement of authority, and it implies the acceptance of responsibility to meet needs of another. This latter commitment will be demanded of the husband as well, though another word is used.

It should be emphasized at this point that this series of instructions must be accepted in total not a la carte. The submission of the wife will work for her and the entire home's welfare only if paralleled by Christ-like love on the part of the husband.

But in terms of the instruction in this verse, a wife subjecting herself to the sphere of authority given her husband and to a responsibility to minister to a certain sphere of his needs, is to be embraced by Christian wives. It is to be clearly expressed in ways appropriate to their culture and their times. This is part of the pattern of a Christian marriage, and it is the only pattern present in the Scripture.

5:23 "For the Husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body."

With this verse Paul reveals the rationale for the previous statement to wives, to be relating to their own husbands as they are to Christ. Again here the phrase "as Christ" appears so that the goal of this instruction is clearly not to perpetrate culture, but to perpetuate Christ. The logic is, wives be subject to your own husbands because the husband is your head. He is your head in the way that Christ is head of the Church.

Now what does this mean? The word for head is *kefalē*. Its meaning has been much discussed. For much of time it has simply been seen as a word that expresses rank, and even a privileged status. More recently however, it has been determined that the word was used in certain contexts with the idea of “source” in view, much like we might speak of the “head-waters” of a river. It is undeniable that such a meaning would fit well in this context where Christ is “head” of the Church because He is its source, that to which it owes its existence. If we take this as the idea Paul is trying to convey in his choice of the word head, then the meaning he has in mind can be explained in this way: Wives, be subject to your own husband because as Christ is the source of the Church so the Husband is the source of the wife.

Source probably refers to two things. Elsewhere Paul bases the differing roles of husband and wife on the order of creation, Adam being the source of Eve. So that is likely one sense in which here he means that the husband is the source of the wife. The other thing he is likely driving at from what will follow is that the husband is a source to the wife of spiritual and emotional resources. That is not to say he is the only source available to her, nor that she has no connection to God independent of him. It is perhaps a statement that there is a sense in which she will find her spiritual and emotional compliment in him, and that he will be to her a source of great blessing. If, as the Genesis account indicates, man found in woman that which gratified his soul, the person who ended his search for affinity, is it not logical to assume that woman finds in man a source of spiritual and emotional blessing as she submits to his care?

And so it seems best to say that the husband is the head of the wife in the sense that she will find in him God’s special provision for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well being of herself and the children they may choose to have together. In this is found the basis for the authority of the husband and the submission of the wife.

5:24 “But as the Church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.”

The church’s relationship to Christ is the example wives should follow in relating to their husbands. This is not an optional part of a Christian marriage, it is a very essential part, and it is to extend into all areas.

There is here then a solemn call to a responsible participation in these blessings, in just the way Christians are called on to enjoy all the blessings of Christ in a reciprocal relationship of love. They are called to submit to His authority in the practical issues of real life even as they enjoy Him as the source of great spiritual and emotional wealth.

The principle of Christian submission that launched this digression in verse 21 is that Christians are to place the needs of one another ahead of their own needs. There is to be a mutual submission of agendas. This demands that wives not simply get their own needs met through a husband, but that they find provision for their own needs in meeting the needs of their husband. We shall see that this rule applies to the husband as well. The flesh would lead a woman to use a man to support the pursuit of her own agenda. It will lead a husband to do likewise. Paul will have none of that.

5:25 “Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her;”

Again in the case of the husband, Christ is foremost. Husbands are called to be like Christ. The spiritual health of the home begins with a determination of a husband to be like Christ. Now this can be influenced by the wife, but in the final analysis it is the husband's choice.

A Christian marriage requires the submission of the wife to her husband and the commitment of the husband to give himself up for her. A husband does not have the option if he wants a healthy Christian marriage of grabbing a wife who will simply “help” him get his own needs met and require nothing from him but daily sustenance. He is to give himself up for his wife.

Now what does this mean, that the husband is to give himself up for his wife? The answer is found in the relationship of Christ to the Church. It is certain that the Church serves Christ and carries out His agenda. So this is not a command that undoes the command for wives to be submissive, nor does it strip the husband of any authority. What it does is demand of him servant leadership.

The Church gives itself up for Christ, but no one has given up as much as Christ. Christ calls us to His service, but no one serves us more than Christ. If the work we do is hard, we are able to complete it because He does more. And this is the role of the husband to lead the way in sacrifice, in being a peacemaker, in self-denial, in selfless toil. Do you call for your wife to sacrifice? You must sacrifice more! Do you call for your wife to work? You must work more! Do you call for her to give up things? You must give more. That is the essence of Christ-like love and it is the only thing that makes submission a reasonable command.

The flesh seeks to draw a man into a self-absorbed lifestyle whereby his needs are met with no sacrifice on his part and no effort on his part to meet the needs of others. There is no room in Christian marriage for such a life. It is anti-Christ. A man must do that which is foreign to his instinct and love his wife, placing her needs ahead of his own.

Under the grand umbrella of Christian submission this is the charge to those who would be Christian husbands. Place your needs underneath the needs of your wife. This is the love God calls you to.

5:26 “that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word.”

Christ had a vision and a plan that involved the Church. It was to serve Him and bring Him glory because that is His exclusive right as God. It is not wrong for a husband to have a vision and plan for his home, if its purpose is to bring Christ glory. It is not to be given up unless a husband finds he is planning for his own glory. So in giving up himself for his wife a husband is not to set aside all agendas. He is to set aside his own fleshly one. He is to be a source of the righteous and holy vision that he has for his home for His whole family. He is to be continually pouring himself out to bring about the sanctification of those under his own care.

As Christ has made himself the source of the Church's sanctification and blessing so husbands are to throw their all into the effort to make their home a place that is different, where sanctification and cleansing happen. It is to be a place of escape from

the tyranny, cruelty, and pollution of evil. Where the world might bruise and batter and rob individuals of spiritual vitality, the home is to shelter and nourish, strengthen, protect and heal those in it. It can do that if a husband develops a vision for it and gives himself up to bring it about. He must lead the way in the acts of service required to set the proper tone in making the home a Christian one. Spiritual leadership is sacrificing in order to bring about God's order of things. That is spiritual leadership and that is the charge to husbands.

Paul's use of the phrase, "By the washing of water with the word", employing it to illustrate God's sanctification process in the lives of His family. The figure of washing with water is a familiar one to readers of the OT and those familiar with the OT worship practices. It represented purifying from the pollution of evil. That is practically accomplished by God in our lives by the Holy Spirit's application of Scripture, which is able to transform our thoughts and lead to change of mind and change of action. The Word is an important influence in the home, the means by which we are all separated from who we more naturally are.

5:27 "that He might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

Christ meticulously brings about sanctification in His church through the Word as it works in our minds to bring about repentance. Where there is repentance, change of life begins to follow. Christ, through the care of the Holy Spirit, does this work in us so that a final product might be brought about that is without flaw, holy and blameless, useful to Christ for all eternity. In Christ's case, He does it for Himself, that being His right as God. He is the logical end of all created things, their highest possible use being for Him. It is good for Christ and beyond good for His church.

In the case of the husband and the home, he is to give himself up with this view in mind, to bring about in his wife and family their sanctification, through which they will realize their greatest joy and good. God's plan can be pursued and realized only when our own is set aside. A husband's role is one of stewardship. Given his sphere of leadership, will he bring about God's plan or will he use those God has given him to meet his own needs and advance his own agenda? The husband is a manager to whom lives have been entrusted, and he will manage his master's assets well only when he sets aside his own selfish agenda. So there is this constant giving up, or setting aside of one's personal needs, for the higher good that comes with the plan and program of God.

This is the challenge for a husband who wishes to be godly and it leads not to a domineering tyrant before whom everyone cowers and around whom the home- life is centered. It leads to a man who needs less than everyone else in the home, who survives on less, and who in the end has been used of God to lead all in the home to the high ground of Christ-likeness. Before the fall of Adam this was the path of the husband. The fall did not remove him as head of the home, but it allowed that he would head the home for his own selfish ends rather than God's. In the words of Genesis 3 he would "rule over" the woman.

5:28 “So husbands ought also to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself.”

The union of husband and wife is so complete in God’s eyes that He describes them as being “one flesh.” Therefore, to love your wife is to love yourself in God’s eyes. When a man chooses a wife he is choosing to add to himself, to extend himself, his “temple” over which he has responsibility.

Having spoken first of the necessity of a man giving himself up for his wife, Paul now approaches the matter from an entirely different angle to say that to love your wife is to love yourself. Now we know that in the Greek culture there was no shortage of love for one’s own body. Not to have such love would have been considered an abnormality. Paul gets mileage from that cultural value by bringing this biblical truth to bear on it, by teaching that a wife is a part of a man’s physical being, a part of himself to be loved and nurtured in the appropriate way. It is no mere sexual or sensually based counsel, but the reality of how God has viewed the relationship from the very beginning (Genesis 2:24).

5:29 “for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,”

Having approached this important issue of the husband’s responsibility from two apparently different angles, Paul now brings them back together. As one nourishes and cares for his own body, so Christ nourishes and cares for His body, the church, and this is how a man is to care for his own wife. So a man has two illustrations of how he is to care for his wife. His own care for his body and Christ’s loving care for the Church.

5:30 “because we are members of His body.”

This completes the thought of the previous verse.

5:31 “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.”

This is a quote from Genesis 2:24, affirmed by Jesus in principle in Matthew 19:5. It is God’s view of how marriage would be and should be. In looking ahead from the creation event, He states in these words what would and should be the norm. There should be a drive on the part of man to leave his father and mother and to switch that loyalty to his wife.

It is normal under the influence of Yahweh’s Spirit for a young man to search for someone who will be the object of his affection and loyalty, to be able to establish a bond stronger than that between himself and his own parents. He is able to leave the one, his most critical relationship to that point and cleave to the other. The result is a union in God’s eyes that is absolute.

From a practical standpoint, in the real world of human relationships, such a union must be worked at, fostered, cultivated, and protected. It does not always come about due to human factors, but it remains that human relationship with the most potential for intimacy at every level, and this intimacy is the will of God in the matter.

5:32 “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”

Paul almost leaves the subject of husband and wife and of human relationship here at the wonder of this great thought that we are members of the body of Christ. But he draws himself back in the next verse, to summarize his thought on that critical subject.

It is a great mystery this that we are members of Christ's body. A mystery is that in which there are factors that are unknown, or not completely understood. It yields greater truth the deeper one digs. Our interconnectedness to each other and to Christ through the Holy Spirit is that way. The how and why of it is unfathomable to the human mind.

5:33 “Nevertheless let each individual among you love his own wife even as himself, and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband.”

Paul has just reminded us that the mystery of Christ is deep. How we are united with Him remains an unfathomable truth, and for that matter how we are linked in the union of marriage is mysterious and beyond our understanding.

With the word “nevertheless” Paul draws back from the great mystery of Christ and the church, which one can sense he might like to say much more about, and returns to the practical matter at hand, summarizing what he has said about husbands and wives. The truth is vast and great but this is the practical instruction in its outworking. Men must love their wives as themselves, their wife in essence taking the place in their hearts normally reserved for self, and the wife is to show respect for her husband as the source of God's blessing and rule in the home.

Ephesians 6

6:1 “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

The first relationship addressed by Paul is the basic one that sets the tone for other relationships. The relationship between husband and wife is that critical. From the pragmatic viewpoint who has not witnessed the truth of the critical nature of the husband/wife relationship? It is out of healthy homes that people are able to have health in other relationships.

This verse moves from the relationship of husband and wife to speak with those directly affected by the marriage relationship, the children. Children can behave “in the Lord,” meaning in the sphere of the influence of His Spirit. In response to that inner working they can be sure that the leading to obey is a right leading, and therefore the leading not to obey is not of the Lord. It is not a complicated matter, it is simply a matter of what is right. This is the Lord’s order with respect to children.

6:2 “Honor your Father and Mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),”

This quote from the ten commandments supports obedience as proper and so tells why it is certain that it is of the Lord. It is conduct that is in line with written revelation and that is the safest of ground to occupy.

Paul adds his observation that this is the first command with a promise attached. This is significant because the previous commands had been in regard to worship. We know that in other contexts abundant promises are made with respect to the worship of God. Yet when the commands were actually articulated in written code, it is this command that is first to have with it a promise. It is perhaps because children need promise of reinforcement, but more likely because obedience is learned and it is learned in the home. Since blessing flows out of obedience, especially under the Old covenant, obedience is an important skill to develop and give oneself to. It dictates the outcome of one’s life.

6:3 “that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.”

God’s promise under the Old Covenant was this, long life in the Promised Land filled with blessing (See Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5). This is the promise made to all of Israel for their obedience to the covenant, long life filled with blessing, and generations of life in the Promised Land. How could the same promise be made in both scriptures unless obedience is a learned form of behavior, a habit taught and mastered in the home that then equips a person for a lifetime of obedience?

Children who learn to obey learn the essential life skill. They learn to deny their instincts for a path of behavior that will yield better long-term results. They learn delayed gratification. They learn to calculate consequence. They learn to listen to conscience. They learn to shape their behavior by cognitive data rather than by feeling. All of these skills transfer not only to their relationship to God, but to their relationship to authority figures of all types in all arenas of life, and it goes well with them.

6:4 “And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

The key phrase in this thought is likely “the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” When fathers cease following the Lord’s leading and instruction, using their position as head of the home for their own gratification, they will produce angry children.

Angry children not only do not learn to obey, but they learn to live for their flesh as well and the error perpetuates itself. It effects not only a home but a nation. An angry child makes a selfish and irresponsible adult who is emotionally handicapped, whose destiny is deep trouble in all of life’s relationships. Understanding the timing and heart of God in bringing discipline and instruction into the lives of your children is an important “dad skill.”

In giving children the charge to honor and obey parents, God places their welfare squarely in the hands of the head of the home. Will a father allow that sacred trust to be abused, or will he walk so closely with God, that his discipline and instruction flow in perfect harmony with the One who has a plan for the life of every child? This is the staggering responsibility of a father. It is the discipline and instruction of the Lord that must be discovered and passed along.

6:5 “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ.”

Having applied the command in 5:21 to the home, Paul now turns to another important relationship that existed among those in the Church. There were a large number of servants (and that is the word used here) and a number of masters. The arrangement between servant and master was not quite that of employer and employee today in America, but it was not quite what we think of when we speak of slavery.

That Paul does not outrightly condemn slavery is a puzzle to us but must have to do with the progress of revelation and the work of the Spirit in the world through it. When slavery did begin to be abolished, the writings of Paul and other Scripture played a very critical role.

Paul tells these servants to be obedient, and that their obedience should be marked by fear and trembling, by sincerity and as an extension of their obedience to Christ. It is not to be done as if marking time until better opportunity or enlightenment comes along. It was to be very genuine marked by the proper inward attitude of respect.

Christ calls people to Himself and enables them to accept and carry out their lot in life. There are exceptions and some significant ones. But because God works through situations, and circumstances, even evil ones, it is often essential to the eventual progress of His kingdom that whole generations endure faithfully and carry out the role that lies before them. This is the norm in the Christian life. Then there are those whom He raises up to be agents of change, who are led and enabled by Him to bring about new order. But even those often first have to learn the discipline and humility of endurance.

We should not deduce too quickly from observation of this norm that enduring injustice is our appointed lot. As we prayerfully accept what God may have for us, we also must realize that individuals with sufficient faith and the courage and strength that follows it, are always lacking. Often God is crying out, “Oh, if there were but one man...!” We must always ask if He wishes to right a wrong through us. Then we must

summon our faith to test for His blessing and His timing in the matter. For Paul and the other churchmen of the day it was apparently not in the plan of God to address the injustice of slavery, and many other injustices, in their day.

6:6 “not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”

Sincerity is the chief thing Paul is pushing for in servants. Their obedience is not to be mere eye service, done only when the boss is around to make a good impression and to be pleasing to the eye of man. It is not to be a mere outward display of obedience to enhance one's stock without really paying the price. It is to be done to please Christ and that always involves motive. When it is done for His sake it carries great reward. If done for our own welfare and to the shallow standard that demands then our only reward will be whatever we earn of earthly things.

6:7 “with good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”

This advice given to servants is some of the most profound and some of the most profitable given in all of Scripture. It is a great personnel motto, business motto, church motto, and ministry motto. It will keep motives pure and it will make our spirits attractive and beautiful.

We can understand this in this way. First a servant is to render service. That seems obvious, since that is the job of a servant, but many employees lose sight of the fact that this is why they are being paid. It is their chief responsibility, to render service. It is not to render advice, not to change procedure, not to dictate how profits are spent. It is to render service.

Second, it is to be done with good will, and if it cannot be so done it is not the kind of service God is pleased with. Good will implies having every intention of advancing the master's interests. It is being an initiator of those things that bring about good things for the master. It speaks of a positive spirit, a person able and willing and even eager to be of service. It is not compatible with reluctance, or a self-service, what's-in-it-for-me mentality.

Third, service is rendered with the Lord's pleasure in mind not man, as if He directed the work and was going to inspect the work (both of which are true if we understand Him correctly). This is the Christian employee's creed.

6:8 “knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”

This is the great principle of blessing and reward that we must have faith and trust in. It is the precise point at which many Christians have a lapse of faith, and fall into unbelief, and so miss out on the blessing of God. We must believe that every good deed will be noticed by the Lord, and that He will repay us through His family. The moment we catch ourselves thinking any job or act of service is a waste of time or unrewarding we should immediately arrest the thought. The only thing that is a waste of time is evil. Whatever good thing each one does is of value in God's eyes and receives reward from Him. To believe otherwise is to rob ourselves of intimacy with God. It is a life changing experience to work in fellowship with the Lord in the way

described in these verses. To approach work any other way is to be guided by the flesh not by the spirit.

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

These must have been radical words in the day they were written. It was, in essence and spirit, the beginning of the end of any form of slavery. It is a catalytic message to Christians on labor relations.

In what sense are masters to “do the same thing to them?” Paul is referring to the command to render service with good will, and it is why the command to “give up threatening” immediately follows. It was an important command because it meant that there should be a distinct difference between a normal, run-of-the-mill master, and a Christian master. There was to be good will extended by both servant and master in the Christian community. There was to be a consciousness on both parties’ parts that they were servants of Christ and as such anxious to serve Him and please Him and receive reward from Him.

Servants are to have a delightful spirit about them. Masters were to have humbleness about them so that though they were still masters they modeled servant hood. And here, masters are reminded with very sobering words that there is no partiality with God. When He casts His decisions of judgment, earthly titles and positions will be meaningless. Masters will get no breaks, nor will less be required of them. They are being directed each moment to do certain things, they are being watched, and they are being appropriately compensated. It is a “darkened understanding” (4:17-18) that allows a master to act in any other way.

6:10 “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.”

Having concluded his thoughts on our relationships to one another and on the necessity of learning to subject ourselves in some sense to the concerns and needs of those around us, Paul now gives his thoughts on our most important personal relationship, our relationship with God. For all he has told us is needed of us, strength will be required. And so he will spend a number of verses speaking of that strength which God makes available to us.

Paul begins with this command, and it is good to consider why it is a command. We will not experience the Lord’s strength just by nature of being His children. It is something we must summon. As Paul launches into a series of figures that liken the provisions of God to a suit of armor, we will see that most involve faith- inspired obedience to some truth and faith-inspired submission to the Holy Spirit to engage certain activities He carries out. As we submit to Him and do those things we are strengthened by Him in all things.

And so verse ten is the core thought of this section, verses eleven through twenty develop and expand this basic command. Because of who we are in Christ we have great strength. It is greater strength than that classically referred to as in our inner selves. It is in our inner-most selves because that’s where His Spirit has taken up residence. He stirs from within us and is the source of power that is far beyond us. He has great power, the greatest of powers and this might become ours when we live the faith life.

Three words in this verse speak of strength. First is the command to be strengthened, *endunmousqe*. It is a general word for power or in this case empowerment. Next is the word translated in the NSAB “power.” It is *kratei* from *kratos* a word that speaks of might and dominion. Finally, the word *iscuos* is used, translated “might,” another term for strength and might. So Paul uses three different words probably to emphasize the resource of God freely available to us. There is no lack of power on God’s part to help us rise to whatever occasion might come our way. Again, Paul is talking about power far beyond that of what humanists call the power of our inner selves.

6:11 “Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”

There is that which God makes available to us that will enable us to stand firm against every trick employed by the evil one. The armor of God is made available with this purpose in mind. It is not just that God wants us to stay on our feet and retreat in the battle without injury. He wants us to be able to stand, to take ground, to give nothing up to the evil one. To do so we must clothe ourselves in this armor.

We cannot expect to stand apart from it or we would not have needed a Savior. The reason we need a Savior is found in the nature of the devil, he is a master of deceit and trickery. Apart from the provision of God we are no match for it. We will simply be “outflanked” in our own mental processes by the rhetoric of Satan, as was Eve, and so led into sin. It is the armor of God that brings about our sanctification.

6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the power, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

The Christian life with its mission, with the individual journey that Paul has laid out for the Ephesians is described here as a struggle. The word is *palh* meaning struggle or fight. Paul has described it as a walk (4:1), as a matter of imitation like one would expect of a child (5:1), but here he uses the imagery of battle and he describes the opponent who has marshaled his forces against us.

They are not people, in the flesh and blood sense. Our armor against them cannot be the normal armament of that kind of battle. It is the armor of God that is appropriate for this kind of foe and this kind of battle. The danger is not just to the physical being, but to the inner being and that is what must be protected. The foe is unseen but is well-ordered with diverse methods. The foe consists of the rulers who rule over them. It consists of their particular “powers,” what we might describe as all they have authority to do.

Our enemy consists not only of such forces assigned to energize the world system so that it resists and seeks to destroy all that is good, but it includes those spiritual forces that produce wickedness who are heavenly beings. They are beings of some rank and privilege in the kingdom of evil, fallen angels who assist their leader in his struggle to usurp God.

All told this is a startling thought, that there is such resistance marshaled against our faith and growth, bent on keeping us from carrying out the will of God. They are seeking to destroy all that God is doing in and through the Church. They are many, they are organized, they have certain power beyond what is human, they are unseen,

and they are in this world and beyond. Such a description is given by Paul not to intimidate and cause concern, but to guide us in our own defense and in our offensive against these forces. The nature of our enemy requires certain weaponry. It is actual weaponry not just strategies, methodologies, or tactics.

6:13 “Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

Through the armor of God we can resist and stand firm. The word for resist is “to stand against,” *antisthnai*. The imagery is one of taking a stand between an enemy and his objective and fighting against him. It is an amazing thing that we as mere human beings can do such a thing against an enemy such as the one described in verse twelve who is clearly superior. That is a tribute to the armor. In taking up this armor we have done everything that needs to be done to stand firm and not be beaten back by the evil one or his forces.

Now, What does the phrase “in the evil day” mean? It could refer to a particular day in the program and plan of God when the world will be under a particularly evil regime. We know such a time will occur under the rule of the Anti-Christ. It is also true that his spirit was already at work and that Paul was likely viewing the whole period of time until the return of Christ as the evil day which will of course culminate in what Paul refers to elsewhere as “the apostasy.” It seems likely that “the evil day” is used here of the entire age until the return of Christ. As we await that great event God’s armor equips us to take a stand in behalf of the kingdom of God against evil. The armor is all we need, and makes us adequate for this great work.

6:14 “Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,”

Girding one’s loins was the process of gathering up from the legs one’s robe and tucking all the material into a belt. That belt was called a girdle in older English versions. The result was that a long flowing garment was converted into something more like a pair of shorts. It allowed for greater freedom and coordination of movement, greater speed, and more agility. It was a standard practice where work was to be done or where one desired to run.

Paul borrowed this figure from Isaiah. Isaiah uses this of Christ and so we can observe first that in doing this we are behaving like Christ. Secondly, we can surmise that truth has an effect on our inner beings and our performance of spiritual work that the “girding of the loins” had on one’s ability to do physical work. Truth enables us to keep from stumbling, to have swift and efficient movement. It keeps us from being entangled with all the distractions and falsehood of worldly life.

We are to add to this the “breastplate of righteousness.” It is Christ’s righteousness that guards our standing from God and gives us rights as sons of God. It is our own righteous deeds and our commitment to obedience that protects our spiritual vitality and keeps us from falling victim to Satan’s schemes that bring us practical spiritual death. As the breastplate protected vital organs, so righteousness, both Christ’s imputed righteousness and our own sanctification, protect the lifeblood of our relationship to God. One cannot hope to survive the spiritual enemy apart from a commitment to righteousness. These things enable us to stand firm. Others follow in the ensuing verses that contribute to our protection and usefulness.

6:15 “and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;”

What happens to a soldier's feet, especially in the days of hand-to-hand combat, was of vital importance. In such times a soldier was very vulnerable if he could not move well. It was essential for effective attack and safe retreat.

It was also true that in the ancient world it was the feet that carried the body and it was the feet that left their imprint wherever one went. The feet of the bearer of good news are said to have beauty in the OT (Isaiah 52:7, Nahum 1:15). Paul elsewhere (Romans 10), borrows this idea and applies it to the preaching of the gospel. And so it is here that the Spirit moves Paul to associate the feet with the good news of the gospel.

The good news of peace with God and therefore with man, prepares hearts, both in the bearer of the good news and in the hearers. Its news burns in our hearts to motivate us and it breaks down the strong holds erected in the hearts of others. It carries us and all we represent into the hearts of all who might hear. And then it leaves behind its distinct imprint as the process of spiritual growth begins to unfold and have its effect.

The gospel is our reason to go and it is what bears us along in the battle. As long as we have it we will continue on and we will prevail. If the words we bring are of self-help or simply of human origin we bring nothing new and nothing that coincides with what the Spirit wishes to use to change the minds of those we speak with.

6:16 “in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.”

Faith, the practice of trusting in the character and ability of God as being such that your own welfare in day-to-day life is completely provided for in His plan, renders Satan's attacks harmless. It is that which failed Eve in the Garden and it is the sin that has led to all others ever since. It is when we listen to those thoughts of doubt in God's absolute goodness, truthfulness, knowledge, love and the like, that we begin to assert our own will. That is the first sin in every instance where we sin.

Faith is the shield that protects our walk. The shield is a great illustration, timeless in terms of the imagery of battle. To the Ephesians, it was something simple that was held in the hand of a fighter. To us something higher tech, like a bullet-proof vest, or an electronic shield of some sort. But to any reader at any time a shield is a great picture of faith. If we are living by faith we will not sin, pure and simple. If we are not we are already living in sin (our definition of what “living in sin” means needs to be changed).

Satan sends “flaming missiles” at us. To the original readers, that meant something different than what we think of. But the practical effect was the same, grave danger and great destruction. Now there is no doubt that Satan can still bring great harm to our physical beings and our possessions, but only with God's permission. Satan's intent in doing so is to get us to “curse God,” or to stop living in confidence in His character and ability, to stop saying He is good. In exercising faith we may still suffer physical loss, but we will inflict great loss on the enemy and the battle will be ours. In the end we will have lost nothing important and gained all that is important.

6:17 “and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Our salvation is our citizenship in God’s kingdom. It is both an event and an ongoing process. The ancient mind did not understand the head as the seat of all thinking but they did understand that wounds to the head were most generally fatal. Our salvation, its past, present and future aspects, must be embraced fully by us always. It must be firmly believed in and more deeply understood with each passing day. If we let go of it our ability to execute life by the Spirit’s leading becomes vulnerable.

We have a weapon, not just pieces of armor. Our armor is meant for our defense but also so that we ourselves can wield a weapon and fight. That weapon is the sword of the Spirit, further defined as the word of God. David was given the sword of Goliath, and said of it “there is none like it” (1 Samuel 21:9). We are given the same sword that the Holy Spirit wields, the word of God. There is none like it. It is the personal weapon of the Almighty One, which has never failed to accomplish what it was picked up to do (Isaiah 55:11). His word brought about all that is. The word of God is our greatest single assets in accomplishing God’s work. There can be no wiser choice then to make personal commitments to understand and to some degree master the Bible.

6:18 “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”

There is another activity that is to be an integral part of the practice of Christianity and that activity is clearly and repetitively stated in this verse. We are to pray with all prayer and petition. The English versions supply a verb in this verse, pray. The Greek text has that word in the form of a present middle participle (nominative plural.). Prayer is presented as something that is the outgrowth of and accompanying activity to all that has gone before. So as we do all the rest, including taking up the sword of the Spirit, we are to be doing it all while praying alertly.

There are different types of prayers within the realm of human thought and emotion. Some are silent, some aloud, some meticulously planned, some entirely spontaneous, some entirely God-focused, some self-focused, others other-focused. All sorts of prayers and praying are to be in our arsenal.

We are to pray at all times. Our prayers are not to be confined to a place or time of the day. Nowhere are we taught to schedule a prayer time, not that there is anything inherently wrong with such a thing. But this is the thing we are taught, to pray always. To live a life such that prayer is an ongoing activity. It is good to remember that we are called to prayerfulness, not just to the task of prayer.

The key thought of this entire treatment on prayer is the idea that we are to pray in the Spirit, under the influence or control of the Holy Spirit. Every prayer offered in any season is to be Spirit led. The word rendered “times” by the NASB is *καιρος*. It refers to a definite time, large or small. Our use of the word “season” conveys its meaning well. Whatever the season, we are to pray according to the Holy Spirit’s prompting. He will lay certain people, certain situations, and certain specifics related to them on our hearts. The Spirit will lead us to pray, and He will lead us with respect to how to pray and what to pray. It is prayer in the Spirit that is particularly effective because it is prayer in line with the heart of God, which requests are always granted.

We are to have a certain objective in view as we carry on the prayer habit. The objective is Spirit-led intercession on behalf of Christians everywhere. We are to be alert with respect to this purpose (that language is distinct in the Greek text), and we are to be alert in a preserving way. In other words we are to continually watch for the prompting of the Holy Spirit to pray for a person or person's brought to mind and then we are to be obedient in pursuing that prompting by petitioning our heavenly Father in their behalf.

This is the type of prayer life God wishes us to rise to. It is not simply a prayer time guided by a list, though it may well include this. The praying in view we might see as springing from prayerfulness. It is a never ceasing activity, like breathing, directed by Yahweh Himself through the Holy Spirit. It reaches not just to those whose special needs we know of, but to all saints. It rises above the circle of ourselves and our close relationships, and fully understood it rises even above our own knowledge of the facts of a particular situation or person.

It is this kind of prayer that we can easily be oblivious to, to the myriad of people and needs that God daily wishes for us to minister to through prayer. It may be the single greatest potential we have in ministry, and it may be the source of our greatest regret in eternity.

6:19 “and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.”

Paul adds to what he has said about prayer for all the saints' a specific request for himself. In doing so he models for us what sorts of things a prayerful person is led to pray for. Paul was in prison. He might easily have prayed for release, which he certainly did at times. But a Spirit-led person looks beyond creature comforts to Divine purposes. Paul's request reflects this.

Paul wants utterance, literally that “a word” might be given to him while in the act of speaking. Paul does not just want to speak, or even to speak well. He wants to speak in words that are of God, to communicate a message that is from God, not simply of his own making. For this he desires “a word from the Lord.” He wants the message and thought that changes a presentation of ideas into a living, powerful, life-changing, authoritative, encounter with God.

Such a message would be a word that would open the minds of the hearers so that to them would be made known the mystery of the Gospel. This is the prayer that should be prayed for all who by virtue of giftedness are involved in the proclamation of truth. It is that each time they speak they might receive the word for the moment that will lend power to their message. But it is also essential regarding normal human conversations. There is great potential in normal conversation for drawing people to faith. Far more words are uttered in normal conversations that we have with unbelievers than those uttered in formal presentations of the faith that they themselves might ever hear.

This prayer is essential and that it be answered is essential because the Gospel is a mystery. It is so not because of its complexity. In other words, the Gospel as it has been revealed is not a mystery. It is a mystery to the hearers because of the darkened condition of the human mind and its incapacity to think as God thinks. Because of their self-inflicted blindness the truth lies just beyond the ability of many to comprehend.

It is for the eternal welfare of the hearers that Paul makes this request. He knows that to successfully spread the gospel he must have supernatural utterance. An important key in this is that he not simply articulate the truth in understandable terms. That is rarely the main challenge. Supernatural utterance includes having boldness to say what is known to be the truth, and the calling forward of the aspect of the truth appropriate to the moment—that will break through self-constructed arguments in the individual's mind.

6:20 “for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.”

Paul did not see his imprisonment as a major blow to the cause of the gospel. He saw himself still as an ambassador for the gospel, though in the custody of Rome. It is a very important type of mindset to develop whatever the trial or the circumstances that our Divine assignment lead us into.

Boldness is the key thing needed to be a faithful and effective ambassador. So twice now in asking for prayer Paul mentions his need for boldness. He wants to speak as he ought to speak. That is always the challenge. It involves saying what God needs said at the very moment in time it needs to be said. When it comes to the gospel it is where we all seem to fail, even when it is our life's work. To speak openly and confidently is the challenge. Since this was critical to Paul, then mutual prayer in this matter is important for all believers.

6:21 “ But that you also may know about my circumstance, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you.”

On several occasion, Paul entrusted this man Tychicus with personal ministry and shepherding that was on his heart. We don't know much of Tychicus except what is said here that he was beloved and faithful. That is enough for any of us to have said about us. Paul entrusted personal errands to this man when he wanted to provide a sense of his personal presence. When others had deserted him and proved themselves unfaithful, we find Tychicus still at his post, on task and seeking to advance the mission. Tychicus is a powerful example to us!

6:22 “And I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.”

Tychicus will be the mailman. He will carry this letter to the Church in Ephesus and also a personal report from Paul as to the particulars of his situation.

Paul thought it important to communicate, not to loose touch with those who could support the overall ministry either by prayer, by gift of money, or by actual labor. Communication being what it was, a personal envoy would be the best means of doing this.

It says a great deal about Tychicus that Paul would entrust him with this, not only to convey information and to receive ministry from the Ephesians, but to minister to them. In this Tychicus becomes more than the mailman. He is a personal agent of Paul, able to do what prison prohibits Paul from doing, lending encouragement in the faith and comfort in the Lord to the Ephesians.

6:23 “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul begins to state the blessings that come with living intimately with God. There is the blessing of peace. It is one of the great things God gives and He can give it immediately, the moment one becomes a child of God. He can also give it continually no matter what the circumstances. He also is a giver of love in unlimited supplies and uses us to convey it to others. Here Paul conveys to them this great thought and reminds them that God is also the conveyer of faith, the increasing ability to trust Him in every circumstance.

Faith and love and hope have a symbiotic relationship if the faith we embrace is the sort that is directed by God and if we ponder it right. They add strength and impetus to each other.

6:24 “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible.”

A corruptible love is one that can be diverted, diluted, and displaced. Those who have such a love for Christ might taste the blessing of God, but they will not go on in the experience of the abundance of His grace. That blessing goes to those who cannot be bought by the world's allure. Paul, perhaps weary of the fickleness of some Christians (see 2 Timothy 4:9-22), feels constrained to single out the faithful to the exclusion of those who waiver and so become a liability to the kingdom of God. The experience of ongoing grace is enjoyed by the faithful. What could be a better blessing than more of the grace of God?