



Ephesians

A Verse-By-Verse Commentary

(Originally written one verse per day)

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CONTENTS

(Hyperlinked- Clicking the title will take you to that chapter)

Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	45
Chapter 3	84
Chapter 4	117
Chapter 5	167
Chapter 6	212

CHAPTER 1

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 1:1

Welcome to the book of Ephesians! It is comprised of 155 verses, and so it will take us (one day at a time, just like your vitamins) about one half a year to analyze it. I hope you will be blessed as each day unfolds with new insights into this beautiful epistle from the mind of God and through the hand of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

He begins by introducing himself right off the bat. The letter bears his name and though many have challenged the authenticity of his authorship in this and in all of his letters, there is no valid reason to suggest that he is not the true author. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles, and the letter is written to a Gentile-led church.

He next identifies his apostleship with the words, “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” He is a messenger of the Lord, having been called by Him personally to perform this weighty duty which has been so amazingly fruitful for the past two thousand years. This is his one claim to the authority of writing a letter of doctrine to them, and it is with this authority that he thus writes.

After this, he notes that his apostleship is “by the will of God.” This is the same phrase as is seen in 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy. It is what further defines his calling, and which affirms his authority.

It also is a note of humility in that he was selected, and therefore it was not of his own merits. Instead it was by the sovereign decision of God that he is so designated an apostle.

In his letter to the Romans, he gave a more formal declaration of his commission, and in Galatians the opening statement was considerably more direct and even abrupt. In other letters, the opening varies as well. The opening statement is given in each epistle to set the tone for the rest of the letter.

Finally, he states that the letter is written specifically “To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.” They are to be the initial recipients of this beautiful letter of doctrine, and they are to be blessed with having been the first to read the subject matter of which Paul felt it necessary to put into writing for the instruction and edification of those in the church.

However, the intent of Paul's letters is not that they would be read and then secreted away for only the Ephesians to refer to. Rather, the anticipation is that it would be circulated among the churches, having copies made and having sessions where the content could be repeated and analyzed.

This is seen in the words, "...and faithful in Christ Jesus." The Ephesians are the main addressee, but all who are faithful in Christ are also included in the words from Paul's hand.

This is seen in the truth that we have, in fact, a copy of the letter before us now. It became well known enough to be considered for inclusion in the Bible, and its contents made it rightly selected for that same purpose. Each step of the process was guided by the Holy Spirit to ensure that we have the sure and perfect word of God to refer to.

Life application: As Paul wrote, he probably didn't think that we would be reading his words two thousand years later, but the personal nature of the note includes us in the epistle, nonetheless. It is a letter directed to each person as an individual who would pick it up and read it. Consider this as you read it, or truly any portion of Scripture.

Heavenly Father, it is so welcoming to know that Your word was written through the hands of the prophets and apostles, speaking to people thousands of years ago, and yet it was also written to each one of us who is willing to pick it up, read it, and cherish the content which comes directly from Your heart into our minds. Help us to hold it in reverence, to refer to it often, and to cherish the precepts that it contains. Help us in this, O God! Amen.

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

In his initial words of verse 1, Paul identified himself, his position as an apostle, his calling by the will of God, and to whom he was addressing. Now he gives the standard greeting which is found in most of his epistles, "Grace to you and peace to you."

Grace is unmerited favor which cannot be earned. This is the common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however is the common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is *shalom*. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet, but is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways.

Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. This grace precedes the peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God.

Paul extends this wonderful blessing to them "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Rather than being an argument against the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is an argument for it. He is tying the two in as one - Jesus being a member of the Godhead. He is not making some type of great division, but a harmonious blending of the two.

Throughout Paul's letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which simply can't be missed. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world.

Life application: Outside of God's creation, which reveals Him in a general way, we cannot comprehend Him except through His special revelation. One way we receive special revelation is through the mouths of His prophets. But these prophets all testified to the same thing - Jesus Christ (John 5:39).

The most magnificent special revelation of God that we have received is the incarnation of Jesus. But for us, even this isn't sight, it is found in the testimony of those who have recorded what they knew into the New Testament. So, in order to understand God, one must know Jesus Christ, and one cannot understand Jesus Christ unless they know their Bible. Today's life application... know your Bible.

Heavenly Father, how grateful we are that we can fellowship with You personally. We can read Your word and know who You are. We can have personal talks with You as we pray in a quiet place or on a bustling city street. And we can feel Your presence as we attend church and fellowship with others, praising You and giving thanks to You for Your wonderful care of us. Thank You for allowing us to fellowship with You, O God, in such intimate ways. Amen.

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

This verse, although divided with periods in the English, is actually one continuous thought which ends at the close of verse 12. In the thought, he begins with the words, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The word “be” is inserted in the English for our clarity. And the word “blessed” is different from the word which is used in the beatitudes which is also translated as “blessed.” It is the word *eulogétos*, and it literally indicates, “worthy of praise.” It is where the term “eulogize,” or “eulogy” comes from. It is only used for God the Father and Christ (meaning God the Son). Thus it shows that the Godhead is worthy of all praise.

The term, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in no way negates the deity of Christ. In fact, it highlights it. As there is One God and He is the Father of Christ, then it shows that there is more to the character of God than just being a monad. Rather, it shows that the two are one, but are yet different persons within the Godhead. The Spirit, although not mentioned here, is the third member of the Godhead.

His next words are “who has blessed us.” The “us” is not referring to the world at large, because the world at large has not been blessed with the spiritual blessings which he will next refer to. Nor is it specifically speaking of the Gentiles, because Paul uses the term “us,” and he is a Jew.

Therefore, “us” must be referring to “the saints” mentioned in verse 1, of whom Paul includes himself. All saints, meaning believers in Christ, are included in the words of this epistle which Paul now sets forth for us.

It is the saints of the ages who have been blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.” These spiritual blessings include peace with God, pardon from sin, redemption through the blood of Christ, adoption as sons of God, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, etc. These are those spiritual blessings that are unique to the followers of Jesus Christ.

The word “places” is not in the Greek, but is inserted for clarity by the translators. Rather, it says more literally, “in the heavenlies.” It can mean “heavenly places,” “heavenly things,” etc. The intent is that all that relates to heavenly matters (things related to or pertaining to heaven) is what the believer is endowed with. It is through the work of Christ that these things are made available, and are also guaranteed.

Paul will refer to these “heavenlies” five times in this epistle; in 1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, and 6:12. Nowhere else will he speak of such things using this particular form of the word. Thus, the letter of Ephesians is especially directed toward an understanding of the spiritual matters which lead to our heavenly inheritance because of our position “in Christ.”

From the moment that we call on Him, we are termed “in” Him, and the benefits to be derived from this exalted position will never be taken away. Paul will confirm this as he winds his way through the epistle. It is remarkable that the very tone of the entire epistle, that of “spiritual blessings,” is that which is highlighted at this introductory moment. His words will follow naturally and specifically from the words of this verse.

Life application: If you want to have a fuller understanding of our position in Christ, and the spiritual blessings which accompany that glorious state, stay tuned as we follow Paul’s thoughts through to the end of this marvelous letter.

O God, it is the most exciting thing to open Your word and to study it, finding the true intent of what You have revealed to us there. Help us to take each thing in context, to never manipulate the intent which You have set out for each verse, and to be careful stewards of this precious gift which You have bestowed us with. Grant us this so that we will never bring discredit upon Your word and thus upon You who have granted this word to us. Amen.

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, Ephesians 1:4

The words here can be viewed in several ways. One view negates the thought of free-will in man, as if God has made a decision to choose specific individuals regardless of whether they do anything or not.

This is a monergistic view which basically looks at all things as directed by God to an ultimate end in such a way that there is no need to “receive” Jesus; there is no need to evangelize others; there is no need to anticipate that the things we do will affect our eternal destiny in any way. It is basically God’s plan being executed by automatons.

The other view is a synergistic view which says that the free-will of man is included in God’s purposes of election; that man is accountable for the actions and decisions he makes; and that receiving Christ is an active part of the redemptive process. The words of Charles Ellicott help define which view is correct (underlining added) –

“The eternal election of God is inseparably connected with the blessing of the Spirit. This passage stands alone in St. Paul’s Epistles in its use of this word ‘chosen’ in connection with God’s eternal purpose, ‘before the foundation of the world’—a phrase only applied elsewhere to the eternal communion of the Son with the Father (John 17:24), and to the foreordaining of His sacrifice in the divine counsels (1 Peter 1:20).

The word “chosen” itself is used by our Lord of His choice of the Apostles (John 6:70; John 13:18; John 15:16-19); but in one case with the significant addition, ‘one of you is a devil,’ showing that the election was not final. It is similarly used in the Acts (Acts 1:2; Acts 1:24; Acts 6:5; Acts 15:7; Acts 15:22; Acts 15:25) of His choice or the choice of the Apostles; and once (Acts 13:7) of the national election of Israel.

In 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 (the only other place where it is used by St. Paul), and in James 2:5 it refers to choice of men by God’s calling in this world. Clearly in all these cases it is applied to the election of men to privilege by an act of God’s mercy here. In this passage, on the contrary, the whole reference is to the election “in Christ,” by the foreknowledge of God, of those who should hereafter be made His members.

From this examination of Scriptural usage it is clear that the visible election to privilege is constantly and invariably urged upon men; the election in God’s eternal counsels only dwelt upon in passages which (like this or Romans 9, 11) have to ascend in thought to the fountain-head of all being in God’s mysterious will. It will be observed that even here it clearly refers to all members of the Church, without distinction.”

From this study, we see that the meaning of God’s predestination, or choosing us, “in Him before the foundation of the world” speaks of an overall plan for the redemption of man, not the individual details of the plan. In other words, God would do something in the realm of space, time, and matter which He created, and which would bring about the redemption of the creatures He knew would fall from His favor.

The plan was laid out and ordained before the creation of anything that existed, and that plan includes God’s petitioning of men to turn back to Him voluntarily; the overall plan includes human free-will. This doesn’t mean He doesn’t know what choices we will make, but it allows for free-will from a human perspective.

In this we see that the details of that overall plan would come by the individual actions of man within the larger concept of “choosing” the elect. In the plan are set parameters which include “that we should be holy and without blame before Him.”

These words show us the object of the overall plan of divine election. They imply a synergistic cooperation between the Redeemer and the redeemed. Because of the fall, man is inherently unholy and unrighteous.

However, in coming to Christ, man is justified before God. From that point we are to strive toward holiness so that we may be presented to God in holiness (see Romans 12:1). Albert Barnes provides the following concerning the responsibilities of the elect –

“The tendency among people has always been to abuse the doctrine of predestination and election; to lead people to say that if all things are fixed there is no need of effort; that if God has an eternal plan, no matter how people live, they will be saved if he has elected them, and that at all events they cannot change that plan, and they may as well enjoy life by indulgence in sin.

The apostle Paul held no such view of the doctrine of predestination. In his apprehension it is a doctrine suited to excite the gratitude of Christians, and the whole tendency and design of the doctrine, according to him, is to make people holy, and without blame before God in love.”

God’s plan neither directs nor chooses individual salvation apart from the giving of Christ (which in reality is what a monergistic view of salvation implies), nor does it direct individual holiness apart from the process of sanctification, of which the individual clearly participates.

If God chose the elect even prior to the fall, then Christ’s work loses its significance. Such ideas conflict with the entire tenor of Scripture and are based on a faulty view of the overall plan. God’s plan does not negate free-will. Instead, God’s plan relies on free-will; it anticipates it; it expects it.

And all of this from God is “in love.” The final two words of the verse show us the nature of God’s heart toward the objects of the plan. God would create in love. God knew that man would turn away from Him, but in love He devised His plan even before that occurred; even as He determined to create.

Man did fall, and in love God continued with the plan of redemption for man; He chose to send Jesus. There is no other plan because the plan is based on the eternal counsel of God even before creation. Therefore, the use of the words “chose us” indicates all those who would be receptive to the plan, executed in love, which was devised in love by God who is love.

Life application: You may choose to accept this analysis of the doctrine of election, or you may reject it. That is your choice. The important point is that as long as you choose

to receive Jesus Christ, you will be saved. If you don't you will not be saved. Choose wisely.

Lord God, it is beyond comprehension that You would step out of Your eternal realm, unite with Your creation, and work within that creation to correct what we have so horribly fouled up. And then, You grant us the choice to believe or reject that what You did is sufficient to reconcile us to You. In the great plan, which You devised before the very foundation of the world, You have left the final decision up to us as to whether we will accept it or not. How wise You are in Your ways. Thank You for granting us this opportunity to participate in Your love through the work of Christ! Amen.

...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, Ephesians 1:5

As this is one long continued thought, let us review the last verse together with this one-

“...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...”

Paul said that God “chose us” in the previous verse, and now he notes that this choice includes “having predestined us to adoption as sons.” The question is, “What exactly does the ‘predestination’ mean; when did it occur and by what means?”

There are several possibilities, three of which should be considered. Before doing so, it needs to be understood that God does not think either syllogistically (meaning He does not make deductions based on facts), nor does He think discursively (meaning going from thought to thought in a random manner as we often do).

God knows everything immediately and intuitively. As He is outside of time, then there can be no time associated with the mind of God. Those (and other such) types of thinking imply the passage of time.

As God doesn't think things through in a pattern, our possibilities are only a reference for us to consider. They do not reflect the actual way that God predestined us, but they are laid out in sequence because everything that pertains to our predestination has occurred in time; in the process of redemptive history. Understanding this, the options we will look at are:

- 1) God “predestined” those for salvation from a point in time even before the fall of man. God, in essence, said, “I will choose these people and none other.” There is no act of the will on the part of the elect, but God willed them for salvation or condemnation from even before the fall. If this is so, then it means that God actually created all the others *for destruction* as a part of His active plan. In this view, He is saying, “I have created some to go to hell.” This crazy, unbiblical view is termed “hyper-Calvinism.”
- 2) God “predestined” those for salvation from a point after the fall of man, but before the point in time when He determined to correct the fall of man by sending Jesus. There is no act of the will on the part of the elect, but God willed each for salvation or condemnation from after the fall. He then decided to send Jesus to redeem those He chose. If this is so, then God selected those He chose for salvation and simply left all the others out of His plan. He ignored their fallen state and said, “They can go to hell. They are not a part of my redemptive plan.” This unscriptural view falls under the general teachings of modern Calvinism.
- 3) God “predestined” those for salvation after both the fall and the plan to fix the fall. This would mean that He says, “I knew that this would happen and I am going to fix this problem by sending Jesus. Anyone who calls on Him will be saved. My plan of redemption is one of ‘choosing’ those who are willing to believe, by faith, that I am a rewarder of those who diligently seek Me.” In this is seen the truth of John 3:16 – “...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” He saw there was a problem; resolved to fix the problem; and sent Jesus on His mission to fix the problem.

The contents of Scripture clearly lay out that God allows man free-will. As this is so, the predestination of man falls into the third category. God “predestined us to adoption as sons” through a plan which reveals His love for His creatures, and yet an allowance for those creatures to willingly accept or reject Him is granted. And this is done “by Jesus Christ” and “to Himself.”

It is through the work of Jesus Christ that God has accomplished His work of predestination. It is the means by which man can and must be saved. As this is so, then it can be the only means by which this may come about; God has no other plan because God is God. Thus, the entire plan is “according to the good pleasure of His will.” This term doesn’t indicate merely a sense of a friendly feeling, but rather that it is what is pleasing to Him.

As has already been noted above from Hebrews 11:6, but which will be cited in its entirety, it is “faith” which is pleasing to God. The entire body of Scripture points to this-

“But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

-Hebrews 11:6

What kind of nutty thinking would state that this faith is not of free-will? Why would it please God to make a being that was forced to believe that He existed in order to be saved? That is as nutty as a tennis puck. Rather, God instilled in man free-will. He also set the parameters by which that free-will would be pleasing to Him. When the free-will is in accord with those parameters, God is pleased with that.

This is the proper understanding of what God has done within the stream of time in which we exist. Again, as noted above though, God doesn't actually think in the way that is presented, but His thoughts are revealed to us in one of those ways as the stream of time, which He created, unfolds.

Life application: Where is God glorified in creating automatons that simply do what He wills? Other than reveling in something that He didn't even need to create in order to get exactly the same effect as if He did, He is not so glorified in any way. Rather, in creating free-willed sentient beings who willingly accept His offer of Jesus Christ, He is truly glorified. From that acceptance, He can then fellowship with those beings, redeemed by the blood of His Son, for all eternity.

Lord God, You are fully complete in Your own Being and You didn't need to create a thing in order to be satisfied with who You are. And yet, because of Your love for the creatures You could create, You did create. And now we are given the choice to accept that, or reject it. Your word tells us that those who are pleasing to You are those who diligently seek after You and have faith in You and in what You have done. Help us to demonstrate faith in the work of Jesus, calling on Him and being saved unto eternal life. And then Lord, help us to pursue Christ all our days. With this, surely You will be pleased. Amen.

...to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.
Ephesians 1:6

This verse is again a continuation of the same thought. It is a comment on the predestination and election which was referred to in the preceding words. Taken together, they read –

“...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

The words “to the praise of the glory of His grace” are a Hebraism. They bear the same meaning as, “to His glorious grace.” And so Paul is indicating that praises are due because of the processes of predestination and election which have been laid out in the stream of time, and in which those who participate should be forever grateful. Such praises are made because of His glorious grace. His grace, revealed in this redemptive process, is the very basis of our gratitude towards God.

To see this further revealed, we can note that first in Ephesians 1:7 “the riches of His grace” is mentioned. Afterward, in Ephesians 1:17 & 18 the focus is on the “glory.” First it mentions that He is “the Father of glory,” and then it speaks of “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

This connection between God’s glory and His grace is seen in a marvelous way in Exodus 33 when Moses spoke to the Lord –

“And he said, ‘Please, show me Your glory.’

¹⁹ Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’” Exodus 33:18, 19

In this, we find that the grace of God isn’t just a favor granted by Him. Rather it is one of His very attributes and a part of His divine nature. He is gracious just as He is love. Vincent’s Word Studies rightly states that, “In praising God for what He does, we learn to praise Him for what He is.”

We praise God because of His grace bestowed upon us, and in this we understand that we praise Him because He is gracious in His very being.

And Paul goes further yet. He says that it is this grace, “by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” It is through Christ that the tie is made. God demonstrates His grace towards us, this very aspect of His nature, through the giving of Christ. Christ is the means of bestowing His unmerited favor upon the people of the world.

Calling Christ “the Beloved” shows the inseparable connection between the two. The love found in this Father/Son relationship is infinite. Therefore, in our uniting with Christ, the love relationship between God and us places us in that same infinite love. Christ becomes our Redeemer, our Savior, and our Mediator to God the Father.

As He gave up His Son for our salvation, not sparing Him, then how great a love God must have for us, the objects of His affection! This is the true demonstration of the glory of His grace. It is the reason why our praises are directed towards Him.

We have been made acceptable in the Beloved, and thus our praise of what the Beloved has done for us are praises for what the Father has done in Him for us. The two are inseparably connected, and thus the praises are also inseparably connected. This is revealed in the words of John –

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” -John 17:1-5

This also explains why Jesus made this claim – “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23). There can be no honor of the Father if the Son is not honored. The grace of God, shown in the Beloved, means that the praise of God either honors both or it honors neither.

Life application: Take time today to sing to the praise of God’s glorious grace. This song from Michael W. Smith, based on this verse, will help you along the way – [Click Here](#)

Heavenly Father, Your word shows that being gracious reflects Your very nature. As You are love, You are also gracious. And Your grace has been revealed in the Beloved, Your Son Jesus. Because of this, we cannot honor You without honoring Your Son. What He did reflects Your very nature. And so, help us to cling to the cross of Christ; Your grace put on full display for the world to receive or reject. Help us to be wise enough to receive Him, and thus receive You. Amen.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace... Ephesians 1:7

“In Him” means Christ who is “the Beloved” of the previous verse. It is through God’s Beloved Son that “we have redemption through His blood.” In the Greek, there is an article before “redemption.” It states “the redemption” and thus it sets the thought apart as the great act of redemption to which any other act (such as the redemption of Israel from Egypt) was only a type and shadow.

In other words, the promised Redeemer of Genesis 3:15 is realized in Christ. From that proclamation, every idea of redemption which is found in Scripture pointed to what Christ would do for us. This true redemption was realized “through His blood.” We now stand justified and free from sin's penalty through the redemption that came by His work, and which culminated in the shedding of His blood (meaning His death) on the cross.

The term "redemption" comes from a root word which indicates the price paid to redeem a person, such as a prisoner of war. It signifies liberty from captivity, bondage, or imprisonment. We are born into sin and we are prisoners of sin, held in bondage by its power and are kept by the master of sin, the devil.

This is confirmed by the devil's words to Jesus in Luke 4 where he stated that "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish." Sin is a firm bond, and the devil is a cruel taskmaster. However, Jesus' mission was to destroy this power. John notes this as the principle reason for His coming –

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." -1 John 3:8

Jesus prevailed where Adam failed. What the devil gained through Adam's disobedience; Jesus regained through His obedience. What God asks is that we simply believe this message, receive His gift, and place our trust in what Jesus has done for us. This is the "redemption through His blood." This is the marvel of what God has done for us. In Him there is absolute victory and complete reconciliation with God the Father.

As a means of highlighting this thought, Paul next says that in Him we also have “forgiveness of sins.” This is a complementary thought to the previous clause. The word for “forgiveness” signifies the complete release of someone from an obligation or debt. Sin’s penalty is ended through the work of Christ for all who believe.

Charles Ellicott notes that the first clause, “redemption through His blood,” looks at the work of atonement from God’s perspective, while “the forgiveness of sins” looks at it from our side. In this he says they are “both being wrought by Him who is Son of God and Son of Man at once. Together they represent the whole truth.”

Joseph Benson adds to the thought by saying, “By price and by power, are bought and delivered from the guilt and dominion of sin, the tyranny of Satan, and the final displeasure and wrath of God.”

Paul notes that all of this was, “according to the riches of His grace.” This is understood to mean the riches of the grace of God the Father. As noted in Ephesians 1:6, grace is an attribute of God and is a part of His divine nature. Therefore, the giving of Christ for our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins is an expression of who God truly is. We can see the infinite grace of God when we look to the cross of Christ.

Finally, this is another marvelous verse which points to the ending of the law for all who are in Christ Jesus. Logically, if we have redemption through Christ’s blood (meaning His atoning death), and this is complementary in thought to “the forgiveness of sins,” and as sin comes about through law, then the obvious deduction for us is that we are dead to the law; its power no longer has mastery over us. Paul explains this exactly elsewhere in his writings.

Life application: As you go about your day, remind yourself of what you have received from God in the giving of His Son. Truly ponder this marvelous deed and think on what it signifies for you. There is an eternity of fellowship with God that lies ahead of us because of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, we can see that the cross of Christ is the true redemption of which all others were only types and shadows. When the Passover lamb of Egypt was sacrificed, it only pointed to the true Passover Lamb who would come and die for us. When You brought Israel out from Egypt and through the Red Sea, it was a mere picture of what You would do for us. You redeemed us from the world of sin. Each thing of the past only looked forward to the great and true redemption wrought by Christ the Lord. How marvelous is the cross of Jesus Christ! Amen!

...which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, Ephesians 1:8

This verse is a transition between the thought of the preceding verse which noted “the riches of His grace,” and that which will explain those riches in the following verses. At

this point, Paul is stating that God has “made to abound” these riches (which are to be explained) toward us.

The Greek word translated as “made to abound” is one which indicates abundance or surplus. It means “to go beyond measure” and thus it gives the idea of overflowing. The riches of God toward us because of the Person and work of Christ simply overflow. And this superabundance which comes to us is “in all wisdom and prudence.”

Wisdom is the excellent use of knowledge. One can be extremely smart and lack any wisdom. For example, a person may have the knowledge of how to make money, but he may not have wisdom in the use of his money.

In lacking wisdom, his intelligence is wasted, and he remains penniless at the end of the month. Another person may not have great knowledge, but he may be quite wise. He may make very little, but at the end of the month he has money in the bank because he was wise enough to save along the way.

Prudence is noted by HELPS Word Studies as “that brand of visceral opinion which pleases the Lord because *shaped by* God's inworkings of faith (‘divine *persuasion*,’ ... i.e. Christ-enlightened perspective which has the *insight* to make intelligent (shrewd) life-applications in the will of God.”

Together, the wisdom and prudence which are indicated here reflect the wise plan which was laid out concerning man’s redemption (wisdom), and the execution of that plan by God in the stream of human history (prudence). As noted, this “wisdom and prudence” will be explained in the coming verses. They are the riches of God’s grace which have been bestowed upon us.

Life application: When we are stuck in a rut, whether mental or spiritual, all we need to do is to get into the Bible and read about what God has done for us in the stream of time. The plan was there from the beginning and was methodically being worked out for eons.

At the coming of Christ, the realization of what He had been doing came about. It all centered on Christ. Now, we are the recipients of that marvelous plan. If we are stuck, pondering what Christ did for us should unstick us. Turn your thoughts to the cross and all that it signifies. How can we be anything but grateful when we consider the cross of Christ!

Lord God, sometimes we get stuck in a rut. It may be a mental rut, a spiritual rut, or some other type of rut. But if we just take the time to consider what You have done for us in the giving of Your Son, how can we stay stuck? Everything in history centers on His life and work. And that life and work was given for our sakes! Your love is seen in the objects of Your affection... the people of the world who have called on Jesus. Unstuck! The cross sets us free. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

...having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ... Ephesians 1:9

This verse, again, is a continuation of the previous and on-going thought. The words “having made known” are a single participle which explain the words “made to abound” of the previous verse. That thought, in turn, explained “the riches of His grace” of the previous verse. This is more evident when read together –

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ...”

It is the abounding riches of His grace which He has made known “to us.” In other words, there is a select portion of humanity to which this has been revealed. It is those who are the called in Christ; those who have heard the message of what He has done and received it.

This would obviously include any who have heard the message whether they received it or not, but Paul is speaking to those who have both heard and accepted the word.

What God has “made known to us” is “the mystery of His will.” The word mystery carries with it more than what we would think of as a mere mystery that can’t be known. It does imply that which was unknown, but it also means that which has been now made known by God’s revelation.

And so, this mystery is that which is entirely unknowable except and unless it is revealed by God. When it is so revealed, it is a “mystery made known.” Further concerning such a mystery, Charles Ellicott says that “Reason can apprehend, when revealed, that which it cannot discover; but seldom or never can it comprehend it perfectly.”

The words “of His will” are actually not explained until the next verse. But they mean that there is a mystery that had yet to be revealed by God which is now revealed. Until the time had arrived, God had kept the knowledge of it back from man’s understanding, but in His providence, He has now (meaning in what Paul is writing about) revealed this portion of His will. And this is “according to His good pleasure.”

God has sovereignly determined when, or even if, He will reveal His will to His creatures. We may have a secret that we keep from our loved ones, even until our death. Or we may choose to divulge it at a certain time when we believe that they are ready to hear it. Maybe the children of the family need to come to a state of mental maturity before they hear the news which is hidden.

The same is true with God’s mysteries. These are things which cannot be known unless He reveals them to us. The timing of their being revealed is solely up to Him. Behind the timing is the purpose for hiding the thing.

Therefore, being infinitely wise, God knew in advance what He would conceal and when He would reveal it. The revealing of such mysteries are those “which He purposed in Himself.” For this reason, we can find no fault in God for the actions He takes.

Being angry at God over things which belong to Him alone makes no sense. He has a right to withhold or reveal His will in His good timing. The words of this verse go along well with the words of Romans 11:34 –

“For who has known the mind of the LORD?
Or who has become His counselor?”

God has chosen our time, place, and position in history for His reasons. When we consider where we are now, we can be grateful in many ways for it. Despite the woes of the world in which we live, we have a great and glorious benefit of our current position. Jesus explained it to those around Him –

“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Matthew 11:11

John was chosen to live at a specific time in history and was considered very great in that particular dispensation of time, and yet those who followed after him would have a

revealing of the mysteries that he was not privy to. In this, they hold a position even greater than he did. Such is the wisdom of God.

Life application: In the world today, we are seeing the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, even right before our eyes. What a blessed time to live! We have confirmation of the words written so long ago which can help us in our times of weakness where our faith is lacking. And certainly this is needed as the world spirals down all around us. Be thankful for the sure evidences we possess which come right out of God's marvelous word!

Heavenly Father, as the world continues to devolve into depravity and enmity with You, we still have a wonderful blessing to encourage us in our faith. We have the sure words of prophecy which are being revealed right before our eyes. Events in Your word, written thousands of years ago, are coming true before us. What an encouragement to us as we face enmity and hatred over our continued trust in You. The world can have its depraved party; we have something far, far better to look forward to! Hallelujah and Amen!

...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

Ephesians 1:10

The verse, like the previous verses, is not a stand-alone thought. It is connected to what has been said. Taking it together with the previous verse we read –

“...having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

Vincent's Word Studies goes into detail concerning the first words of this verse by saying, “*Eis* does not mean in, but unto, with a view to. Dispensation has no article. The clause is directly connected with the preceding: the mystery which He purposed in Himself unto a dispensation.”

What he is saying is that the translation of the KJV and the NKJV (which is cited above) is faulty and clumsy. It should more aptly read, “...with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him...” (NASB)

God laid out a plan with a view towards the fulfillment of that plan. At the right time, that plan would come to its fullness. As we are still awaiting the return of Christ, that time has not yet been realized, but the work of Christ is what makes that end view both possible and certain. Everything is being reconciled through the work of Christ.

The term “dispensation” means “administration” or “stewardship.” It is used in the management of a household. God’s plan has been worked out and formed with this end in view. Each step has been carefully and logically worked out in human history for the purpose of gathering “together in one all things in Christ.”

The Greek word for “He might gather together” gives the idea of summing up. When an orator closes his speech, he will sum up what he has spoken. In essence, “I have talked about all of these things for the past hour, and this is the final point I am making concerning those things.”

God has chosen a way of showing us our desperate need for His grace, given to us through Christ. There was the Garden of Eden; there was the fall; the turning to wickedness; the flood; the Tower of Babel; the dispersion of the peoples; the call of Abraham; the forming of the covenant people and their sojourn in Egypt; their release from captivity in Egypt; the giving of the law; the time of the judges; the time of the kings; etc. Every step of the way has been methodically given to show us what He has done and why.

All of these things were steps along a journey to lead us to the giving of His Son. Through Christ and what He has now accomplished, all things are being gathered into one, “both which are in heaven and which are on earth.” The word for “all things” is in the neuter gender, and it therefore goes beyond the idea of all “persons.” It is a complete restoration of all creation. Vincent’s word studies details what this means –

“God contemplates a regathering, a restoration to that former condition when all things were in perfect unity, and normally combined to serve God's ends. This unity was broken by the introduction of sin.

Man's fall involved the unintelligent creation (Romans 8:20). The mystery of God's will includes the restoration of this unity in and through Christ; one kingdom on earth and in heaven - a new heaven and a new earth in which shall dwell righteousness, and ‘the creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.’”

The entire creation is prepared for restoration because of what Christ has done. Christ came in the fullness of times in order to set that final plan in motion, and all of it will be accomplished through Him.

Life application: If things seem out of control, take time to consider this verse. God has a plan which He has been working on since the very beginning. In the coming of Christ, and in His triumph over sin and the devil, the victory is assured.

We are simply living in a part of that plan. It is a time of grace where God is building a church made of the people He has redeemed through this time of grace. At some point, the number of people will be realized, and we will move into a new part of this plan. Don't worry about the troubles around you. God has it all under control!

Lord God, in reading Your word and in seeing the final promises which are still ahead of us, we have a hope which transcends this world in which we live. Yes, there is wickedness everywhere, but You are allowing that to continue so that many will come to You through the grace of Christ. When the right moment comes, Your plan will enter a new phase. Until then, we have the sure confidence that what Christ did in the past guarantees what will come about in the future. No fear here! We are safe because of Jesus' work. Amen.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,
Ephesians 1:11

In verses 11 & 12, Paul uses the term "we." Then in verse 13, he will use the plural word for "you." For this reason, many scholars state that this is showing the order of salvation with respect to the idea of "to the Jew first and then also to the Greek." This is, for example, how Charles Ellicott sees it –

"Ephesians 1:11-14 form the third part of the Introduction, applying the general truth of election by God's predestination in Christ, first to the original believers (the Jews), and then to the subsequent believers (the Gentiles)."

It is true that the Jews were the first to receive the message, and then the Gentiles were later its recipients, and this seems probable concerning what Paul is saying. Or it could be that he is saying that it was those who heard and received Christ (meaning the apostles, etc.) who are then relaying the message on from that initial point.

In this then, the stress is not laid on the nature of the person, but rather it is simply the logical progression of receiving and then transmitting the gospel.

Which option is correct becomes even more important in the opening words, because Paul says that “In Him we have obtained an inheritance.” The KJV and the NKJV make the verb active, but it is not. Rather, it is passive. The correct reading is that “we were made a heritage.”

Thus, it literally is worded to suggest that we were designed as an inheritance. It does appear that Paul is speaking of Israel, who was made an inheritance of God in the promise of the coming Messiah.

Following this, he says, “...being predestined.” The idea of predestination is detailed in the commentary on Ephesians 1:5. However, Paul adds in that this predestination is “according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” This idea has to be evaluated with care and it needs to be done so while considering the rest of Scripture.

As was noted in Ephesians 1:5, free will in man is something that God takes into consideration. Therefore, the words “according to the purpose of Him” includes two separate thoughts. The first is the “universal agency of God” (Albert Barnes), and the second is man’s responsibility in exercising his free will. One does not negate the other. Just because God knows what choice a man will make, it in no way negates the choice of the man.

God considers man’s will and includes it in His working out “all things according to the counsel of His will.” It is both a comfort for those who are willing to submit to the authority of Christ, and it is to the shame of those who are unwilling to do so.

God, in His infinite goodness, has granted us the right to choose where we will place our allegiance, and thus where we will spend eternity. In the case of Israel, they were collectively made an inheritance, and yet they individually chose to be a part of that, or not, by faith in their Messiah.

Life application: You have a choice to make concerning Christ. If you have chosen Christ, you have the continued choice to make concerning obedience to Him. Choose each step of your walk wisely. Choose Christ and pursue Christ!

Heavenly Father, how marvelous You are. You have fashioned each of us for Your sovereign purposes, and You have granted us the choice to follow You, or to go our own way. You don't force us to love You, but You tenderly call to us in hopes that we will. Grant us the wisdom to use the few precious moments of this life wisely so that we will be prepared for the judgment which lies ahead. Grant us hearts to pursue Your offer of peace through Jesus' shed blood now. Amen.

...that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:12

Again, we should take this together with the previous verse for context –

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

As noted in verse 11, Paul is probably generally speaking of Israel collectively by using the term “we.” However here he is actually referring to the individual Jews of Israel who received Jesus as their Messiah. It is they “who first trusted in Christ,” and who “should be to the praise of His glory.”

Vincent's Word Studies notes that the term “who first trusted” refers to Jewish Christians, and the verb describes their messianic hope before the advent of Christ. Therefore, the appropriate rendering of these words should be “we who have before hoped.”

Further, he notes that the article in Greek before “Christ” should be translated. It should say, “in the Christ.” As the coming Christ was the subject of all messianic expectations, and as Jesus fulfilled those expectations, Paul is speaking of Jesus as the Christ who was anticipated and who has come. Therefore, the thought should read, “that we who have before hoped in the Christ...”

It is these Jews who were a part of the body of Israel, and who had so long awaited the coming Christ, who put their hope in Jesus and who are “to the praise of His glory.” These first believing Jews were the “means of celebrating his glory” (Albert Barnes). In the body of Israel, it is these who ascribed true heartfelt praise to him as the result of their salvation.

Life application: Paul does not lump Israel and the Gentiles together as the same entity. Rather, he consistently makes a noted separation between the two. This is a truth which

continues to this day. We are all one in Messiah as regards to salvation, but there are Jews and there are Gentiles; there are males and there are females. These differences continue to exist.

It sure is wonderful to be in Your presence, O God. Even on the most trying of days, we can fall back on the peaceful assurance that You are here and You are tending to our destiny with a loving hand. The trials will end, and our destiny is assured because of our faith in Jesus the Lord. What a comfort this is in a world full of trials and troubles! Thank You for that peace which surpasses all understanding. Amen.

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Ephesians 1:13

The word “trusted” in this verse is inserted by the translators, assuming that it is referring to “trusted” in verse 12. It only says, “In Him you also, after...” What Paul is referring to is debated, but what seems likely is that he is speaking of the inheritance and predestination of verse 11 –

“In Him also **we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined** according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ **In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...**”

The reason this is likely is because later in this verse he notes their belief, something synonymous with trusting. And so, here, it is more likely that he is speaking about the inheritance and predestination than simply repeating the idea of trusting. Paul is specific that the Gentiles (represented by the Ephesians at this time) have also received what the Jews had received. This reception came about “after you heard the word of truth.”

A person cannot receive the inheritance without being told about it, unless one believes that the inheritance is something given apart from faith. But this is contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture, including the rest of the verse to come.

It is only after hearing this word of truth, which as Paul says to them is “the gospel of your salvation,” that the inheritance can come. This gospel is the message of God’s

workings through Christ in order to redeem man. It is the grace of God in Christ which alone can bring salvation.

After giving this carefully worded thought, he next says, "...in whom also." This is referring to "In Him" at the beginning of the verse, and thus to Christ who has been the main subject of verses 3-12. Paul continuously reminds us that all of these spiritual blessings come about through being "in" Christ.

In order for this to happen, he then describes to them how it happened with the words, "...having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." The Bible never teaches the Calvinistic idea of "regeneration in order to believe."

In other words, it is neither explicit nor implicit – here or anywhere else – that this occurs. Belief is a volitional act of the will. It is not, either before or after salvation, something forced in man externally. Such a warped doctrine is never hinted at in the Bible. Instead, it is always shown that God is pleased with faith which comes from the man when he exercises his own free-will.

When the individual believes, he is "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." The word for "sealed" is *sphragizó*. It "signifies ownership and the full security carried by the backing (full authority) of the owner. 'Sealing' in the ancient world served as a 'legal signature' which guaranteed the promise (contents) of what was sealed" (HELPS Word Studies).

This seal then is as sure as a signature of ownership by God. It is something that is given and will never be taken back. If it were to be taken back, then it means that God has made a mistake in His sealing; something impossible. Paul will explain this further in the next verse. For now, the logical progression of what Paul is saying is –

- 1) A person hears the word of truth (the gospel of their salvation).
- 2) They believe the message.
- 3) They are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.
- 4) They are now entitled to all of the benefits that the Jews, as an inheritance, also received by that same process of faith.

The key point to remember is that none of this would have occurred without first hearing the gospel message. As Paul said to the Romans –

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

Only after hearing can one believe, and only after one believes are they sealed with the Holy Spirit. When sealed with the Holy Spirit, the individual will also share in the inheritance. Without that sealing, they will have no such inheritance which is found in God's provision in Christ.

As a point of debate, Vincent's Word Studies agrees that the word "trusted" is incorrect, but he says that the thought "In Him you also" is nominative to the words "were sealed." This doesn't make sense as the "were sealed" comes after the thought, not before.

As Paul didn't use the term in the preceding verses, it is what the later-mentioned sealing results in – that of an inheritance – which is mentioned both before and after the words, "In Him you also." The highlight of Paul's words are on the wondrous benefits which result from the process, not the process itself.

Finally, the Pulpit Commentary notes that, "The Spirit is called the Spirit of the promise, because he is often promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:27; Joel 3:1, etc.)." What had long been anticipated by the Jews has come about because of the work of Christ. This promise was granted to them, but it is also granted to all who believe, even among the Gentiles.

Life application: You can no more lose your salvation than God could make a mistake.

Lord God, Your word says that we are sealed with the Spirit of promise when we believe the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. By simply trusting in the work of Christ in fulfillment of the law, we are accepted by You as if Your signature has been inscribed on us. We could no more lose this than You could make a mistake in giving it; something impossible. Our heavenly inheritance is secure because of the work of Christ! What a marvelous surety we have! Thank You for this promise, O God. Amen.

...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:14

It is right to look at this verse along with verse 13 for proper context –

"In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."

The believer trusts in Christ after hearing the word. It is this word which is the gospel of his salvation. Once a person believes in Christ, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit “who is the guarantee of our inheritance.”

The word for “guarantee” is *arrabón*. It is a rare word, found only three times in the New Testament and it means “properly, an installment; a *deposit* (‘down-payment’) which *guarantees* the balance (the *full* purchase-price)... [It] is the regular term in NT times for ‘*earnest-money*,’ i.e. *advance-payment* that guarantees *the rest* will be given...[it] then represents *full security* backed by the purchaser who supplies sufficient proof they will *fulfill* the entire pledge (promise).”

Understanding the meaning of this word, it is impossible to see how anyone can believe in a loss of salvation for a person who has – at any time in his life – believed in Him and been saved. If God seals us with His Holy Spirit as a guarantee, and if we can lose that, then –

- 1) It was not a very good guarantee.
- 2) It is of our effort and not of God that we are saved.
- 3) It devalues the value of Christ’s blood which was used for that purchase.
- 4) God made a mistake in sealing us with His “guarantee.”

If we can lose our salvation, at any time after being saved, then salvation is not of grace, but of works.

This word, *arrabón*, comes from the Hebrew word *eravon* which is also found only three times in the Bible, all in Genesis 38 in the account of Judah and Tamar. In that account, a picture was being made of the work of Christ, including the Gentile-led church age. The story is a magnificent one and a detailed sermon on its meaning can be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZrTF468Q_I

As noted, the word *arrabón* is found only three times in the New Testament. The other two times are in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and in 2 Corinthians 5:5. In all three uses, it is referring to the pledge of the Holy Spirit. He is our surety and our guarantee. As this is the sealing of God in us, it represents the highest of all authorities. It further represents an eternal decree of God. It can never be undone without violating the initial decree.

Therefore, we are one hundred percent secure as we wait “until the redemption of the purchased possession.” What is being referred to here is “the complete and final salvation from sin and death” (Charles Ellicott).

This indicates the result of the action, and not the action itself. In other words, we have already been purchased by and through the work of Christ. This is evidenced by the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

What is being referred to is the action that will be taken, at some future point, based on what has already been purchased. This action is noted in 2 Thessalonians 2 where Paul speaks of the revealing of the coming antichrist. There he writes –

“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

⁶ And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.” 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7

The “He” referred to in this verse is the Holy Spirit with Whom we are sealed. Paul says that a day is coming, prior to the revealing of the antichrist, that the Holy Spirit will be “taken out of the way.” This is the rapture of the church. We will be taken to be with Christ during the time of tribulation which is coming on the earth. As noted above, if the Holy Spirit is taken out and we are not, then that was not a very good guarantee.

Rather, we are guaranteed of being taken out – just as the Bible states. God cannot lie and our hope is secure. And all of this is “to the praise of His glory.” Vincent’s Word Studies notes that this final clause is to be taken together with the words “you were sealed.” Our sealing is to the praise of God’s glory because it conforms to “God’s purpose as it respects Himself.”

His plan of redemption is that for which He is to be glorified. The sealing of the Spirit, based on faith in the work of Christ, is what brings Him this praise. He is glorified through the way He deals with His redeemed. And praise God for this wonderful plan!

Life application: If you have doubts concerning the doctrine of “eternal salvation,” then all you need to do is think logically about what God’s word says. If your salvation is up to you, then it is not by grace. If not by grace, then we are pursuing the wrong God, because the Bible says that God saves us by grace through faith. Works are excluded.

Heavenly Father, Your word shows that we are saved by grace and through faith. If we can do something after being saved that will cause us to lose our salvation, then our salvation is up to us, and it isn’t really by grace. Rather, when we trust in Christ, we are sealed with Your Holy Spirit as a guarantee. The deal is done; the seal is from You. We

have the surest hope of all that You will never leave us and never forsake us. Hallelujah and Amen!

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, Ephesians 1:15

Paul's wording here is very close to the wording of Colossians 1:4. It is known that Paul had visited Ephesus and that he had not visited Colossae. For this reason, some look at this letter as not being written exclusively to the saints at Ephesus.

However, he uses similar terminology in Philemon 1:5 also, and so the address solely to the Ephesians is not necessarily to be considered a later addition, nor is this a reason to dismiss this letter as a forgery.

"Therefore" is based on verse 13 which concerns their having "heard the word of truth" and then "having believed." Based on this, they were "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." Because of these things, he says, "I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints..." He will state in the next verse what the result of these things are. For now, it is sufficient to concentrate on the words at hand.

"After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus" are the words scholars lean on to state that the address "to the saints who are in Ephesus" is a later addition. As Paul had been there and personally seen the faith of those in Ephesus, the logic is that there would be no point in stating this. But as was seen above, he uses the same terminology in Philemon.

Instead, this is speaking of their faith which obviously continued to grow, both in number and in maturity. Paul had not been to Ephesus for some time. When hearing of their status, his words of elation make complete sense.

The words translated here as "your faith" are literally, "the faith among you." It is the only time he uses this phrase, and it therefore lends credence to the thought that this letter was actually addressed to the Ephesians. As he has been gone, and as "the faith among" them had expanded, it is natural to think that he would have heard of it after it occurred. He is pleased to have learned of the state of the Ephesian church.

The words, "in the Lord Jesus" do not give the same idea as "towards the Lord Jesus." Faith towards Jesus is centered on Jesus; whereas, faith "in the Lord Jesus" embodies much more. It signifies a faith which acknowledges God's work, in Christ, and thus it is a

faith which includes the plan of God the Father as well as the work of the Spirit. Each of these have already been noted in his opening words (e.g. see verses 3 & 13).

Paul is especially elated to hear of both this faith as well as their “love for all the saints.” This is an evidence of their faith in Christ. It is the expression of that faith being worked out among those who are also “in Christ.

It is the mutual respect that all believers should have, but which is sorely lacking among the redeemed in today’s world. Doctrinal differences lead to immense divides in the church. Among the Ephesians, such problems may have existed, but their love remained strong towards all believers. It was, therefore, of exceptional note.

Life application: With the Bible written, we have our source of doctrine for proper Christian conduct and belief. Because of this, divisions within the faith are certainly more pronounced.

When a congregation practices something which clearly violates Scripture, it is rather hard to continue to show them fraternal love. They are demonstrating disregard for the word, and thus for God who gave the word. It will be good when Christ returns and sorts out our many differences, both petty and great.

Lord God, You ask us to demonstrate love towards all, especially those who are of the household of faith. But it sure can be hard when they refuse to heed Your word. It can be even more difficult when their doctrine isn't in accord with Your word. Such willful disobedience to the precepts You have laid down shows a lack of care for You who gave that same word. It will be marvelous when You come back for us and sort us out. May that day be soon. Until then, give us hearts to love others, knowing that we too are not perfect in our faith and practice. Amen.

...do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

Ephesians 1:16

It is common to Paul’s letters to have such a statement, or a part of such a statement, included in the early portion of them. In some letters, the stress is on the thanks, in others it is on the prayers. The letter to the Galatians noticeably skips over this general sentiment though. He had greater concerns with them.

With the Ephesians, he notes that he does not “cease to give thanks for” them. He was far distant from them and knew that he may never see them again, but he could communicate with them and hear of their continued faith in the Lord.

The previous verse noted that he had heard of their “faith in the Lord Jesus and [their] love for all the saints” and he was overjoyed at this. The knowledge of their steadfastly holding to the gospel which had been presented to them was a source of joy and elation, leading to constant thanks.

But more than just thanks, he tells them of his “making mention of” them in his prayers. He not only thanked God for their current state, but he also petitioned God for this to continue, for them to be strengthened and emboldened in their walk, to be protected and safe from the wiles of the devil, and to be comforted in their trials and tribulations.

He uses the same term, “making mention,” in both Romans 1:9 and Philemon 1:4. Paul was a faithful friend and a heartfelt prayer partner for those he so loved. As far as this constant thanks and prayer he mentioned, there is no reason to not believe it, just as he says it.

This doesn’t mean that Paul got on his knees, closed his eyes, and continued to be in thanks and prayer with the exception of taking time to eat or sleep. Rather, as he worked, as he walked, as he contemplated the many fruits of his labors, he took the time to thank God and pray for those he was so intimately connected to. It is reflective of his own admonition to those in Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Later in this epistle, he will speak of spiritual warfare in great detail. He knew that a part of that warfare was to continue in praise to God, and also to continue in petition to Him. In particular, see verse 6:18 concerning this.

Life application: Even though God already knows the end from the beginning, and even though the plan is complete in His mind, this should not lead us to a fatalistic view of life where prayers are ignored. Rather, our prayers are figured into the plan, just as our free-will calling on Jesus is figured into the plan.

If we don’t receive Jesus, we will not be saved. Likewise, prayers that are unuttered can never be heard. God’s foreknowledge of all things outside of time factor in our actions within the stream of time. Pray!

Heavenly Father, one of the marvelous things You have granted to the sons of men is the opportunity to pray. We can open our hearts to You, and You hear and respond according to Your grace and mercy. As Jesus is the Mediator between our prayers and Your ears, we can know that only those prayers offered through Him can be accepted by You. And so, we offer them to You in His name – the perfect Mediator who stands between fallen us and perfect You. Thank You that our prayers are heard because of Him. Amen.

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

The wording in this verse is rich in Christological significance. In the previous verse, Paul said that he did not cease to give thanks for the Ephesians, making mention of them in his prayers. Now he explains what the substance of those prayers are. They form a prayer that is beautifully worded and suitable for use by anyone who yearns for the rich understanding of the work of Christ.

He begins with “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...” The prayer is directed to God the Father. It is thus a reference to the humanity of Christ as our Mediator to God the Father, while at the same time it highlights Christ’s deity.

As God is infinite, and as we are finite, there is an infinite gap between the two. Christ Jesus is the bridge between us. He is finite in His humanity, and yet He is infinite in His deity. He is the One to carry our prayers across that infinite divide, and He is the One to bring the answer to those prayers back into our finite realm. Such is the mediatorial role of Christ between the perfect and infinitely holy Creator and His fallen creatures.

After this, he calls Him “the Father of glory.” However, the English fails to include an important definite article. Young’s Literal Translation rightly says –

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of the glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the recognition of him,” YLT

The words are “the Father of the glory.” This is speaking not of the glory of the Father, which is unseen, but the glory of Christ which is seen. The glory of God the Father is revealed through God the Son. In the Old Testament, it was the glory of the Lord, YHVH, that was seen. Jesus is the Incarnation of YHVH. This can be substantiated by referring to Acts 7 where the same term “the glory” is used by Stephen –

And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran...” This is found in Genesis 12:1 and it is speaking of the Lord. It is the same Lord who appeared to Abraham at other times, including in human form just prior to the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 18:1. In the New Testament, this “glory” was revealed to us in the Person of Jesus –

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

It is this “Father of the glory,” meaning the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Paul petitions. His prayer is that He “may give to [them] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

The term “spirit” here, according to the scholar Alford, “is neither exclusively the Holy Spirit nor the spirit of man, but the complex idea of the spirit of man dwelt in and moved by the Spirit of God.” This is correct.

The prophets and apostles used their own knowledge as they wrote, and yet their writings also reflect the working of the Holy Spirit in them. Although our thoughts and words are not inspired and thus to be considered as scriptural, Paul is asking that the same moving of the Spirit will work in our spirit to reveal to us the truths which are laid out in Scripture.

The work of the prophets and apostles was for the writing of Scripture; the use of those Scriptures is for our understanding of what has been written.

In this spiritual working, Paul asks that it be directed to “wisdom.” This is the gift of knowing what is sound and proper in the interpretation of God’s word. One can read Scripture and misapply its contents. This is not wise.

Wisdom is found in fearing God and cherishing the right application of His word. “Revelation” is the actual grasping of what God has placed in His word. One might say, “Give me the wisdom to see your words revealed to me.” This revelation that Paul speaks of is “in the knowledge of Him.”

It is asking that we be able to peer into the very heart of Scripture to see Christ revealed. In doing so, we see God the Father revealed, because it is Christ who reveals Him to us.

This is the beginning of Paul's petition for the Ephesians (and thus us!) as he writes his words to them.

Life application: We cannot know God without knowing Jesus Christ. We cannot know Jesus Christ without knowing the source of instruction on who He is, which is the Holy Bible. Therefore, we cannot know God without knowing our Bible. Let us handle this precious gift carefully, looking for God to reveal Himself to us through it.

Lord God, today I commit my steps to You. Please direct my feet; keep me on the proper path, from which I am bound to wander without Your leading; and should I stray, quickly redirect me back to You. Without Your guidance, I am certain to head into thorns and briars, help me to not get into those things! Instead, keep my feet on the soft grass which leads to the still waters of rest. Lord God, today I commit my steps to You. Amen.

...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
Ephesians 1:18

The first clause is really dependent on the previous verse. Taken together the two say-

“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...”

This then is the continued prayer of Paul which is being expressed in words. The first clause reads that, “...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.” The Greek actually says, “the eyes of your heart.”

The heart is considered the seat of understanding and the place from which wisdom is derived. This is especially true with spiritual understanding. It encompasses the totality of the inner man.

Paul's prayer is that understanding would flow into them and fill them. And this filling has a specific purpose. It is so “that you may know what is the hope of His calling.” This is the calling of God in Christ that carries with it a specific hope. The “hope” he speaks of is not referring to something “hoped for” as if it is yet to be attained. Rather, it is the result of our redemption through Christ Jesus.

Paul is now, as he will be throughout this epistle, speaking of “heavenly” things. The “hope of His calling” speaks of our eternal inheritance in Christ. It is already secured based on our belief in Christ, even if it is not yet actuated.

The reason for understanding this now (as his prayer desires for them), is so that in this world of trouble, we can look beyond the moment to the greater world, the world of glory, which lies ahead. This is revealed in the next clause which speaks of “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

In the Greek of this clause alone, there are eight words in the genitive case. A genitive is a word “relating to or denoting a case of nouns and pronouns (and words in grammatical agreement with them) indicating possession or close association.”

The abundance of genitives shows that, “Glory is the essential characteristic of salvation, and this glory is richly abounding. His inheritance: which is His, and His gift” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

This is what we now possess, completely and forever. It can never be taken from us as it was given to us with a pledge (see verses 1:13, 14). For this reason, we can walk in this world of woe and have confidence that no matter what happens, our inheritance is secure, and it is glorious.

The riches of what lie ahead are ours now, and so nothing should make us falter in our walk with Christ. No matter what force of evil comes against us, greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.

Life application: As the world continues to devolve into wickedness, let our hearts not be troubled. Should we be faced with the horrifying demand of renouncing Christ or losing our lives, let us have the faith of the saints of ages past and say, “Nice try devil, but no thanks! I have a sure hope and calling which will see you cast into the Lake of Fire as I sit, watching from a heavenly setting.”

Lord God, give us the mind to remember our salvation which has already been guaranteed for us by the work of Christ. We ask this during those times when we face troubles and sadness, and especially during any time where we may have to face renouncing Jesus or losing our own lives. What can the world do to us? We already have the guarantee of our rich inheritance because of the work of Christ. Help us, O God, to remember this always. Amen.

...and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power... Ephesians 1:19

Paul continues his prayer here for the saints in Ephesus (and thus us!) concerning the opening of the eyes of our hearts to the magnificence of what Christ has done for us. In this verse, he continues with his use of superlatives, beginning with the words, “and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power.”

The Greek words for “exceeding greatness” are used to describe what Paul actually cannot describe. He uses pen and ink in a struggle with the thoughts of his mind to relay to us the immense magnitude of the greatness of what God has done for us. It is this which is now revealed through the mystery of Christ. His words further disclose to us the grandeur of the riches of God’s divine grace which is working toward us.

The Pulpit Commentary states that, “The whole energy of the Divine Being is turned on to our feeble, languid nature, vivifying, purifying, and transforming it, making it wonderfully active where all was feebleness before, as the turning on of steam suddenly wakens up a whole mass of inert machinery.”

Paul then notes that this immense working of God is “toward us who believe.” We are the objects of God’s marvelous workings in the stream of time and human existence into which Christ stepped. The actual workings will be described in the next verses, but in order to show us the spectacular nature of them, we are given the matchless words of this verse now.

To complete this preparatory thought, he says that this exceeding greatness of God’s power, which is directed towards us as believers, is “according to the working of His mighty power.” Vincent’s Word Studies notes that the words “His mighty power” are insufficient to translate the Greek. Rather it should be “the strength of His might.”

The word for “strength” is a word used only of God which denotes both “relative and manifested power.” The word “might” refers to “indwelling strength.” And the word “working” denotes “the active, efficient manifestation of these.”

Taken together they reveal more than just a latent “power,” but rather an active working of God which is connected to the words “exceeding greatness of His power” of the preceding clause.

As Vincent's states, "The magnitude of God's power toward believers is known in the operation of the strength of His might." As you can see, Paul's words are very carefully used to reveal to our minds the opulence of God's mighty power working towards us.

As stated, the actual use of this power is yet to be described. Paul will list it as he continues to show us the greatness of what God has done in and through Christ the Lord.

Life application: If Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, struggled with just the right terminology to describe the glorious workings of God in Christ, then we should be attentive to these nuances and contemplate them when they are explained to us. In this, we can then truly begin to state what our minds have begun to grasp - "How great Thou art, O God."

Lord God, help us to remember that even if by the world's standards we might seem like a failure, that in Your eyes we aren't. When our hearts are directed to You, and when our lives are lived in accord with Your word, then we are doing what is right. A spouse may leave, friends may reject, but You are ever-faithful, and ever-true. You are a Husband to the widow, a Father to the fatherless, and our Comforter in times of need. Help us to remember the words of Your servant David who said, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?" Our hope is in You and we shall praise You, even through the storms of life. In You we will hope, for You are the help of our countenance. You are our God. Amen.

...which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, Ephesians 1:20

These words now explain "what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power" of the previous verse. The "which" of this verse refers especially to "the working" of the previous. This is marvelously described by Albert Barnes –

"The 'power' which was then exerted was as great as that of creation. It was imparting life to a cold and "mangled" frame. It was to open again the arteries and veins, and teach the heart to beat and the lungs to heave.

It was to diffuse vital warmth through the rigid muscles, and to communicate to the body the active functions of life. It is impossible to conceive of a more direct exertion of

‘power’ than in raising up the dead; and there is no more striking illustration of the nature of conversion than in such a resurrection.”

In the resurrection, God’s mighty power was on display in such a marvelous way that it becomes the believer’s very point of hope. We can understand creation because we can see it, we can analyze it, and we can contemplate it. In so doing, we understand the marvelous majesty of the Creator. We can consider how immense His power must be by that which He has created. The same is true with the resurrection of Christ for the believer.

In the resurrection, we can understand the power of God in a new way. Nothing, not even death, could hold back God’s power in the reanimation of the body of Christ. As this is so, then if we are in Christ, we can then be assured of this in us as well. We can trust that the power of God which worked in Christ will also work in like manner in us.

In this Epistle, Paul highlights this marvelous moment, but then he goes beyond it. God raised Christ from the dead, but He also “seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly places.” This is a confirmation of Jesus’ own words in Matthew 28 –

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Matthew 28:18

Christ, at the right hand of God, is in the position of power and authority. It means that in Him is all of the power of creation and resurrection. The greatest powers ever contemplated are endowed in Him. Because of this, we have the absolute assurance that we too will be resurrected, just as He was. It is a guarantee that cannot fail.

For now, we are to look to Christ with eyes of faith and to behold the majesty of God, who stepped out of the eternal realm, in order to restore us once again to intimate fellowship. This He did through Jesus Christ, and this He continues to do now through Him. All things are being brought to their fulfillment through Christ, who even now sits on heaven’s throne.

Life application: Are you sure that there is ground beneath your feet? You should be as sure in your faith that Christ has all things under control as you are of the fact that the ground is really there. Don’t doubt, but look to Christ who has gone before us into the heavenly places.

Lord God, we stand in awe of Your marvelous power which is on display throughout the heavens. In Your creation, there is more power than we could ever truly imagine, and yet

You are the One who brought it all into existence by simply speaking. If all of this came from You, then how marvelous You are! Why should we fear when Christ has gone before us in death and in resurrection. If He has done that for us, then we too have the same sure hope. Thank You for displaying Your magnificent power in such a grand act of love! Amen.

...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. Ephesians 1:21

While reading this verse in order to analyze it, I raised my arms in victory. “YES!” Who cannot get excited at such marvelous words!

In this verse, Paul completes the very long and continuous thought that he began in verse 3. To keep it in context, the previous verse is cited with it here –

“...which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”

God worked the exceeding greatness of His power toward us in Christ. When His earthly mission was complete, He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places “far above all principality and power and might and dominion.”

The words which are translated as “principality and power” give the idea of government and the authority committed to that government. Christ’s position is above all such things. As there are both earthly and heavenly hierarchies, it signifies that He is the ultimate authority on earth and in heaven; He is God.

The words “might and dominion” further describe the first two words. This “might and dominion” is “the actual force and the moral force of dignity or lordship in which it is clothed” (Charles Ellicott).

All governments, and all of the power associated with them, are far below the authority and power of Christ. Their ability to rule, and the scope of their rule, is finite. In contrast to this are Christ’s might and dominion, both of which are infinite. Paul refers to this same idea several times in his epistles. Two examples are found in Philippians 2:9 and in Colossians 2:10.

Paul's next words further show Christ's supremacy. He says that Christ's authority is over "every name that is named." A name signifies a position, title, area of authority, and so on.

If the name is given to something by another, it then implies authority over that thing. For example, Adam was given the right to name the animals. Thus, he was set as the authority over them. In the naming of his wife, Eve, he was demonstrating authority over her.

In Exodus 3:14, the Lord proclaimed His name, I AM THAT I AM. He is the self-existent One. Nobody can claim authority over Him because He is before all things, and His name signifies His eternal nature and His infinite Being. Christ follows in the same way, proceeding from the Godhead. He has a name, but it is above all others. This is confirmed by the words of Revelation 19 –

"His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself." Revelation 19:12

No authority can be claimed over Christ because His unknown name identifies His infinite Being and His eternal nature. Where all others are named in a knowable way, Christ is named in an unknowable way.

Only as He reveals Himself, slowly and eternally in the stream of time, can we comprehend His true Being. Thus, He is above "every name that is named." And this is true "not only in this age but also in that which is to come." Christ is the eternal Logos, the Word of God.

This age began at the creation of the universe, which He created. He was before it, and thus He is above it – including all that is in it. In the age to come, He will reveal Himself eternally to His subjects, all named, all fully known, all subjected to Him. We will ponder that Name, which is above every name for all eternity, and yet we will never fully know it. There will always be something more of Himself to reveal to His creatures.

Life application: Take time to hail the name of Christ – the eternal Word of God. And don't stop! Eternity itself will be filled with the ceaseless praises of our heavenly Lord.

Lord God, who can withhold their praises for You? You were there at the beginning, forming the universe according to Your wisdom. You are here today, working out Your marvelous plan for the objects of Your affection. And for all eternity, You will endlessly

and ceaselessly reveal Your infinite goodness to us. Surely it is right to praise and exalt You for the glory You possess. Great are You, O God, and greatly are You to be praised. Amen.

And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, Ephesians 1:22

The idea of placing all things under the feet goes back to the Old Testament. In the 8th psalm we read –

"You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all *things* under his feet." Psalm 8:6

These words from the psalm speak of man, but in the greater sense they speak of Christ who took on the nature of man. Adam (man) fell and lost his right to the world. Christ came to reclaim that.

Through His work, He has been granted all power and all authority. In this, the "He" is emphatic. "He (emphatic - meaning God) put all *things* under His (meaning Jesus') feet." The meaning is that all things are in subjection to Him, not because He was simply set over these things, but because God has granted Him these things as a gift. Christ has all authority over all things.

The next words show a surprising concept which should not be missed. God "gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church." All things are "under His feet," and He is "head over all *things* to the church."

What this means is that we are, as Paul explains in Romans 8:17, "joint heirs with Christ." The next verse will bear this out, but even without it, if Christ is the head, then the church must be (as verse 23 will show) His body.

Therefore, we see the exceptional magnitude of the inheritance we possess because of Christ. We are subject to Him as our Head, but all things are below us (as we are members of His body). This takes us back to the authority of man at the beginning. God gave us dominion over the animals of the earth. He gave us the right to subdue the earth and to fill it. We were subjected to God, but were granted authority below Him.

The devil gained control over that, and man has been subjected to him. However, Christ regained that control. Now all who are in Him are again a part of the original intent for

creation. A Man (meaning Christ) is its head, and we are His body. We share in the inheritance of what Christ has obtained. It is truly a marvelous thing which God has done for us in Christ.

Life application: When you see the wicked advancing in the world's system and seemingly getting away with their wickedness, don't let it trouble you. They will have their moment of ease and supposed power, but they will be swept away like the dust beneath your feet. Our inheritance is so far superior to what they think they have, that there is simply no comparison at all.

Lord God, Jeremiah asked why the way of the wicked prospers. He was confused about why things worked out that way. We often feel the same. We see utterly wicked people, such as in our governments, who seem to get away with everything. They are not held accountable for their evil. But their supposed victory is temporary, and it is just a passing vapor. Our inheritance is so very much greater. The world can have its depraved party which will end. In Christ, we have an eternal inheritance which can never be taken away. Thank You for this sure and grounded hope! Amen.

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

The meaning of this verse is one which is highly debated, and the wording is somewhat obscure. It should be taken together with the previous verse for context –

“And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Paul says that it is “the church which is His body.” John Chrysostom says that, “...the complement of the Head is the Body, and the complement of the Body is the Head.” Christ Jesus is fully God and fully Man. In His deity, there is no lack. He is a member of the Godhead, and they are in eternal fellowship and harmony with one another.

In His humanity, there needs to be something to complement who He is. It would make no sense to come as a human if there were no humans who would be affected by His coming.

But humanity is fallen and needs a Redeemer. In coming as their Redeemer, He would be incomplete without a group of redeemed. He is also the Savior, King, High Priest, etc. A savior without saved would be no savior.

A king without a kingdom and subjects is not truly a king. It is the church which fills these roles and which completes who Christ is. This does not mean that He is lacking in anything in His being, but that His roles are complete in those whom He heads.

In order to show that this is the case, and that it is not Christ who is lacking in His being, Paul immediately follows up with the thought that the church is “the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” It is the church which “fills up” or “makes complete” the roles of Christ. His glory and His power are seen in the fact that He is our Head.

Without such a body, these would only be known to Himself. But as His body, we are able to acknowledge them. And yet it is Christ “who fills all in all.” He is transcendent over all things and it is He who does the filling of the church. Charles Ellicott states that “we are infinitely more incomplete without Him than He without us.”

He is the Vine, we are the branches. Together we form a whole, but the branches are dependent on the Vine. He was the crucified One; we were crucified with Him. He is the glorious One; we too now share in His glory. Christ is the Head; we are the body.

Life application: God did not need to create, but He did. He became the Creator when He created. Likewise, Christ did not need to redeem us, but He did. When He redeemed us, He became the Redeemer. In all things, Christ is the preeminent One through the things He has accomplished. Let us never forget that Christ truly is our All in all.

Heavenly Father, the fact that You created shows that You care about Your creation. And the fact that You sent Jesus shows that You care about Your redeemed. What kind of love! It is beyond comprehension that You have done so much for us. We deny You, we mock You, and we shake our fists in Your face in defiance. And yet, You continue to hold out those beautiful nailed-scarred hands to us in love. Thank You for patiently waiting for our often tardy response. Thank You for Jesus our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2:1

There is a lot going on in Chapter 2 of Ephesians. In one sense, the first verses match the Genesis creation account. Verses 1-3 reflect the chaos which occurred at the beginning. Verse 4 parallels the Spirit of God hovering over those waters of chaos. Verses 4-10 reflect the calling of creation into order. What occurred on a physical level in creation also occurs in a spiritual sense in the redemption of man.

There are also two streams of attention which are being addressed in this chapter. In verses 1, 8, & 11, Paul writes in the second person. However, in verses 3, 10, & 14, he writes in the first person.

The two streams are united in verse 18 with the words, “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Together, Jew and Gentile are united as one as described by Paul in verses 19-22. It is a masterful use of writing to demonstrate the marvel of what Christ has done in and for His redeemed.

This first verse of the chapter begins with, “And you *He made alive*.” The words “He made alive” are not in the original, but are inferred from verse 2:5. What Paul has done is jump back to his thought which ended in verse 1:14.

From verses 1:15-23, Paul redirected his attention temporarily and now he continues with the process of what occurs in the believer. If we take 1:13, 14 and place 2:1 directly after them, we can see what Paul is relaying –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. ... And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins...”

Our trusting in Christ (and not a moment before, Calvinists) led to being sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is our guarantee. At that moment our spirits were regenerated, and we were made alive together with Christ. The rebirth is complete in the exercising of our faith and in what results from that.

The verse ends with, “who were dead in trespasses and sins.” If the inserted words are removed, the thought follows naturally with Ephesians 1:13, 14 and which then is followed naturally with the subject (God) of verse 2:4 and the object (us) of verse 2:5 –

“^{1:13} In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. ...
^{2:1} And you, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ... ^{2:4} God ... ^{2:5} made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),”

Obviously the “us” of verse 2:5 speaks of both Jew and Gentile who Paul refers to in the interim verses, but the overall stream of thought is realized when the verses are placed in this order. The intent of Paul’s words is to show that humanity is fallen. There is no spiritual life in us, but through faith in the work of Christ, the spiritual connection to God is reestablished.

What Adam lost for us, Christ has regained for us. The chaos of mankind is brought into harmony and order through the work of Christ.

Life application: As the human spirit can only be regenerated through faith in the work of Christ, then it follows logically that Jesus’ claim of John 14:6 is true. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to God except through Him.

O God, the New Testament of the Bible shows that there is only one way to be reconciled to You, and that is through the work of Jesus Christ. I place my hope, my trust, and my faith in Christ alone. Grant me the burning desire to share this message to the world all of my days. In Christ, there is pardon and full redemption. Without Him, there is only eternal separation. Thank You for the work of Christ my Lord. Amen.

...in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, Ephesians 2:2

This verse follows in one continued thought from verse 1 –

“And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ...”

The words “in which” speak of “trespasses and sins.” Paul, writing to the Ephesians, notes that they (and thus also we who follow after) “once walked according to the course of this world.” The word “course” simply means “age.”

The current age of this world is one of trespasses and sins. People are conceived in sin, they are born in sin, they live in sin, and they die in sin. Without Christ, this would be the continued course of this world for all people and forever. Our walk would be a walk of death leading to death.

Paul further expands on the thought with the words, “according to the prince of the power of the air.” There can be no doubt that this is speaking of the devil; Satan. He is the ruler of this “course” or “age.” He deceived Adam and from that moment on, he has had the rule over all that has occurred here.

The title given to him by Paul, “the prince of the power of the air,” is unique in the Bible and it has given scholars a great deal of debate as to what it exactly means.

However, it isn’t too difficult to determine by thinking about the way that the world has been structured. Man was created a temporal (physical) being. He was given dominion over the earth. The air surrounds the earth, and it is the sphere in which we move.

As angels and demons are spirit beings, they don’t move on the earth as we do. Rather, their movement can be equated to moving through the air. They rule over “the sons of disobedience” meaning fallen man, from this position.

However, God is above them, ruling from heaven. Thus, He is ultimately in control of all things, even within the sphere of “the air” where the devil exercises his power. This is evidenced in the book of Job. It is also seen in the gospels, Acts, and elsewhere. In 1 Thessalonians 4, we read these words –

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17

Christ will descend from heaven and raise the dead from the pit of the ground (the grave), demonstrating His authority over that realm. He will catch up those on the earth who are still alive, demonstrating His authority over that realm. And together, we will meet Him in the air, demonstrating His authority over that realm. It will be an “in your

face” demonstration to the devil, showing that he is utterly defeated by the authority of Christ.

Paul’s words show that we were once under the power of the devil. We dwelt in his sphere of influence, and we walked according to his government. And this government, though defeated in Christ, continues on at this time. It is ruled by this same “spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.”

As we look at the world around us, we can see the evident truth of this. Those who are not redeemed certainly walk in the course of this world. They are under the rule of the devil, and they are subject to his wicked direction.

Unfortunately, far too many Christians still walk according to his rule, even though they have been freed from the power of the trespasses and sins which they once were subjugated to.

Life application: We have been freed from the devil’s power by the work of Christ, and yet how often do we allow ourselves to fall back into his sphere of wickedness! Let us consider that we have been bought with a price. We belong to a new Master, and our allegiance is to be to Him and to Him alone. Let us endeavor to live for Christ at all times.

Heavenly Father, there is a great spiritual battle going on in this world. There is the rule of the devil and his sphere of influence which permeates all people who have not been redeemed by Christ. Help us to be light to this world of darkness, leading many to the greater rule of Christ. In Him, there is freedom from sin and death. And while we are engaged in this battle, help us to not fall back into the trap of the devil and allow ourselves to be overtaken by his many temptations. Keep us on the holy path of Christ at all times. Amen.

...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. Ephesians 2:3

This verse is referring to “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” of the previous verse. Here, Paul makes an all-inclusive statement. He has been speaking to the Ephesians with the word “you.” Now he includes himself and all people, Jew and Gentile, with the words “we” and “all.”

This reveals a truth that is seen both implicitly and explicitly in Scripture. We are conceived in sin, born in sin, and live in sin. We are under the influence of the devil. Until we come to Christ, this is our “default” position.

The world doesn’t like to hear this, and the common term, “He is a good person,” is used to show that humans can be inherently good. But this is not what the Bible teaches.

Rather, we may be good in relation to others, but we are far from “good” in the biblical sense. Instead, “we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh.”

Here, Paul is referring to the physical lusts that we as humans pursue. Anything which is earthly and sensual, and which is not deemed as a holy pursuit, is considered in the words, “the lusts of our flesh.”

However, Paul has more which he includes in the overall depravity of man. He next states, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” The soul of the man is inclusive of both the conduct of the flesh of the body as well as that of the mind. The “mind” speaks of our thoughts which we may act on, or which we may simply dwell on without taking any action.

Either way, they are a part of that which is directed by the devil, and which is cause for separation from God. As these things are instilled in our very nature, even from conception itself, it shows the complete and utter depravity of man. The devil has total power to work in “the sons of disobedience.”

Because of these things, all people are separated from God. Even those who have come to Christ were, at one time, “by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” The Greek word for “by nature” is *phusis*. It indicates “the underlying constitution or make-up of someone (something).” It is that which is fused into our very nature.

Two important truths must be considered in these words. The first is explicit; that without Christ, we would still be “children of wrath.” As this was our very nature, there is nothing we could do about changing it. It was tied into who we were, completely and entirely. Thus, as children of wrath, we were destined for destruction and complete separation from the holy God.

The second one is implicit; that we are now no longer considered “just as the others.” Instead, even though we may have these same lusts and desires because we are still in our fallen bodies, we have a new nature according to Christ.

Our sin is not imputed to us because of Christ. Instead, we are “children of God” and no longer “children of wrath.” Our new nature is infused into us. We go from a state of anticipated destruction and separation, to a state of anticipated redemption and glorification.

Paul will continue to explain this in the verses ahead. We are now no longer directed by the devil, even though we still live in earthly, corruptible bodies. Instead, we are directed by Christ. Sin is dead in us because we died to sin through the work of Christ. The thought of this verse can be seen reflected in the words of John –

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12, 13

Life application: If you have received Christ, then you have been granted the right to be called a child of God. In Christ, we are granted freedom from the power of the devil. Some wondrous day, we will be taken out of these fallen bodies which continue to struggle with the trials of a fallen world. We will be granted new bodies, a completely new nature, and an eternal existence which will be forever pleasing to our heavenly Father.

Lord God, the Bible teaches that all people, without exception, are fallen and are “children of wrath” by nature. We are conceived in sin, born in sin, and have only the expectation of Your divine wrath. But in Your goodness toward us, You sent Jesus to give us a new nature, a new hope, and the right to be called sons of God through Him. What manner of love is this! Thank You for Jesus. Thank You that we are freed from the power of the devil by Jesus’ wonderful work. Amen.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
Ephesians 2:4

This thought picks up after verse 2:1 –

“And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ... But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,”

The intervening verses simply explained the details of our dead condition. They described living in a state of certain ruin from which there was no escape and only an inevitable and final bringing on of God's wrath could be expected.

However, as the Pulpit Commentary so beautifully states it, "Man's extremity becomes God's opportunity." Where we were destined for certain destruction, God stepped in and redirected the situation for us.

The word "but" is emphatic and conveys the absolute sovereignty of God in the matter. We could do nothing. We were in an impossible state of death leading unto death. But God transcends our realm, and what is impossible for us is entirely within His abilities. And yet there is more. Not only is correcting the matter within His ability, but it is also a part of His very nature to take the action.

"But God" shows the absolute contrast between our helpless condition and God's ability to correct it.

"Who is rich in mercy" reveals that mercy is a part of His nature. Just as He is gracious, truthful, holy, loving, etc., He is also merciful. It defines His character. And this mercy is "rich." The Greek word gives the idea of "muchness." He is simply abounding in mercy towards the objects of His affection. The mercy, therefore, streams from Him in abundance.

"Because of His great love" shows that the mercy is directly connected to His love. Just as mercy defines His nature, so does love. And as His mercy abounds, so great also is His love. It overflows from Him as a spring overflows its opening. The water is impelled up and out by the force of pressure.

It is as if in Him, the outflowing of His love cannot be bottled up. Instead, it streams from Him towards His elect as is seen in the words, "with which He loved us." Again, the Pulpit commentary notes that "the verb of love governing the noun of love makes the idea rich and strong. This view of the exuberance of the Divine attributes from which salvation has its rise is in harmony with the whole character of the Epistle."

Paul's explanation of what occurs towards us when we are "in Christ" is revealed throughout the letter, and it conveys to us the highest sense of God's reaching out to His creatures, demonstrating His infinite attributes through the giving of His Son for us.

As the psalmist cried out, so should we also call out from our souls –

Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!
For His mercy *endures* forever. Psalm 136:26

Life application: When we fail to act as we should; when we really mess up and think, “How could God still love me?”; we can come to this verse and ponder it. Because of Christ, God’s mercy simply flows over us, His love surrounds us, and His eternal salvation continues to adorn us. Let us pick ourselves back up, and proceed on with pursuing Christ – who already pursued us!

Lord God, Your mercy towards us in Christ Jesus is simply unimaginable. We were dead in our trespasses, and yet You stepped in and revealed to us Your great goodness in the giving of His life in exchange for ours. What kind of love has been lavished upon us! Now, O God, help us to pursue You just as You pursued us. Direct our steps according to Your will for us, and give us the wisdom to not stray from that marvelous path. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

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

As seen in the previous verse, this verse, which is connected to verse 4, now ties us back to verse 1. Taken together, the thought goes –

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ...⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

We were “dead in trespasses and sins,” but God “made us alive together in Christ.”

This verse is, unfortunately, taken to unnecessary extremes by those who hold to a monergistic approach to our salvation. Such is the teaching of “Calvinists.” In this, they will say that a person who is dead is dead. They can in no way make themselves alive, and therefore “regeneration precedes faith” (Tabletalk Magazine on Ephesians 2:1-10).

In other words, God sovereignly chooses who will be saved; He then “regenerates them in order to believe;” and then they believe. In essence, they are saved in order to be saved. In essence, a person is saved before they believe, not after. The belief is a result of their salvation, because regeneration of the Spirit is the saving mark of God (see Ephesians 1:13, 14). RC Sproul states their ideology this way –

“You have as much power to awaken yourself from spiritual death as a corpse has the power to awaken himself from physical death.”

In this, a serious category mistake is made. Just because a person is *spiritually* dead, it does not mean that they are completely dead. A functioning brain is a part of human existence... well in most cases!

The spiritual connection between God and man is cut, but this does not mean that man is incapable of doing good things, nor is he incapable of seeing what is good and pursuing it. In the giving of Christ, God makes an offer to fallen man. Man sees this good work of God in Christ and chooses, of his volitional free-will, to accept it or reject it. If it is accepted, then He is deemed righteous by God, justified by the work of Christ, and regenerated in his Spirit.

Sproul is correct that we cannot awaken ourselves from spiritual death, only a work of God can do that, but that work of God comes not from being “regenerated in order to believe,” but rather from an act of the free will in man which then triggers God’s regeneration of our Spirit.

This is what Paul is referring to when he says that God, “...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” Our spirits were dead, but God made them alive – not before, but after we believed.

Albert Barnes goes further with Paul’s intent. He says (underlining added) –

“The construction here is, ‘God, who is rich in mercy, on account of the great love which he bare unto us, even being dead in sin, hath quickened us,’ etc. It does not mean that he quickened us when we were dead in sin, but that he loved us then, and made provision for our salvation.”

It was love to the children of wrath; love to those who had no love to return to him; love to the alienated and the lost. That is true love - the sincerest and the purest benevolence - love, not like that of people, but such only as God bestows. Man loves his friend, his benefactor, his kindred - God loves his foes, and seeks to do them good.”

Although it is true that we were dead in sin when we received Christ, Barnes argues that this isn’t the main point of the thought. Rather, he says that the focus is on God’s love towards us, even in our deadened state, and thus He made a way for the correction of

that state. The concept of monergism, being regenerated in order to believe, is erroneous and leads to other major faults in one's theology.

The final words of the verse today are that "by grace you have been saved." Grace is unmerited favor. It is getting what you do not deserve. We are the offenders, but God graciously forgives our offenses through the gift of His Son.

Life application: Forced grace is not grace.

Lord God, how grateful we are for Your glorious grace. When we were dead in sin, separated from You because of our first father's misdeed, You still loved us enough to promise a Redeemer. Slowly and methodically, You worked in history until that glorious moment when Christ came. Now through Him we have complete pardon and full redemption, by simply trusting in what You have done. Thank You for Christ Jesus our Lord. How grateful we are for Your glorious grace. Amen.

...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:6

By taking this verse with the previous one, we can see Paul's intent more clearly –

"...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

His words are tying our state directly to the work of Christ.

- 1) He was crucified for our sins and was buried; we were "dead in trespasses."
- 2) He was brought back to life because He had no sins of His own; we were made alive together with Christ (because our sins were dealt with through His cross).
- 3) He was raised from the tomb; we were raised up together.
- 4) He was seated in heaven; we are made to sit together in the heavenly places in Him.

What occurred with Christ is what has happened to us in the same order; the two parallel, Christ being the pattern for those who would follow after Him. These actions are described by Paul in the indicative. They are a simple state of fact concerning what has occurred. He has raised us up, and He has made us to sit together.

In God's dealings with us, it is an accomplished fact. We are merely awaiting its actual occurrence. Christ's resurrection and seating in the heavenlies guarantees our entrance there as well.

In fact, Vincent's Word Studies notes that when the word "together" is used for the translation, it is ambiguous. To clarify its meaning, he notes that the Greek more fully reads, "Even now we sit there in Him, and shall sit with Him in the end." The deal is done. Just as Christ is seated on His heavenly throne, we are – ipso facto – seated there with Him.

These things are, as Paul notes, done by God "in Christ Jesus." The term is used to show that we are not simply granted these privileges because of His work, but somehow at a distance. Instead, they come to us because we are intimately connected to Him; united to Him through faith. What occurred with Him, indeed occurs to us as well.

Life application: We may, from time to time, do something so utterly stupid that we might feel that we have blown it with God - once and for all He has rejected us because of our failings. Paul's words show that this is incorrect. By faith in Christ, we are united to Christ. God could no more reject us now than He could reject His own Beloved. Deal done. The victory is secure.

Lord God, we see the marvel of Your wisdom displayed all around us. The intricacy of what You have created is beyond imagination. And yet, the Bible shows us that Your attention is far more directed to Your redeemed than to anything else. In sending Jesus, You have opened a path back to You. We can come to the throne of grace and find help in our time of need, and we have the absolute assurance that we will someday be seated there with Him. Thank You for this cherished knowledge. Thank You for Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

...that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7

This has been one continuous thought since verse 4 which contrasts the thought of verses 1-3. The words "that in the ages to come" are set against verse 2 which said, "the course of this world" which implies the past times in humanity during which the mystery of Christ was hidden. This is described by Paul in Colossians 1:26, 27 –

"...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are

the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

In Christ, the mystery is revealed. Throughout the ages, it will be a source of richness to those who are His redeemed. This is that “He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

The words “He might show” are in the middle voice. Thus, they denote that God intends that these things are done to reveal His own glory.

What is anticipated in these coming ages is to be revealed in “the exceeding riches of His grace.” The grace of God is one of His defining attributes. It is a part of His very nature. However, God cannot be gracious or merciful without also executing justice in a display of His righteousness.

He cannot violate one of His defining attributes in the process of granting another. Therefore, these riches of His grace are revealed “in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

It is through the work of Christ that God’s righteousness, His justice, His mercy, His grace, and so on all shine forth in one dazzling display of who He is. Further, the Greek word *en* or “in” is given to show that only those who are “in Christ Jesus” are the recipients of this. The KJV unfortunately translates this as “through.” Because of this, it could include anyone. But such is not the case. It is only those who are “in Christ” that will receive this marvelous grace.

The Pulpit commentary describes the kindness of God towards those who are in Christ – “Kindness in the **matter** of the blessing, forgiving us freely, and accepting and adopting us in him; kindness in the **manner** of the blessing, dealing with us as Jesus dealt with the woman that was a sinner, or with the thief on the cross, or with Peter after he had fallen, or with Saul of Tarsus; kindness in the **extent** of the blessing, providing amply for every want; kindness in the **duration** of the blessing – for evermore.”

The work of Christ is the proof of what is now realized and what will continue to be realized in the ages to come. It is thus to be an encouragement for us, right now, as we await its final consummation. We have an absolutely sure and trustworthy hope because of the work of Christ.

Life application: Marvelous things lie ahead as we walk in the presence of the King of the ages.

What could be more marvelous, O God, than anticipating what lies ahead of us. What we have in the world around us may be beautiful at times, but it is still a world filled with bitterness, hatred, and fighting against You. In the ages to come, that will all be swept away. There will only be joy, peace, and harmony in Your wondrous presence... all because of the giving of Christ for us. How marvelous it is to contemplate! Thank You for Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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

In verse 2:5, Paul parenthetically stated, “by grace you have been saved.” After that, he explained what the resulting actions of that salvation were. Now he returns to that same parenthetical thought to further define what being saved by grace means.

He begins with “For” in order to show that all of the things which resulted from that salvation are connected to this act of grace. In other words, the entire deal is of grace; none is merited.

We “were dead in trespasses” but “He made us alive together with Christ” in an act of grace. He raised us up by an act of grace. He made us sit in the heavenlies with Christ by an act of grace.

He continues on with “by grace you have been saved.” It is a repeat of the parenthesis of verse 5. The words “you have been” are in the present indicative active. An indicative serves as a sign or indication of something.

In this case, it serves to mean, “ye were saved at first, and continue in a state of salvation” (Charles Ellicott). It is a done deal; salvation is eternal, and it has been “through faith.”

Here he moves from the effect of verse 5 (being saved by grace) to the cause of that occurrence (by faith). The “grace” comes from God while the “faith” came forth from the object of the grace, meaning the man. The faith is the cause of the action, the grace is the effect of the exercise of that faith.

Further, “grace” has the article in the Greek, thus it is “the grace.” It is not just any grace, but “the grace of God” which is bestowed upon the believer in Christ and His work.

Next, to demonstrate that “the grace” is truly “grace,” he says, “and that not of yourselves.” One cannot merit grace. The exercise of faith cannot be said to be a work or deed of merit. Instead, it is a logical, necessary choice which one must make in order to be saved. If we want to continue to live, we must breathe. It is not a work. Rather, it is a necessary requirement of sustaining life.

When we do what is necessary in order to live, the salvation is bestowed upon us; “it is the gift of God.” A gift is something which costs nothing. It is free and it is without strings attached. Further, a gift is a gift.

It is not something that can later be taken back based on another action. If it could be, then it was not a gift from the start. Again, as before, logic dictates that salvation must be an eternal decree of God. When faith is exercised, the person is sealed with the Holy Spirit. They are saved and they will keep being saved; once and forever. Therefore, “that” and “the gift of God” are synonymous; the second merely explains the first.

To understand the verse more fully, it needs to be noted that both “grace” and “faith” are in the feminine, but the word “that” is in the neuter. Therefore, “that” is not speaking of only “grace” or “faith.” Instead, it is speaking of the entire process of salvation by grace which is through faith. Thus “faith” cannot be considered a work. Here is how the verse looks –

For by grace (feminine) you have been saved through faith (feminine), and that (neuter) not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...

The importance of this is seen in refutation of the doctrine of those who claim that man is “regenerated in order to believe,” and that man does not possess free-will. The argument is ridiculous on the surface, but this is what is taught by some. Instead, the faith is exercised, and the result is being saved by grace, the very thing Paul has been speaking about since verse 5.

The Pulpit Commentary correctly states the nature of the faith –

“It is not that faith is accepted by God in place of works, but because faith indicates that attitude of men towards Christ in which it pleases God to save them, transferring to him all their guilt, imputing to them all his merit.”

Finally, there is an emphasis on the word “gift.” Using an article, the Greek says, “of God it is the gift.” The salvation of God is the gift of God based on a mere act of faith by the man. If the faith were a part of the gift, then it wouldn’t really be a gift in the truest sense. At best it could be considered a forced gift, but even that is a contradictory thought.

Life application: Precision of thought is required in order to keep from being duped into bad theology. Please take time to read more commentaries on this verse and then make a logical conclusion based on the best evidence provided.

Lord God, thank You for the gift of salvation which comes by a mere act of faith. Our bodies are pleased to continue functioning when we continue breathing. Breathing is not a work. Rather, it is a necessity. In the same way, You offer us life-eternal by exercising a mere act of faith. It is not a work, but rather a necessary condition of life. And when we reach out and believe in the work of Christ, we receive the gift. That is grace! This is simply beyond understanding. Thank You for giving us the avenue of hope which leads back to You! Amen.

...not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:9

In the Old Testament, the focus for the people of Israel was to be the glory of God. This is seen consistently from the very beginning, all the way through the time of the law. The people were to glory in the Lord, and in Him alone –

“Thus says the Lord:

‘Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,

Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;

²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this,

That he understands and knows Me,

That I *am* the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight,” says the Lord.”” Jeremiah 9:23, 24

So important to the Lord is this precept that He further stated the following through Isaiah –

I am the Lord, that *is* My name;
And My glory I will not give to another... Isaiah 42:8

Paul directly equates our salvation with this same precept. Verse 9 is given to explain the words of verse 8 –

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

There can be no boasting before the Lord in that which He alone has accomplished. This brings in the obvious, and often argued, point concerning the exercising of faith. Is free-will a work? Does the free-will choice of calling on Christ bring us to a point where we can boast before Him?

This was dealt with in verse 8, and the answer is no. In fact, it is just the opposite. We are already in the sea, we are already without hope, the waters already surround us. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves.

However, God provides a way out. Is it wrong to choose that avenue? Or should we ignorantly say, I will deprive God of His glory if I reach out my hand and receive His salvation? There is no other hand, there is no other salvation.

If God asks us to receive His offer, it is not a work to do so. But in this same sea are all others of the human race. They would rather stay in the depravity of sin and so choose to not respond to the offer. Their refusal is no more a work than our acceptance. Only God will receive the glory for the salvation or the just condemnation.

This line of thought is reflected beautifully in the 115th Psalm. Take time to read that psalm today and to contemplate what the writer is telling us. The Lord chose Israel, but Israel had to respond, individually, as to whether they would comply with the Lord’s directives or not. The Lord has chosen a church, and each of us has a choice to do the same –

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,

Because of Your truth.

² Why should the Gentiles say,
'So where *is* their God?'" Psalm 115:1, 2

In Romans 3:27, 28 Paul makes a clear and concise distinction between "faith" and "deeds of the law." Faith is not reckoned as a deed. It is reckoned as a response to Christ's work. To teach others that they do not need to receive Jesus Christ is to simply lead them to hell on that great day of judgment.

Life application: Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. This way, others can hear and respond.

The offer is made, the deeds have been accomplished. The choice is now up to each of us. Lord God, You have sent Your Son, the Messiah. He has fulfilled the law and now offers peace through the blood of His cross. Help us to not be silent, but to speak out now about the glory of Christ and the marvel of Your offer of grace and mercy. Let us never shy away from the proclamation that Christ has come. And thank You for His coming! Amen.

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

From the thought of being saved by grace and not of works, thus excluding any boasting on our part, Paul notes that we are His (meaning God's) workmanship.

The word "His" is emphatic, showing that it is solely a work of God. He has created us, He has redeemed us, and He has orchestrated His plan, which includes us. All of this was done apart from our participation. The Greek reads, "Of Him, indeed, we are workmanship."

The word translated as "workmanship" is *poiema*. It is found only here and in Romans 1:20. There, it refers to that which God has made in the physical creation. The word means just that: "a thing made, a work, workmanship."

In this we can see that our works are excluded in the process of salvation. Instead, it is the work of God which saves. This word *poiema*, eventually came down to us in the form of "poem."

This doesn't mean that we are "God's poem," but just as a poem is formed by a poet, so we are formed into that which God designs. We are the work of His intelligence, having been formed by His hands.

We, His work, have been "created in Christ Jesus." Jesus is the means by which God has accomplished this. It is through faith in His work that we become a part of this "new creation."

Paul speaks specifically of us as a new creation, or new creatures, several times in his letters, such as in 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, and again in verse 15 of Ephesians 2. God did the work, through Christ, for the purpose of accomplishing our own "good works."

This then reiterates the thought of verses 8 & 9. Our works are not that which come before, but rather they are the consequence of what God has done. In our receiving of Christ, we are sealed with the Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation, but it is with the expectation of accomplishing good works.

This brings in an obvious question, however – "What works?" What is it that we are expected to do? Are we to help little old ladies cross the road? Don't the unregenerate do this also? What works are required in order for us to fulfill this plan of God that we have been created for? In short, the answer is that whatever we do by faith which is good and acceptable after salvation is a good work, counted for righteousness.

Apart from Christ, the greatest and most noble deeds are counted as filthy rags. It is only through being "in Christ" that a deed is made acceptable before God. The very same deeds as the unregenerate are made acceptable; they are sanctified, by being "in Christ" as long as they are deeds of faith. This is further explained in Hebrews 11, using one example after another, by showing us that it is faith which pleases God.

This further explains the very difficult and often misunderstood passage in James 2, especially James 2:24 which says that "man is justified by works, and not by faith only." It is deeds of faith which justify us, not deeds in and of themselves. Any deed not of faith is not acceptable for credit. Therefore, it is ultimately faith which justifies the man.

This is then reflected in the final words of the verse. We have been "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." These words again show us the synergistic relationship between God's work in Christ and our faith. In Philippians 3:12, 13, Paul will say –

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.”

We are told in both passages that it is God who works, and yet we are expected to work. In God’s plan, there is His predestination of the matter, and yet man’s free-will is also highlighted. That free-will is man’s faith, both for salvation, and for deeds which follow salvation.

Faith is never considered a work, but rather a necessary part of the process. God prepares the salvation; man receives the salvation by faith. God prepares the workmanship; man walks according to God’s preparation. On both sides of the process, there is a synergism which is evident. It is that faith is a necessary requirement of pleasing God.

Life application: What more could we give to God than to live holy lives of faith? Heaven is not the purpose of our salvation; holiness is. And one cannot be holy without exercising faith in that which God has revealed – both for us, and for us to do.

Lord God, our faith is small and fragile, but by keeping our eyes on Jesus and our minds in contemplation of Your word, it will surely increase. What else is there to carry us through the times of difficulties and trials which hem us in on all sides? Help us, O God! Remind us to pursue You through the sure word You have given and to trust in the work of Christ which is detailed there. Help us to be people of great faith, with whom You will be pleased. Amen.

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—
Ephesians 2:11

Paul gathers up the lesson of the previous verses into a summary thought with the word “therefore.” He is asking the Ephesians to reflect on what he has said and to consider their new status and position in Christ. Early in chapter 1, he said this to them –

“...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to

the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,
¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:10-14

He said in those verses that God had gathered together “all things in Christ.” He explained this as those things “both which are heaven and which are on earth.” He then noted that even they, the Ephesian Gentiles, had believed and they “were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

Now, in order to show the magnitude of what this means to them in particular, he asks them to “remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh,” were now to be considered in a different light.

They were without Christ, and they were not included in the overall redemptive plans of God concerning the nation of Israel. Circumcision was Israel’s mark of inclusion into this body, and it was that which marked them out as separate from the rest of the people groups of the world.

At that time, they were “called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision.” In this, he uses the abstract for the concrete – “Uncircumcision” for “uncircumcised,” and “Circumcision” for “circumcised.” However, he adds in a note of irony. It was the Circumcision who “called” the uncircumcised the “Uncircumcision.”

It was a note of contempt. They looked down on those who were not a part of them as a cruel master might look down upon his dirty slave. The irony is that Paul gives back the term “called” to the Circumcision. In other words, “They are the ‘so-called’ Circumcision, but that term is now just as derogatory as ‘Uncircumcision’ once was.”

The reason for this is that it was “made in the flesh by hands.” He will explain the irony in the verses ahead, demonstrating that the external sign no longer meant anything at all. It is a thought which is comparable to many other verses in his letters, such as Romans 2:25 & 4:12; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6 & 6:15; and Colossians 3:11. As far as the references in Galatians, they simply explain the thought which permeates most of the epistle.

Paul's words are so clear and concise concerning this issue, that it is more than a wonder how people can still find some type of elevated distinction in being circumcised in the flesh, but it happens every day. If one is "in Christ," then circumcision of the flesh is nullified as a marker of distinction.

Life application: Where is your hope? Is it in a mark of the flesh? If so, then Christ's marks of the cross mean nothing to you. Is it in an observance of the law such as not eating pork? Then Christ's fulfillment of the law means nothing to you.

His words, "It is finished" are abrogated by your futile attempt to do what He has already done. Trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and be reconciled to God through Christ. Put your useless deeds of the flesh away!

Lord God, I would rather trust in the marks on Jesus' body than in any mark upon mine. If I am to boast in circumcision, then His scars become a pointless gesture to me. And I would rather trust in His work which led up to the cross than in anything I could do in hopes of pleasing You. If I am going to trust in my adherence to the law, then His words, "It is finished" are of no value to me. Instead, I trust fully in the Person and work of Jesus Christ alone for my approval in Your presence. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.

...that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12

In one verse, Paul defines five conditions with which those outside of Israel were in. If considered in their proper light, the ramifications are terrifying. All people on earth, with the exception of those who were in a particular group were "without Christ."

As God is infinite and holy, and as man is finite and fallen, there is an infinite gap between the two. There is no possible way to bridge that gap apart from Christ. "Without Christ" then means "without access to God."

There was only birth into the stream of humanity apart from God, life of woe leading to death, life ending at death, and a continued and eternal separation from the Creator. Without Christ, there was (and still is) no hope. It is not that Christ was just not present with them, as if they could call out to Him and be reconciled to Him. Instead, they were without Him in the fullest sense; they had no part in Him.

He next notes that they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.” The word in Greek is a verb, not a noun. It reads “being alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.” They were out, and they were kept out by the state they were in.

With few recorded exceptions, this was the state of all people on the planet. They were born, lived, and died apart from the access to God which was provided through Christ to all who were of Israel’s commonwealth.

The importance of “being alienated” rather than “being aliens” is understood in the promise to Abraham that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” through him. The alienation came from the fall; the commonwealth of Israel is a restoration of that.

Until Christ came, this was the default position for all people outside of Israel. It should be noted that this is a spiritual, not a national commonwealth. Paul explains this in Romans 9:6 stating that “they are not all Israel who *are* of Israel.”

For those who lived by faith in the hope of Christ, they were set apart within this spiritual commonwealth, enjoying the benefits that are derived from it. As a side note concerning this, if we are brought into the commonwealth of Israel through Christ, then it shows that we are not Israel. The church has not replaced Israel, but is brought into a right relationship with God through this spiritual commonwealth. Israel is Israel; the church is the church.

To further highlight the plight, he moves on to “strangers from the covenants of promise.” The Greek reads “the promise.” Further, the word “covenants” is plural and the word “promise” is singular.

A promise was made right after the fall that restoration would be made, and that man would be brought back into a right relationship with God. After that time, a series of covenants was made in order for this to come about based on that one promise. This is reflected in the words of Hebrews 1:1 –

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets...”

The Gentiles were not a part of these covenants, and yet they were a part of the promise. Until Christ came, they had no hope in the world and were cut off from what Christ was doing through these covenants.

Paul then notes that the state of these people was, “having no hope.” They may have had thoughts about eternity, and indeed they wrote and spoke about such things, just as non-believers do today. However, these were and are merely speculations and fanciful wishes which are not based in reality.

The word “hope” here doesn’t mean “an expectation of.” Today Muslims who blow themselves up in the name of their false god have “an expectation of” paradise, but it is not one based in God’s reality. The “hope” Paul refers to is “a certainty of that which is offered by the one true God through Christ.” The Gentiles were in this terrible state and were “condemned already” according to Jesus’ words of John 3:18.

Finally, Paul notes that they were “without God in the world.” They had God in the general sense of receiving His goodness in rains, sunny days, blue skies, and etc. These things reveal God and make us aware of His nature, but what Paul is referring to is the connection to Him which comes through Christ.

Christ the Mediator is what allows us to be “with” God in the fullest sense; to be “children of God” through adoption; and to have the eternal inheritance that He offers through Christ.

Through Him, these five terrifying states of existence are obliterated. We now have full access because of what He has done. And yet, today, people voluntarily exist in the state that at one time they had no choice in participating in.

God has offered the restoration of all things to us if we will simply receive them by faith. And yet, we as humans will do anything to set aside this grace and establish our own reconnection to God; something which is impossible.

Life application: In Christ, we who were once far off are now brought near to God. Let us never forget the magnitude of what He has done for us.

Lord God, we stand in awe of what You have done through Jesus Christ. The connection was severed; the gap was infinite. Man had no hope in this world but being born into a state of expectant death and eternal separation from You. But in Your great love with which You love us, You sent Christ to reestablish the connection and to bring us back to You. May we not squander this marvelous offer! Open eyes and hearts to the truth of what He has done, O God. And may Your glorious name ever be praised. Amen.

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

The words “But now” are set in contrast to the words of the previous verse. In former days, the Gentiles were:

- 1) Without Christ
- 2) Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
- 3) Strangers of the covenants of the promise
- 4) Having no hope
- 5) Without God in the world

But now “in Christ Jesus” means that we have moved positionally from Adam to Him. We are “in Christ” and participate in all those things which we were unable to partake in. Because of being “in Christ” Paul says that “you who were once far off...” These words tell of how the Jews would speak of the Gentiles.

The Jews had the temple where God dwelt among them. They had the oracles of God which could speak to them. They had the feast days and the many other privileges which come through being “near” to God.

The Gentiles had none of these things and thus were “far off” from them. However, even those “far off” were not completely forgotten by God. Isaiah told them this –

“I create the fruit of the lips:
Peace, peace to *him who is far off* and to *him who is near*,”
Says the LORD,
“And I will heal him.” Isaiah 57:1

Through Christ, there is now peace. Those who were “far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” It is the blood of Christ which is considered the seal that guarantees us a new nearness to God. Earlier in Ephesians 1:7, it said that we have “redemption through His blood.” This indicates that the blood is the means of redemption. But it is also that which guarantees it as well.

It is as if the blood of Christ has been sprinkled on us. We are cleansed and purified by it. It is what provides the atonement, or a propitiation, for our sins as is noted in Romans 3:25. Therefore, it is what now allows us to draw near to God, regardless of physical location. This is revealed in the marvelously comforting words of Hebrews 10:19 –

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.”

Life application: If you have received the work of Jesus Christ, you have been redeemed, your sins are atoned for, peace with God has been restored, and you have access into the very dwelling place of the Almighty. As this is so, what should you fear?

Lord God, we often worry about the things which happen around us, as if they can somehow affect us in a permanent way. But this life is temporary and fleeting. In calling on Christ, we have been redeemed, we have received atonement, peace with You has been restored, and we have full and complete access to Your dwelling place. As this is so, why should we be anxious or afraid of the earthly things which surround us? We have an eternal guarantee because of Jesus. No fear here... the blood has made all things new. Amen.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, Ephesians 2:14

Paul has been describing the woeful state of the Gentiles for the past few verses. In verse 13 we then read, “^{But} now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Now in explanation of this, he says, “For He Himself is our peace.” The words, “He Himself” are emphatic. It is through Christ alone that this peace comes about. The idea of peace as given by the Lord simply permeates Scripture. For example, from the Old Testament we read –

“I create the fruit of the lips:
Peace, peace to *him who is far off* and to *him who is near*,”
Says the Lord,
“And I will heal him.” Isaiah 57:19

Then at the birth of Christ, the heavenly host proclaimed –

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” Luke 2:14

As Christ was finishing His earthly ministry, we then read –

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:27

Paul’s words, however, show that not only does Christ grant peace, He is our peace. He uses the word “peace” in an abstract sense to show that it defines Him and His work rather than merely being a result of what He has done. He is the source of it and the continuation of it. In Him, we now have this peace. Next, to further define this, he says, “who has made both one.”

This is speaking of the division between Jew and Gentile which was especially highlighted in verses 11 & 12. Here Paul uses the term “both” in the neuter gender. By doing this, he shows that these states simply existed. They were facts concerning the nature of the state; Jew and Gentile. There was no peace and no accord between the two, but in Christ we are made one. Peace exists because of His work. “Both,” showing a distinction, is replaced with “one,” showing peace.

As a secondary note, it is also true that Christ is our peace between God and us. Where there was once enmity and strife, there is now love and contentment between the two. But this is not the intent of Paul’s words here. That is well described by Paul elsewhere though. In this verse, he is dealing with the issue of individual status before God – Jew and Gentile. This is fully evidenced by the words that Christ “has broken down the middle wall of separation.”

This “middle wall” refers to the wall which was in the temple in Jerusalem beyond which no Gentile could pass. Flavius Josephus indicates that it bore a sign which proclaimed death to any Gentile who passed it. This is what is referred to in Acts 21 –

“Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” Acts 21:28

By supposing that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple, it would have been considered a defilement of it.

Where the Jews could go, the Gentiles were excluded. However, in Christ, that middle wall of separation no longer exists. Gentiles are considered on the same level as Jews because of the work of Christ.

Life application: Too often we see people continuing to make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, as if Jews are lifted up as having a special importance and favor with God within the church. This is incorrect. In Christ, all are on the same level, even as far as access to the Throne of Grace.

Lord God, how marvelous it is that all people on earth are entitled to come to Your Throne of Grace on an equal footing when they have come to Christ. There is now no elevation of status because of heritage, race, creed, or color. To You, we are either in Christ and with full access to You, or we are without Christ and alienated from You. And what is so remarkable is that this is granted to us by choice. Will we receive Your offer of peace or not? Thank You for allowing us to choose life. Thank You for Christ Jesus. Amen.

...having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, Ephesians 2:15

This verse brings in a question upon which scholars are divided. Is “having abolished in His flesh the enmity” speaking of “the middle wall of separation” of the previous verse, or of “the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances”? Here is how they read together. Remember that the words “that is” are inserted by the translators –

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace...”

The answer, when looking at Paul’s thoughts, is that it is speaking of both. The “wall of separation” was there in the temple *because* they were the stewards of the law. The second explains the first. Christ has made us (meaning Jew and Gentile) both one. The way He did this was by breaking down that middle wall. And that middle wall stood because of the law which set Israel apart from the nations.

The law is now abolished. The word in Greek is *katargeó*. It properly means, “idle down, rendering something inert (‘completely inoperative’); i.e. being of *no effect* (totally without force, completely brought down); done away with, cause to *cease* and therefore abolish; make invalid, abrogate (bring to nought); “to make idle or inactive” (HELPS Word Studies).

It is the law that Paul implicitly and explicitly states many times in his letters which is obsolete. The author of Hebrews states it explicitly three times and implicitly another dozen or so as well. The law was given to Israel, and it was intended to show us the need for something else. Paul explains this in detail in Galatians. Its purpose was to lead us, as a tutor, to Christ. In Christ's fulfillment of the law, it is annulled, obsolete, and set aside.

The Bible does not make a distinction between the "moral" and "ceremonial" aspects of this law. They are a united whole. Having said that, those precepts which are restated in the New Covenant are binding; hence, we are not to commit adultery, murder, etc. However, any precepts which are not repeated under the New Covenant are abolished. The Sabbath is such a law. Rather, belief in Christ brings us into God's rest (Hebrews 4:3). Christ is the end of the law for all who believe.

In abolishing "the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances," Jesus has created "in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace." The dividing wall is torn down and now, in Christ, we are one. This does not mean that Jews are no longer Jews and Gentiles are no longer Gentiles. This means that in relation to Christ, and concerning salvation based on that relation, they are on the same level.

Gentiles are now no longer alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. They are now in Christ, having hope, and sharing in the riches of the true God while in this world.

Life application: Paul explicitly states that the law is abolished. Do not be duped by people that take one or two verses completely out of context, and then tell you that you are obligated to adhere to precepts of the law. Abolished means just that. Our salvation comes by faith in Christ's completion of the law – end of story.

Lord God, many in the world are looking for peace with You. They may toss a sacrifice into a volcano in hopes of obtaining Your favor. They may blow themselves up on a busy train in an attempt to be granted paradise. They may give money to a church, believing that this will make You happy. Or they may hold to a law which was annulled through a New Covenant. And yet, none of these things will bring us one step closer to You. Only through our trust in the shed blood of Christ alone can we be reconciled to You. What a simple thing to do, and yet it seems that it is the most difficult of all. Help eyes to be opened to the truth of what Christ did. Salvation is of the Lord! Hallelujah and amen.

...and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. Ephesians 2:16

This verse explains and builds on the thought of the previous verse. Together they read–

“...having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace,¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”

The “one new man” of verse 15 precedes the thought of reconciliation which is given in verse 16 in the order of Paul’s statement; but actually, the reconciliation comes first, thus the new man is created.

The verb from which “reconcile” comes is *apokatallassó*. It is used only here and in Colossians 1:20 and 1:22. It means more than bringing about conciliation, but reconciliation. In other words, there was once unity, but that was lost. Now in Christ, and through His cross, there is harmony once again.

As Vincent’s Word Studies Notes, “This brings out the profound idea, which so especially characterizes these Epistles, of a primeval unity of all created being in Christ, marred and broken by sin, and restored by His manifestation in human flesh.”

The Pulpit Commentary shows this thought in a marvelous way. They say, “If Christ had only to proclaim God's friendship toward sinners, why should he have suffered on the cross? The cross as a mere pulpit is hideous; as an altar it is glorious.” In other words, God didn’t just proclaim reconciliation to fallen man as with a trumpet, but as an offering. In the crucified body of Christ, the enmity that existed has ended.

It needs to be remembered that this enmity is speaking first and foremost of that which existed between Jew and Gentile. It is true that the cross does this between God and man, and this will be noted in the coming verse in exactly this context, but it was the Jew who had access to God through the temple worship. Now, the cross of Christ offers it to all. The “middle wall of separation” no longer stands between Jew and Gentile. The enmity which existed is put to death.

Life application: Do you have a secret prejudice or bias against a person of a certain color or national heritage? If so, you are not seeing that person as God does. All people are descended from one man, Adam. Thus, all are related.

Now, in Christ, there is even more reason to not have enmity towards such a person. If they are “in Christ,” they are truly one with you in Christ as well. Put away your prejudices and see your fellow Christians as true brothers in the Lord.

Heavenly Father, Christ Jesus came to give His life a ransom for many. This includes people of every nation, tribe, and tongue. If He has done this for all of these categories, then why should we be dividing up our love by those same categories? Rather, help us to see humanity with Your eyes. Help us to reach across all barriers in love, sharing the message of Christ with any and all who will but receive it. Amen.

And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. Ephesians 2:17

The word “He” here is speaking of Christ Jesus, and yet, it cannot be said that Christ “preached peace” directly to the Gentiles, represented here by the Ephesians. He had ascended to the Father by this time.

And so, we see the Oneness of God hinted at in the Trinity. It is the Holy Spirit who transmitted the message (and continues to do so through the word) after Christ’s ascension. Jesus even spoke of this to the disciples concerning His peace –

“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:25-27

Therefore, though it is the Holy Spirit who is directly speaking, it is still in Christ Jesus’ name that He does so. Understanding this, we see that “He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.” The word “peace” is *eiréné*. It properly means, “*wholeness*, i.e. when all essential parts are joined together; *peace* (God’s gift of *wholeness*)” (HELPS Word Studies).

In other words, the peace here speaks of our being reconciled to God. There is no longer a state of enmity between the two parties. Instead, there is peace.

Those “who were afar off” is speaking of the Gentiles; “those who were near” is speaking of the Jews. This is a quote from Isaiah 57:19 –

“I create the fruit of the lips:
Peace, peace to *him who is far off* and to *him who is near*,”
Says the LORD,
“And I will heal him.”

A few things are of interest in this. One is that the Gentiles are mentioned first. This points to the scope of the “peace” which has come through Christ. The number of Gentiles far exceeds that of the Jews. Though the message is “to the Jew first” in chronology, it is the opposite in scope.

Secondly, the fact that “peace” was preached to the Jews signifies that until the work of Christ was complete, the enmity between God and Jew still existed. The work of Christ was anticipated in the rituals of Israel, but the peace truly only came when that which was anticipated was fully accomplished.

The repetition of “peace” toward both Jew and Gentile shows this to be true. This peace is not only something realized between Jew and Gentile (as verses 11 & 12 show), but it is also peace between each category and a third party, meaning God.

Life application: People want to believe that they are at peace with God through their good attitude, charities, etc. This is a lie. The only way to have peace with God is through accepting the work of Jesus Christ as Lord.

The most moral, decent, and giving person in human history is no closer to God without Jesus than the greatest sinner of all. Only Christ! Only Christ can bring the peace we need. Spread the word!

Lord God, the world speaks of “having peace with God” because of having a good attitude, being a nice person, giving away things to charity, and the like. It is as if we can buy Your love through our efforts. But Your word shows this to be untrue. We have no peace with You because we already have sin which puts up a wall between us. You took care of that sin-debt on Jesus’ cross. Only through His shed blood can we get the sin-debt out of the way. Help us to think this through and to first be reconciled to You. And then our relationship really begins. Help us to not miss this most important point. Thank You for Jesus and His cross! Amen.

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:18

This is one of the “Trinitarian” verses found in Paul’s writings. Here we have the work of Christ which results in our being conducted by the Spirit into the presence of the Father. Access to the Father is the subject of the verse. There is an emphatic structure in the sentence - “Through Him we have the access, both of us in one Spirit, to the Father” (Charles Ellicott).

It is through the work of Christ that both Jew and Gentile are granted this access. In reception of His work, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14) and thus the access becomes assured.

The word for “access” is *prosagógé*. It means to “come towards (near); *have access (approach)*, with intimate (face-to-face) interaction (note the prefix *pros*). All three occasions of *prosagōgḗ* (‘interactive access’) refer to ‘having audience (*direct access*) with God’ (J. B. Lightfoot, *MM*)” (HELPS Words Studies).

The word is a technical one which gives the idea of being conducted into the presence of royalty. When this occurs, it is through a trusted officer of that court. In this case, it is the Holy Spirit who testifies that, “This one is mine; he has received the work of Christ and is now allowed full and unfettered access.”

This concept fully supports the words of Jesus in John 14:6. He is the way to obtaining access, and there is no other way. Through His work, we are granted this right.

Life application: If you are in a slump and feel that God has left you, come back to Ephesians and read what Christ has done for you. In your reception of Him and His work, you are sealed with the Spirit of promise, and you are granted full access to the throne of grace.

Lift yourself up and press on with the full assurance that you were, are, and will continue to be accepted by Him.

Lord God, Your word says that when we receive the work of Christ, we are granted the seal of assurance that we belong to You. The Spirit of promise is sealed upon us, and He conducts us to Your very presence when we need to come to You with our prayers and petitions. What an honor! What a blessing! You have given us everything to stand approved in Your royal court. Thank You for what You have done. Praises and honor and glory and power belong to our God. Amen.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, Ephesians 2:19

These words take us back to verse 12 –

“...that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

After that, Paul explained how both Jew and Gentile have been united into one fellowship. In further explanation of that, he says, “Now therefore...” It is a summary idea of what has been explained in those preceding verses.

He then follows with, “...you are no longer strangers and foreigners.” The word for “stranger” signifies “an alien.” The word “foreigners” is more closely aligned with someone who lives in an area, but is not a member of the culture of that area. Abraham, for example, lived in Canaan.

However, he was not a Canaanite. Instead, he was a pilgrim or a sojourner. He had free movement in the land and was friendly with those of Canaan, but he could not really have been called a citizen as they were.

Next Paul gives contrasting thoughts by stating the word “but.” Instead of being apart from the commonwealth of Israel as strangers and foreigners, the Gentiles are now “citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

We have been brought into that commonwealth, and we have full rights as citizens of the nation, and we have full membership in the household of God. The contrast is seen in the two words of each category. Those who were “aliens” now have citizenship; those who were sojourners now have a household.

Through the work of Christ, all people are entitled to these benefits if they will but reach out and receive what He has done.

Life application: Paul’s words again show us that through the work of Christ, we have a new status. He doesn’t say that we now have the right to citizenship (as if it is something future and which could be lost), nor does he say that we now are accepted in order to be welcomed into God’s household (as if we could do something which would

cause that door to be shut). Rather, he states that the transaction is complete in Christ. The deal is done!

Lord God, Your word tells us that because of what Christ did, we are brought into full citizenship with the saints. We too now share in the commonwealth of Israel. Your word also says that we are now members of Your household. Our sojourning is over, and we have come home to You. Help us to keep this in mind as we pass through this life which continues to seem contrary to that. The world truly is not our home. We have come to the heavenly Mount Zion and are destined for eternal glory because of Christ our Lord. Amen!

...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, Ephesians 2:20

Paul now more fully develops the words of the previous verse which noted that the Gentiles are now “members of the household of God.” This household is being built into an edifice. The nature of the edifice will be explained in the next verse, but for now it is noted that this household was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”

The meaning of these words is generally taken as the Old Testament prophets and the apostles, but this is not the full sense of the words. First, if this were so, it would have reversed the order saying, “...the prophets and apostles.” Secondly, Paul uses this same term two more times in this same epistle –

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

“And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...” Ephesians 4:11

The edifice which is being built is upon a foundation of these two categories. As apostles are a New Covenant concept, they are in the preeminent place, being noted first. However, it would be incorrect to assume that only New Covenant prophets are being designated here by Paul as will be seen.

But this brings in a seeming contradiction to 1 Corinthians 3:11 –

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

In that verse, Paul calls Jesus Christ the foundation. How can this be resolved? It becomes discernible by Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18 –

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

In that verse, Jesus was not referring to Peter as the rock (meaning the foundation). The words of the verse do not agree in gender, and thus it is not Peter who is being referred to. Rather, it is the proclamation that Peter had made in a preceding verse –

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matthew 16:16

Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) is what the church is built on. Understanding this, the words of Paul become clear. The term “apostles and prophets” is not speaking of the individuals, but rather the proclamation of the individuals. The proclamation of the apostles, and the prophets (of any age) whose words point to Jesus as the Messiah, are what Paul is referring to.

The prophets of old anticipated Christ Jesus; the prophets of the church expound upon this truth. Therefore, there is no need to exclude the OT prophets from this verse, even though that is not an unrealistic possibility.

Next Paul says that “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.” This is a concept which goes back to the 118th Psalm –

“The stone *which* the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.” Psalm 118:22

Jesus ascribed this verse in the psalms to Himself in each of the three synoptic gospels. Peter referred to it in Acts 4:11, and a similar OT verse, which is found in Isaiah 28:16 is used by Peter in 1 Peter 2:6, 7. Paul also refers to this stone in Romans 9:33.

The cornerstone of a building is considered the most important of all. It is the first laid and it is that upon which all else is built. Everything else rests upon its surety as a foundation stone. This stone is that which is most honorable therefore, and it is that which is most evident. Such is Christ in the edifice which God is building.

The chief cornerstone is Christ, and the foundation is the proclamation concerning Christ. From there, everything else will find its proper place within the edifice.

As a final side note, if Peter were the foundation of the church as Roman Catholics incorrectly claim from a misinterpretation and misuse of Matthew 16:18, then Paul would have at least mentioned him in a separate category here. He does not. Peter was one of a select group, but by no means was he elevated to any high place or honor among them.

Life application: Verses like this one need to be carefully considered in order to avoid misinterpretation of them. This verse has been used by some to allege there is a contradiction in Scripture, something which is incorrect.

It has also been used by nutty people to make unfounded claims that they are prophets of God, and thus a more important part of the church than others. Again, this is something which is incorrect. It is Christ who alone is to be elevated in the church, and His word is free of contradiction.

Heavenly Father, as we contemplate the marvel of Your creation, how can we come to any other conclusion than that everything is perfectly arranged, and everything is interconnected by Your wisdom. All things are leading to a marvelous reconciliation of what You originally intended for Your people. Each thing that occurs brings us a step closer to that coming about. Even the things which seem evil are being used by You for a good end. Your word tells us it is so, and the progression of time and history reveals it to be true. Thank You that all things are coming to a wonderful time of reconciliation and restoration because of Jesus the Lord! Amen.

...in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, Ephesians 2:21

In this verse, Paul now explains what being “members of the household of God” means. An edifice was implied, but now we learn what type of edifice it is. He begins the verse with, “...in whom.” This is speaking of Christ. He is the foundation, and it is upon Him that the building is founded and continues to grow.

The next words, “the whole building,” show that it is one building being erected out of many parts, but those parts are inclusive of both Jew and Gentile. There is no distinction between the two, thus demonstrating the supremacy of the work of Christ.

If a distinction was made between the two for the purpose of the building, then it would diminish His accomplishments and make our status within the building dependent on

what we were before being joined through His work. It can only be after receiving Christ that any merit is imputed to a person in the matter of good works for rewards.

Going on, we as believers in Christ are “being fitted together.” This gives the idea of the craftsman using the materials in a house to erect that house. Boards are precisely cut, stones are shaped, tiles are placed with care.

Each person is a unique member of this building. Jew and Gentile, male and female, various cultures and ethnicities... all being fitted according to the wisdom of the Master craftsman.

It is through this process that the building then “grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” The verb is a present active one. It is on-going, and it is continuous in nature. The building is a living-organism which is being fitted for the purpose of being “a holy temple.” Peter makes a similar note about believers in his first epistle –

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:4, 5

Like Peter, Paul saw that the temple in Jerusalem was merely a type and a shadow of what God would do through the church. The word for “temple” is *naos*. It is that part of the temple where God Himself resides. Thus, the church is to be considered as the Holy of Holies; the place where God meets with man.

The verse finishes with the words, “in the Lord.” The verse began with “in whom” and with it ending on the same thought, it becomes obvious that the building is erected upon the foundation of Christ; it is built up in Christ; and it will be completed by Christ. This is actually seen in the words of Zechariah 6 –

“Behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH!
From His place He shall branch out,
And He shall build the temple of the LORD;
¹³ Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.
He shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule on His throne;
So He shall be a priest on His throne,

And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” Zechariah 6:12, 13

Christ is the Cornerstone, He is the Builder of the temple, and He is the Capstone. It is all a work of Christ for the purpose of having a place where God may dwell among His redeemed for all eternity.

Life application: Should you feel that you are not a valuable part of what God is doing in His church, consider this verse. A building is not complete without each and every piece being fitted together.

God has selected you to be an integral piece of the temple in which He will dwell for eternity. If this is so, then you are most precious indeed. God doesn't make mistakes and your inclusion in His temple is with purpose, intent, and love.

Lord God, it is a wonder and a marvel to think that You are building a temple from the people of Your church; a beautiful place where You will reside among the redeemed for all of the ages to come. As we each are members of Your church, then each of us must be a precious part of this temple, without which it would be incomplete. Knowing this gives us certainty that we have purpose, and we are of true value to You. Thank You for this marvelous assurance! Amen.

...in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.
Ephesians 2:22

The entire thought from verse 19 is as follows –

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Therefore, “in whom” is speaking of Jesus Christ of verse 20. It is also the same term “in whom” of verse 21. Next, “you also” is in the second person plural and is speaking specifically of the Ephesians. However, as Paul's letter is a part of Scripture, it includes any Gentile who receives it and who is also in Christ.

Those included in that thought are “being built together.” Each Gentile who receives Christ is, like the Jews to whom we once were alienated from, being used as a part of the building of this temple. The words refer to individuals, not groups.

And the purpose of this process of building is “for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” The word for “dwelling place” is *katoikétérion*. It is used only here and in Revelation 18:2.

The term “dwelling place” is a literal and good translation of the word, but the idea of this dwelling place is that it corresponds to the temple which was once a part of the worship in Jerusalem. What was seen in types and shadows is now being realized in the church. God is literally dwelling in us, and we are each a part of the whole dwelling place which is being built by Him.

The term “God in the Spirit” once again brings in the idea of the Trinity. The Pulpit Commentary notes that, “...the temple is the habitation of the First Person; the source of its life and growth and symmetry is the Son; the actual up-building and glorifying of it is by the Spirit.”

Life application: Consider what God has done in your salvation. He offered Jesus to us. By faith we received Him and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13, 14). In this exchange, we were made a part of the temple which is being built as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

As each of these points is recorded in Scripture, then why should we worry about whether God continues to accept us or not? Can God make a mistake? No! Therefore, our salvation, by necessity, must be eternal. Thank God for what He has done!

Lord God, of all of the marvelous things to be seen in Your creation – a beautiful world filled with many wonders, constellations, galaxies, nebulae, and more – You have chosen to make Your dwelling place in and among Your redeemed. This is not in a building made with hands, but one eternal in the heavens, and of which we are a part. You have looked with favor upon us because of the work of Christ. And so, for all the ages of ages we will give You praise for what You have done for us. Hail the name of Jesus! Amen.

CHAPTER 3

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— Ephesians 3:1

The words, “For this reason” take us back to the previous chapter which highlighted, in particular, the bringing in of the Gentiles to the commonwealth of Israel. It being a spiritual entity means that we now share in the same benefits of that of Israel, without having replaced Israel. God is working on building a household out of both Jew and Gentile in which He will dwell. It is “For this reason” that Paul begins his next line of thought.

In the coming chapter, but especially in verses 1-13, Paul is going to meticulously weave two thoughts into one. These thoughts will be built upon the preeminent thought of the previous chapter, that of Gentiles being grafted into the commonwealth of Israel.

The first thought is an explanation of this new concept of the bringing in of the Gentiles. The second thought is the result of the first, which is Paul’s selection as the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13) to both reveal this mystery and to provide instructions concerning it.

The reason why verse 13 is selected as the end of the insert of this two-pronged discourse is that it says, “For this reason, I Paul...” in verse 1, and then it says, “For this reason I bow my knees...” in verse 14. Because of this, it seems that the insert thought runs especially from verse 2 to verse 13. After stating his name, thus designating the identity of the one whose task will now be explained, he further identifies himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus.”

This is a phrase he will repeat of himself in several other epistles. It shows the length that Paul was willing to go through for the sake of the gospel, even unto imprisonment. It further shows that the gospel is not chained, even if he is. In essence, the chains of Paul reveal the will of Christ for Paul.

As a prisoner, Christ is able to use him to show that His gospel can overcome any such obstacle. This truth has been borne out countless times in history since then, and it continues to be borne out in the world today.

It is to be noted that there is an article in front of “Christ Jesus” in the Greek. It says “the Christ Jesus.” Paul is showing that there is one Christ, or Messiah, and that He is found in the Person of Jesus, and in Him alone. He is the Christ who was promised at the

beginning, and it is He who is revealed in the message which Paul now proclaims to the Gentiles.

Finally, Paul notes that he is Christ's prisoner "for you Gentiles." The very purpose of his imprisonment, as well as all of Paul's sufferings, was to make the gospel known outside of the Jewish people. It was the Jews that pursued Paul from place to place. As they did, the message spread.

It was often the Jews who brought Paul before the leaders of whatever area he was in. When they did, the gospel message spread. And at times, Paul was imprisoned because of the words and accusations of his own countrymen. And when this occurred, the gospel spread.

The wisdom of how God transmitted the gospel, both then and now, is especially evident in such cases. Where there was a supposed triumph over the message, it turned out to be a victory for its continued spread.

The chains of Paul are a way of showing empathy for his audience as they struggled with their own conversions. They may have lost friends, jobs, or even family over their receiving of Christ, but Paul was with them in spirit. He was also subjected to such difficulties, and yet he was able to spiritually overcome them. Thus, his words were intended to show them that they could too.

Life application: If you want proper church-age doctrine, stick to the words of Paul. Everything else is written for our learning and edification as well, but Paul's letters are especially directed to the Gentile-led church age. They are our "marching orders" during this dispensation of time.

Lord God, thank You for the marvelous words which You have revealed in the pages of the Bible - that Gentiles have been brought near to God through the shed blood of Christ. Whereas we were once far off from You, we are now close. Whereas there was once enmity between us, there is now a propitious relationship. Thank You that we can call on You and know that our words are heard. Thank You for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

...if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, Ephesians 3:2

To maintain context, verse 2 should be read with verse 1 –

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— ² if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you...”

The word translated as “if” here does not imply uncertainty. Rather it is a statement of affirmation. The NIV translates this as “Surely you have heard” in order to more closely translate the thought. Charles Ellicott says that it is “a half-ironical reference to a thing not doubtful.”

Understanding this correctly, Paul’s words of verse 1 fall into their proper place. He noted that he was “the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles.” His position as a prisoner does not affect “the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to” him.

He was selected as the Apostle to the Gentiles and his position was being fulfilled through the circumstances which occurred to him, even being a “prisoner of Christ Jesus.” The words “which was given to me” are not referring to “the dispensation,” but to “the grace of God.” The word “dispensation” will begin to be described in verse 3.

As grace is being described here, a question arises as to what this grace is referring to. Is it the grace of being granted his apostleship, or is it the grace of God for salvation which is found in the gospel message?

Although scholars are divided on this, what seems most likely is that he is speaking of the grace bestowed upon him for his apostleship. First, the context of his words is that he is a prisoner for Christ. Secondly, he uses the same idea in Romans 1, and elsewhere, to define his apostleship –

“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;” Romans 1:5, 6

Paul understood that his calling was solely of grace, and it had been given to him for the purpose of bringing the message of the gospel to the Gentile people of the world. It is this message which is found in the “dispensation” which formed the time of his apostolic office.

The word “dispensation” is the Greek word *oikonomia*. It gives the idea of the management of the affairs of a household. Paul had just been speaking of the “household of God” in the last verses of the previous chapter. The adding of the

Gentiles at this time in history (meaning the period which we consider the “Gentile-led church age”) is the dispensation which Paul is referring to now.

As noted above, this dispensation will be described more fully in the coming verses.

Life application: It is very wise to not be captivated by a single translation of the Bible. If one is, they will inevitably come to erroneous conclusions about what is being said in the original languages. Be wise, study and show yourself approved, and don’t get swayed into a “one version only” belief.

Lord God, thank You for the many different translations of the Bible which are available, including the original languages. When reading several versions, we can often get a fuller understanding of what the intent of the original is. And more, we have the writings of wise scholars, learned in the original tongues, who can provide even more valuable insights into the true reading of Your word. What a blessed time we live in! It is all available at our fingertips if we just take advantage of it. Thank You for such marvelous access into Your very heart and mind. Thank You for Your precious word! Amen.

...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, Ephesians 3:3

The words of this verse note the way that Paul learned of the “dispensation” he mentioned in the previous verse. It was “by revelation.” The words are emphatic in the Greek. It was not by man’s wisdom that this was made known, nor could it have been discerned by man. Rather, it was a “mystery.”

As noted in Ephesians 1:9, the word mystery carries with it more than what we would think of as a mere mystery that can’t be known. Although it does imply that which was unknown, it also means that which has been now made known by God’s revelation. And so, this mystery is that which is entirely unknowable except and unless it is revealed by God. When it is so revealed, it is a “mystery made known.”

What was unknown and unknowable to man apart from it being revealed by God, was made known through this special revelation to Paul. This is something he notes in Galatians 1 as well –

“For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:12

He finishes this verse with a parenthetical thought, “as I have briefly written already.” This is not referring to another letter which is now lost. Rather it is referring to what he has already said in this letter. The thought was introduced in Ephesians 1:9 and explained through 1:14.

He then expanded on it in Chapter 2 as well. The mystery that he is referring to is not the gospel specifically. Rather, it is the fact that the Gentiles are a part of the gospel. They are now included in the rights and benefits of the commonwealth of Israel. He is the apostle who was chosen to transmit this mystery to the world and to give the epistles which govern this dispensation of time.

Life application: Without studying Paul’s epistles, the message of Christ’s work for the Gentiles will be completely misunderstood. This is why he is so maligned by Judaizers and others who want to re-insert the law into their theology. Diminishing the writings of Paul is the only option. Thus, such people diminish the word of God. They are heretics who are to be rejected. Stand on Paul’s epistles for your proper church-age doctrine.

Heavenly Father, You are so very good to us. You send the rains in their season, and You give us the cool spring days and the full sun of summer. Plants know when to sprout and when to put forth their fruit – all at Your direction. How is it that we fail to do the same? Help us O Lord to be fruitful and to bear much fruit for You in this season we live. Help us to not squander the precious few moments we have to share the message of Christ... the only hope of restoration with You. Amen.

...by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), Ephesians 3:4

The Greek words “by which” indicate what he has already written. This is more evident when the previous verse is taken together with this one –

“...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),”

Paul has been writing concerning the revelation by which Christ made known to him the mystery. In reading this, he says that he expects his reader would understand his “knowledge in the mystery of Christ.”

Again, the word mystery is used in the sense of something which was previously hidden, but which is now made known through God's special revelation. Paul was the one chosen to receive the unveiling of this mystery. Once received, he has then shared it with those to whom he was sent, meaning the Gentiles.

He did this both verbally as he travelled, and in writing as well, in order to support the message he had proclaimed. We are the continued recipients of those writings as they are included in the pages of Scripture. The mystery of Christ is now open and available to be read and understood by any who will pay heed.

For Jews who reject the New Testament, they believe that they alone are the recipients of God's word, both in writing and in the application of it to themselves as a people. For those who accept the New Testament, but diminish the importance of, and twist the meaning of, Paul's epistles, the mystery is not properly understood. Thus, the grace of Christ is often missed, and there tends to be a reinsertion of the Old Testament laws into their theology. Both of these are heretical concepts.

Paul's reception of the revelation of this mystery is what opens up the truth of the church age to the people of the world. Jew and Gentile alike equally share in the finished work of Christ. Their inclusion into this body is solely an act of grace, and it comes only by faith in what He has done.

Life application: A thorough study of Paul's words, and then the application of them to our Christian walk, is expected of every believer. They are an integral part of what God has done through Jesus Christ. Without them, there is only confused theology and an improper walk, a walk which is not of faith in Christ's finished work.

Lord God, when Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross of Calvary, it took the greatest burden of all off of our shoulders. Our futile attempts at pleasing You have been set aside. Now faith in what He has done is our means of access to restoration and eternal fellowship with You! Help us never to diminish the work of our Savior by reinserting precepts from a law which could save no one. Help us to trust in the work of Jesus alone. With this, we know You will be pleased. Amen!

...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: Ephesians 3:5

The word “which” is referring to the “mystery” of verses 3 & 4. This mystery is the work of God in Christ for Jew and Gentile which Paul has been speaking of and which he will continue to explain. This mystery was not made known “in other ages.”

God has worked through “dispensations” or “ages” in order to effect His redemptive purposes for fallen man. In the previous ages, there was one line of people specially chosen to lead humanity to the Messiah.

However, rather than focusing solely on that one line, he notes that this mystery was unknown to all. This is understood by his words that it “was not made known to the sons of men.”

This term, “sons of men,” is speaking of all of those born into the stream of humanity. Jesus is often called the Son of Man, thus declaring that He is truly and fully human. Paul uses the term this way to then make a distinction between the general stock of humanity and those chosen for a particular purpose. All born into humanity are sons of men, but some sons of men have been granted particular abilities. This is seen in the next clause.

The words “as it has now been revealed,” mean that what was an unknown mystery has now become known by the means of revelation. Paul didn’t say that in the past ages the mystery “had not been revealed.” Instead, he said that it “was not made known.”

The mystery does not come about by mere logic or mental training. Instead, it only came about through revelation “by the Spirit.” In the book of John, Christ spoke of how the Spirit testifies of Him. First, in John 5 He said –

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” John 5:39

Then, in John 15 He said –

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” John 15:26

The first was speaking of the Spirit-inspired Old Testament. The second speaks of the coming Spirit-inspired New Testament. The Old Testament certainly gives types and shadows and even hints as to what was coming, but it could not have been understood

without the further revelation of the Spirit in the New. And this revelation of the Spirit was “to His holy apostles and prophets.”

The word “holy” is given in contrast to “the sons of men.” Only those chosen by God and granted this special revelation could then turn and reveal it to the world for an understanding of what God has done.

This shows that those “holy apostles and prophets” were granted this insight at a particular point in time and for a particular purpose; to reveal the Word of God to the world. They proclaimed the word; the word was recorded, and which is now our New Testament; and then the revelation stopped.

In the pages of the Bible, we have all the information necessary for our life and practice as Christians. No further revelation is required. Nor should more revelation be anticipated.

Life application: Beware of those who say, “The Lord has given me a prophetic word.” Unless he repeats and then explains a passage of Scripture, he is to be shunned. God has revealed His will to us in the pages of the Holy Bible.

Lord God, You have revealed Your will to us in the pages of Scripture. The revelation we need in order to conduct our lives as faithful and doctrinally sound Christians is found there. What more do we need to rightly conduct our lives in Your presence? Grant us the heart and desire to pursue this magnificent treasure. Help us never to look for more “revelation” from those who claim to be prophets and apostles. Your word is written, and it is sufficient. Thank You for Your perfect word. Amen.

...that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, Ephesians 3:6

This is the explanation of the “mystery” which Paul has been referring to in the previous verses. It is the revelation of that which would have been (and continues to be) unimaginable - even unthinkable - to the Jews.

They had been the selected and chosen people. They had received the oracles of God. They had been the stewards of the law. It was promised that the Messiah would come through them. Because of these, and a thousand other reasons, they assumed that they alone would be the recipients of the promises of God. But they were wrong.

Paul now explains this with the words, “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs.” Everything that was promised as coming to the Jews would likewise be shared by the Gentiles. There was no “greater inheritance” for the Jews than for the Gentiles.

He next says that the Gentiles would be “of the same body.” Both Jew and Gentile would be a part of the same organism which God is building in Christ. They would be equal members of the household of God without distinction.

Thirdly, Paul says that the Gentiles would be “partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” This means that every honor and blessing bestowed upon one would be bestowed upon the other. The sealing of the Holy Spirit which came upon one would also be granted to the other. This sealing is the authorization to receive the fullness of what God has planned for His people, and it is given in full measure to all who come to Christ.

Further, none of these points which Paul makes come indirectly through the Jew. The Gentiles were not required to become Jews before receiving the honors. Instead, they receive them apart from this earthly badge of distinction.

This is seen in the three words which Paul chose to use in order to describe the state of the Gentiles who are in Christ. They reveal that the Gentiles hold the status of being joint-heirs, in a joint-body, and jointly partaking of that which is granted.

So particular is Paul in his choice of wording here, that two of the three descriptive words are unique to the New Testament and to classical Greek. Paul had to invent words to show the results of the outstanding plan of God which is revealed in this mystery.

It is solely through the work of Christ that either category is granted this status. The sealing of the Holy Spirit can only come through His work. When it comes, the person – regardless of his earthly status – is brought into the family of God.

Life application: Two important points of doctrine can be deduced from this single verse. The first is that though there is no distinction in Christ between Jew and Gentile, the two categories still remain. Gentiles cannot be joint-anything with Jews if the two become one in personal category.

Further, the idea that Gentiles need to either convert to Judaism, or to hold to the precepts of the law which originally established their faith, is proven false. One category

(Jew or Gentile) cannot be a joint-anything with another if he has become the same in life-walk. Gentiles remain Gentiles, Jews remain Jews, and that which makes a person one or another is not imposed on the other.

Lord God, it is a marvel and a wonder what has happened through the work of Christ. Both Jew and Gentile are brought into an equal and full participation in Your kingdom because of Him. And it is solely because of Him. Only He fulfilled the law that stood opposed to both. Thank You that by a mere act of faith, all who believe are welcomed into Your promises. Thank You for this marvelous offer of peace and son-ship through Your promised Messiah! Thank You for Jesus! Amen.

...of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. Ephesians 3:7

The words “of which” are referring to “the gospel” of the previous verse. Paul acknowledges that he “became a minister” of this gospel “according to the gift of the grace of God.”

He was a persecutor of the church. His rightful due was to be punished for his actions. He in no way merited God’s favor, and yet the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus and called him to his apostleship. This is grace, undeserved favor.

It was the “grace of God” alone and without it, he would have continued down his wayward path. However, a different end came about in him because of this marvelous grace which was given “to him by the effective working of His power.”

The words here should rather be translated as “according to the effective working of His power.” This is because, “The gift was bestowed in accordance with that efficiency which could transform Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle to the Gentiles” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

It was an active, not a latent power which transformed him. Grace was bestowed, and that grace actively and sufficiently transformed him from who he was, to the person he came to be. The entire verse speaks completely and solely of the power of God and the grace of God to effect His purposes in Paul, and thus to carry through with His redemptive purposes in the stream of time.

Life application: In our salvation, and in our continued walk with Christ, it is the power of God which changes us, and it is the power of God which works in us for His sovereign

purposes. Let us allow God to use us without striving against Him. Rather, let each of us be an open and receptive vehicle for His workings in the circumstances in which He has placed us.

Heavenly Father, everything about us came from You. Our time, place, position, and abilities all came from You. The salvation in which we stand was an act of grace from You as well. As You have determined all of these things, then we must be in the perfect place that we should be. We are exactly where You want us. Help us to see this and to work effectively at this moment in time in Your service. Let us not squander this marvelous moment in which we live. Amen!

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, Ephesians 3:8

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul called himself “the least of the apostles.” Here he takes the thought further and says that “the gift of the grace of God” of the previous verse was given to him who is “less than the least of all the saints.”

Here he uses a word found nowhere else in Scripture, *elachistoteros*. It is a “comparative formed from a superlative.” The comparative refers to himself, “less.” The superlative is the one who even stands above him, “the least.”

Paul looked into himself and saw the depth of the consciousness of sin that dwelt in him and he reasoned that what he saw was certainly less worthy of God’s favor than any other saint. To him, the makeup of who he was demonstrated the highest grace that could be given.

But he notes that “this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” In these words, he contrasts the “saints” with the “Gentiles.” This is evident from his words of the previous chapter –

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...” (2:19)

The “saints” refer to those in Christ. Until the Gentiles came to Christ, they were not saints. Therefore, he is making a contrast between them. The idea of “Gentiles” being brought into the household of God would have been unheard of, and thus the term is almost used in a derogatory sense.

Because of this, it shows the level of grace that was bestowed upon Paul once again. Despite being the least of the saints, he was given the great honor of taking this once “unclean” group of people and preaching the message of Christ to them.

But more than just a simple message of their acceptance, he was given the honor of conveying to them “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” The word he uses for “unsearchable,” *anexichniastos*, is found only here and in Romans 11:33. It conveys the idea of the inability to comprehend.

The riches are beyond finding out. It is an implicit note of the deity of Christ which will be expanded on in the verses ahead. As only God is unsearchable, then the unsearchable riches of Christ demonstrate the divine nature of Christ.

It is these marvelous wonders which Paul, the least of all the saints, was given the grace to share with the Gentiles. He was chosen to bring them from their lowly state to a position on the same level as the saints of God who were drawn out of the chosen nation of Israel.

Life application: Those who understand the depth of sin which dwells in their soul will more fully appreciate the magnificence of the grace which is bestowed upon them through Jesus Christ.

Lord God, when we start thinking highly of ourselves, all we need to do is to consider what being saved by Christ means. Only a sinner needs a Savior. And if we were sinners, then the grace of the Savior must have been great. More than that, we continue to be saved by this same great Savior. Each misstep and each wayward deed is covered by the immeasurable grace of Christ. Understanding this, we can stop thinking so highly of ourselves and go about our lives fully appreciating that we stand solely on the merits of the Lord. Thank You for such marvelous grace. Amen.

...and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;
Ephesians 3:9

In this verse are a few words which differ in ancient manuscripts. The first notable one is “fellowship.” In Greek, it is the word *koinonia*. However, other manuscripts say, “dispensation.”

The word is very similar, *oikonomia*. The mistake in translation would be easy to make. The second major difference is that the words “through Jesus Christ” are not in some manuscripts. Neither of these changes the doctrine of Scripture. For the sake of consistency in analysis, the evaluation will assume that the NKJV is correct. However, this doesn’t mean it is. It is simply the NKJV which is being used for the study.

Paul says first, “... and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery.” The word “see” properly means “to illuminate” or “to enlighten.” He is saying that the grace bestowed upon him was that he would be used as the means of making all see this fellowship of the mystery of the Gentiles being brought into the New Covenant through the work of Christ.

This word “all” is used, as it often is, in the superlative sense. Not all in his time, nor all in the ages since his time, have had this mystery illuminated to them. Further, for those who have had it explained, it doesn’t mean that they believe it. The word of Christ tells of what He has done, but that word is often misunderstood or rejected. Therefore, even those who have had the truths of Christ illuminated to them, don’t really see them as they truly are.

However, it was Paul’s task to share this mystery in both his life and actions and in his writings. They open up to the world this “mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God.”

As previously explained, a mystery is something which was hidden and has now been revealed. It could not otherwise have been known without God directly revealing it to the world. From the beginning of the ages, it was hidden. Only a select line of people were considered “the sons of God.”

The rest of the world were considered in the broader sense of being “sons of men.” One line was destined for God’s favor; the other was destined for destruction. It is through Paul that the mystery is made known that the Gentile people of the world would now have access to, and be participants in, the workings of God concerning their redemption and salvation.

He finishes up with the note that it is God “who created all things through Jesus Christ.” Jesus, the Word of God, created all things. This is reflected in John 1:1-3 –

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

What Paul is doing with the addition of these words, is showing that the same member of the Godhead, Christ Jesus, is also the one who is the Establisher of this new outcropping of His redemptive plans.

Everything dealing with the creation is done through Jesus Christ, including the creation of one new man out of the two – both Jew and Gentile. This is the mystery of the fellowship which had been hidden for so very long. This is what Paul now reveals to the world through his writings.

Life application: If you want to understand the church age and the doctrine by which it is governed, you need to understand Paul’s letters. To reject Paul is to reject the church of this dispensation. To reject the church during this dispensation is to reject what Jesus Christ is doing in the world for humanity. Stay away from anyone who would twist or diminish the words of Paul as given by the Holy Spirit through him.

Lord God Almighty, surely we must stand amazed at the marvel and the wonder of what You have done through Jesus. He came to His own in order to reconcile them to You. At the same time, You opened a door through Him for all of the people of the world to also have that same reconciliation. Now, people of every tribe, tongue, and culture – without regard to color, lineage, or location, have the same access to You. Your eternal temple is being built out of precious stones of every variety. Thank You for including any and all who come to You through Christ by a mere act of faith! Amen.

...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, Ephesians 3:10

The words “to the intent” explain the thoughts of verses 8 & 9 concerning the grace given to Paul in relation to the sharing of the gospel to the Gentiles. It also refers to their being gathered together with the Jews to form a single, united, and whole church. It was for this “intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church.”

The word for “manifold” is found only here in the New Testament. It is *polupoikilos*. It comes from two words, *polus*, meaning “much in number,” or “many” (think of the

word “poly”); and *poikilos*, meaning “multi-colored,” or “variegated.” It was used in the Greek Old Testament when referring to Joseph’s multi-colored robe.

The intent of this then is that many aspects of God’s wisdom are revealed in the forming of the church. There is wisdom in how it began, there is wisdom in the selection of the people, there is wisdom in how the message is conveyed, etc.

Each aspect of the construction of this heavenly temple, made of individual people, displays the wisdom of God in Christ the Lord. It is as if a heavenly tapestry of colors is slowly being formed into a grand and beautiful painting where all the details come into the clearest focus.

It is through this organism that His manifold wisdom is displayed “to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*.” This is now the fourth of five times that Paul has mentioned the *epouranios*, or “heavenly realms.”

Within the sphere of these heavenly realms, there are “principalities and powers.” Which are viewing what goes on in the material creation. But in particular, their attention is directed to God’s working in the redemption of man.

God had selected a group of people from the beginning by which He would reveal Himself to the world. There was one select line of chosen people and all others were left unattended to as far as special revelation is concerned.

The principalities and powers in the heavenly realms (certainly this is referring to both good and bad entities as can be seen from many passages of Scripture, but Job 1:6 is sufficient to demonstrate this) viewed what God was doing. They were aware of the writings of the prophets, and knew that God was doing something, but they could not deduce what it was. This is seen for example in 1 Peter 1:12 –

“To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.”

In 1 Corinthians 4:9, Paul continues with this thought by saying that he and the other apostles “have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.” The heavenly beings watched the apostles, curiously studying what they were doing in order to see how God’s wisdom would be revealed through them.

A heavenly theater has been set to view this worldly spectacle. Now, in this new dispensation known as the church age, the absolute marvel and majesty of the wisdom of God was put on full display.

So, the question to be asked is, “What is it about the church that demonstrates this manifold wisdom of God?” The answer is that when all of heaven thought God was doing a single thing through a single group of people, and which would have a very limited effect on humanity, it turned out that what He had done was of unlimited scope in regard to the people of the earth.

The single selected line was set apart unto God while all the other people of the world went about making up their own religions and falling further and further away from God. And yet, through Jesus Christ, all of these who were far away have been brought near through His blood.

The fact that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God in exactly the same way is the most astonishing thing of all. None of those in the heavenly realms could ever have guessed it, and yet it was promised in the very writings of God through the Jewish people.

Life application: The Bible gave all the necessary information for those who read it to know what was promised, but it didn't give the specifics of how it would come about. Only in Christ do the Scriptures make any sense.

We should now cherish those words even more. When we see what was once concealed, but now revealed through Christ, we should be more and more astonished at the marvelous workings of God in human history.

Lord God, the plan that You had set, even from the very beginning of creation, was slowly laid out in human history. And as the years passed, You revealed a bit more of it with each new story and each new prophecy. And yet, even the angels who looked into what You were doing could not figure out what was coming. Now, through Jesus, Your manifold wisdom is revealed to the world. How marvelous is Your plan! How great is Your hand upon us! How splendid is the church which You are building! Thank You for Christ Jesus, our hope of glory. Amen.

...according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,
Ephesians 3:11

The verses of this paragraph are a continuous thought and should be kept in that context. To fully grasp what is said here, uniting it with the previous verse will help –

“...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*,¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The “wisdom of God” is made known to the “principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*” by what is occurring in the building of the church. Paul now states that this “wisdom of God” is “according to the eternal purpose” of God.

The idea is that from the eternal state itself, God had a plan to reconcile all things to Himself. That plan is being worked out in the stream of time which He created.

What we see as random and often even chaotic, is completely known to God. It is further not out of control at all. An example of this is Joseph being sold by his brothers. They intended evil, and Joseph certainly did not understand his plight, but God had already figured it into the plan. Each step is a part of “the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jesus is the focal point between the eternal state and what occurs in the stream of time. This is why Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 10 that the Rock which followed Israel was Christ. He has always been there, working out His plan. However, the word for “which He accomplished” carries a sense of ambiguity. It could mean either being “ordained” or being “worked out.”

In other words, scholars debate whether this is saying that God’s eternal purpose was “ordained” in Christ Jesus or whether it is “being worked out” in Christ Jesus. The latter is probably the true sense. God’s purpose was ordained from the eternal state. However, Christ is the means by which all was created, and by which all is being worked out.

This seems the most likely because the word for “purpose” is *prosthesis*. It means “a setting forth.” It is the word used to indicate the show-bread (the consecrated bread) of the temple in Jerusalem, such as in Matthew 12:4. What is occurring is according to God’s presentation of His eternal purpose as if the setting of the showbread; Christ Jesus the Lord (who is God) is the One to work out that purpose within the stream of time.

Life application: There may seem to be random, and even chaotic, events in the world around us, but God has it all under control. Don't lose heart if the world continues to come against you. God's plan includes your eternal security if you are in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Lord God, Your word tells us that You have an eternal plan which is being worked out in the stream of time. All things are known to You, and nothing is either random or chaotic. Instead, each thing that occurs is being directed by You and is completely under control. Help us to remember this when things appear otherwise. You are God and You are to be trusted. Grant us peace to accept this as we face the uncertainties of life. You have our eternal destiny completely under control. Thank You for this reassurance. Amen.

... in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Ephesians 3:12

The words in this verse are similar to verse 2:18 –

“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

Paul is bringing the practical application of what has occurred back into focus. In 2:18, he was speaking of the fact that Gentiles, along with Jews, “both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Now he simply says “we.”

He has been describing the mystery which defines his apostleship, which is the bringing in of the Gentiles to God through the work of Christ. It is the “fellowship of the mystery” that he spoke of in verse 9.

Together, both Jew and Gentile are joined into one fellowship. In this state “we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” The Greek word for “boldness” indicates especially a boldness of speech. This boldness then surely includes several aspects:

- 1) Boldness to call on Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, for salvation
- 2) Boldness to make our prayers known to God through Him, not fearing that they will be hindered or obstructed in any way
- 3) Boldness to speak of the marvelous riches of Christ to others
- 4) Boldness to proclaim our salvation, understanding that is an accomplished fact

The second, that of unhindered prayer life, is probably where the stress most fully lies though. This is because of the next words: “and access with confidence.” Our prayers are unhindered and there is with them the confidence that we have free and unfettered access, even with a sure confidence, to the throne of grace. This is reflected in the words of Hebrews 4:16 –

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

These marvelous privileges are ours simply “through faith in Him.” By trusting in the finished work of Christ, we may now enter the Most Holy Place where God dwells. And we may do it without any sort of hindrance at all.

In Israel of Old, only the high priest, and only once a year, could gain this type of access. However, through the torn body of Christ, which is represented by the torn veil in the temple in Jerusalem, we have full and unfettered access.

Life application: The prayers of God’s people now pass through Christ and immediately into the presence of God. There are no obstructions at all because Christ has opened the way back to full and unfettered access to Him. What was lost in Eden is realized in what Christ has done. Our fellowship is intimate, and it is immediate. Let us never assume that our prayers are unheard. Each one is heard because of what Christ has done for us.

Lord God, Heavenly Father – what was once only seen in type and shadow is now realized in full in the person of our Lord Jesus. In the past, a veil stood between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place where You met with Your people. In the tearing of Christ’s body, which is that true Veil, we now have complete and unfettered access to You. Today, we will use it to praise You. And so, hear our praises, O God. Hallelujah for what You have done. Glory, honor, strength, and might belong to You! Hallelujah to You, O God. Amen.

Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. Ephesians 3:13

Paul now makes a petition for strength. All translations state it as a request for strength for his readers – “I ask that you do not lose heart.” However, the scholar Bengel, says that “the nominative of the finite verb is naturally the subject of the infinitive which follows.” For this reason, he says it should read, “I ask of God that I may not faint.” He is

a lone voice in this, and it seems to then not agree with the words of verse 16 which are yet ahead.

However, if he is speaking of himself, the word “Therefore...” is referring to the “grace of God which was given” to him of verse 2, and which he continues to refer to after that. If he is speaking of his audience, the word “Therefore...” is referring to the mystery which has been revealed to them; that they are now “fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” referred to in verse 6, and which he continues to refer to after that.

It is difficult to be dogmatic about this. Either way, Paul is petitioning for strength so that either he or the Ephesians “do not lose heart.” The word is *ekkakeó*. It is a word which indicates “to be utterly spiritless, to be wearied out, exhausted” (Strong’s). In classical Greek, it also means to be cowardly, but this is probably not the intent here. Rather, Paul is using it in the sense of being “dispirited.”

It is used only six times in the New Testament, once by Jesus in Luke 18:1, and five times by Paul. Whether he is referring to himself or the Ephesians, he notes that the losing of heart is on account of his “tribulations for you.” His work was on behalf of the Gentile people and despite his present imprisonment, this situation could actually continue to be a source of benefit. He then expressly states that this benefit is “for your glory.”

Here, he either means that their not losing heart because of his suffering was for their glory, or that his sufferings were their glory. This, because they actually bolstered his teachings as he was willing to suffer for the very thing that he had proclaimed to them.

He had been given a high office in the household of God, and yet he suffered in chains because of it. His ability to suffer in this way, and not lose heart (either him or them), was (or became) a marvelous example to them as well.

Life application: When we see people suffer for the sake of Christ, and yet they remain steadfast in their proclamation of Him, it strengthens us. As this is so, we should then be willing to stand firm in our proclamation of Christ as well, thus giving others this same confidence. Let us not draw back in our time of testing!

Lord God, should a time of testing of our faith come about, grant us the ability to stand fast in it and be willing to suffer loss, suffer persecution, or even suffer death without faltering in our witness of Christ Jesus. Help us to never bring a note of discredit upon His glorious name through our own failings. And so, stand with us and embolden us should

that day come. This we pray that You will be glorified, and others will be edified through our faithful stand. Amen.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Ephesians 3:14

This takes us right back to verse 3:1, which said –

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—”

Prior to that, from verse 2:11 - 2:22 was a discussion on how the Gentiles had become partakers with the Jews in the commonwealth of Israel and were, like them, being built up into a holy temple in the Lord; “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Immediately after those words came his first “For this reason.” After that, he wrote from 3:2 until 3:13 about how this was previously a mystery which was now revealed through him. With that parenthetical thought now complete, we are given the second “For this reason.”

As an emphasis as to how overwhelming it is that he has been granted this high honor he says, “I bow my knees...” The use of these words shows a solemn type of prayer which indicates great humility while being awed at the work of God.

It is certain that Paul wasn't bowing his knees as he either dictated the letter to a scribe, or wrote out the words himself. Therefore, the term is used in place of the emotion and act.

From this verse, some scholars conclude that kneeling is, “The usual, and the proper posture of prayer is to kneel... It is a posture which indicates reverence, and should, therefore, be assumed when we come before God. It has been an unhappy thing that the custom of kneeling in public worship has ever been departed from in the Christian churches.” Albert Barnes

There is no reason at all to come to this unfounded conclusion. Paul elsewhere writes that we are to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is without a doubt that he did not expect the saints to stay on their knees at all times and simply pray their life away in that position.

Rather, there are different positions one will assume at different times. One may pray as if speaking to God as a friend while driving their car. The same person may stand atop a

mountain and raise his hands in a prayer of exultation at the majesty of God; shouting out with joy at the marvel he beholds.

He may also fall to his knees in awe and in acknowledgment of his unworthiness of such a high honor being bestowed upon him – as Paul is doing here. Or he may fall flat on his face in a prayer of absolute mourning, anguish, or pain.

Paul’s use of “I bow my knees” reflects his overwhelmed state at what has been granted to him, and the immense implications of what it means that the Gentiles will also share in the blessings of what God has done through Jesus Christ.

He finishes the verse with, “...to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” His overwhelmed prayer of what he has written about is directed to the first Person of the Godhead. He has chosen this form of address because it is through Jesus that the Father/son relationship is made for us.

As He is the Father of Christ, we now too share in the son-ship of the Father because of Christ. For this reason, the prayer is made directly to Him. It is Christ upon whom the household of God is erected; a household of which we are a part.

This prayer does not in any way negate praying to or through Christ as is seen elsewhere in the NT. However, the terminology of the direction of our prayers should be based on the substance of the prayers. The substance of Paul’s words of this verse are specifically shaped to be addressed to God, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” because of what they are referring to.

Life application: Let’s not get legalistic in our prayer life.

It is the most wonderful honor, O God, to come to You and know that our prayers are heard. We know this because Jesus is the Mediator between us. Through Him, we have full and unfettered access to You. Thank You for allowing Your people to come – whether with arms stretched out in praise, knees bowed in awe, or faces flat in humility. Whatever our state at the time, because of Christ Jesus, You are pleased to hear and respond. Thank You. We praise You in His magnificent name. Amen.

...from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, Ephesians 3:15

In this verse, an immediate question arises. “Is ‘from whom’ speaking of the Father, or of Jesus?” Here is the previous verse included with this one –

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...”

There is a subtle play on words in the Greek. “Father” is *pater* and the word rendered as “family” is *patria*. This may indicate Paul’s connection between the two. However, it is through Christ that son-ship is realized. He is the Son of God, and through Him we are included as sons. Thus, the naming of the family does seem more likely to be from Christ.

If so, the play on words is showing the connection to Christ, the Son of the Father, and to the family who derives its name from Christ as well. It is hard to be dogmatic though. Either way, Jesus Christ is fully God, and so it doesn’t change the overall intent of what is being said.

Whether from God, be it Father or Son, “the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” What this means is that all of the saints, alive now or having passed on, share in the same family privileges. This includes Jew and Gentile, male and female, and without distinction to color, creed, or culture.

Any and all who have called on Jesus are brought into the family of God through the work of Christ and are so named. A good example of this is the bringing of Ephraim and Manasseh as co-equals into the family of Jacob –

“And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.” Genesis 48:5

Such is true with any who are “in Christ.” They are named by God as family members because of His work.

Life application: Although we must speak against heretical doctrine, and correcting bad doctrine is also a necessary part of our allegiance to the Lord, we need to remember that those who are truly saved are members of our one family. Let us endeavor to treat them as such.

Lord God, Your word says that because of the work of Christ Jesus, all who believe in Him are brought into one family. All are named in this single household, and yet we too often tear one another apart over little issues which have no bearing on our standing in this family. Help us to not act in this manner, but to be willing to overlook the faults of others

who bear Your name. It's a hard sell in today's world, but grant us wisdom to act faithfully towards our fellow family members. Amen.

...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ... Ephesians 3:16

The verse should be considered with the previous verses for context –

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...”

The words, “that He would grant you” are speaking of God the Father mentioned in verse 14. There is a chiasmic structure to the words of these verses which seems to show that “from whom” of verse 15 is surely speaking of Christ –

Father
Christ
From Whom
That He
Riches of His glory
Strengthened with His might
Through His Spirit

This clues us into who Paul is referring to in each instance. And so, his prayer is a concern that the Father would grant something specific to those in Ephesus (and thus all who are the recipients of the epistle throughout the ages).

His next words, “according to the riches of His glory,” have a strong emphasis in them. They are speaking of what God has done through Christ. This term is used in the same way in Philippians 4 –

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19

These “riches of His glory” are what can be seen through His workings in and through Christ, just as such riches can be seen through the physical creation. When we ponder the many things which God has done, we are pondering the riches of His glory.

They are the open and visible manifestations of what He does to express Himself. And so, Paul prays that these riches will be granted to his audience in order “to be strengthened with might.”

Again, this is a reference to the work of Christ. It is what was seen in His work, and it is that which is available through understanding the implications of that work. Christ prevailed over the law, over the horror of the cross, and over death itself.

He never failed to please the Father in all ways. This is the strengthening that is being petitioned for us by Paul, and he asks that it come “through His Spirit in the inner man.”

He has now introduced the third member of the Godhead into Scripture once again. The Spirit of God is what will provide to us the strength which Christ possessed as we yield to God. Our inner man will be built up and strengthened as we rely wholly on God to direct us.

This will only come about as we yield to Him through such actions as prayer, praise, study of the word, fellowship, and the like. But it is a process which can occur as we attempt to be more like Christ. This same sentiment is reflected in Paul’s words of 2 Corinthians 4 –

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward *man* is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which *are* not seen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Life application: Though we will never be perfect in this life, we should strive always to become more Christ-like at all times. Let us ever pursue the magnificence of what God did through Christ by applying His word to our lives.

Lord God, it is marvelous to see the riches of Your glory displayed in the world around us. We can see the majesty of the heavens which reflect back Your wisdom. We can see it in the intricacy of the spider and its web. It is evident in the marvelous depths to which the whale can dive to. The sunrise and sunset display such riches in ten thousand colors of splendor, changing from moment to moment. And the greatest riches of Your glory are seen in the Person and work of Jesus our Lord. He radiates out the full splendor of Your majesty. How exceedingly glorious are You, O God. Amen.

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

Again, context of the preceding verses is necessary to fully see Paul's intent –

“...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ...”

In the preceding verse, he noted that we should be “strengthened with might through His Spirit. He now immediately returns to the second member of the Godhead, Christ. Paul asks that He “may dwell in your hearts.”

Charles Ellicott notes that the indwelling of Christ “is not a consequence of the gift of the Spirit; it is identical to it.” This is supported by Jesus' words of John 14:16-20 –

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.¹⁹ “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.²⁰ At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

The indwelling of Christ is directly equated to the indwelling of the Spirit; there is no connecting particle in the Greek. This means that, “Where the Spirit of God is, there also is Christ” (Bengel). And this is received “through faith.”

There is an article in the Greek of these words – *dia tes pisteos*, or “through the faith.” Thus, faith is the means of this occurrence. When we exercise faith, we are sealed with the Spirit of God, and we thus appropriate all that Christ offers.

The verse ends with the notion that this appropriation of the work of Christ is what will cause us to be “rooted and grounded in love.” Two separate metaphors are combined into this one thought. The first is that of a tree's roots which are buried deep into the soil. They hold the tree firm, but even more, they draw up the nutrients and water with which the tree may live. This is comparable to our own position in Christ. It is through Him that we may draw up all the riches of what God offers to His redeemed.

The second metaphor, is that of Being “grounded.” It is an architectural word which speaks of the laying of a foundation. It is the firm base upon which all else will stand. As Christ is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), then it is He who is the full and complete support for all that we do in our Christian lives. Paul uses the same mixture of the tree and foundation terminology again in Colossians 2:6, 7 –

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Finally, the metaphor of this uniting of the roots and the foundation is said to be “in love.” This is certainly referring to the vertical love towards God in Christ as well as the horizontal love of the believer toward other believers.

When a tree is rooted and reaches out its branches, it receives the sunshine by which it continues to grow in strength and vitality. This is the same concept which is being expressed for the believer concerning love. Our foundation is set, but our growth will only be fully productive as we are guided in love.

Life application: Christ is with us, dwelling in us, from the moment that we receive Him. God has done a marvelous thing for us through the Person of Jesus by reconciling us to Himself. And even more, He has not left us as orphans. Rather He continues to reside with us through His Spirit.

The access is granted at any and all times if we will simply appropriate what He has given us. Let us yield ourselves to God at all times and open this fount of spiritual blessing.

Lord God Almighty, all things are Yours, and by Your power they exist. And yet, the one thing which seems to not even acknowledge this is that which You have pursued the most. Man has turned from You and gone about finding every way to ignore You, deny You, and actively shun You. But You have patiently worked throughout history to reveal Yourself to us. Through Jesus, You have offered us a pardon and a state of peace. Turn our hearts to You; open our minds to His work; and be pleased to live in our praises for what You have done. Amen!

...may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— Ephesians 3:18

This verse should be placed with the previous verse to get a fuller understanding of Paul's intent –

“...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height...”

He conditions the fourfold aspect of this verse on the point of “being rooted and grounded in love” of the previous verse. By being so firmly set, he petitions that we may then “be able to comprehend with all the saints...”

It is a call for universal understanding. The Ephesians are being addressed, but the letter is inclusive of all believers. He petitions for Jew and Gentile alike to be able to comprehend “what *is* the width and length and depth and height...”

As in the English, so in the Greek, an article only precedes the first of the four words – “the width and length and depth and height.” Because of this, Paul is giving the idea of infinite vastness; something actually unattainable. It expresses the totality of what he is speaking of. We are not to place our minds on one aspect of it, but of the entirety of it.

The question however is, “What is Paul speaking of?” There is no noun or pronoun given which indicates possession or close association to the words in this clause (a genitive). Some translations tie it directly to the next clause which speaks of “the love of Christ.” This seems likely on the surface, but why then didn't he just say that? Charles Ellicott wisely notes –

“Various answers have been given; but as St. Paul has obviously of set purpose omitted all definition, leaving the phrase incomplete in absolute generality, no answer can be perfectly satisfactory.”

In other words, Paul purposefully left off what was on his mind, as if his words could not even describe what he was thinking of. It is as if he was writing to make a point about something; he then stopped, and simply stumbled over what he was trying to explain.

And so, he just left it unsaid. Thus, it is probably referring to the totality of everything that God has done for us in Christ – to include the wisdom behind it; the knowledge of what has been done and is to come; the love involved in the cross to redeem His people; the splendor of the resurrection; the fact that both Jew and Gentile are included in the

plan; the word which has been given to explain it; the giving of the Holy Spirit to seal it upon our faith; and on and on and on.

Paul simply stopped, gasped, and then wrote about what is otherwise impossible to express. And then in essence he says, “I hope you will be able to grasp the infinite majesty of this redemptive process in all its varied aspects.”

How then can we comprehend what is incomprehensible? How can we apprehend that which cannot be seized? How can we attain that which is out of reach? The answer is that we cannot, but we should strive to do so.

Our highest joy should be searching out the mystery of God’s workings in and through His creation in order to redeem man. We should ponder the imponderable love of God. We should seek out God’s infinite wisdom, read His word, yield to His Spirit, and cling to Christ’s cross. This is what Paul would ask for us to do.

Life application: Fix your eyes on Jesus. All things come into clear and understandable (even if not fully attainable) terms when we do this.

Lord God, the manifold aspects of Your wisdom are on display in what You have done for Your people. You have set forth knowledge for us to ponder and included it in Your word. You have called people of all races as Your own, Jew and Gentile without distinction. You have done it through the cross of Christ and proved it in His resurrection. And You have sealed our faith with the guarantee of Your Holy Spirit. All this You have done – so much that we will ponder the majesty of the plan for all eternity. All of our praises we send forth to You, O God. Honor and praise belong to You alone. Amen.

...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19

The verse here forms a play on the words “know” and “knowledge” which form a paradox, and yet which reveal certain truths. Paul, filled with a desire to express the infinite nature of what God has done for us, had just given one paradox. It is that we –

“...may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height...” (3:18)

It is impossible to comprehend that which is infinite. And so, he stopped as if gasping and then moved on to this verse. He desires that we are “to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.”

The “to know” indicates learning through experience. This is in the aorist tense. The “knowledge” indicates having grasped what should be known.

However, if what should be known is infinite, then we cannot ever fully learn through experience what we are being asked to know. What he is saying then is that we are to learn through continued experience, at any given time, what God is revealing of Himself in the love of Christ. As Charles Ellicott states it –

“...so that they may always go on from faith to faith, from knowledge to knowledge, and yet find new depths still to be fathomed.”

Like the air that fills the bellows, so the love of Christ should fill the mind and soul, and yet there is an inexpressible amount of air on the outside, still untapped. And so, we should again fill our mind and soul in order to obtain more knowledge. And then we should repeat this process again and again, for all eternity – ever striving to grasp what can never be truly understood. No matter how long we live in the ages of ages to come, we will still be finite. We will never entirely attain the full knowledge of the love of God in Christ.

However, we should forever continue to pursue it so that we “may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Again, it is another paradoxical statement. How can one who is finite be filled with the infinite? Though it is impossible, it is what we are being asked to do.

Again, an aorist verb is used for “filled.” We should be like the open vessel into which is poured the stream of flowing water. Though the water spills out the top, new water comes in to replace it, filling and filling until the eternal ages have come and gone and yet the flow keeps coming.

This is the splendor of what God offers to reveal to us as we contemplate His infinite goodness towards us in Christ Jesus. And this is what Paul asks us to know and to be filled with.

Life application: Let the goodness of God in all its fullness come and fill you, even to overflowing, and then... let Him continue to fill you some more. Never cease being filled with the glorious love of God in Christ Jesus.

Lord God, we are like clay pitchers, empty and dry. And You are the source of the eternally flowing Water of life. Fill us so that we might be filled, and never cease filling us with the infinite knowledge of Your love for us which is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Though the ages will come and go, we will never have received all of the filling that we can obtain. Give us wisdom to pursue You now and always, drawing near to You to be filled with this precious Water of life, this infinite outpouring of Your love. Amen.

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

Paul bursts into a doxology of praise as he is often seen to do. As he writes his epistles, it is apparent that the process of writing (or dictating) his thoughts helps him to unpackage the wonder of what God has done in Christ. His emotions rise to such a crescendo that he literally bursts out with words of praise. Such is the case here as he ponders the enormity of what God has done.

The words, “Now to Him,” are speaking of God the Father as seen in verse 14. It is He “who is able to do exceedingly abundantly.”

This is a compound adverb which is only found here and twice in 1 Thessalonians. It shows the incomprehensible nature of what God can do. What is done by Him is beyond anything which could have been expected or anticipated. Vincent’s Word studies argues that these words are an independent clause –

“Read the whole, ‘Unto Him who is able to do beyond all, exceedingly above that which,’ etc.” Vincent’s Word Studies

In other words, they are a contemplative thought of Paul which stops short because of an inability to continue for a moment. It would be as if someone were thinking on the marvel of what God is. In doing so, he stops and says, “God is so great; amazingly marvelously great... greater than I can describe!”

From that high note, he recovers himself and then continues on with the superlative nature of what God is capable of doing. He says, “...above all that we ask or think.” When we petition God for the most incredible of things, God is able to meet those prayers and even go beyond what we have asked for. And while praying, our thoughts are on our highest hopes. But God’s ability to perform exceeds even those highest of hopes.

However, it is important to remember that Paul ties “ask” and “think” in with what God is “able” to do, not with what He will actually do. Sometimes our prayers are not in accord with His Divine will. If this is the case, then we cannot expect that they will be answered in the way we wish. Rather, what He is able to do is “according to the power that works in us.”

God is working in us according to His will and His predetermined end. There are times when our desires meet that will, and there are times when they will not. But through it all, His magnificent will is being worked out and we will realize the superlative nature of His workings at the end.

Life application: God is God; we are man. Let us always make our petitions known to God in humility and with high expectation, but let us also acknowledge to Him that “Your will be done, O God.” We should never “claim” anything in His name. It is presumptuous and arrogant to do so. Instead, let us allow Him to direct His will without us snapping fingers of pride.

Heavenly Father, thank You for meeting every need of ours according to Your great wisdom. Thank You for perfectly aligning Your will with our lives so that what You have planned will come out as it should. And because it is Your plan, keep us from presumptuous displays of pride by “claiming” anything in Your name. Instead, let us remember that You are God and You alone will decide what prayers will be answered as we desire. When things don’t come out as we hope, grant us the ability to say, “Your will be done, O God.” Surely with this You will be pleased. Amen.

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

The words “to Him” are speaking, as in the previous verse, about God the Father who has orchestrated all things according to His wisdom for the redemption of mankind. It is He who has done, “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (verse 20), and to whom belongs “the glory in the church.”

All credit is given to God in the church concerning our redemption and eternal status where we will live in His presence. No credit can be taken for our entry into this exalted and glorious edifice, and no credit can be taken for our position within it. God has appointed all things according to His wisdom, and we are merely the recipients of this marvelous grace which has come “by Christ Jesus.”

The word “by” is arguably better rendered as “in.” The work has been done by Him, and we are in Him now as members of the church.

And because we are members of this body who are in Him, we shall exalt and give glory to God for “all generations, forever and ever.” Here Paul has invented a phrase which attempts, failingly, to explain the eternal state that we have been brought into. Albert Barnes says that “There is a richness and amplification of language here which shows that his heart was full of the subject, and that it was difficult to find words to express his conceptions. It means, in the strongest sense, forever.”

A literal translation would be “...unto all the generations of the age of the ages” (Vincent’s Word Studies). God’s plan had a beginning in the stream of time, but there shall be no end to it.

The redeemed of the Lord shall walk in His presence for time without end, ever searching out the manifold wisdom and glory of God. It is the wondrous hope and expectation that we now possess because of the work of God in Christ.

Life application: If you are of the redeemed of the Lord, then praise Him! You will be doing it for all eternity, and so you might as well get started with that now. Be pleased to give God all the credit He is due for the marvelous gift of eternal life. Be pleased to hail the name of Jesus!

Heavenly Father, You have promised that Your redeemed will walk in Your presence unto all generations, and even unto the age of the ages. Though our lives had a moment when we came into existence, there will never be a time when this life will end. Because of Jesus, You have ordained that we will walk in Your glory and seek out Your splendor forever. As this is so, help us to start the praises now. Let us hail You because of the wonderful work You have wrought in order to bring us back to Yourself. Glory to you in the highest! Amen.

CHAPTER 4

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, Ephesians 4:1

The word “therefore” is given based on all that he has thus far said in the epistle. He is asking them to consider all that he has written and to take it into consideration. This is made especially poignant by the words “I... the prisoner of the Lord.” The Greek reads “in the Lord.” Though he was a prisoner under Nero, it was because of his status “in the Lord” that he was imprisoned. It is what the Lord had willed for his life at that time, and his service would be best used from prison.

This may seem contradictory, but Joseph was once imprisoned, and it was that time of incarceration that eventually led him to becoming the second highest in the land of Egypt. God was using his time in prison for a greater purpose, and the same was true with Paul who was also being used in this manner. Based on that status, meaning a prisoner in the Lord, he desired them to “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

If Paul’s incarceration was part of God’s plan, then they could look at his position which would otherwise seem ignoble, and they could then consider that whatever position they were in, they too could find it a place of honor because of the Lord’s positioning them where they were. In that position, be it high or lowly, they could then walk in that worthy manner. If high, they would conduct themselves with humility. If low, they would conduct themselves with dignity.

Paul has shown them that position in this world is irrelevant in regard to position in Christ. This is what he is relaying to them with his “therefore.” They should consider themselves as Christians first and foremost, and conduct their walk in that regard.

Life application: It is a common thing for people to get swept up in an almost “idol worship” concerning pastors, preachers, and teachers of the Bible. But it should not be this way. Rather, some of the seemingly lowliest of the church may be the ones who are walking in the most worthy manner in regard to their calling. Let us consider all according to how they honor the Lord, regardless of their position or title.

Lord God, it is wonderful to know that we are all accepted by You because of the Lord Jesus. It doesn't matter how wealthy we are, how big of a house we have, what color we are, or what our job is. These are worldly things. You look at us based on how we walk

according to our calling, and not by these temporary divisions of life. Be pleased to be glorified through how we present our lives as Christians, and help us always to desire Your glory and honor above all else. Amen.

...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, Ephesians 4:2

What Paul will now state is an explanation of what it means to “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” What he will say is very similar to what he also wrote to those in Colossae –

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;” Colossians 3:12

His words are also tied in very closely to Jesus’ words which run through the Beatitudes. They are what we are expected to live out in this walk of life in Christ. In this verse, he begins with what might be termed “passive graces.” In other words, they are things that we less actively do, but rather they reflect a passive attitude. They are to be modeled on those things which Christ, who went before us, also displayed in their perfect sense.

He begins with “lowliness.” This is an attitude of the mind where we don’t put ourselves on a pedestal, but rather we exalt those around us above ourselves. He writes of this attitude of diminishing one’s own importance in Romans 12 –

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Romans 12:3

His next thought is that of “gentleness.” It is a meekness of the person which is willing to suffer injury without retaliation and without seeking revenge. Our gentleness should exude out of us when dealing with those around us just as Christ also did. He didn’t retaliate against those who came against Him, but He suffered their degradation and punishment.

“Longsuffering” is the same thought as that which he gave in 1 Corinthians 13:4. It is a passive action, and it is something that requires perseverance. We should be willing to put up with a constant stream of trials and yet be willing to praise God through them. Job suffered as much as almost anyone, and yet he made this resolute proclamation –

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Job 1:21

Finally in this verse, he notes that our walk should include the attitude of “bearing one another in love.” The word indicates a purposeful endeavoring in our attitude. We should have an earnest desire to exert ourselves in love in order to “secure a thing not lightly obtained” (Albert Barnes). People can wear us out with their own pet peeves, insecurities, jealousies, and the like. In our walk, we should be willing to bear such things in love rather than breaking down and shooting forth darts of anger.

Life application: Paul’s words are a tough thing to live out, but they are written under the inspiration of the Spirit and are thus things that we are being asked to do because they are what God approves of, and therefore expects of us. Let us endeavor to the utmost to act in accord with these precepts.

Lord God, sometimes we just may not feel very loving or willing to suffer the shortcomings of others, but this is what You would ask us to do. In Your word, we are admonished to act in lowliness and gentleness towards others. To be longsuffering in our attitudes toward them, and to bear with others in love. Help us in this Lord. It is a tough thing to pursue, but with reliance on Your Spirit, it can be done. And so, be with us as we endeavor to be pleasing to You in this way. Amen.

...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3

These words complete the list of things by which one will be able “to walk worthy of the calling with which” he was called. In order to do this, he notes that we should be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit.” The word “endeavoring” doesn’t really share the sense of the original which indicates “to make speed.” Thus, something like “haste to keep the unity of the Spirit” is more in line with Paul’s intent. We should strive with all willingness and speed to ensure such unity.

This “unity of the Spirit” isn’t referring to a possible division of the Holy Spirit, but rather any division of those sealed with the Holy Spirit. Paul has been speaking of the church as one body, and that we are all members of one household. Therefore, we should be united in our conduct and our walk because of this.

However, this brings in an obvious difficulty. When doctrine is lacking, or the word of God is mishandled (either unintentionally or intentionally) there can be no true unity of the Spirit. This is seen throughout the epistles and even in the seven letters to the seven churches. In Romans 16:17, Paul says –

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”

Therefore, it is understood that such divisions will exist; a lack of unity is inevitable. Paul doesn't say that this cannot occur. Rather, he instructs that at times it must occur. What he is asking of us in this verse is that we work with all speed to not let this happen when circumstances so dictate. It is our job to strive for felicity among the brethren and to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

This “bond of peace” that he speaks of probably refers back to Chapter 2 –

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace...” Ephesians 2:14, 15

Where there once was the great division of Jew and Gentile, Christ had made peace. If such an immense source of enmity could be ended through His work, then all others are also possible as well. However, it is incumbent on the offender as much as the offended to be willing to strive for this peace; something which is less likely to occur.

Someone who holds to a particular incorrect doctrine will often double down on their stand rather than seeing reason. Pride steps in and is unwilling to admit wrong. Thus, the bad doctrine is then passed on to others and it becomes a larger and larger separation.

This is why there are so many denominations with so many unfavorable doctrines to contend with. Some are heretical; some are doctrinally unsound; some are simply nutty pet peeves. It is only through a pure and wholehearted pursuit of Christ that these things will ever be set aside. As God is love, Colossians 3 shows us how this will be effected –

“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

-Colossians 3:14

Putting on love is what will unite the Spirit. It must be the highest love, that of love for Christ and His word, which brings this about. If we are willing to put Him first, then the incorrect doctrines will be set aside for purity of doctrine which stems from Him.

Life application: Paul admonishes us to strive for unity, but he never asks us to do this at the expense of proper doctrine. The world of ecumenicalism errs because it puts unity above purity of doctrine. This is a bad place to be. The words of Scripture ask us to have our allegiances aligned properly. Doctrine matters more than false unity.

Lord God, Your word asks us to strive for unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. However, Your word also tells us that false doctrines and heresies are not to be condoned. In the world today, we have placed a spirit of ecumenicalism above the mandate to pursue sound doctrine. This can only lead to a sad end where our hearts are directed away from You. Help us never to make this mistake, but to put our allegiance to You above all else. This we pray as Your word is our guide for our walk in this fallen world. Amen.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;
Ephesians 4:4

This verse enters with an abruptness not realized in most English translations. The words “*There is*” are inserted by the translators. If left off, it would read –

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ ... one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;”

Here Paul is demonstrating why we are to “walk worthy of the calling with which” we were called, something which included all of the points which he then followed up with. It is because the church is one united body. From an earthly standpoint, nothing could seem further from the truth.

There are fingers pointed in every direction at every minor disagreement in even the finest points of doctrine. Further, there are those “churches” which are not even a part of the true church. The problem with this is that many cannot discern which denominations are heretical and which are not.

Added on top of that is the fact that there are many individuals in the church who are unsaved wolves who are simply there to further destroy harmony within the church. And possibly worse than those, there are some who are truly saved and yet they have the spiritual maturity of a baby, having never developed in their theology. And yet, they strut about dividing the people over issues they have no understanding in.

It would seem that “one body” is the most laughable statement possible, but Paul is correct. All true believers were brought into the body by faith in the work of Christ, and in that alone. When they believed, they were sealed with the Spirit which brought them into this mystical body.

And to ensure that we understand this, he next says, “and one Spirit.” As there is one Spirit, (meaning the Holy Spirit), and as the work of the Spirit includes the sealing of those who have truly believed, then there logically can be only “one body.” He is the One to determine who is in and who is out.

In man, there is error in thinking, there is error in judgment, and there is error in doctrine. But in the Spirit, there is no such thing. The church has been selected in a perfect manner by God who cannot err. Though we may not know who is saved and who is not, the Spirit does because we each “were called in one hope” of our calling. In this statement, hope is not the object which is being described. Rather it is the principle.

We have a hope in us because we have believed in Christ, trusted in His work, and been sealed with His Spirit. It is the surety we possess, either in great measure or in an ungrounded and weak measure, or in whatever measure we possess that hope. The presence of the Spirit, which unites the true church, is to this body just as the spirit is to our natural bodies. It is the life of the church for growth and continuance. This is why Paul says elsewhere that we should be “filled with the Spirit.”

We have the Spirit, in full measure, the moment we receive Christ. We will never get “more” of the Spirit. But the Spirit can get more of us as we yield ourselves to God.

Life application: How do we yield ourselves to the Spirit? Through prayer, praise, petition, study of the word, and fellowship with other believers. The filling of the Spirit is not an active action, it is a passive one. As we yield to God, we will be filled more and more. Let us take these actions and become vibrant, useful members of this marvelous body to which we belong.

Almighty and most gracious Heavenly Father – it is an honor and a blessing to be included in Your marvelous church, the body which You have established through the work of Christ. We are a group from every race, creed, culture, color, and economic status. Each of us has the potential to do marvelous things if we simply are willing to learn Your word and yield ourselves to You. Grant us the wisdom to use this short span of time that we have been allotted towards building up this body and being productive members of it. This we pray for Your glory. Amen.

...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; Ephesians 4:5

Paul continues the thought of the previous verse. There, it noted the “unity of the Spirit.” Now the second member of the Trinity is named; “one Lord.” Further the idea moves from the calling (what we are expected to do in verses 1 thru 4), to the One who calls and how that position is realized.

The church is established on Christ, and it is built up in Christ. He is the Foundation and the Capstone of the church, and He is its Lord. We are brought into the church through faith in Him and what He has done. But the “one faith” mentioned here is not that which is believed (meaning the tenets of doctrine), rather it is the principle of faith. There is one faith for all who are members of the household of God. We place our faith in the work of Christ, and we are brought into “the faith.” And this leads to “one baptism.”

Despite the general belief by most that this is speaking of the external rite of baptism, this is not at all what is being spoken of. Rather, it is the “baptism of the Spirit” which comes by faith in Christ. Paul said in chapter 1 –

*“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14*

This sealing is the baptism which is being referred to. This is confirmed by the words of Jesus in Mark 16:16 –

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

The formula here shows what the conditions are. If one believes, he is baptized and thus saved; He has received the baptism of the Spirit. If one does not believe, he has not received the baptism and will be condemned. Salvation is conditioned on belief and baptism; condemnation is conditioned on not believing. Therefore, Jesus cannot be speaking of an external rite. The “belief” and the “baptism,” though not synonymous, are equated as one occurrence. This is confirmed then in Paul’s words of Ephesians 1:13, 14.

He shows this elsewhere as well. In Galatians 3:27, he says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” This is not speaking of water baptism, but of the baptism of the Spirit. One is clothed in Christ through faith in His work. In Acts, the household of Cornelius first received the Spirit by hearing the word and believing.

Only then did they later submit to water baptism as an external sign of the inward baptism already realized. This same thing is referred to by Paul in Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:3-5. In each instance, he is speaking of the work of the Spirit and equating it with “baptism.”

Finally, faith is placed first at some times (Mark 16:16), and at other times “baptism” is placed first (Colossians 2:12). Thus, these are one occurrence with two separate parts. The rite of water baptism is not what is being spoken of here. Rather, that is an ordinance for the church; it is an outward demonstration of the inward change which has already taken place.

Life application: Why is it important to understand that water baptism is not what is being spoken of here? Because if this is misunderstood, then other nutty ideas immediately result. Two obvious ones which are taught in some churches are, 1) Water baptism is a condition for salvation. 2) There is a second baptism of the Spirit for some people.

Major denominations teach these incorrect doctrines which then lead to supposed superiority of some people over others. But Paul shows in this verse that there is one baptism which places all on a level field before the Lord. Doctrine matters.

Lord God, it is so wonderful to know that by mere faith in what Christ has done, we are sealed with Your Spirit. We receive our “baptism of the Spirit” at that moment, dying with Christ and being raised by Your mighty power. We are dead to the law and all that stood opposed to us, and we are raised to newness of life in Him. What a marvelous

thing to consider – all because of the work of Another! Thank You for what You have done for us through Christ the Lord! Amen.

...one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Ephesians 4:6

Paul has been writing about the idea of unity. He did this concerning the “one body,” meaning the church. He then wrote of there being “one Lord,” who is Christ. Now he says there is “one God.” This is speaking of the Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each is a member within this Godhead.

This “one God” is thus “Father of all.” This is speaking less of “God the Father” than it is of “the Fatherhood of God.” In other words, Paul’s idea of unity is what is being focused on. The unity of the Godhead is the “Father of all.”

Each part of the Godhead has its role, and combined they form the Godhead. The Father is God, but the Godhead is not merely the Father. Likewise, the same is true with the Son and with the Spirit. Each is God, but the Godhead is not merely any of the three, but all three combined. As a very simple example, Time is one thing, but Time is comprised of Future, Present, and Past. Each is Time, but Time is not merely any of the three. Rather, Time is comprised of all three.

It is the Godhead which is “above all, and through all, and in you all.” Paul is speaking to saved Christians in this verse. God the Father is above all. He is the Sovereign God who directs all things according to His will. God the Son is the One who brings us into the unique Father/son relationship with God. It is through Christ that all are brought into the body of Christ. And finally, God dwells in us. It is the Spirit who seals (and thus is “in”) all.

Again, it needs to be stressed that these words are speaking of unity, and thus they are directed to the saved believers within the church. The words here in no way imply the “universal Fatherhood” of God towards all people in the world. It is speaking of the unique relationship between God and His select and sealed people which is accomplished through believing in the work of Christ.

Life application: We are united in the body of Christ through the work of Christ. The old saying “blood is thicker than water” should apply to all believers in their conduct toward other believers. It is understood that brothers argue, but they are also willing to defend one another. If we argue, let it be over pure doctrine, but let us endeavor to defend our

fellow believers just as ardently against the world which comes against us because of our united faith in Christ.

How good You are to us, O God. You have called us to be members of Your body because of the work of Christ. It means we who believe are members of this unique family. Help us to treat one another in this light. Yes, we may fight, but let it be over proper doctrine. And though we may fight over that, help us to also defend one another against the world system which comes against us. Grant us to be willing to stand up for our fellow family members in Christ just as we would for our own earthly family members. Help us to work for this unity, to Your glory. Amen.

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

Ephesians 4:7

There is unfortunately an article in the original Greek which is not included in this translation. It says, "But to each one of us the grace was given..." It is a specific grace, not a general one, which Paul refers to. This then is not speaking of things like salvation, eternal life, and so on. Rather, it is speaking of the grace which is bestowed upon a person for conducting their services for the Lord.

An example of this would be Bezalel, the main artificer of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Of him, the Bible reads –

“And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of workmanship*,⁴ to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze,⁵ in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of workmanship*.” Exodus 31:3-5

Bezalel was given the grace to accomplish particular tasks which needed to be accomplished in the construction of the tabernacle. In Christ, we are given the same. The Lord is building His temple and each of us is given such grace “according to the measure of Christ's gift.”

He is the Lord, it is His temple which is being built, and He is the one to apportion out what is necessary in order to accomplish this marvelous task. This grace is most certainly a part of our makeup as individuals. There is no reason to assume that this is some type of grace which is instilled in us after salvation. Rather, we are each given abilities from the eternal mind of God based on our genetic makeup, our place in time and location, the education we have received, and so on.

It is certainly more sensational to claim that we have been endowed with a special gift of the Spirit after salvation, but this has to be read into the grace we have been given as much as assuming that it is based on who we are as individuals. In fact, in the calling of Jeremiah, his particular office was one which was ordained before his birth –

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying:
5 ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
Before you were born I sanctified you;
I ordained you a prophet to the nations.’” Jeremiah 1:4, 5

The Lord knew Jeremiah from His eternal mind, and He selected him from that state. Each person in the church is no different. Some are orators, some are business people who can give, some are janitors. Christ has determined the gift. And as it is a gift, it is unmerited. No person should think more highly of himself than he ought. Whatever we have is what we have received from God.

And so, we should rather mourn over not using our gifts to the fullest. The janitor who works out his duties to the highest degree possible is doing a better job than the pastor who whips out a cheesy sermon that took no effort to write, which will merely tickle the people’s ears, and which provides no insights in the marvel of Scripture which has been given for the building up of God’s people.

Life application: Whatever our gifts are, they should be used for the glory of the Lord and to the fullest measure of our ability. Anything else is to squander the gifts we possess.

Lord God, You have given each of Your people gifts according to Your wisdom. You have done this so that we would in turn use them to build up Your church and to bring glory to You. The person who cleans the church, and who does it to the best of his ability, is using his gift more wisely than the pastor who provides chintzy sermons, shallow Bible studies, and poor counseling for his flock. May we mourn over our failure to do our very best for You with the gifts we possess. And then, may we decide that we will use them to the fullest in the days ahead. Amen.

Therefore He says:

**“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”** Ephesians 4:8

The verse begins with “Therefore.” This is stated to explain the previous words, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” In order to show this, Paul cites the substance of Psalm 68:18. He changes several words, and he goes from the 2nd person to the 3rd person. Thus, it is not a direct quote, but rather it conveys the substance of what was said and then he equates it to the triumph of the work of Christ –

“You have ascended on high,
You have led captivity captive;
You have received gifts among men,
Even *from* the rebellious,
That the LORD God might dwell *there*.” Psalm 68:18

In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was the place where God met with man. Its placement in Zion was the sign of victory of God over His enemies. They were defeated, the land had been subdued, and God rested in His place. The thought of ascending on high is that of being exalted above all the others who have been placed in subjection to Him.

Though Zion was not the highest peak in elevation, it was considered the highest place of honor. Thus, any time that someone traveled to Jerusalem, regardless of direction or elevation from which they came, they were said to “go up” to Jerusalem.

As the Lord who dwelt between the cherubim of the ark had been brought to this place of exaltation, and as it was a sign that His enemies had been vanquished, it says, “You have led captivity captive.” This signifies that those who were once the captors (called the abstract “captivity”) had themselves been made captive. They were now the subdued prisoners who were conducted in bonds during the triumphal procession to that spot of exultation.

Quite often this verse is cited as a display of the prisoners being released from captivity by the work of Christ. Though this is something He did, it is not what is being referred to here. Rather, it is the foes of God being brought into captivity. After this defeating of His enemies, it then says, “You have received gifts among men.”

Ascribing this thought to the work of Christ, Paul modifies it and says, “And gave gifts to men.” This is the specific explanation of the previous verse which said, “...but to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” The spoils of war were handed out to the subjects of the kingdom according to the pleasure of the

vanquishing ruler. Likewise, God passes out His gifts of victory according to His choosing as well.

Paul's words, though modifying the psalm, do not change the intent. The two thoughts side by side say:

And gave gifts to men (Paul)
You have received gifts among men (Psalm)

The same idea is expressed. Christ received gifts which He then immediately turned around and handed out to His subjects. This follows from other times in Scripture where the same thought is denoted by a sudden and succinct expression. Scripture may say something like, "Bring me a heifer," which is simply a shortened form of "Bring a heifer to me for sacrifice."

The analogy Paul is making is that Christ was victorious in His work. He was exalted to the highest position, there at the right hand of God, and from that position He gives the Holy Spirit to His subjects in the measure He so chooses.

Life application: If you have called on Christ, you have been sealed with the Spirit. Now it is your responsibility to take the gift you possess and use it for God's glory. Each thing that you do should be geared towards returning glory to God for the grace which He has bestowed upon you.

Lord God, are we too busy with the things of life to honor You with who we are as Your people? In an act of grace, Christ came and lived the life that we were unable to live. He gave up His life in exchange for our failings, and He then granted us the guarantee of eternal life – all undeserved; all grace. And yet, we have so much to do – sports, TV shows, dining out and watching a movie. How busy we are! What ungrateful subjects of the King of kings! Forgive us, and turn our hearts towards the advancement of Your kingdom. Our lives are but a span... a short one. Use us up now Lord. Use us up to Your glory which will radiate for all eternity. Amen.

(Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? Ephesians 4:9

Paul now introduces a parenthetical thought concerning what he just said in verse 8. There he cited the psalm which said, "When He ascended on high..." He demonstrates

that the psalm was intended to be a messianic psalm, and which pointed to Christ's descent from heaven to earth.

It is thus also a presentation of the divine/human nature of Christ. Christ ascended, but in order to ascend, it meant that something else had to occur first. In order for us to think this through, he places it in the form of a question, "[W]hat does it mean but that He also first descended...?"

It is His human nature which is being referred to here. The reason for this is to show that what was asked of us in verses 1 through 3 was already imposed on Christ the Lord. We are not being asked to do anything that He did not take upon Himself. Those words read—

“...to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

This is what Christ did as is noted in Philippians 2:5-8,

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.”

Understanding this, we are shown that God stepped out of the eternal, infinite realm and united with humanity; He “descended.” This is something that Jesus spoke of in John 3:13 –

“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

However, Paul's words go further. He says that “He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth.” Questions often arise as to what this term means. Sensationalists will generally say that this means that He went down into Hades itself. They even tie this into the words of the psalm concerning His leading captivity captive, indicating the releasing of souls from a type of prison. But as we saw in that analysis, it is not speaking of that at all. This is not speaking of His descent into hell. It is speaking of His incarnation.

A contrast is being made between His ascension to “far above all the heavens” of the next verse, and the lowly state of being confined to “the lower parts of the earth” of this verse. Again, the reason for Paul’s words of verses 1-3 explain what he is talking about. We are in “the lower parts of the earth” and we are being asked to conduct ourselves in a particular way.

In order to be compliant and grateful for our current station, we are being told that Christ Himself, very God of very God, came and did the same. Because He was willing to do so, we should likewise be willing to emulate Him. The coming verses, after the parenthetical thought, will continue to show us this. We are to live in this world and to pursue life in this world, but we are to do it with the heavenly attitude which Christ retained while He walked among us.

Albert Barnes rightly states this concerning Paul’s words –
“Into the lower parts of the earth - To the lowest state of humiliation. This seems to be the fair meaning of the words. Heaven stands opposed to earth. One is above; the other is beneath. From the one Christ descended to the other; and he came not only to the earth, but he stooped to the most humble condition of humanity here...”

Life application: Beware of those commentaries which tend to over-sensationalize Scripture. There is enough sensation in the work of Christ to fill our hearts and minds with an eternity of wonder. When people speak of dreams and visions, of angels and demons, and of heaven and hell, they often get off into unnecessary explanations of these things. The sensationalism sells well, but it is more often than not an inappropriate analysis of what is being relayed.

Lord God, You ask us to be reasonable in our interpretation of Scripture and to not become puffed up in our analysis of it. It is so easy to follow after sensational statements about dreams, visions, angels, and demons, but it is normally just a giant distraction from what You are actually trying to tell us. The work of Christ is sensational enough all by itself. Help us not to claim things which are not according to Your word, nor to follow people who make such outrageous boasts. Help us to follow sound interpretation and to fix our eyes on Jesus – the most sensational Person ever! Amen.

He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) Ephesians 4:10

Here, Paul is still referring to the psalm he quoted concerning the ascension of Christ. He just noted that His ascension implies that He had to first descend. Christ did not

originate on earth, and therefore He had to have come from elsewhere; He descended to our lowly station. Now Paul speaks of “He who descended...” It is He and not another. The same One who came from heaven, descending to dwell among us, “is also the One who ascended.”

The descent was the incarnation; God uniting with human flesh. After that, He ascended – fully God and fully Man. He did not put off His humanity, but retains it forever. And yet, in this marvelous state, it is He who “ascended far above all the heavens.” The ascension of Christ was a demonstration that He is fully God. In Matthew 28, we see what it means to be in this state –

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Matthew 28:18

With this power, He ascended. And this was not just “above the heavens,” but “through the heavens.” This is noted in Hebrews 4:14 –

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession.”

The expression gives us the sense of Christ’s movement from sphere to sphere, claiming authority over each as He went. Eventually, He came to His final and most exalted spot, there to rule from the throne of God with His Father. From this highest position, far above the heavens, He rules completely and fully. This position is His in order “that He might fill all things.”

If we think of being in a room which is completely dark and then a light is turned on, we can partially understand Christ’s position. The light shines and it dispels all darkness. Everything becomes clear and the entire room is filled with what was once lacking. We receive the light, the heat of the light, the knowledge of what the light shows us, and so forth. This is what God has done in Christ.

The universe itself was frustrated by sin. There was darkness and chaotic occurrences because the devil had stepped in and fouled things up. The light of Christ, however, shone through the darkness and the darkness could no longer overcome the light. And this remains true. Christ’s light is being radiated out, filling all things according to a set plan. Thus, He fills all things. As Ellicott says it –

“Christ, as God, is present everywhere; as glorified man, He can be present anywhere.”

Life application: We may think there is darkness in the world, which is gaining traction and somehow frustrating God's plans, but this is not the case. They are being worked out despite the darkness. He has simply allowed it to continue until the time of His choosing. Christ's victory assures us that this is so.

Heavenly Father, it seems that there is a pall of darkness on the earth which is taking over and vexing the plans for a perfect world for us to dwell in. But Your word tells us that the darkness is already defeated through the work of Christ. His light is there, radiating out Your plan which is being fulfilled despite the forces of wickedness. What a great hope we possess. What we see around us is temporary and it has an appointed time when it will end. In Christ is victory, light, and fellowship. Thank You for this marvelous hope that we possess! Amen.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, Ephesians 4:11

This verse begins with an emphasis on the word "He." Thus, the NKJV says, "And **He Himself** gave some to be..." It refers back to "Christ" of verse 7. It is He and He alone who has made these designations. Though man may ordain, only Christ truly appoints. Each person is placed in their position within the church according to Christ's choice and His designation.

In these selected positions, he begins with "apostles." This category is to be taken in its stricter sense. The word "apostle" means "messenger," and at times, the early church was said to send out "messengers" using the term "apostle." However, the stricter sense is speaking of those designated specifically by the Lord and meeting certain qualifications.

For example, one is that they had personally seen the Lord. Paul fits this requirement because of his unusual meeting with the Lord on the road to Damascus. This stricter sense of the designation of "apostle" no longer applies within the church. It ended with the last of the called apostles, and its need ceased with the final word "Amen" at the end of the book of Revelation.

Next, he notes "some prophets." From the earliest times of the church, the office of prophet was separate and distinct from the other offices of the church. They were those who received special revelation from the Lord for the establishment and building of the early church. Such people stood and proclaimed what they had received under inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

As in the case of the office of apostle, this office of “prophet” has ceased. The history of the church shows us this. Only those who boastfully make unfounded assertions still claim this title. It is both unnecessary (we have the written word of God), and it is presumptuous because it makes a claim of special revelation received from the Lord that cannot be validated.

The only prophesying that is truly relevant today is forth-telling, not foretelling. If one proclaims what has been written, it could be considered the work of a forth-telling prophet, but there are other titles which better describe this function. The term “prophet” is no longer needed within the church, despite boastful claims otherwise.

Paul next states, “some evangelists.” This word, *euaggelistés*, is used only three times in the New Testament; here, in Acts 21:8; and in 2 Timothy 4:5. HELPS Words Studies notes that it means “someone with a *vocational calling from God* to announce the *good news* of the Gospel.” ... “Every Christian is called to share the Gospel, but ‘an evangelist’ does so as a *vocation*, which includes preaching the *full message of Christ’s salvation* (the *whole Gospel*).”

The verse concludes with, “some pastors and teachers.” These two offices are lumped together here just as they were noted under the single category of “teachers” in 1 Corinthians 12:28. These people preach the word, both to the unconverted and to the converted. They are to care for those under their charge in organization, instruction, proper explanation of the word now written, building up the body, counseling, etc.

The office of pastor is possibly broader in scope than the teacher, but as both are noted under the one title of “teacher” in 1 Corinthians 12, they both are given for a united purpose.

Concerning the offices listed in this verse, and whether the first two are still relevant or not, Albert Barnes provides a wise and considered thought –

“On the question whether this celebrated passage describes the regular orders or the functions, ordinary and extraordinary, of the ministry, we may fairly say that while no doubt the very genius of the passage points to the latter alternative, yet the ultimate appeal must be made to history.

It is clear, from the nature of the case, that none could inherit the direct and universal commission from Christ held by the Apostles; it is certain historically that the supernatural gifts of prophecy and miracle passed away; it is hardly less indisputable

that the two functions of evangelism and pastorate were always shared among the three orders of bishops, priests, and deacons after the close of the Apostolic age.”

Life application: Although it sounds impressive for someone to claim the title of “apostle” or “prophet,” they are inappropriate titles to claim. Best to steer clear of such folks.

Lord God, it is certain that Your word is all-sufficient for our faith and practice. We have no need of further revelation from You other than from a sound interpretation of what You have already given us in the pages of the Holy Bible. And the secrets which continue to be revealed from it, even to this day, show us that this is so. Keep us from being duped by people who make extra-biblical claims to special revelation. Rather, give us hearts that are willing to do the hard work and actually pick up Your word, read it, and apply it to our lives. With this, You will surely be pleased. Amen.

...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, Ephesians 4:12

The word “for” is used three times in the English of this verse, but actually two different words are used, *pros* and *eis*. The word *pros* gives the idea of “with a view to.” It is the ultimate end which is in view. The word *eis* gives the idea of “unto.”

The first thought is, “...for the equipping of the saints.” The appointment of the five offices of the previous verse (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), is with a view to, or the ultimate end of, “equipping the saints.” The word translated as “equipping” here is *katartismos*. It is found only here in the New Testament, but it is found in classical Greek where it refers to the refitting of ships, and also to the setting of bones.

It is as if the church is being used in order to bring about a refitting of that which was lost. Those in this special body are being brought into a restored relationship with God where intimate fellowship will exist, just as it originally was for Adam. The “ministry” and the “edifying” which are next mentioned are the means to obtain this end. Thus, “equipping” is in the emphatic position.

This is why we can discern that two of the offices are no longer needed, that of the apostles and prophets. They were given with a view to the equipping of the saints. With the end of the apostolic era, and with the end of the giving of biblical inspiration, they were no longer required. However, the other three categories are still needed for the

end purpose of equipping the saints. They are being perfected for the ultimate goal for which the church is intended.

Next Paul notes that this is “for the work of ministry” in order to reach the desired end goal. As noted, the word “for” here gives the idea of “unto.” The equipping of the saints is “unto the work of the ministry.” The work of the ministry, then, is intended for the equipping, or perfecting, of the saints. The evangelists, pastors, and teachers conduct their duties in order for this to come about.

Further, their work is for, or unto, “the edifying of the body of Christ.” When the body (meaning the sum of the individual parts) is edified, then the end goal of equipping the saints will be met. Paul’s words are logically showing us how the church is being prepared to be the beautiful temple where God will reside.

He will continue with this line of thought in the verses ahead, and he will tell why this work is so vital. Failing to adhere to the inspired words of the apostles and prophets, and a failure to have sound evangelists, pastors, and teachers, can only lead to a sad end.

Life application: It is right and appropriate that we should pursue sound doctrine. Understanding the nuances of the Greek is often not possible by reading any given translation of the Bible. Therefore, an analysis of the original languages, and sound commentary from those who have been properly trained in those languages, is a reasonable way of discerning what is right and proper concerning sure doctrine.

Lord God, thank You for giving us such a firm and sound foundation on which we can stand. Your word is faithful, and it is precious. In it, we can see what You intend for us and we can see Your marvelous plan of the ages – from beginning to end. In it, we are assured that all will be made right once again for those who have called on Christ and have received Your offer of forgiveness through His shed blood. Thank You that we don’t have to wonder if we have these things. We can be sure of them. Thank You for this marvelous guarantee. Amen.

...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; Ephesians 4:13

The intent of the several offices previously noted was that they were given to accomplish specific tasks until “we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.” The words, “unity of the faith,” are given not concerning unity of

doctrine, but of the act of belief. It is “the faith” which is referred to. The work of those mentioned in verse 11 is given for bringing people into the faith. It is also to bring them to “the knowledge of the Son of God.”

It is of special note that the term “Son of God” is used rather than “Son of Man.” Christ accomplished the work in His humanity, but it is in the knowledge that He is the Son of God upon which our faith is dependent. If Christ were only a man, He would have inherited Adam’s sin through His father. But He is fully God and no sin was transferred from His Father. The resurrection proved this. Thus, He was “declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

In our understanding of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, we will then develop “to a perfect man.” The idea here is that of growth and maturity. A child may have knowledge, but it is imperfect. As he grows into a man, his knowledge of things grows, and he becomes grounded in what he does.

For example, if he sets out to become a doctor, he will have limited knowledge of his desired profession. But through schooling, observance, and practical application, he would develop into a knowledge-filled practitioner.

This is to be the goal of each Christian who has first obtained the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. We are not to get saved and then feel we have satisfactorily met all we are to do. Instead, we are to be like the youth who desires to be a sound and effective doctor. We are to grow into maturity in Christ “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Our knowledge of Him leads us to be like Him. We are to be morally mature, grounded in understanding, and to be Christ-like in all we do. To be in “the stature of the fullness of Christ” is to walk in this world as He did, to pursue righteousness in full measure, to be able to expound upon the truths of Scripture accurately and completely. In all ways, we should endeavor to be fitting examples of the One who went before us, Christ the Lord.

As a notable point, it cannot be argued that all five offices of verse 11 must therefore remain until this is fully realized. Rather, each remains as long as it is needed for its specific purpose. The offices of apostle and prophet actually do continue on to this day in the sense that we still have the writings of those who gave us the New Testament, even if they do not continue on as necessary offices.

Life application: To be Christ-like does not mean that we are to pursue works of the law as Christ did in His earthly ministry. It is to trust in the work that He has accomplished and to go forward in that knowledge. We cannot impose on ourselves the burden of the law and say, “I am being Christ-like.” We will fail at the law; He prevailed over the law. It is important to understand this and to rest in His work and to emulate Him as the Fulfiller of the law. This cannot be stressed enough.

Lord God, Your word asks us to mature in Christ so that we will be like Christ. Help us then to understand this correctly. We are to trust in what He has done in fulfillment of the law, and so we are to trust that the law is, in fact, fulfilled. Our growth in Him is not to failingly do what He has already done, but to pursue His righteousness as an accomplished deed. Thank You for the freedom we have been given by what He has done for us. We can be pleasing to You by faith, and we will mature in that state by our continued faith. Help each thing that we do to be a work of faith in the Gift already granted. Amen!

...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,
Ephesians 4:14

Paul is still speaking of the appointment of the five offices mentioned in verse 11. These were given for the purpose of equipping the saints, edifying the body, and so forth. This then would lead to the point where “we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (verse 13).

Now, in contrast to the “perfect man” just mentioned, he reverts to the thought of what so many in the church are, children. This word is often translated as “babes” or “infants.” It is almost exclusively used in a negative sense. It refers to those who are impulsive, rash, unthinking, and so on. Such people are easily manipulated, and their doctrine is as changing as those of the garments of a woman in a fashion show.

The reason for this is because they are not grounded in Scripture by those who have been mentioned in verse 11. This is what they need, but it is also what they often stubbornly refuse to receive. People who spend all their time in prophecy circles are a classic example of this type of believer. They are often shallow in biblical knowledge, and their focus is myopic and twisted. Such people are ripe for being turned with very little effort at all. Their attention span is only as long as the next crazy video about another “prophecy” issue.

Thus, they are “tossed to and fro.” This is the only use of the word *kludónizomai* in the Bible. It refers to the waves which rise and fall, billowing high and then turning into deep caverns. People without proper doctrine are carried along in just this manner, ever pulling at their faces and saying, “Oh my!” as they are pulled from strange doctrine to strange doctrine. Such crazy teachings are described by the words, “with every wind of doctrine.”

In a raging storm at sea, the winds turn from one direction to another, blowing the spray of the waves right in the face of the sailors at one moment, and then knocking them off their feet from behind in the next. This is the idea that Paul gives here. Instead of picking up the Bible, checking it carefully, and taking all verses in context as they should, they pull verses out of context, or they receive verses already torn out of context. They establish doctrines which have nothing to do with God’s intent for His people.

This is done “by the trickery of men.” The Greek word is *kubeia*, and it is another word unique to the Bible. It is the source of our word “cube,” and hence it gives the idea of dice. The sleight of hand by the player of dice fools those who are in the game. So, it is with the sleight of hand of those who misuse Scripture in order to pervert its true, pure, intended meaning.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Hebrews Roots Movement teachers are great examples of this type of sleight of hand. With a few verses, cunningly presented without all of the relevant information, the shallow and unprepared person is led completely astray.

And this “trickery of men” is from “the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” This refers also to the skillful abilities of gamblers. It gives the sense of shrewdness of behavior which is reflected in “unscrupulous cunning that stops at nothing to achieve a selfish goal” (HELPS Word Studies).

The ultimate goal of such manipulation is power and greed. When one is spiritually bound up in this way, they are easily manipulated to do the desires of the false teachers, and are more than willing to expend themselves and their fortunes in order to appease their cruel taskmasters.

For the term “deceitful,” Paul uses the term *methodeia*. It is “a predictable (pre-set) *method* used in *organized evil-doing (well-crafted trickery)*” (HELPS Word Studies). None of this is arbitrary or unplanned, but is methodically prepared in order to bind up and imprison the uneducated person.

Life application: By running ahead and following teachers without first reading and contemplating the word of God, people are so quickly and easily turned astray. One must be exceedingly careful what teachers and preachers they will follow. And no matter who they are instructed by, every person has the responsibility to then go out and check what they have been taught.

Paul wrote these words 2000 years ago. False teachers have thus had a long time to prepare their false teachings and to employ their wicked schemes against the body of Christ. Beware!

Lord God, Your word provides ample warning that we are to be cautious in who we listen to and believe concerning right doctrine. The manipulation of the uneducated is a simple thing to do. How sad it is that we are so unwilling to simply pick up Your word and study for ourselves so that when we are presented with the cunning wiles of false teachers, we will see their error and head for the door. In the end, we only have ourselves to blame for the sad spiritual state we are in. What a mess! Clean us up, Lord. Grant us the wisdom to simply pick up the word and read it. Help us in this. Amen.

...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head— Christ— Ephesians 4:15

Paul begins the verse with a word here translated as “but.” It is given to contrast the equipping of the saints in order to keep them from being children who are tossed to and fro by all kinds of false, cunning, and deceitful teachings. Instead of such things, sound instructors of the word are always to be “speaking the truth in love.” This thought comes from a single Greek word which is used only here and in Galatians 4:16.

It is used in classical Greek with a full meaning of “to be true, to arrive at truth, and to speak truth” (Vincent’s Word Studies). HELPS Word Studies tells the Christian that it “includes Spirit-led confrontation where it is vital to tell the truth so others can live in God’s *reality* rather than personal *illusion*.” All teachers of the word are to speak only in truth. They are never to waffle in their proclamation or their convictions concerning what God’s word states.

However, Paul gives an extra precept for them to follow. They are to speak “the truth in love.” One can speak the truth bluntly and with force. The tone can be disgusted or crabby. In this, the truth is spoken, but it can actually produce a harmful reaction in the hearer.

It is true that people who do not receive Jesus are going to hell, but to stand on a street corner as an evangelist and to condemn all those who don't believe to this sad fate in a demeaning and arrogant way, will only lead them further from Christ. It is unfortunate that so many teachers follow this abrupt and demeaning path. The very thing they should be doing, which is leading people to Christ, is the very thing they fail to do.

Paul never waffled in his doctrine, and yet when he confronted another who was not following the truth, he did it in a firm yet loving way. A good example of this is found in Galatians 2:11-21. Peter was failing in sound doctrine, and Paul corrected him without demeaning him in any way. He spoke in love. Such an approach is proper so that those who hear "may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

This idea is contrasted to that of the previous verse. There he spoke of the state of believers as "children;" a term used in a negative way. Here he speaks of believers who are given the truth in love as those who "grow up." There is to be a process where believers mature in order to become sound, effective members of the body. In doing so, they will be sound "in all things into Him who is the head."

This is to be the goal of our Christian life, and so it is sad to see how few actually avail themselves of it. Such a large percentage of believers are content to live their lives in spiritual immaturity. Paul tells us that in order to be sound in Christ, we are to mature in Christ. It is an exhortation which we ignore at our own peril. Without growth, we will be unprepared for what transpires when trials, doctrinal issues, and false teachers come our way.

Life application: Have you called on Christ? There is a lot you need to know. Don't get stuck on one subject and spend your whole Christian life stuck in that box. Rather, take in the whole counsel of God and pursue Him and His word all your days. Be an effective member of His body.

Lord God, heavenly Father, Your word asks us to speak the truth in love. We can't speak the truth if we don't know it. And we won't speak the truth if we are not grounded in it. It is so easy to waffle in our convictions when faced with difficult issues. Is Jesus the only way to be reconciled to You? "Ummm, errrr, I... I don't want to offend." How ridiculous we are to care about offense! Your word is truth. Now help us to not be shy in proclaiming it, but give us the right reason to speak it in love. With this, You will surely be pleased. Amen.

...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:16

The words “from whom” are speaking of Christ from the previous verse –

“...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies...”

It is from Christ that “the whole body” finds its source, its growth, its strength, and its direction. This whole body is said to be “joined and knit together by what every joint supplies.” However, this is not a really great translation of these words. The Greek says, “every joint of supply.” The sustenance is not from the joints (what every joint supplies), but is from Christ through each joint of supply.

Each person who fulfills a role within the church does so based on what Christ has given them, not based on what they have as independent of Christ. This is the idea which is later given in Colossians 2:19 –

“...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God.”

As Christ supplies, so that nutrient is passed on through the joints “according to the effective working by which every part does its share.” What the Lord provides is given in order to be effectively worked out through the various parts of the body. Those who are evangelists should evangelize; those who are preachers should preach; those who are teachers should teach; and etc.

Two things should be noted concerning this. First, there are those who have abilities, but who use them in inappropriate ways. Women teaching men is prohibited in Scripture. If a man comes to Christ through the teaching of a woman preacher in a church, it cannot be said that the end justifies the means. The disobedience of this “preacher” cannot be regarded as “effective working.”

Secondly, many have been given the abilities to work effectively within the body. However, if they do not employ what they have been given in an effective manner, it cannot be said that they are working effectively. In other words, free will and proper adherence to God’s word are considerations of what is being said here. Only when the

two are correctly aligned can it be said that the work is truly effective. Only then can it be said that each is doing his share.

When those things are properly on display and effectively being worked out, it “causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” It is true that the body may have grown through the preaching of a female from the pulpit, but it cannot be said that it was “for the edifying of itself in love.”

Adherence to God’s word is a demonstration of love. Failure to adhere to it is a demonstration of selfish intent. That selfish intent is more harmful than one might at first realize. As an example, should a man come to the Lord through the preaching of a woman, and later he realizes that his conversion was based on another’s disobedience, true harm actually results in several ways which can be easily thought through. Thus, rather than edification, there is confusion; rather than love, there is bitterness.

There can be no true “holding fast to the Head” in disobedience. It is also lacking when someone neglects to exercise the gifts which they have been given.

Life application: There can be no true love in an action which is willfully disobedient to God’s word because God’s word is an extension of who God is. Jesus explained this in John 14:15 – “If you love Me, keep my commandments.” Keeping the commands of the Lord, in proper context, demonstrates love for the Lord. Let us put aside both laziness and pride and strive to be obedient to the word. This is showing love for Him.

Lord God Almighty, You have given us Your word as the rule and guide for the conduct of our lives. In obedience to Your word, we demonstrate love for You. When we are disobedient to it, the opposite is true – we demonstrate contempt for who You are. Help us to express our love for You by honoring You through the word You have given us. Let us not have pride or laziness step in and sever our loving connection to You. Give us this so that we will always be honoring of Your glory. Amen.

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, Ephesians 4:17

In verses 4:1-3, Paul began a practical application for our Christian walk. That was then laid aside for the next 13 verses as he moved into a doctrinal analysis of the unity of the various parts which make up the church. With that complete, he now reverts back to his practical application of what our spiritual walk should entail.

“This I say, therefore” is stated as a summary thought concerning that doctrinal analysis of the previous 13 verses. The structure is:

- 1) Walk this way (verses 1-3)
- 2) Message of unity of the various parts (verses 4-16)
- 3) Based upon verses 4-16, you now know the reason that you should walk this way.

To bolster his proclamation, he next says, “and testify in the Lord.” He is speaking as the Apostle to the Gentiles with the authority of the Lord Jesus. He is “in the Lord” in a unique position which allows him to speak with authority concerning these now-saved Gentile believers.

All of this is for the practical application of their life-walk based upon the inserted comments in verses 4-16. Those words were given to show them that they were not aliens to the covenant, but they are included in it; they were not outside the house of God, but they are a part of it; they are not servants within the family of God, but are rather sons through adoption.

Paul notes to them that because of this unity, “you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk.” They had been accepted into the family of God; they were now a part of the living temple of God; and they were members of the covenant community with full rights and benefits to be derived from this standing.

Their Christian life was to be a pilgrimage and a journey in this world. Thus, they should not be like the other Gentiles who were outside of what God is doing in the church. The others walk “in the futility of their mind.”

This “futility” will be explained in the next two verses. It is also what Paul wrote in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, starting with Romans 1:18. He also writes about it elsewhere in his epistles.

The Greek word which is translated as “futility” indicates a type of aimlessness because there is no final purpose or meaningful end. The walk of the Gentiles is a walk of nonsense because it is that of a transitory existence which ends without any hope. Paul is saying to them that in Christ, this is no longer the case.

Life application: What is a vain existence? Choose any Hollywood idol. They are handsome or beautiful; they are rich and famous; they have everything that could be desired from a worldly standpoint; and yet they have no end purpose and thus no hope.

They marry and divorce with alacrity. They drink heavily and often turn to homosexuality or some other perversion, trying to fill a void which can never be filled apart from Christ.

In Christ, we have our void filled. The things of this world no longer seem pleasing, and our walk is directed anew to the eternal. How marvelous it is to know that there is more than just a temporary walk of futility, ending in oblivion.

Marvelous, majestic, wonderful God – thank You for the hope we possess in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

...having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

Ephesians 4:18

This is a somewhat difficult verse unless the parallelism is understood. There are four separate clauses. The first and the third are connected as are the second and the fourth—

1st- having their understanding darkened

3rd- because of the ignorance that is in them

2nd- being alienated from the life of God

4th- because of the blindness of their heart

The words are speaking of “the rest of the Gentiles” of the previous verse. There is an ignorance of God which is found in the unregenerate man. This is especially so because as the ages have passed, man has lost more and more of the knowledge of God which was originally known. There was a time when a Messiah was anticipated. As the nations spread out, that knowledge was replaced with other forms of worship which were based on works rather than the anticipation of One who would restore all things.

Eventually, their understanding became darkened “because of the ignorance that is in them.” They could no longer perceive any of the things of God. If one understands that God has a plan, then they will, at least in part, trust that the plan is being worked out. However, if life is just a thing which we must suffer through, and if God is “out there” but not working a good end for all things, then the understanding becomes more and more darkened.

Every possible religious expression will come about as people make stuff up in order to satisfy the empty void of the thought of a life without hope. Muslims made up a system of submission which supposedly offers a free ticket to paradise and 72 awaiting perpetual virgins for any who die in the cause of their god. Hindus made up a system of reincarnation, and the worship of 340 million different gods. The list goes on and on. The true knowledge of God is darkened from their understanding because of the ignorance that is in them.

As a result of this, they are “alienated from the life of God... because of the blindness of their heart.” The term, “the life of God” is unique in the Bible, but it is based on the truth of Jesus Christ – a thought which permeates Scripture. In John 1:4, “the life of God” is revealed –

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

It is the promise of the Messiah that kept the ancients directed toward the life of God. They had hope in the fact that God was working out a plan. They trusted that God was just, fair, and righteous. In this, they understood that He would do the right thing. Their faith in what was coming kept them in His favor.

Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews shows us this. People from both inside the covenant line and from without, such as Rahab the harlot, understood that God had a plan. They trusted it and were deemed faithful; their hearts were not blinded to this “life of God.”

However, there were those who were, and are, alienated from it. Their hearts are blinded through a lack of knowledge. In this lack of knowledge, they cannot exercise faith in God. This is the state of those who simply live out their existence, making stuff up or following made up stuff, and perishing apart from God. It is a life of death leading to death. Paul will explain the result of such a life.

Life application: The words here follow along very well with the words of Romans 1, especially starting in verse 18. Take time to read these two passages side by side and think on how perfectly they reflect the sentiments of the people of the world. The Bible is God’s “instruction manual for mankind.” As this is so, it should perfectly reflect the world around us... and it does. Pay heed! God is speaking to us so that we can learn. In that learning, we can then have knowledge to hopefully pull others out of the blinded, hardened life in which they exist.

Lord God, Your word reveals to us the state of man and the reason we act the way we do. It explains why the perversion which surrounds us is growing almost exponentially. It also explains why the truth that You have revealed to us is becoming more and more despised by those who are caught up in this perverse cycle. Help us to be faithful to You and to Your word as we face greater and greater enmity from the world around us. It may not be long before our faith in You is tested in a terrifying way. Give us strength to endure the challenges set before us. Help us to be faithful to You through whatever comes. Amen.

...who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. Ephesians 4:19

As we analyze this verse, think of the world in which we live. Think of those who it describes and the position they hold within our society. They will be analyzed at the end in relation to the verse.

The “who” of this verse is giving a description of “the rest of the Gentiles” of verse 17 who had been alienated from God and blinded in verse 18. Paul now describes what state those actions result in. He says they, “being past feeling,” have come to a state of perversion which is the normal result of life without God.

The single word, from which “being past feeling” derives, indicates the cessation of feeling pain. It is only used here in the New Testament, and it is being used to express a sense of having no shame or empathy at all. The person simply ceases to care about anything morally upright.

Paul also says they “have given themselves over to lewdness.” The word translated as “have given themselves over” is used when speaking of Christ giving Himself up for the world. It is also the same word used in Romans 1:24 which speaks of God giving the reprobate up to uncleanness. When a person gives himself up to evil, then their Creator gives them over to the power of evil. It is a synergistic occurrence. There is a complete surrender on one part, and thus there is a complete letting go on the other.

This giving over is to “lewdness.” The Greek is a word which indicates “*violent spite which rejects restraint* and indulges in lawless insolence (wanton caprice)” HELPS Word Studies. Anything perverse and disgusting is pursued with reckless abandon. In this attitude, it becomes evident that any who do not follow their path would then be considered outside of what is now normal. Their lawlessness becomes the standard of law.

Paul next says that these people are set “to work all uncleanness with greediness.” The word for “work” here indicates a trade or a business. The immoral working of these people actually stands as their life’s work and goal. Just as a carpenter works in carpentry as his life’s means of expression, the immorality of these people stands for the very expression of who they are. It is as if they wake up in the morning and put on “uncleanness with greediness.”

The “uncleanness” stated here speaks of ritual impurity. When a person is in this state, they are unacceptable to bring offerings to God. They have become defiled and outcasts from anything sacred. It is as if they have an open and running infection, or they have been in direct contact with a corpse – the highest penalty for sin being death – and thus they are utterly defiled.

The word for “greediness” is commonly translated as “covetous.” They have and they want more. They grasp after uncleanness as if it is a treasure to be found and put on display. The NKJV says “with greediness,” but in Greek it is *en* (in) greediness. It is their very state of mind to act wickedly and to hunger after more wickedness.

It should be noticed in this verse that it doesn’t say they have become stupid, as if their blindness has destroyed their intellectual capacity to reason. Rather, he focuses on the moral degradation which their state leads to. This is the most dangerous place of all. They have the intellectual ability to think, but they do not use it for reason. Instead, they use it for that which is wholly perverse, and which stands in opposition to God.

Having looked at the substance of the words, and having been asked to evaluate who these words describe, have any examples come to mind? It is as obvious as it could be in today’s world that those on the left, the so-called “progressives,” are being minutely described. They wantonly seek after the destruction of human life through abortion, and yet they are past feeling with regard to the murder of that life. It becomes a sensation to count the dead and then to add more to the list.

They promote every sexual vice known to man, and they force it on everyone around them. That which is wholly vile and vulgar is that which they proclaim as morally just. In so doing, they make those who follow the proper moral path to be outlaws. If their stand is argued against, they use the political and judicial process to silence their opponents.

They work their iniquity as if drinking in water, and they spew out their vile behavior in open sight of the world through movies, public displays of sensuality, and even through

the use of the news media. Impurity is their state of mind, and they are wholly unclean to God. And yet they continue down their path of vile behavior, being self-condemned and yet reveling in this path to perdition.

A more fitting description of those on the left could not be found anywhere in the world today, and yet Paul wrote about them over 2000 years ago. The ways and paths of man are seen at all times in those who reject God and who pursue this aberrant course of moral perversity to its logical end.

Life application: The closer you associate yourself with the “progressives” of the world, the more wicked and unclean you will become. Tying oneself into their path ultimately results in a tie which becomes harder and harder to sever. Think carefully on who you support for one reason or another, and rather look at their overall agenda. Do you stand with God? Then stand apart from those who are wholly opposed to Him.

Lord God, Your word tells us that when we are separate from You, we follow a natural course of all that which is opposed to You. Respect for human life is lost; wanton immorality increases; moral perversion becomes acceptable, and those who oppose it become the perceived “lawbreakers” of the world. Isn’t that where we are in society now? Help us to cast off these unclean and despicable leaders and to restore righteousness, before it is too late. Help us to make the right, godly, and moral stand against the perverse. Give us the intestinal fortitude to stand up and say, “No more!” to these agents of wickedness. To Your glory alone, help us to live out our days in godliness. Amen.

But you have not so learned Christ, Ephesians 4:20

The sentence begins with an emphatic “But...” as Paul contrasts his readers to the darkened minds of the Gentiles. He is making an adamant statement concerning those who are born again. The words “learned Christ” are unique in the Bible, but they correspond to the idea of Christ being preached and taught.

Through the message of Christ, we learn of His Person, His work, the scope of His work, the nature of His many offices, etc. Thus, it is not merely the doctrine of Christ, but rather the fact that He is the subject of His own message. We have learned of Him through the message of Him.

Because of this, we are not darkened in our minds, and we are not set on a path of futility leading to debauchery. In this we see that the term “Christ” is referring to the

office which is held. Whereas “Jesus” in the next verse is speaking of the office holder. The Gentiles walk in futility because they are without an understanding of the office which Christ fills.

What Paul is doing is taking the words of verses 9 through 16 and contrasting them to verses 17-19. The offices of verse 11 are given to teach us of Christ and how to conduct ourselves in Him. We are to avoid the state which he describes in verse 14, that of being “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”

Such an existence in Christ would be comparable to the darkness which still exists in the walk of the Gentiles. We have not so learned Christ. Instead, we are to be sound in our theology; mature and perfect in our doctrine.

Life application: Paul, under inspiration of the Spirit, has shown us that our Christian walk is to be one which is completely contrasted to that of the world in which we walk. We are not to conform to the world and thus be ineffective in our presentation of Christ. If we are like the world, then there is no difference between us and them, and thus there is nothing to emulate.

Lord God, help us to be sound, faithful followers of Your word. If we conform ourselves to the world in which we live, then we have nothing distinctive to offer to those who are without Christ and who are lost. Grant us wisdom to conduct our walk in this world in a manner which will cause others to desire something different; something better. Help us to act out the gospel as well as to speak it out. There is hope in Jesus! Let us be willing to demonstrate this in lives of holiness which are dedicated to You. Amen.

...if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:
Ephesians 4:21

This verse is to be taken together with the previous verse –

“But you have not so learned Christ,²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:”

There is a strong connection being made between “Christ” and “Jesus” in these verses. Paul is indicating that there is the true Christ and there are false presentations of Christ. He notes that true believers haven’t learned Christ in a way that leads to the lewdness and ungodliness of the previous verses “if indeed you have heard Him.”

There is an emphasis on “Him” as if it should read, “if indeed you have heard He Himself.” In other words, “If it was the true Christ whom you heeded, then you have learned a way other than that which I just described.”

To further bolster this, he goes on by saying, “and have been taught by Him.” It is rather to be translated as, “and have been taught in (Greek: *en*) Him.” If one is in Christ and is taught in the teachings of Christ by those designated in verse 11, then they will not walk in the vile way of the unregenerate. Instead, they will fit the description of those who are properly trained in accord with the words of verses 12-16.

Paul is carefully and methodically establishing what is right and appropriate for Christians in the conduct of their lives, and also that which is unacceptable. We learn the proper spiritual understanding of what it means to be in Christ “as the truth is in Jesus.”

Paul now moves from the title and position (Christ) to the Person (Jesus) who fulfilled and continues to fulfill the role of the title and position. Jesus claimed in John 14:6 that He is the Truth. It is through studying the life that He lived as recorded in the gospels that we come to understand the true Christ.

Further, it is through an explanation of that same life of Jesus that we understand the nature of what His life meant, as well as the significance of His on-going work. This same use of “Christ” and “Jesus” to show the complement between the office and the One who fulfilled and fills the office is found elsewhere in the New Testament. One excellent example is given by Paul in Romans 8:11 –

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

The Spirit of Jesus is the Man raised from the dead and who dwells in us; the position of Christ was raised from the dead and is the same authority who will also give us life.

The two concepts, Christ the Man and Jesus the Man, must be taken together. A “Christ” who is not Jesus is a false Christ. The role of “Christ” which does not adhere to the life of Jesus is a false presentation of Christ. The doctrine which we follow of “Christ” must be the same doctrine which is presented in Jesus, or we are following a false Christ.

Life application: The only way to know if we are pursuing the true Christ is to pursue Him as revealed in the Person and work of Jesus who is the Christ and the only true Christ. And yet, we rise early and find a thousand reasons to not read and study the Bible. Let us not make this catastrophic mistake, but let us be wise and diligent in our study of Christ Jesus.

Great and awesome God! How wonderful it is to know that You have given us all we need in order to be saved, and then to live out that salvation in a right, proper, and holy manner. All we need to do is look to the life of Jesus, as is recorded in Scripture, in order to see who fulfilled the work of Christ and who continues to fulfill that most sacred position even now. There is one Lord, and He has come to lead us back to You. Give us wisdom to pursue Him now, while He may be found. Give us wisdom to emulate Him with all the zeal we can muster! Amen.

...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, Ephesians 4:22

As the truth is in Jesus, who is the Christ, Paul now exhorts the Ephesians (and thus us) to that which is right. He instructs “that you put off, concerning your former conduct...” This refers to all of the things that preceded their calling on Christ which he described of the “rest of the Gentiles” in verses 17-19. They once walked in such futility and now they have been called by Christ, who is Jesus the Man, to step away from “the old man.”

This “old man” is the former walk. It is that which is opposed to the new calling in Christ. Logically, if we had to be called out of that life, then it is incumbent on us to remain out of it. It would be contradictory to be called out of something if it were ok to return to it. If someone were unknowingly swimming in a poisoned lake, and if they were then called to come out of that lake in order to live, it would make no sense to again say, “I’m going for a swim in the lake today.” Unfortunately, Christians far too often decide to return to the poisoned lake, time and time again.

But Paul exhorts us to realize that this “old man” is “that which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” There can be no health in returning to that which grows corrupt. Instead, there can only be further corruption. These “deceitful lusts” are explained by verse 19 as lewdness and the working of all uncleanness and greediness.

The words “which grows corrupt” are passive, and therefore they mark “the progressive condition of corruption which characterizes ‘the old man’” (Vincent’s Word Studies). The old man is set in corruption because this is its very nature. It bears a process of

degradation which can never become Christ-like. This is because it is according to (as the Greek properly reads), “lusts of deceit.” It is as if Paul personifies “deceit.” If one follows the old man, they follow Deceit. If one puts off the old man, they can then properly follow Christ.

Life application: The Bible stands as a warning sign by the great ocean of corruption – “Do not swim in these waters!” How is it then that we constantly feel the need to return and plunge into that which can only corrupt us? Let us endeavor to fix our eyes on Jesus and pursue life and health which is found in Him alone.

Lord God, You have given us a great and marvelous warning sign in the pages of the Bible. “Do not return to the old man, but be renewed in Christ.” And yet, like a ragged garment which is filled with a corrupting mold, we put on the old man, and we pursue Deceit wherever he leads. Help us to not follow this path, O God. Instead, keep us from being tempted by that which can only lead to sin’s degradation. Remind us to fix our eyes on Jesus where there is health, prosperity, blessing, and life everlasting. Amen.

...and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, Ephesians 4:23

This is an exhortation from Paul, and thus “the spirit of your mind” is not speaking of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, those translations which capitalize “Spirit” here are incorrect. Man is not ever considered the subject of the Holy Spirit. The times when the Holy Spirit is mentioned, the subject is in relation to God and His redemptive work.

Understanding this, he exhorts the reader to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” HELPS Word Studies defines the word translated as “be renewed” (which is found only here in the New Testament) as to “make new in relation to time.” They note that “believers are reminded of God's continuous offer to bring new strides in their sanctification through ‘sanctified reasoning’ – raising the meaning *up to new levels of spiritual comprehension and reality.*”

This sanctifying renewal of the mind is something that we must work at. People who look to the Holy Spirit as the sole means of sanctification in this manner have misunderstood what it means to be a sound follower of Christ. We do not get an external injection of holiness as we walk in this life. Rather we are to actively pursue it through our own moral activity. The spirit referred to is “the higher life-principle in man by which the human reason, viewed on its moral side - the organ of moral thinking and knowing is informed” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

So how do we do what is necessary to be renewed in this way? Where does the knowledge for what we are to do come from? Obviously, it is from a study of Scripture. It was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our benefit. In other words, though we actively are to be renewed in this manner, it is the Spirit of God who passively participates in this process.

Again, Christians err when they believe that all they need to do is snap their fingers and all of the benefits of the Holy Spirit will pour down upon them. Hence, we have weak churches filled with weak Christians because study of the word is relegated to an afterthought instead of being our chief means of doing exactly what we are instructed to do.

Life application: Mature Christians will look for sound preachers and teachers to instruct them in the words of Scripture, and they will supplement what they have learned through their own studies in the word. In doing so, they will have the right moral compass by which they can effectively renew the spirit of their mind.

Lord God, You ask us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. Without a detailed and continuous study of Your word, that isn't going to happen. And so, give us the desire to pursue You through this marvelous gift which You have given to us. Forgive us for neglecting the means by which You have made this renewing possible. Now, spur us on to get into the word, study it, and apply it to every facet of our lives. With this You will surely be pleased. Amen.

...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:24

In verse 22, we were told to put off the old man. If we do this, something must logically replace it. As he has just asked us to be “renewed in the spirit of your mind,” Paul now bolsters that thought with, “...and that you put on the new man.” In stating “the new man,” he is referring to being conformed to the image of Christ.

The “old man” is the Adam in us with all of his weaknesses, failings, and corruption. The “new man” is Christ in us, anticipating that which still lies ahead, but which we can emulate even now. Paul refers to the contrast between these two in 1 Corinthians 15:46-49 –

“However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

⁴⁷ The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from

heaven. ⁴⁸ *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.* ⁴⁹ *And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man."*

Although Paul speaks of this as future, that only means in the fullest sense. When we come to Christ, we move positionally to Christ. This is seen, for example, in Galatians 3:27 as well as in other passages from Paul's hand. As we move in position from Adam to Christ, we are instructed to live now as if it is already fully realized.

This "new man" is plainly stated next as being "according to God." Adam was created by God, but Adam disobeyed Him. In his disobedience, he was immediately spiritually disconnected from God (he spiritually died). He further was condemned to die physically; he took on the nature of corruption leading to death. Christ, in contrast, was perfectly obedient to His Father. In His obedience, His life was lived "according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." This is what we are asked to emulate now.

We have put on Christ and thus we are to live according to how Christ lived. This new life that we are to live will be further explained in the verses ahead. We are not just given an exhortation without explanation. Rather, we are given the overall picture of how we are to live, and then this is followed up with practical details which we can follow in order to live out our lives in a manner which is pleasing to God.

Life application: Paul's words here are exhortations for us to live in a manner which is pleasing to our Creator. But just as important for us, they are given so that we can live without further troubles in our lives. If we follow the proper path, it is obvious that we will avoid many pitfalls which could otherwise come our way. However, the only way to know this proper path is to read the map which leads us on it. Read your Bible.

Heavenly Father, You have asked us to walk on a certain path which will keep us from displeasing You, and which will also keep us from our own set of troubles and trials which are sure to come if we don't follow it. And yet, how can we know how to properly follow the path unless we read the map which guides us on it? Are we so dull as to assume that we can be pleasing to You and be kept from troubles without reading Your word and applying it to our lives? Help us to not be dull. Instead, make us wise through a constant study of Your word! Amen.

Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. Ephesians 4:25

“Therefore” is given as a summary of the previous few verses which provided the thought that “the truth is in Jesus.” Now, Paul admonishes us to (according to the Greek) “put away the lie.” Here, the abstract “the lie” is used to contrast truth which is found in Jesus. If we are in Christ, we are to emulate Him. The lie is incompatible with truth and therefore we are to put it away.

Instead, we are instructed to “*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor.*” The term neighbor is referring to believers as is revealed in the next words, “for we are members of one another.” However, despite referring specifically to believers, lying is to be completely removed from our lives.

We are to deal in truth at all times and avoid any hint of dishonesty. Jesus shows us in John 8:44 that lying is of the devil. We are to have no part of his wicked way, but are to fully and faithfully put on Christ and emulate Him.

Concerning the specific context of lying mentioned by Paul here, that of lying to members of the one body, it would be contrary for a hand to lie to the other hand. If a task needed to be accomplished with two hands, one of them would need the help of the other. But if the left lied to the right, the job could never get finished.

If the eye saw a shoe waiting to be put on a foot, but told the foot that it didn’t see the shoe, then the foot would never receive its shoe and the happy time at the restaurant would be missed by the whole body. In other words, the body of believers is an interconnected whole. It is contrary to the aims of the body for one part of it to lie to another.

Life application: When a lie enters between two people, a bond of trust is ended. It is extremely hard to repair such a rift because a lie is so personal. If a person cannot be trusted with the truth, there is no basis for any true relationship at all. There will normally only be distrust from that point on. Healing such a rift can take an extremely long time, or it may never come about at all. Let us be careful to be honest in our dealings with others at all times.

Heavenly Father, Your word asks us to put away lying and to always speak the truth. How difficult it is when we have been lied to. A bond of trust is broken, and the rift is a hard one to heal. When lying becomes our nature, no trust at all can ever come about. This is the devil’s joy, but it is a point of sorrow for the offended. And so, help us to reside in truth as a dwelling place, and to speak the truth as our new nature in Christ demands. And, Lord, be there reminding us of this in our consciences always. Amen.

“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, Ephesians 4:26

Paul now reaches back to the psalms for a necessary thought concerning his discourse. This is a citation from the Greek translation of Psalm 4:4. Here he uses two different words to describe the emotions. The first is “angry” and conveys the sense of showing “settled opposition.”

It “is *positive* when *inspired by God* – and always *negative* when arising from the *flesh*” (HELPS Word Studies). The second is “wrath,” and it conveys the sense of “irritation (exasperation, bitterness) which is provoked, i.e. by someone causing a personal (‘up-close’) sense of anger” (HELPS Word Studies).

Paul says that we are to in fact be angry when it is right and proper to be angry. If we have a godly anger towards something, we are showing a correct attitude, not a negative one. Our anger at the sinful nature is not only anticipated, but it is expected and approved of. It is not sinful to be filled with righteous indignation. However, in our anger we are told “do not sin.” We should not let our anger at the sinfulness of another cause us to sin.

A good example of this is that we are to be angered at the vile conduct of those who oppose God through such things as the support of abortion. As this is a tenet expressly stated, for example, in the platform of the Democrat party of the US, we are to be angry at all democrats for supporting the murder of the unborn. And yet, we are not to allow our anger at them to turn into sin through violence or vulgarity.

Paul then tells us to “not let the sun go down on your wrath.” As noted, this indicates irritation which is provoked. When we allow ourselves to become exasperated to the point where it consumes us, we lose our direction and our focus. Instead of thinking on the things of God, we think on the things of the fallen world. If we continue in this state, it will eventually push out everything else. And so, in order to keep that from happening, we are to put our irritation aside and not dwell on it.

Paul uses a known custom of the times to demonstrate how to do this. The Pythagoreans bound themselves to find reconciliation to their differences before the sun set. They would shake hands, or find some other token which would bring about peace. Thus, the bitterness that could well up in the night would be quieted before it could get out of control. This is a sentiment not unlike the second half of Psalm 4:4 –

“Be angry, and do not sin.

Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah”

In meditating on what is good, pleasing, holy, and pure, the things which caused us to get riled up will fade away.

Life application: Carrying around bitterness for an extended period of time will inevitably cause harm to the one carrying it. It may also result in physical acts which will later be regretted. The more we carry such anger, the more rash and impulsive we are likely to become.

Lord God, help us to fulfill Your word which tells us to not let the sun go down on our wrath. Surely carrying around bitter thoughts of those who offend us can only poison our souls. And more, this could cause us to do something which You would regard as sin. Let us not be so consumed in this way. Let our anger be righteous and godly, but never sinful. This is not an easy command to fulfill, so be with us at such times we pray. Amen.

...nor give place to the devil. Ephesians 4:27

The word *diabolos*, or devil, means “slanderer.” In this case, it is used with an article to indicate “The Slanderer,” or “The Devil.” He is recognized as the same as Satan, a name which Paul uses throughout his writings. The name “Satan” describes one of his methods of working evil; he is “The Accuser.” Thus, he stands accusing man before God, and he also strives to set man against man. The title, “The Devil,” describes the one who introduces enmity into man through slander.

To “give place to the devil” is to allow him to work his wickedness in one’s life. It is allowing the heart to be influenced by his evil intent. This is done through a variety of means. Paul has already addressed putting away lying, and not allowing the sun to go down on one’s wrath. If we fail to do these things, the devil will certainly seize his opportunity to enter the situation and cause trouble to arise.

He will continue with a list of things which could allow the devil to find a place in our heart. In the end, if we do something opposed to God and His word, we are allowing ourselves to be opened up to the work of the devil. In fixing our eyes on Jesus, and in contemplating the word of God day and night, we will have our hearts open to Him and shut to the devil.

Life application: The Bible acknowledges that the devil and demons are real. As this is so, we need to heed the commands and exhortations of the Bible lest we get sideswiped by these miscreants. And the only way to do this is to know what these commands and exhortations state. Read and know your Bible.

Lord God, Your word tells us that Satan is real and that he has control over a vast army of foes who stand opposed to our relationship with You. As this is true, only in knowing Your word and what it warns concerning his wicked ways can we be safe from his influence in our lives. What a tragedy it is that we have time to attend a football game where we spur on our heroes and rail against our foes, and yet we don't have time to read Your word which tells us of a much, much more important battle. Help us to get our priorities right. Help us to think clearly on this. Amen.

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Ephesians 4:28

In the Christian world, we might ask, “Why does Paul even bother with this? Isn't it an obvious thing?” The answer is that among Christians, stealing is certainly known as something which is wrong to do. And even among those who are not Christians, but who know the general precepts of the Bible, it is known that Christians look down on stealing. However, this is not a universally applied precept, even in today's world.

It is true that pretty much every society has rules against stealing, but the individual is often brought up in a culture where it is normal to take things that don't belong to them, even without a second thought. If they don't get caught, their conscience simply ignores what they have done. They have been seared to the concept of considering this as moral wrongdoing.

In the case of those in Ephesus, this was certainly the case. Paul saw this common trait of the people and he knew that they lacked the proper moral guidelines to govern their conduct. It may have been a law in the Roman Empire to not steal, but in the lesser cultures, they lived by those norms which they had always lived by. And so, Paul needed to include this thought to show them that the moral expectation of Christian living was not to steal.

And further, he goes beyond the thought of prohibiting it by giving them a positive precept to replace their prior conduct. Instead of stealing, they should instead labor. Such a person should find a way of “working with *his* hands what is good.” This sets stealing off as the opposite of good.

It is contrary to what is morally sound. And then, to further strengthen his words, he goes beyond simply doing what is good for self by supplementing the “good” of which work provides even to showing that not only should it take care of one’s personal needs, but it is proper in order “that he may have something to give him who has need.”

He has, in just one thought, gone from harming others in order to promote the welfare of self, to helping self, and to the additional plus of being able to help others. In stealing, there is actually only harm to all concerned. In working for what is good, there is the possibility of a double blessing. One can enrich himself, and he can also take care of others who are in need.

As another positive benefit of adhering to these words now, there is surely a heavenly reward awaiting those who adhere to God’s word, who are diligent in laboring honestly with their hands, and also who are willing to help those who are in need. All in all, great things can be expected, and are sure to result, from applying the precepts found in this verse.

Life application: A life without productive work is one which will lead to all kinds of troubles. The old saying, “Idle hands are the devil’s playground” is correct. If we don’t fill our time with productivity, we will fill it with that which is detrimental to ourselves and others. Therefore, let us remember the words of Moses –

“And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands.” Psalm 90:17

Heavenly Father, Your word admonishes us to not only refrain from stealing, but to go beyond that in the pursuit of working with our hands in that which is good. And this isn’t instructed to us just for our benefit, but so that we may help others with what we earn. Mold our hearts to be faithful to not steal from others; help us to pursue hard work and honesty; and instill in us the desire to be willing to share of what we earn with others who are in need. With these things, surely You will be pleased. Amen.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. Ephesians 4:29

What a difficult verse to properly and continuously apply to our lives! One cannot turn on the TV, sit in a restaurant, or do almost any other thing without being surrounded by corrupt words. And yet we are asked to, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of” our

mouths. The word for corrupt in the Greek is one which indicates that which is rotten, useless, or depraved. It is used in Matthew 7:17 to describe rotten fruit.

Our words are not to bear such corruption. Rather they are to be that which “is good for necessary edification.” This is set in complete contrast to that which is corrupt. Things that are corrupt sink into themselves. They stink, and they become weak and unable to be held together any longer. However, that which edifies is that which builds up. It provides strength and it causes things to bind together in a stronger way.

This is what we are admonished to do towards those around us. What the focus is on is not our vertical relationship with God so much as our horizontal relationship with our fellow believers and even with those who are not believers. In our speech, we are to form our words so “that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

For believers, we will keep from bringing them down, or from causing them to stumble in their walk with the Lord. For non-believers, we are to be an example of that which is right, which is honorable, and that which points to Christ. If our speech is foul and corrupt, we will only cause them to see such loathsome conversation as the norm among Christians.

Thus, there will be no truly visible distinction between us and the rest of the world. To “impart grace to the hearers” is to lead them to that doctrine which saves, meaning Christ. If our words are not in accord with the righteousness of God which is found in Christ, then our hearers will not understand how they are to also properly conduct themselves in a holy and righteous manner.

Life application: Wholesome speech is a hard thing to find in the world today. Because of this, and because we are susceptible to assimilating that which we are constantly immersed in, how easy it is for our own speech to become corrupted and just like the rest of the world. It takes real effort to not allow this to happen, but it is what we are admonished to pursue.

Lord God Almighty, our Creator and Redeemer, You have admonished us in Your word to let no corrupt words proceed out of our mouths. This is a tough precept for us to follow in this world which attacks us with a constant stream of vulgarity. We hear it on TV, we hear it at work, we hear it on the streets. It fills our ears everywhere we go. But we have been asked to not let such talk infiltrate our minds so that we then use the same vile language. Please God, keep us strong in this and help us to not allow course talking or

vulgarity to issue from us. Help us to be examples to the world of that which is holy, pure, and proper. Amen.

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

A list of negative things which we are exhorted to avoid has been given since verse 25. Along with them have been given contrasts which we should engage in. This verse is now introduced to show the effect of participating in such negative actions. And further, the negatives will continue for the next few verses. They will likewise contain positives to contrast them. In avoiding the negatives, and in acting out the positives, we will “not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”

In these words, a much fuller description of the Holy Spirit is given than is normally introduced. It more literally reads, “The Spirit, the Holy [of] the God.” It is an expression of the Personhood of the Spirit within the Godhead. This expression is further bolstered by the term “grieve.” It is a clear indication that the Spirit is not an “active force” as is claimed by the heretical Jehovah’s Witnesses. Rather, it indicates Personhood. An “active force” cannot be grieved.

Understanding this, it is still to be noted that the Spirit of God cannot actually be grieved by our actions. Instead, the words are used to show the type of grieving that a friend would endure if they were negatively violated by our actions; the kind of behavior which would cause such grief. Paul is saying that we are not to act in a manner which would cause a close and beloved friend to be grieved by what we do.

Immediately following up these words, Paul next says of “the Spirit, the Holy [of] the God,” that it is He “by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” The Spirit is the Seal of our guarantee of redemption. This is more fully explained in Ephesians 1:13, 14 –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

These words of Paul once again show us that salvation is an eternal decree of God. As noted in Ephesians 1, if God seals us with His Holy Spirit as a guarantee, and if we can lose that, then –

- 1) It was not a very good guarantee.
- 2) It is of our effort and not of God that we are saved.
- 3) God made a mistake in sealing us with His “guarantee.”

As none of these are possible, then our salvation, at the moment we believe and are sealed with the Spirit, is a done deal. Though attacked often as a false doctrine, the terms “eternal salvation,” or “once saved always saved” are biblically supportable and correct.

The teaching of the possibility that one can “lose” his salvation is discrediting of the work of Christ, exalting of one’s own efforts in the place of what God has done, and it calls into question the very integrity of the work of all three members of the Godhead. It is unclear thinking, contrary to the words of Scripture, and is to be ignored and refuted by those who trust that God is fully capable of saving us, and keep on saving us, despite ourselves.

Life application: If you are saved, you are saved.

Lord God, it is so very marvelous to know that our salvation through belief in the work of Christ is guaranteed, and that it is not up to us to “keep on being saved.” Christ did the work, the Father agreed to the faith exercised in the work, and the Spirit has sealed us for the day of redemption. Are we more capable of saving ourselves than You? Rather, You are fully able to save and to keep on saving Your wayward children. Help us to commit our souls to You knowing that You are able to keep what we have committed to You until that Day. Amen.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. Ephesians 4:31

Paul has just stated that we are to “not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” This list is certainly given to include those things which would cause this to occur. He is admonishing us that these things will keep us from being filled with the Spirit. Instead, they are an indication of walking in a carnal way which is opposed to a Spirit-led life. The list will go on into the next chapter as well.

He begins with “bitterness.” The word “bitterness” is a good translation of the Greek. It indicates having an embittered or resentful spirit. We are to avoid this and to instead let go of those things which well up and poison our inner selves.

“Wrath” is a word which signifies “getting heated up” or “breathing violently.” It is a “passion-driven behavior, i.e. actions emerging out of strong impulses (intense emotion)” (HELPS Word Studies).

“Anger” comes from a word indicating “to swell.” It “proceeds from an internal *disposition* which *steadfastly* opposes someone, or something based on extended personal exposure, i.e. solidifying what the beholder considers *wrong* (unjust, evil)” (HELPS Word Studies).

“Clamor” signifies loud wailing which is exhibited with great emotion; screaming or shrieking. It would even go to wailing in non-human sounds as if possessed by a demon. Just imagine the crazy person at Walmart who yells incoherently at the checkout counter because there aren’t three candy bars of the same type on hand.

“Evil speaking” is the Greek word *blasphémia*. It indicates abusive language, and thus blasphemy. It “‘switches’ right for wrong (wrong for right), i.e. calls what God *disapproves*, ‘right’ which ‘exchanges the truth of God for a lie’” (HELPS Word Studies).

Paul notes that these things are to “be put away.” We are to not act in such a manner as described by these malignant attitudes. And further, he says that includes “all malice.” In other words, “malice” describes the underlying attitude of evil. It is inherent evil which is present, even if it is not seen in an outward expression. Those evil things which we harbor, even inside, need to be quenched as we walk in newness of life in the Spirit.

Life application: Imagine that someone is filming you as you have a violent outburst described in the above words. How would you feel if it was presented to the world? The Lord is there, seeing all we do. And therefore, how much more should we not want to act in such inappropriate ways.

Lord God, Your word asks us to refrain from outward demonstrations of vulgarity and outlandish displays of anger, wrath, and bitterness. We are implored instead to walk in newness of life in the Spirit, and to be pleasing representatives of You at all times. Help us to keep our fits of rage quenched, and to rely on Your calming Spirit always. May we never act in a way which would bring discredit on the title “Christian” that we bear. Help us in this, O Lord. Amen.

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

Q: How did Christ forgive you? Think about that and this will be addressed as we go on.

In this verse, Paul contrasts the words of the previous verse. Instead of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, we are to be –

- 1) Kind to one another. The Greek word translated as “kind” “describes what *God* defines is *kind* – and therefore also *eternally* useful! ‘We have no adjective in English that conveys this blend of being *kind and good* at the same time’ (M. Vincent).”
- 2) Tenderhearted. The word is used only twice in the NT, here and in 1 Peter 3:8. It is a combination of the words “good” and “guts.” The visceral organs were considered the seat of emotions, and so the guts are used as our modern term “heart” is used.
- 3) Forgiving one another (qualified by “even as God in Christ forgave you.”) To be forgiving is to overlook that which offends, setting it aside and not picking it back up again. When an offense occurs, how we deal with it will define how Christ-like we ourselves are becoming.

The question above now needs to be addressed, because it is a part of the words which Paul has given us for the rule and guide of our lives. And so, “How did Christ forgive you?” There are several aspects which scholars focus on. Each of them is correct and should be applied in our forgiveness.

- 1) Forgiveness should be unmerited. If someone comes to you and asks pardon, you should be willing to give it without strings attached. God forgave us in Christ without any strings attached. He simply cancelled our sin debt.
- 2) Forgiveness should be complete. If someone comes to you and asks pardon, you are to completely forgive them of their offenses. In Christ, God has forgiven every sin without exception.
- 3) Forgiveness is to be permanent. When pardon of an offense is requested, it is to be forgiven and forgotten. It is not to be taken up again at a convenient time in order to require more of the person. It is to be pushed out of the mind and forgotten.

Having said these things, this verse is one of the most abused verses in Scripture by those who want to lord the precept of forgiveness over others. There is a common element to each of the three points mentioned concerning forgiveness (and any others that may be considered) which is almost always overlooked. John Gill makes the immense mistake of stating the following in his analysis of this verse –

“...that is, fully and freely, and from their hearts; and so as to forget the offences, and not to upbraid them with them hereafter; yea, they should forgive them before they repent, and without asking for it, and that for Christ's sake...” John Gill

The question is, “How did Christ forgive you?” The answer is, “I asked Him to forgive me, and I was forgiven.” There is an action following an action. And yet, people overlook the obvious and state that we must forgive everyone, unconditionally, and at all times, and even before they acknowledge their offense. This is not how God forgave us in Christ. To state that it is leads to the heresy of universalism. God forgives all sin *potentially*; He does not forgive all sin *actually*. Only when one comes to Him through Christ are sins then forgiven.

There is not a blanket waiver of all sins which has been unconditionally handed out to humanity. Rather, there is a blanket waiver which must be received by the offender. Never let any person tell you that you must forgive everyone without conditions because it is what Christ has done. That is absolute heresy.

When someone who offends you comes and asks for pardon, you are to pardon them. But until they come to you for pardon, they cannot actually be forgiven; only potentially. Get your boxes right and don't be a Christian “punching bag” for the depraved of the world to beat upon you at will.

Life application: Forgive others as Christ has forgiven you. To understand what this means, re-read the comments above.

Lord God, thank You for the forgiveness which is found in Christ Jesus my Lord. It is unmerited, complete, and permanent, and it came by a simple act of free-will when I realized I was an offender against You. In my confession, You have freely and fully forgiven me. Now give me the desire to tell others about Your goodness. May all understand that Your forgiveness is not unconditional, but it is already available. By a simple acceptance that Christ died for us, any and all can be saved. What a great God! What a marvelous offer. Thank You for the forgiveness which is found in Christ Jesus my Lord! Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. Ephesians 5:1

“Therefore” is given for us to consider what has been said and then to apply it to what will be said. Paul spoke about learning of Christ in verse 4:20. That led into the appropriate walk for believers. A description of how to conduct that walk was then broken down for us in verses 25-32.

In those verses, we are instructed in how to walk properly and thus to be sound in our learning of Christ. The verses ended with, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

With that final thought, we are then told, “Therefore be imitators of God.” In doing the things which were described, we are imitating God. Those final words of “forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” were explained in detail. It was noted that our forgiveness is to be universally available, but not necessarily universally applied.

We are not required to forgive those who do not repent of their conduct toward us, just as God does not forgive those who do not come to Him through Christ. The forgiveness is potentially unconditional, but it is not actual until it is requested.

To prove this, we can go just a couple verses down in Chapter 5 where Paul will say –

“For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

A person who has no “inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God,” and upon whom “the wrath of God comes,” is obviously not forgiven. And so, in order to be imitators of God, we are to hold to that which is good, refrain from that which is evil, and to forgive openly and freely, but not unwisely. In so doing, we will be “as dear children.”

A child who is dear is a child who emulates his parents in the ways they instruct. He further emulates his parents after seeing the way they behave. If we openly “forgive” someone who is violently opposed to the Christian message, who is a fornicator, an unclean person, a covetous man, or an idolater, without them first being willing to come to Christ and turn from those things, then we are not emulating our Father in heaven.

We are, instead, condoning their lifestyle, and thus actually working against His intent and purpose for these people.

However, this is what modern churchianity has come to. Doors are swung wide open to those who practice such things, and there is no hint of condemning the conduct in which they are engaged. Supposed blanket forgiveness of sin is handed out, and the example of God, which is given to us in Christ, is ignored.

Life application: When we are asked to be imitators of God, it does not mean that we are to only assume what others might consider the “positive” aspects He possesses, but all of His attributes. We are to have a moral sense of righteousness, justice, intolerance towards sin, and the like. If we fail in this regard, we are not upholding the words of Scripture, and we are not glorifying our Father who is in heaven.

Lord God, Your word asks us to be imitators of You. This means that we are to be loving, forgiving, and kind to others, but it also means that we are to be morally grounded. We are to emulate Your righteousness, Your justice, and to be intolerant towards sin and moral perversion. When we fail to uphold Your moral purity, we are not honoring You at all. Rather, we are bringing shame upon Your great name. Help us to never waffle in our moral convictions, but to stand against everything aberrant and perverse. In this, we are as dear children, emulating our perfectly moral heavenly Father. Yes, help us in this. Amen.

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Ephesians 5:2

In order to be imitators of God, as the previous verse demands, we are to walk in holiness and to accomplish those things which were given to us to heed in the previous chapter. But in addition to that, we are to “walk in love.” Love is the tie which binds all of those other aspects of our walk together. This is seen in Jesus’ words of John 13:34, 35 –

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

But this love is defined in a special way by Paul now with the words, “as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us.” Jesus didn’t just command us to love, but to do so

with a type of love which is self-sacrificing. He made this known to us explicitly in John 15:12, 13 –

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

We are to follow in His self-sacrificing love. This does not mean that we all have to literally die for our friends, but that our sacrifices are such that we would be willing to die for them. In Christ’s death, Paul next brings in the Old Testament system of sacrifices and offerings to show us that what was in the Old only prefigured the greater and more perfect work of Christ. He says that Christ gave Himself for us “as an offering and a sacrifice to God.”

The offering was His life, lived under the law and in fulfillment of the law, which was given to God on our behalf. He fulfilled the law perfectly and completely without ever failing in any precept. The sacrifice was then His death in satisfaction of the law. This is referred to in Hebrews. Chapter 10 of Hebrews explains it quite well –

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.

⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin
You had no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.’” Hebrews 10:5-7

The sacrifices and offerings of the Old Testament were mandated under the law, and yet they are not what the Lord desired. Instead, they only pointed to the life of Christ. This is seen in the words, “a body you have prepared for Me.”

These words of Hebrews 10 were written by David in Psalm 40:6-8, and they show us that David understood the temporary, transitory, and prophetic nature of the law’s sacrificial system. In Christ, they find their fulfillment. In His death then, there is “a sweet-smelling aroma.”

This term goes back to the sacrificial system which is detailed in the Old Testament, especially in Exodus and Leviticus. When a sacrifice was made as a burnt offering or a sin

offering, the portion that was burnt on the altar before the Lord was deemed as “a sweet-smelling aroma.”

These offerings were given in anticipation of the cross of Christ. It was His cross which is the true and complete “sweet smelling aroma” to God. Through Him, full and complete restoration to God is made for the people of the world. Through His cross, we are made acceptable to God once again.

This perfect offering is what we are to emulate. As Christ walked, so are we to walk. And His perfect sacrifice, based on His perfect life, is what we are also to emulate. In our walk, we are to be willing to offer ourselves to God and in the service of others in love.

Life application: It is a very high calling to which we have been called. Are we willing to put aside our petty differences and hold our fellow Christians in high esteem as we have been asked? Are we willing to expend ourselves, serving others even as Christ served us? Let us remember these words and think on them as we interact with other believers.

Lord God Almighty, You have asked us to walk in love, as Christ also has loved us. He gave Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God. Can we honestly say that we are willing to do the same for our fellow brothers? Help us to be obedient to You in this, and to put others ahead of ourselves. Help us to be a sweet-smelling aroma to You by giving our lives as living sacrifices to You in this way. With this You will surely be pleased, and so may it be in our lives. Amen.

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; Ephesians 5:3

The verse begins with “But...” as a contrast to being imitators of God, walking in holiness, and being an acceptable offering and sacrifice to God. In contrast to those things, we are warned against “fornication and all uncleanness.”

Fornication is sexual intimacy which is outside of the bonds of marriage. This is connected to “all uncleanness.” It is a general reference to life’s impurities, and anything that a man could pursue which would otherwise defile himself. Such things are to be considered in the same light as fornication.

Along with that, he includes the words, “or covetousness.” In using “or” instead of “and” he places “covetousness” in a distinct class, and yet it is closely associated with

fornication and uncleanness. Covetousness indicates a desire for more and more. It demonstrates eyes that are never satisfied with what they have, and an attitude which is insatiable towards self-gratification.

The connection between the two is obvious. Fornication and uncleanness are things we are actively participating in which defile us. They are acts of self-gratification being fulfilled, but covetousness is a state of mind for more of the same. It is the mental state that what “I am being filled with is insufficient. Therefore, I will go after more in an attempt to find satisfaction.”

Such things show that we do not place God in the center of our minds, but rather He is pushed out of them in order to make room for that which is in opposition to Him. Because of this, Paul says, “...let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for the saints.” Not only are we to abstain from such things, but we are not to even discuss them. The very mention of such things spurs inside of us sparks of desire which can quickly lead to action in an attempt to fulfill them.

Instead, we are to be thankful for what we have, praising the Lord for His grace, and edifying our fellow Christians through an acknowledgment of His hand in our lives.

Life application: The admonitions of Scripture come to us from the hands of men guided by the Holy Spirit. God created us and He knows exactly what is best for us in our lives. These admonitions, exhortations, and commands are for our benefit. We have been saved through Christ. What God would have us do are those things that a caring Father knows are best for us.

Heavenly Father, Your word is given to us for instruction and guidance, not to take away our rights, but to direct us as children who are loved and cared for. When we look at Your word as a system of rules and punishments, we fail to see the love behind the letter. But You sent Christ to take what we deserve. Now that the judgment for our sins is past, You are instructing us for our benefit. Help us to remember this, and then help us to be obedient as faithful children within Your house. Amen.

...neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. Ephesians 5:4

In the previous verse, Paul gave several negatives which Christians are to refrain from in their behavior and conduct. He continues with more negatives which are certainly tied to the “all uncleanness” of the previous verse. They are-

“Filthiness” – This Greek word is found only here in the New Testament. It indicates obscenity, indecency, or baseness. Those things in a conversation which are indecent, both in speech and in gesture are included in this.

“Foolish talking” – The Greek word *morologia*, is again unique to the New Testament. It is the combination of *moros*, (think of a moron), and *lego*, indicating speaking. Thus, it is moronic speech. It gives the sense of “speech flowing out of a *dull, sluggish* heart (mind) that *lost its edge* (grip) on reality. This is the ‘talk of fools, involving foolishness and sinning together’” (HELPS Word Studies).

After this, he mentions “course jesting.” For a third time, a unique word in the New Testament is used by Paul. It is, “From a compound of *eu* and a derivative of the base of *trope* (meaning well-turned, i.e. Ready at repartee, jocose); witticism, i.e. (in a vulgar sense) ribaldry – jesting” (Strong’s). This would thus give the sense of “polished and witty speech as the instrument of sin; refinement and versatility without the flavor of Christian grace” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

Paul, under inspiration of the Spirit, tells us that these things are “not fitting.” Our speech and actions are to be wholesome and pure, not sensual and unclean. In today’s world, where everything seen on the internet is so vulgar, and where a thousand posts a day are viewed by our eyes which are nuanced with perversion and vulgarity, it is a hard thing to distance ourselves from. And yet, it is what we are called to do.

Instead of these things, we are to rather give thanks. Jamieson-Faucett-Brown says that the word here has “a happy play on sounds in Greek, ‘eucharistia’ contrasted with ‘eutrapelia’; refined ‘jesting’ and subtle humor sometimes offend the tender feelings of grace; ‘giving of thanks’ gives that real cheerfulness of spirit to believers which the worldly try to get from ‘jesting.’”

Life application: Instead of rude, course talking, we should be speaking words of edification to one another, and of praises to God. Instead of fighting in the flesh with our mouths and actions against that which is upright and moral, we should be singing in the Spirit. Let us keep this thought at the forefront of our minds, doing our best to speak that which is wholesome, glorifying of God, and edifying of others.

Heavenly Father, our eyes are introduced to a thousand profane emails and posts a day. Vulgarity and crude innuendo are seen in a continuous stream as we interact with others on social media, and yet You ask us to not engage in such things ourselves. Help us in this endeavor. It is so easy to become what our eyes and ears have beheld. Keep us free

from this type of corruption, and help us to live and speak in holiness and with pure tongues. Help us to be edifying of others and glorifying of You. Amen.

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Ephesians 5:5

There is an emphasis here which is lacking in the translation. It says, “For knowing you recognize.” The NIV gives a good sense by saying, “For of this you can be sure.” It is at once a warning and a statement of great clarity. It is something that should be obvious on the surface to all who contemplate what will be said.

After this, we are given a direct list of personalities which concerns what will then be explained. These are fornicators, unclean people, and covetous men. The last are then explained as idolaters. The list corresponds to those just mentioned in verses 3 & 4. He first warned that such sins not even be named among us. Then he says that such people have no “inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

People who live in such a manner as described here have misplaced priorities. They look to the things of the world and not to the things of God. Until they come to God through Christ, they remain apart from His forgiveness and salvation.

Having said this, a verse such as this, when taken out of context, can be used to demonstrate a loss of salvation is possible. However, Paul will show this is not the case as he continues with his words. In a similar warning which is found in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul followed up the warning with the words, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

The actions are past tense, and they indicate the complete nature of the sanctification and justification of the individual. Although it will be stated differently here in Ephesians, the same thought carries through. Once one is saved, he remains saved. From that moment he is granted an “inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

The words here in Greek are *tou Christou kai Theou*, “the Christ and God.” There is one article applied to both “Christ” and “God” which perfectly demonstrates the oneness of the two. It is a consistent thought found throughout the New Testament that Jesus Christ is fully God. One must truly abuse Scripture to find a separation between God and Christ. They are one and the same.

Life application: Each of us has set up idols in our hearts. We have been unclean and covetous at times as well. And yet, because of applying the blood of Christ to our lives, we are now washed clean and are considered pure before God the Father. Thank God for Jesus Christ who cleanses us from all impurity!

Lord God, if we truly look at our lives, we cannot deny that we have engaged in all of the things which are opposed to Your splendor. We have coveted, we have lied, we have been unclean in our hearts and actions too. And yet, because of Your great love with which You love us, You sent Jesus to pay our sin debt. His shed blood is fully sufficient to cover our sins and to keep covering them throughout our lives. How marvelous this thought is, especially when we stumble and fall. Thank You for the power of the blood of the Lord Jesus to purify us once and for all! Amen.

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

The negatives which were set forth in the previous verses, to include those mentioned towards the end of Chapter 4, are being addressed here. Paul warns the Ephesians by saying, “Let no one deceive you with empty words.” The word “empty” gives the thought of that which is void or worthless. There is no substance behind what is spoken. In other words, the warning is that some will come forward to say that those things which have been warned against are actually ok to engage in.

As people come to Christ, there is almost inevitably a conflict which arises between their old walk and the new walk which they have chosen. Very few are immune to the tempting enticements which pull the old man back to the old ways.

There are those who have been friends for years that don’t understand the new direction which has been taken, and they work to bring their “wayward” friend back into the fold of carnal life. They will use words which are intended to convince the young and immature believer that it is ok to indulge in those things. But such arguments are “empty words.” There is no true substance behind them.

Rather, it is “because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” Paul wrote of the wrath of God in Romans 1, explaining what brings it about. The things he mentions here in Ephesians are a part of that process. It is because of participating in these things that the world is judged. And this judgment follows two distinct lines.

The first is judgment in this world through diseases, conflicts which lead to physical harm or death, and the like. The second judgment is that of being cast for all eternity away from the presence of God. The Lake of Fire is the ultimate end for all “the sons of disobedience.”

As an apostle, Paul is showing that these vain arguments are exactly that. They are empty and without any substance behind them. The warnings of Scripture, to include the apostolic warnings (which are now recorded in the Bible), are given to direct us away from that which is harmful, and which brings about the wrath of God, and toward that which is pleasing to Him.

Life application: To ignore the warnings of Scripture can only lead to a sad end. There will be trials and pains in this life, and there will be either judgment and condemnation for non-believers, or a loss of rewards for believers. Stand firm on the word, and do not be deceived by vain words which are contrary to the word of God.

Lord God, Your word is often dismissed as a book of heavy-handed rules which limit our freedom, and which are given to steal our joy. But this is the last thing which is found there. Instead of the bondage of disobedience leading to punishment and death, there is the freedom of living free from that which brings pain and condemnation. The rules in a society are given for the good of the people. How much more then is Your word given for the benefit of Your children! Thank You for the marvelous protections and safeties which Your word gives us. Amen.

Therefore do not be partakers with them. Ephesians 5:7

This is referring to all of the negatives he has introduced, both in the last chapter, and in this. “Therefore” is the conclusion which he brings in concerning those things. As a reminder, these are the negatives from the previous four verses –

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; ⁴ neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

To “be partakers with them” means to share in their behavior. To share in their behavior then means to share in the wrath which comes with it. Having said that, “the sons of disobedience” is referring to the unregenerate. Paul has made a distinction between the unsaved and the saved. Because of this, his words in no way negate the doctrine of eternal salvation. The sons of God already have their inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (see Ephesians 2:4-7). The sons of disobedience do not have this.

Thus, the wrath of God on unbelievers will be worked out in condemnation; the wrath of God towards our sin as believers will be worked out in a loss of rewards. As we have moved into the heavenlies and been seated with Christ, we are not to be partakers of unholy living, but in that which is just, righteous, and holy.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with associating with the unregenerate. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 5 that if we were to not do so, we would have to “go out of this world.” However, in associating with unbelievers, we are not to partake with them in any conduct which the Bible forbids. The only way to do this though is to know what the Bible says. Read your Bible.

Lord God, You have asked Your people to not be partakers with those who act in inappropriate ways. How can we know what is inappropriate unless we read and know Your word? Is it really that difficult for us to just pick it up, turn to the church-age epistles, and study them? Are we so busy that we don't have time to listen to Your words and respond to them? Help us in this Lord! We are so easily drawn away from that which is important. Instill in our hearts the desire to be obedient through reading and applying this marvelous gift which You have written for us. Amen.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light Ephesians 5:8

The Bible is literally filled with the concepts of light and darkness, even from the first verses to the last. A contrast is being made, but it is more than just a literal light and darkness which is spoken of. Rather, it is quite often speaking of these in a figurative sense. This is what Paul is referring to here. The verse is highly emphatic, and it is contrasting what has just been spoken of concerning the “sons of disobedience.”

He begins with, “For you were once darkness.” Here, and in the clause to come, he uses the abstract to speak of the concrete, thus showing the emphasis. In that his readers “were once darkness,” it implies that it was their very nature. The word “darkness” is *skotos*. It signifies darkness, either physical or moral. Here it is referring to the moral

darkness previously mentioned. It is “the *principle of sin* with its *certain results*” (HELPS Word Studies).

The darkness was our nature. We were infected with sin and could do nothing but pursue sin. We were bound by the law. Paul explains what that means in Romans 7:8-11-

“But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead. ⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰ And the commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me*.”

The “darkness” can be equated with the death which results from the law. However, Paul next says, “but now you are light in the Lord.” The Greek word is *phos* and indicates “light, a source of light, radiance.” It speaks of light, but “(especially in terms of its results, what it manifests); in the NT, the *manifestation of God's self-existent life*; divine *illumination* to reveal and impart life, through Christ” (HELPS Word Studies).

This “light” then can be equated with the “life” of Paul’s word in Romans. In fact, John shows this close connection to the two words when speaking of Jesus –

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” John 1:4, 5

The life that we have is given to us in place of the law which brought death. How did this happen? It is because Christ fulfilled the law for us. When we receive His gift of fulfilling the law, we die to the law; new life has come. The darkness of death is defeated, and we become light; children of light. In this new state, Paul admonishes us to therefore “Walk as children of light.”

We are shown to not just reflect light, but we actually are radiating light. This is why, even in the Old Testament, it was understood that we Gentiles would so shine forth –

“Arise, shine;
For your light has come!
And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.
² For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
And deep darkness the people;

But the LORD will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you.
³The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.” Isaiah 60:1-3

In that we have come to the light of Christ, we now shine forth with that same light. Life has replaced death; light has replaced darkness. As we have been born into new life through Christ’s fulfillment of the law, so we also have been born into light in how to walk in this world.

The emphasis of this verse, then, is given to show that just as we once were darkness – like the sons of disobedience – we are now children of light. We are not to participate any longer in that which is contrary to our new nature.

As a fine point of theology, this verse – when properly considered – once again demonstrates the doctrine of eternal salvation. The law is fulfilled for us; we are dead to it. We have taken on a new nature. Paul shows that we can go back and do the things of darkness, but they do not change our new nature.

Those deeds are simply contrary to it. We have not gone merely from being “in darkness” to being “in light.” Instead, we have gone from *being* darkness to *being* light. The emphatic nature of Paul’s words is intended to show us this as an absolute truth.

Life application: If you have called on Christ, the light of Christ now dwells in you. Arise! Shine forth! Your light has come! Don’t enter again into darkness, but rather radiate out that marvelous truth that you are now a son of God, fully redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Lord God, Your word shows two states of man. We are either in Christ and we are light, or we are not in Christ, and we are darkness. If we are light, we have life. If we are darkness, we have no life. As this is so, then help us to be willing to radiate out Your light for others to see. Help us to not participate in darkness any longer. It is contrary to our new nature and can only hinder others from coming to know You. Guide us as children of light and life for the benefit of others and for Your radiant glory! Amen.

(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), Ephesians 5:9

This verse is parenthetical as is evident when seen together with the surrounding verses-

“For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”

It is the work of the Spirit which has brought us from darkness and made us “light in the Lord.” Because of this, light is our new nature. In order to describe that nature, we are told what that means by the words, “the fruit of the Spirit.” Paul says that it is in “all goodness, righteousness, and truth.” These attributes are set in contrast to those negative things detailed at the end of Chapter 4, as well as those noted in the previous verses of this chapter.

Paul gives us a list of the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22, 23 as well –

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control.”

These are the things which come from a right application of the word of God in our lives. It is the Spirit who inspired the writing of Scripture, and so in order to know what is right and appropriate according to the word of God, we need to know what He has detailed for us. This includes Paul’s letters which were given by divine inspiration.

Anyone who thinks that they will, by default, have the fruit of the Spirit without studying and applying the word of God is self-deluded. The Ephesians had to be told these things by Paul, a designated apostle of the Lord. How much more then should we rely on those same things that they were told by him!

Life application: Enjoying the fruit of the Spirit comes from understanding what that fruit is, and then pursuing it in the manner in which God says that those things will come about. That is found in studying and applying the word to our lives. Read your Bible. Study what it says. And then, adhere to those things which it instructs you.

Lord God, where can we go to know what You expect of us? How can we be pleasing to You? And how can we find out what will keep us from doing that which is against Your will? The answer is obvious, and yet we find pretty much anything else to fill our time with EXCEPT doing that which will help us with answering these questions. The answer to them is to read Your word and then apply what it says to our lives. But apparently, that isn’t as important to us as we claim! We say we want to be pleasing to You, but we ignore the way of finding out exactly what that means. Forgive us of this, and stir our hearts to pursue You through Your marvelous written word. Amen.

...finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. Ephesians 5:10

This “finding out” what we are to do is connected to the word “walk” of the previous verse. Taken together it says, “Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.” As we walk in the light, we are to find out that which is “acceptable to the Lord.” This is very similar to the statement which Paul uses in Romans 12:2-

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The same word is used there and in this verse. It comes from the idea of the testing of metals. When a person wants to “find out” the purity of gold, he will take a sample of it and test it. The process of such testing is to determine if there are impurities, and if so, the gold can be refined in order to further purify it. This is to be true with us as well. By finding out what is acceptable to the Lord, we can then apply it to our walk. In so doing, we are being purified.

This transforming process is compared to the standard measure which we have available to us, the word of God. This is what is to be used for the refining of our walk in this life, and it is what will be opened for our judgment when we stand before the Lord. The words “what is acceptable to the Lord” are to be our goal; they are the standard of our testing.

This does not come to us by an inner voice or some type of external injection of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it comes from reading and applying the word of God to our lives. As we learn and comply, we become more and more acceptable to Him.

Life application: A closer walk with the Lord must come about by adherence to God's word. Without it, we become the arbiters of what is and isn't acceptable. Stay close to the word, know the word, and live out the word. Allow the Holy Spirit to fill you through obedient conformity to God's word.

Lord God, You have set a path before us, showing us how to be acceptable to You. It is known as the Holy Bible. In its pages are found all we need in order to be pleasing children, walking in holiness. Help us not to listen to some dubious “inner voice” which is sure to lead us astray. And give us the wisdom to understand that Your Spirit isn't going to externally mold us, as if we can sit and wait for the transformation. Rather, we need

to know Your word, and then to walk in accord with its precepts. In this, we will surely find out and adhere to those things which You approve of. Thank You for this wonderful word. Amen.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.
Ephesians 5:11

In verse 9, the “fruit of the Spirit” was mentioned. This was explained as “all goodness, righteousness, and truth.” Further, it was implied that this is “what is acceptable to the Lord” (verse 10). Now, in contrast to that, we are instructed on “the unfruitful works of darkness.” With such things, we are to “have no fellowship.”

This means that we are not only to not participate in them, but we are not to be adjoined to those who do participate in them while they are so engaged. By being around people who are carousing and conducting their lives in unholiness, we will become infected by that state as well. This is what “fellowship” implies.

Rather than having such fellowship, we are rather to “expose” them. The word from which “expose” is translated gives the idea of confronting, admonishing, convincing, rebuking, and the like. We are to act in such a manner that a complete contrast is set up between our “fruit of the Spirit” and their “unfruitful works of darkness.”

In so doing, we will hopefully convict them of their sin and have them turn from such things. If we fellowship with them while they are so engaged, that will never come about. We are to stand apart and demonstrate those attributes which are acceptable to the Lord.

Paul speaks of such things in Romans 6 as well. There he says –

“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. ²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³ For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What is important to understand here is that by being admonished to not fellowship with such unfruitful works, we can – in fact – fellowship with them. We are given the choice as to how we will conduct our walk. It is unfortunate that so many blood-bought

believers in Christ choose to spend their time, not in pursuing what is pleasing to the Lord, but in engaging in exactly what they are asked to refrain from.

In the end, our rewards and losses will be based on how we apply the precepts of the word of God to our lives. What a sad meeting with the Lord it will be for many who have chosen to ignore these warnings, and to continue to fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

Life application: In order to bring others to a state of conviction concerning their own sin, we cannot fellowship with them while they are engaged in those sins. In so doing, we are then condoning their wickedness and keeping them from understanding their need for Christ. We have been given a gift in our salvation. Let us be grateful for it, and show that appreciation by walking in accord with that which is pleasing to the Lord.

Lord God, all-powerful and glorious, You have given us the gift of salvation through the shed blood of Christ. Help us to realize the high cost that was paid to free us from the sin-debt we owe, and to never again fellowship in the unfruitful works of darkness. Instead, help us to walk as children of light, exposing that which is contrary to Your will. May our life and actions bring others to a state of heartfelt conviction over their sins, and a turning to You for freedom from their wayward walk. May our actions speak out boldly, turning many to You. Amen.

For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

Ephesians 5:12

This verse is given to highlight the utterly shameful conduct of the “works of darkness” of the previous verse. They are often so perverse and so shameful that they should not even be spoken of. This is a difficult thing in the world today where sexual perversion, satanic rituals, and obscene displays of so-called “art” are made open and public.

What was once “done by them in secret” is now highlighted by our elected leaders, proclaimed as acceptable by our judges, and placed at the choicest hours of viewing by the media. Even more, the internet has these things pop up before our eyes by the mere click of a wrong button.

The completely vile nature of the offenses is to be left undescribed by our lips. If this is so, then how much more are we to refrain from them! This is Paul’s intent here. He is indicating that our walk is to be one of light. The works of darkness are often so

despicable that we are to not only refrain from participating in them, but just mentioning them is inappropriate.

Life application: While the world devolves into its perversion party, we are to keep our eyes directed towards the Lord, our hearts in meditation upon Him, and our lips fully praising His glory. Let us not have ourselves be caught up in the debauchery which surrounds us, but rather let us have our minds renewed and reinvigorated by God's word at all times.

Lord God, our hearts are saddened by the works of darkness in this depraved world. The perversion, the unholy religious practices, and the obscene nature of culture, media, and art literally permeate society. The things once only done in secret by the world's off-scouring are now highlighted by our elected leaders, proclaimed as acceptable by our judges, and are on prominent display on TV and the internet. Help us to be strong in our walk, sure in our moral convictions, and ready to proclaim the right way of pleasing You so that others can see and turn from the path which they have chosen. Help us in this, O God. Amen.

But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Ephesians 5:13

The words of this verse are exactingly precise and also very nuanced. Thus, scholars argue over the accurate intent of them. They are based on the surrounding verses, including the verse to come, and so the meaning can be more readily discerned when taken as a whole –

For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

¹⁴ Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.”

Paul is showing the contrast between light and darkness. We were once darkness; now we are light in the Lord. How did this come about? It was because the light of the Lord

first shone on us. Because of that, our deeds were exposed; they were “made manifest by the light.”

If we think of the parable of the tares from Matthew 13, we can get an idea of what is being said. The two plants, wheat and tares, grow up together and are almost indistinguishable. However, when the light shines on them, the tares are “made manifest by the light.”

Now think of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ time. They walked among the people and were thought to be good and pious men. However, the light of Jesus’ words about them brought their deeds to light. They were exposed for what they truly were.

In context, Paul is saying the same thing to the believers in Ephesus about the deeds of the pagan world around them, and from which they had been called. The light of the gospel shone on them, disclosing the true nature of who they were in relation to the holy God. This same system of light, truth, and revelation was to be used to discern the state of those who were not yet living in Christ. The vile nature of their lives is exposed by the light which now filled the believers in Ephesus. This is reflected in Philippians 2 –

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...”

-Philippians 2:14, 15

By shining the light, everything is made manifest by the light. Paul’s words, given under inspiration of the Spirit, show us that the light of the gospel message is the only way to make things which are indecent appear as they really are. Once the truth of the gospel shines on the deeds of wickedness, they are exposed and can be compared to that which is right, holy, and proper.

Life application: Jesus asked us to have our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works. In this, they too can be brought to glorifying our Father in heaven. Without the light of Christ radiating through us and exposing where their error lies, they cannot discern the true nature of their deeds. There must be something to reveal the error, and something to compare it to. We are to be that light and standard for others to do these things.

Heavenly Father, we cannot be light to the world if we are just like the world. The deeds of darkness cannot be exposed if we don’t shine the light of Your gospel on those who

lack it. And so, help us to shine as lights in the world, bringing to light the difference between what is only a weed which is to be pulled up and burned, and that which is a rich grain, ready for harvest. Help us in this by redirecting our minds to Your glory at all times. Amen.

Therefore He says:

**“Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.”** Ephesians 5:14

This verse is another which is troubling to scholars. Paul begins with “Therefore He says...” The “Therefore” is setting a contrast to verses 11-13, and is being directly aligned with verses 8-10. We are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,” while at the same time we are to “walk as children of light.” In order to do these things, he then gives the next words, “He says.”

This implies a citation of Scripture, as it is always used in this manner. However, no such citation exists. The closest we can get is a combination of two verses from Isaiah –

Your dead shall live;
Together with my dead body they shall arise.
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;
For your dew *is like* the dew of herbs,
And the earth shall cast out the dead. Isaiah 26:19
Arise, shine;
For your light has come!
And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. Isaiah 60:1

Some scholars see one or another being loosely cited, others see both being combined and loosely cited, and still others find either of those options nonsense. There is actually nothing unprecedented about two citations being combined into one. This happens elsewhere in the New Testament. There is also nothing unusual about a rather loose citation. This also happens elsewhere in the New Testament.

However, what is more probable is that he is referencing the account in Jonah where the captain of the ship comes to wake Jonah from a deadened sleep. There in Jonah 1:6, it says –

“What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps the God will shine on us, so that we may not perish.”

In that verse, the captain uses the word *ashath*. It is a verb which means “to shine.” This word, *ashath*, comes from a primitive root which means “to be sleek” and thus glossy and hence through the idea of polishing to shine. And so the translation should read, “Arise, call on the God;” perhaps Paul was thinking of this account when he penned these words.

By shining the light, everything is made manifest by the light. Despite being in a real storm in the sea of chaos, and despite being under physical harm, there was a spiritual connotation that was being drawn out, even by that pagan captain. There was disharmony between them and God which needed to be rectified.

Though they didn’t know *of* the gospel, they knew that there was a need *for* the gospel. The light of the gospel message is the only way to make things which are indecent appear as they really are. Once the truth of the gospel shines on the deeds of wickedness, they are exposed and can be compared to that which is right, holy, and proper.

The main key to understanding this is Paul’s use of the word “Christ.” If he is citing the Old Testament, then the word “Christ” is an obvious interpretation of that citation. He is taking a known set of words and applying a prophetic meaning to them in the work of Christ.

And so, we are assured that it is Isaiah that is being quoted. But more than that, it is a quote which then asserts the Incarnation. The “glory of the LORD,” meaning Yehovah of the Old Testament, is being directly equated with “Christ” of the New. What was concealed in the Old is now revealed in the New.

Understanding this, the citation is saying that walking as children of light (which occurs by arousing from the sleep), and having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (which occurs when we “arise from the dead”), is what will cause Christ to give us light. We are to actively pursue Christ, and actively shun the darkness of the things of this world. As we do, we will be given the light of Christ.

Life application: There is no stagnation in our walk towards our eternal home. We are either moving towards godliness, or we are moving away from it. Each moment is a new moment in which we are to continue to press forward with our eyes on Jesus. In Him is

light, and in order to know Him, we must pursue Him through His word. Reader, you are admonished to get your nose into the word and pursue it daily. And then, think on what you have read as you go about your daily walk.

Precious Heavenly Father, You have told us that in walking as children of light, and in having no fellowship with the deeds of darkness, Christ will give us light. One thing is for certain, we can't know how to do those things, unless we know what they involve. And as Your word is what explains them to us, we would be O so wise to spend our time in Your word. Who doesn't want more light from Christ! And so, instill in our hearts a great desire to know Him through Your precious word. Amen.

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, Ephesians 5:15

Paul now begins with “See then...” This is an instruction based on the previous verse –

Therefore He says:
“Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.”

As we are given the light of Christ, we are then to ensure that we “walk circumspectly.” The word is *akribós*, and it means, “‘the high point, *extreme*,’ ... properly, extremely accurate, very exact; ‘*more (very) accurate*’ because researched down to the finest detail (‘factually precise’)” (HELPS Word Studies).

In other words, our walk is to be based on that light which we receive when we depart from the ways in which we once lived, and instead pursue Christ as He is. This is described by Paul with the words, “not as fools but as wise.” Fools in the Bible are depicted as having no spiritual wisdom. They live in sensual pleasure and pursue those desires with reckless abandon. They are careless about sin and unconcerned about the things of God.

The wise, on the other hand, are those who fear God. The fear of the Lord, the Bible says, is the beginning of wisdom. After fearing the Lord, they pursue Him and His ways. They emulate Him and are willing to be pleasing to Him, as faithful subjects of His kingdom. Their eyes are set on heavenly things, away from that which is earthly and sensual.

Life application: Let us endeavor to pursue the words of this verse with all of our hearts and souls. And the way to do so is to know what the Lord considers foolish or wise. This is learned through applying the words of Scripture. Learn your Bible!

Lord God, Your word tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Instill in us this reverential fear, and then instill in us the desire to pursue You and Your ways, molding ourselves and our lives to be more and more like You. Let us walk in the light of Christ, given to us as obedient subjects of Your glorious kingdom. Amen.

...redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:16

The word “redeeming” comes from the Greek word *eksagorázō*. It is a combination of two other words, *ek*, which indicates “completely *out from*.” This intensifies the word *agorázō*, which means, to “buy-up at the marketplace.” In this then, it indicates to “take *full advantage* of, seizing a buying-opportunity, i.e. making the most of the *present opportunity* (recognizing its *future gain*)” (HELPS Word Studies).

In the few hours that we have each day, in the short number of days we have each week, and in the quickly fading weeks, months, and years of our lives, we need to take advantage of the time we have been given, pursuing the greater and weightier matters which have eternal significance.

Instead of whining about what is bad, we should give praise for what is good. Instead of moaning about our situation, we should be in prayer for the needs of others, and for the glory of God. Instead of reading novels which satisfy our minds for a moment, we should read and study God’s word which will enrich our souls for eternity.

Rather than telling others about the latest sports statistics, we should tell others about the great deeds of the Lord and the love of God found in Christ Jesus. These are the types of things we should pursue in order to redeem the time.

And the reason why is “because the days are evil.” The world is a fallen place. Even when things are going really well for us individually, there is still death, sadness, and pain for others. When one person is becoming rich, others are in the process of losing all they have.

A thousand planes may take off safely, but from time to time one will not reach its intended landing site. The tides rise and fall with regularity, but when it is unexpected, a

tsunami may come and destroy the land. Man does not know the day of his death, and we can never say when we will meet a friend or family member for the last time.

Life application: The days are evil because they are unknown concerning the next moment. Joy may be ahead, but sadness may also be waiting there as well. It is our obligation to make the very most of each day for the positive work of the Lord, and for the sake of eternity which lies ahead. Our attitude should be, “Use me up now, Lord. My time is yours.”

Heavenly Father, our next breath is not guaranteed, and our next moment may be one of tragedy, sadness, loss, or pain. We do not know our end, and we cannot be assured of seeing a friend or loved one again. And so, help us to redeem the time in these days of evil. Help us to realize that each trip in a car may take us where we need to go, or it may result in a trip to the morgue. Help us to have an eternal perspective at all times, knowing that our time in Your service is limited. “Use me up now, O Lord. This life is Yours.” This is our prayer today. Amen.

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Ephesians 5:17

The word, “Therefore” is certainly referring to the thought of verses 15 and 16 –

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

But, in a fuller sense, it is speaking of the entire argument which led to that statement. We are to be imitators of God, walking circumspectly and not as fools. Rather, we are to be wise. Now Paul says, “...do not be unwise.”

Here he uses a different word than that of verse 15. It is *aphron*, and it means “*lacking* perspective because *short-sighted*, i.e. lacking the ‘over-all picture’ (perspective) needed to act prudently.” We are not to be lacking the overall picture. To explain what this entails, he then says, “but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

The Bible says that –

“The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.” Proverbs 9:10

We begin to demonstrate wisdom by fearing the Lord. From that steppingstone, we are to then learn what His will is for us. How do we do this? Do we go meditate in the corner of a room? Do we watch TV, hoping to hear a wise man tell us what God's will is? What is it that brings us to an understanding of the will of the Lord? It is reading and remembering Scripture. It is the source of our understanding what we are to do, how we are to act, and what we are to refrain from doing.

It is incomprehensible that people do not want to learn Scripture and yet they claim to be followers of the Lord. How can you follow and imitate that which you do not know! Although spoken to Israel while under the law, Jesus' words in the parable of the sower show us where such an attitude can lead –

“And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.” Luke 12:47

Further, without knowing the word and applying it to a right understanding (in context) of what it is saying, He then gives these words from Matthew 13 –

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.”
-Matthew 13:19

Is this how we want our state to be? Does it matter so precious little to us what the Lord intends for our proper walk in His presence? Are we willing to have the wicked one come and steal away our joy which was sown in our hearts?

Life application: A Bible which remains unopened and unread is a true tragedy.

Lord God, we can ponder what the word “tragedy” means. It is used to indicate a calamity, catastrophe, or even a cataclysm. And so, what is a “tragedy” for Your followers? It is to fail to get to know You through Your word. An unopened Bible which gathers dust is a true tragedy. Help us not to face Your displeasure at the seat of judgment which lies ahead. Instead, may we stand approved before You. Help us to turn the tragedy of an unused Bible into the honor of needing a new one because the one we carry is worn out from use. Amen.

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,
Ephesians 5:18

This verse, unfortunately, has been taken to amazingly absurd extremes by some. From one poor handling of the issue of drinking to another, the doctrine of total abstinence from alcohol arises. Neither this verse, nor any verse in Scripture, can be used to justify this stand.

The words begin with, "And do not be drunk with wine." Being drunk is something which has happened since the earliest times of man on earth. The Bible is full of stories of people drinking to excess. What was probably most on Paul's mind was the custom at that time of the orgies held to Bacchus, the "god of wine."

In festivals such as this one, and others as well, one thing led to another, and it is noted that people would go from heavy drinking to running wildly in the streets and committing all kinds of sexual sins. This is why he writes, "in which is dissipation."

The words refer to "be drunk," not "with wine." It is evident that wine itself does not necessarily lead to dissipation. The Lord's first miracle was to make wine, and yes, it certainly had alcohol content. The consumption of alcohol is condoned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:22, and Timothy is instructed to drink wine as a type of stomach medicine in 1 Timothy 5:23. These, and countless other examples, show that the drinking of alcohol is not forbidden in Scripture.

Throughout the Bible, there is acceptable drinking, and there is unacceptable drinking. The same is true with acceptable eating, and unacceptable eating. People can have money, but they are not to be greedy with money. People are not to engage in illicit sex, but not all sex is illicit. Reason and a proper use of Scripture clearly shows that drinking is not forbidden in the Bible, but dissipation which results from drinking is.

One is not to drink to the point of excess. Instead, they are to "be filled with the Spirit." As has been seen elsewhere, the term "be filled" is passive in the Greek, just as "be drunk" is in the first clause. A person drinks wine, and the wine makes him drunk. A person likewise needs to do something in order to be filled with the Spirit, they need to yield themselves.

The believer has all of the Spirit he will ever receive the moment he calls on Christ, but the Spirit can get more of the person. On the day of a person's marriage, they are now married and will never get more married, but the spouse can get more of the other spouse as yielding takes place.

The same is true with the Spirit. In order to be so filled, the Christian is to sing praises, pray, worship, fellowship, read the Bible, talk on the things of the Lord, etc. In doing these things, he is “filled with the Spirit.” Paul’s heart is that believers would so yield themselves to the Spirit that they would become revelers in God’s goodness at all times, not revelers in dissipation, even for a moment.

Life application: The Bible needs to be handled carefully and without regard to presuppositions or biases. We are not to insert our desires, pet peeves, or insecurities into our interpretation of Scripture. Instead, we are to accept that there are things we may or may not indulge in which are permitted by the Bible. If we do not participate in them, whether drinking of alcohol, eating of certain foods, or whatever else, we are not to impose our weakness in that area on others.

Lord God, Your word provides far more freedom than the world gives it credit for. Too many speak of it as a book of rules and “don’ts,” but it is far more a book of freedom and “do’s.” The don’ts are those things which are harmful to us and to a right relationship with You. The do’s are those things which lead to satisfied, productive lives and a right relationship with You. Help us to be content with what we are permitted to do, and to abstain from all things we are to stay away from. Thank You for this word which gives life and freedom to our souls. Amen.

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

Paul’s words of the last verse ended with, “be filled with the Spirit.” This is immediately followed with the words of this verse, which is a continuation of the same thought. In being so filled, we are to “speak to one another” in ways which are wholesome and edifying. He then explains what that means by using three categories –

“Psalms” refers, without a doubt, to the Old Testament psalms. What Paul is saying is that our speech is to be interlaced with words, right from Scripture, which will build others up. They are to remind others of the words of Scripture as well, providing a spiritual connection between us and them.

To understand this from a worldly perspective, if two people attended the same college, they would have their school fight song. From time to time, in order to inspire one another, they might take the words of that song and speak them (or sing them) out. “Go the distance you men of Noble College; stand firm on your education, on that great body of knowledge.”

In so doing, they would be building one another up in something that is already written and useful for such a purpose. No greater source of such edification can be found for the Christian than the words of Scripture themselves, especially from the psalms.

Though it is not entirely sure, “hymns” may be referring to songs which are based on Scripture, and which relate scriptural truths. The word used for “hymn” in Matthew 26:30 is derived from the word Paul uses now. It is known that at the Passover Seder, certain Psalms were sung each year. Therefore, this term can be referring to psalms as well as songs not directly coming from the Bible, but probably quoting parts of it.

“Spiritual songs” may be even broader in nature than “hymns.” They may simply be songs that speak of the Lord and His goodness without actually quoting anything directly from Scripture. However, they are pure, edifying, and will fill others with the goodness of God.

Although the meaning of the second two words is not fully known, this seems to be a logical explanation of what Paul is referring to. From these types of songs, he then says, “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” The word for “making melody” here is a verb which corresponds to the noun translated as “psalms” above.

What Paul is saying here is that not only should we outwardly sing and share music, but we should do it in our hearts as well. We are not to let a root of bitterness creep into our hearts as we ponder the wicked world around us. Instead, we are to have wonderful words of glorifying God in our hearts at all times, welling up in us so that we are not overcome by the world around us. In this, we are to do it “to the Lord.”

This then is truly being “filled with the Spirit” as was noted in the previous verse. We are actively contemplating His goodness, and are thus passively filled with the Spirit. As we yield, the Spirit fills.

This same set of words is almost repeated in Colossians 3:16 –

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

There is a noted difference between the two. In Colossians, it says that we are to use these in order to teach and admonish one another. It is an active instruction based on

these things. In this verse it is more a way of letting emotion be drawn out of us in order to edify others and glorify God.

Life application: How can we overcome the world, especially when it is draining us of joy and taking away our ability to act in a godly manner? The answer is given in this verse. We can do so by speaking and singing words of Scripture, or words based on what the Bible teaches. This is our fount of blessing, instruction, and joy as we wait on the return of the Lord.

Let us use it often, drawing from it as if we are drawing out water from a well in a dry and thirsty land. Let us allow our souls to be filled with the beauty of the word, even until it then flows back out of us for the edification of others.

Lord God, the world is a dry and barren desert which saps us of life. But there is an oasis for our weary souls where a fount of living water is found to quench our thirst and refresh us. And yet, how often we fail to walk over to it, pick it up, and drink from it. Your word, O God, is life and it provides to us fresh water to renourish us as we wait upon You. Grant us the wisdom to drink from it often, even until we ourselves overflow with it towards others. Help us to be wise in our use of time, and to partake of this deep well of life. Amen.

...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Ephesians 5:20

These words are logically tied to the preceding verse –

“...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

As we are making melody in our hearts to the Lord, we are to be “giving thanks always.” One of the great errors of humanity is ingratitude. When we fail to give thanks for each and every kind blessing bestowed upon us, we fall into error. This is then reflected in a degradation of our relationship with God. Eventually, our hearts become darkened to the things of God –

“For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not

glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1:20, 21

It is so easy to ask for blessings, but we then often fail in being grateful for those things we receive. Instead of this, we need to continuously be thankful for what we have, and pour out our hearts concerning those things we lack. And our thanks are to be “to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There is a strong emphasis here in both expressions. God the Father is the Fount of all blessing, and He is rightfully exalted through the thanks that we return to Him. But, each of these thanks is to be given “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is Christ who makes the path back to God the Father for us.

The ingratitude mentioned in Romans 1 is an ingratitude which is directed towards “His eternal power and Godhead.” In order to truly be grateful for those things we enjoy, we are to be thankful to God through the One who caused these things to come into existence, and who continues to sustain them even now.

This is Jesus Christ (see John 1:1 & Hebrews 1:3, for example). Further, in Jesus Christ, we are brought into son-ship with God the Father. Therefore, He is to be the One named in all of our thanks and praises to Him. This sentiment is found again in Colossians 3:17 –

“And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

A portion of it is expanded upon in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 as well –

“Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Life application: Being grateful to God for our many blessings is not to be overlooked. Even in times of distress – of heart or of body – we should continue to demonstrate thankfulness. In so doing, we are acknowledging His sovereign hand on us in all circumstances.

Lord God, give us hearts which are grateful for each and every blessing that comes our way. Help us not to forget all that You have done for us and thus let a bitter root of ingratitude well up in us. May we never assume that anything we have is deserved, but rather, that You have granted grace to us through Your kind and open hand. With this

spirit of gratitude, we will thank You for all that comes our way, and we will do it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

...submitting to one another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:21

This verse continues to explain “what the will of the Lord is” from verse 16. It is an admonishment which is grammatically tied into that thought, and yet it also is a lead into what will next be exhorted concerning the duties of wives, husbands, children, and slaves. Those exhortations are given to show what “submitting to one another in the fear of God” means.

But, just from these words, we can deduce that “submitting,” or humbling ourselves, before others is what is expected. Pride puts up walls between people and God, and between people and people. However, humility leaves open a way for people to meet the needs of others. It is not demanding, and it shows no arrogance. This is what we should do when interacting with others.

As noted, Paul’s specific examples are forthcoming, but it is not to be limited only to those he explains. We should have an attitude of submission to all those around us in order to bring down walls of animosity and strife. And this is to be done “in the fear of God.” Christ Jesus came in the humblest circumstances of all. From His birth in a manger, to His death on the cross, He demonstrated the humility which all of us should likewise demonstrate.

And yet, we need to remember that Jesus never let doctrine falter, nor did He flee in a cowardly manner from His enemies or the enemies of God. There is to be a balance in our lives where we demonstrate humility on one hand, and a firm resolve on the other.

In all ways, He did exactly as His Father expected, and we are to do so as well. Let us never allow the forces of moral perversion or enmity with God to assume that they can use us as punching bags without facing rebuke and correction. Evil must be addressed, or we are not demonstrating all the Christ-like attributes that we should.

Life application: When we interact with the world, we are to demonstrate humility, submitting to others as Christ would. And yet, we are also to be firm, fixed, and resolved in our attitude towards the wickedness which surrounds us. Let us never give an inch on our firm stand to uphold God’s word.

Lord God Almighty, we are told in Your word to submit to one another in the fear of God. In doing so, we will act in a Christ-like manner. And yet, we are also instructed to stand against the evil of this world and to call out that which is morally corrupt, noting it for what it is. Too often, Your followers are attacked for our firm stands against the wicked, but we are to live balanced, Christ-like lives. He stood against all evil and perversion, highlighting it for all to see and be aware of. May we do nothing less! Give us wisdom in these things, O God. Amen.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Ephesians 5:22

Admonitions for wives which are very similar to this one are found in Colossians 3, Titus 2, and 1 Peter 3. Other much more carefully worded restrictions upon women are noted throughout Paul's writings as well. For modern times, women who believe it is ok to preach or teach or have authority over men will simply disregard those prescriptions, or twist them out of their intended context, in order to justify what is explicitly forbidden.

They will also take descriptive verses from the Old Testament (a dispensation which has ended), or from the book of Acts, completely out of context in order to again justify that which is forbidden.

The one verse from Paul which they hold up as relevant in allowing women to teach, Galatians 3:28, is again torn out of its intended context. Paul's words there show that there is no spiritual difference in men or women, just as there is none between Jew and Gentile or slave and free man.

But the fact that Paul mentions the categories is intended to show that the physical distinctions still exist. Slaves remained slaves in Rome, Jews remain Jews even when coming to Christ, and women do not become men when they become Christians. However, there is no spiritual subordination in these categories, and no "lesser salvation" for any of them.

Understanding this in proper context, wives are to "submit to" their husbands. A hierarchy is set within the family unit. The man is the head of the household and the woman is to defer to the man's decisions. It is inappropriate, and against the natural order of things which was established at the very beginning (Genesis 2), for women to have the lead role in family matters. God has ordained it this way. Families and societies which do not follow this model will inevitably be dysfunctional in regard to proper biblical standards.

Albert Barnes rightly identifies four areas which the woman is to submit to the man.

- 1) In domestic arrangements.
- 2) In regard to the laws which are to regulate the family.
- 3) In business matters.
- 4) In everything, except that which relates to conscience and religion.

The last category is intended as being in conscience according to God's word, and in religion according to what God has ordained. A woman is not to follow her husband if he is in violation of either of these two precepts. In all other ways, they are to submit as is indicated here and elsewhere in Scripture. And, further, women are told to submit to their husband "as to the Lord."

This is explained in the next verse. Simply put, it is because the Lord requires it, the Bible directs it, and the Spirit (who breathed out Scripture) testifies to it. To not follow this standard is to be disobedient to the Lord.

Life application: Modern society fights against the words of this verse. Women are told that the Bible is archaic and even inappropriate, but God says otherwise. He has ordained all things according to His wisdom. To reject what is stated here is not less detrimental to right living than being a homosexual or a drunkard.

Lord God Almighty, Your word is truth. It has ordained certain roles within society for men and for women. It further defines those roles within the family. However, it has become "unfashionable" to follow Your word and to reject this order which You have established. This is detrimental to the family, to society, and to our relationship with You. Help us to follow Your word alone, and to be obedient to the hierarchies which You have established by Your sovereign will for the proper conduct of our lives. Give us willing hearts to be obedient to You and Your word above all else. Amen.

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Ephesians 5:23

This verse now explains the words of the previous verse, which said –

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."

Wives are to submit to their husbands because "the husband is the head of the wife." This thought is in line with the words of 1 Corinthians 11:3. There Paul said, "But I want

you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.”

There is a divine order in how God has structured humanity, and how He has ordained the family unit. When this structure is violated, it upturns what is right and appropriate. And there, in turn, comes a breakdown in the family. If this is the common practice of a culture or society, that society will also break down. A clear and evident proof of this is found in the breaking down of America as the nuclear family is likewise being broken down. Culturally, we are casting off what God has ordained, and society is feeling the negative effects of this.

Paul explains this hierarchy further with the words, “as also Christ is the head of the church.” Christ has direct and rightful control over the church. He is its Founder and Leader. All that occurs within His church is ordained by Him. Likewise, the man is to be the head of the wife. It is he who is given direction of family matters, and control of the household belongs to him.

As a note of comparison, Paul then finishes his thought with, “...and He is the Savior of the Body.” In these words, various scholars find disagreement in how they are to be translated. Some make them out as a contrast by changing “and” to “but.” In other words, the man is the head of the household just as Christ is the head of the church, but Christ is the Savior of the body (meaning there is a distinction being made between the two heads).

Others see an analogy in this. Just as Christ is the Savior of the body in a spiritual sense, the husband is to be the savior of the household. He is to lead in religious matters, he is to be the protector of the family, and he must be willing to die for them if necessary. If not he, then who is their defender? This view seems more appropriate, and it is actually fortified in verse 25.

Life application: It is the duty of the man of the house to lead the house. He is ordained by God with a right, a dignity, and with authority to serve in this manner. Men are the seat of reason. On the contrary, women are more led by emotion. God has determined that the man’s makeup is that which is preferred for leadership.

Lord God, Your word provides us with instruction on the proper order and headship of the family unit. You have ordained that the man is to lead the house, just as Christ is the Head of the church. When we deviate from this pattern, family life breaks down. When this pattern continues to grow, the society will inevitably degrade into chaos. It is quite

clear that this is the pattern of our world today. Help us to turn back to the model which You have ordained for right family living. You are God, and You do not make mistakes. May we learn this important lesson before our society is destroyed. Amen.

Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Ephesians 5:24

The word “Therefore” is given to show us a conclusion based on what was said in the previous two verses. Christ is the Head of the church, and the church is subject to Him in all ways. In the same manner, as laid out by God’s divine hierarchy, wives are also to submit “to their own husband in everything.” This obviously excludes anything which is contrary to the will of God. No person is to violate their duty to God in order to be subject to another, regardless of what their position is.

Thus, the statement leaves the wife with the following hierarchy of priorities –

- To God
- To her husband
- To herself

What an unhappy verse for the world today! There is talk of freedom from the bonds of marriage. There is talk of the woman running the house. There is the notion that any “god” is simply an evolutionary process which randomly and chaotically brought us to the state we are in, and thus there is no real difference between people. Any perceived difference, such as biological sex, can be corrected through surgery and medicine. Therefore, we are actually all on equal footing and thus no hint of submission is necessary.

But the Bible speaks otherwise. No wonder it is so maligned and railed against! How dare the “God” of the Bible mandate something which places the female in submission to her husband! But, by casting off these supposed shackles, it is we who will suffer. Only a breakdown of that which is moral, just, and honorable can result from being disobedient to the will of God as is laid out in Scripture. Let us endeavor to heed these words and act in accordance with God’s perfect will.

Life application: Because of the established hierarchy in the family, the need to honor God through proper direction of His will is up to the husband. Should he force the wife to submit in a way which is contrary to what He commands, it can only lead to a breakdown in the family and harm for all concerned.

Lord God Almighty, it is so very wonderful to know Your word and to be obedient to it. In doing so, the truly difficult choices are put behind us. What great pressure is taken off of us if we simply heed Your word! And yet, how often do we decide to follow our own wayward paths. In turn, life gets complicated, and we wonder why we are in the mess we are in! Help us not to be so confused! Grant us wisdom to pursue Your will through Your superior word. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, Ephesians 5:25

In verses 25-27 we will see the stages of salvation presented to us. In verse 25 is the giving of Christ for us – justification. In verse 26 is the work of being cleansed by the water of the word – sanctification. And in verse 27 we will see the presentation of the church in glory, holy and without blemish – glorification. It is through this work of Christ that Paul now says, “Husbands, love your wives.”

There was the duty of the wife to submit to the husband just as the church submits to Christ. But the husband is not without direction. Rather, he is to not lord his authority over the wife, but rather is to love her “just as Christ also loved the church.” In Ephesians, we see on several occasions that Christ sees Himself not fully complete without the church. In Ephesians 1, it says –

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

-Ephesians 1:22, 23

Later in this chapter, we will read –

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church.” 5:29

We are the body of Christ, and He loves us as such. Likewise, the husband is to so treat his wife. This love of Christ for the church is so deep that He “gave Himself for her.” Thus, He has given the husband the pattern of how he is to also act towards his bride. His love is to be a self-sacrificing love that says, “No matter what the cost, I will honor this woman that God has given to me, even to death itself.”

Life application: A husband who abuses his wife, or who treats her less honorably than the most precious jewel that he could possess, is not honoring the Lord through his

marriage. Paul's words are imperatives for us to live by, not shun. When we fail to honor our spouse in the way that Scripture states, we are being disobedient servants of the Lord.

Heavenly Father, Your word tells husbands that they are to love their wives even as Christ loves His church. He gave Himself for her, hanging on a cross to bring her close to Himself. How few of us are that devoted to our bride! Are we willing to place her as our precious jewel, defending her even with our lives? Help us to be faithful in our marriage duties, and loving of the spouse that You have blessed us with. Help us to be like Christ in this way. Amen.

...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,
Ephesians 5:26

There are subtleties here that need to be looked at carefully. First, this verse is speaking of Christ's love mentioned in the previous verse. It is then being used as an example to husbands for how they are to treat their own wives. Christ "gave Himself" for the church "that He might sanctify and cleanse her." The words actually should be rendered "...might sanctify having cleansed her."

We are cleansed through the work of Christ. We stand forgiven and justified before God because of the giving of His life. In that act, we are sanctified "with the washing of the water by the word." There is a two-fold aspect of sanctification that the Bible speaks of. The first is that we are sanctified, "set apart" unto God, through the work of Christ. There is also a sanctifying process which is on-going in nature which we actively participate in. This is actually seen in Jesus' words of John 13:10 –

"Jesus said to him, 'He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.'"

It is further explained in John 17:17 –

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

We are cleansed (having bathed); we require sanctification (periodic washing). It is a two-fold and distinct process. The original picture of this goes all the way back to the book of Exodus and the ordination of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood of Israel. They were fully washed and consecrated as priests in Exodus 29.

However, they were instructed that they were to continue to wash their hands and feet at regular intervals in Exodus 30. Those washings made specific pictures of Christ and His work, both for our cleansing and our on-going sanctification.

It is these most important points which are seen here, and which explain very carefully what Christ has done for us. It also shows what He will continue to do for us if we apply His word to our lives. This “washing of the water by the word” is what occurs when we hear the word, the gospel of our salvation, and then accept it.

At that moment, we are saved by God and sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is the baptism of the Spirit. The rite of water baptism is an outward demonstration of the inward change which has already occurred. It is not specifically what is spoken of here. The spiritual baptism, and on-going spiritual cleansing, is the reference being made.

Again, these words are given to us as an example of what Christ did for us, and thus what the husband is to do for his wife. Just as Christ gave Himself up for us in order for us to be a perfect and spotless bride, so husbands should be willing to expend themselves for the sake of their precious wives.

Life application: We have been cleansed by the work of Christ. We are also to grow in Christ through the study and right-application of His word. Let us endeavor to do these things and not allow ourselves to get pulled back into the world from which we are called out.

Lord God, Your word shows us that the work of Christ has cleansed us from all unrighteousness. We are cleansed and purified by it. But Your word also says that we are to continue to go through a process of sanctification, washing ourselves as in water with the word. It sure would be great if Christians actually followed through with the second after having received the first. Grant us wisdom to look into Your perfect word, and then to apply it to our lives. Help us to not be sappy, weak, or impotent followers who add nothing but confusion and disharmony to Your precious church. Amen.

...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:27

The full thought should be considered to understand the context –

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the

word,²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

Christ gave Himself for His beloved church in order to make her ready for Himself. He has given us His word to prepare us for our union with Him as well. All of the ceremony stems from Him and is directed by Him. It will even be that He will “present her to Himself a glorious church.”

This role of His is what is known as a *paranymph*. It is “a ceremonial assistant and/or coach in a ceremony. In ancient Greek weddings the bride and bridegroom were attended by paranymphs, and from this use it has been generalized to refer to attendants of doctoral students, best men, and bridesmaids in weddings and the like. It can refer specifically to the friend of a bridegroom tasked with accompanying him in a chariot to fetch the bride home.”

Christ is the One who will accomplish this fetching of the bride home, there to present her to Himself. But He is also the one who gave Himself for her, sanctified her, and cleansed her. In all matters, He is the One who has directed the affairs of the bride so that she will “not have spot or wrinkle or any such thing.”

The idea of a “spot” is that of sin. It is the Greek word *spilos*, and it is only found here and in 2 Peter 2:13. The spots on a garment would reflect the impurity of that garment. The literal spot is used as a metaphor for moral imperfection, and thus sin. In Christ, our garments are made spotless; we are brought to a state of sinless perfection.

The idea of a “wrinkle” is that of the consequences of sin – getting old and dying. The word for “wrinkle” is *rhutis*, and it is only found here in the Bible. It is the sign of aging. This will no longer be evident. Our old nature in Adam will be removed, and we will be forever in a state of youthful vitality. No wrinkle of Adam will be detected.

Further, Paul continues by stating that there will not be “any such thing.” There will be nothing which detracts from the beauty of Christ’s bride. We will be wholly undefiled, perfectly radiant, and eternally set in our status as Christ’s precious bride. We shall be “holy and without blemish.”

No error or fault will remain in us when we are presented. This idea hearkens back to the sacrifices of the Old Testament where animals were to be “without blemish” when presented as an offering to the Lord. They were to have no marks which detracted from

their perfection. So will the bride of Christ be when we are presented to Him. This is spoken of in Revelation 19-

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

⁸And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Revelation 19:7, 8 (KJV)

Life application: Christ has done His part for His bride, and He will continue to do so for her until the wonderful day when He presents her to Himself. As this is so, shouldn't we be endeavoring to do the same? Let us strive for perfection which, even if it is unattainable in this life, is what our Betrothed would ask of us.

Lord God, You have done all the work to present Your church to Yourself without spot or blemish or any such thing. As this is true, shouldn't we be acting as if this is the case? Shouldn't we be preparing ourselves spiritually now for this marvelous marriage ceremony? Help each of us to prepare ourselves now to be a beautiful part of what is coming. Let us not squander our time as we await Your call for us to come to You. Amen.

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. Ephesians 5:28

There is debate as to what the word “so” is referring to. Is it speaking of that which is before, or that which follows? The answer is, “To that which is before.” To understand, the entire thought must be presented (note the underlining) –

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church.”

The intervening verses were an explanation of how Christ loved the church, and they were also an explanation of what the result of that love would be. With the example given, the admonition with its explanation then follows.

Christ loved the church so much that He gave Himself for her. This is something one would do as if it was his own body. So the husband is to do for his wife, because the wife is truly one flesh with him (see Genesis 2:23). The pattern was set at the beginning and it should, naturally, follow through in all subsequent humans. However, sin entered the world. With that came disharmony, dissatisfaction, and divorce. But this was not the original intent for a man and his spouse (see Matthew 19:1-10).

With the work of Christ complete, we are to consider our marriages as being under the original pattern which was intended by God. Men are to love their wives even as if the two are one, because they are one. It would be illogical to not protect oneself, and therefore, “he who loves his wife loves himself.”

Life application: “If a man wishes to promote his own happiness in the most effectual way, he had better begin by showing kindness to his wife.” Albert Barnes

Lord God, Your word is rather clear on the issue of marriage and all that it entails, especially concerning the issue of divorce. And yet, we would choose rather to follow our own personal mores and reject what You have ordained. But You have said that husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. The two are now one and so he who loves his wife loves himself. It comes down to this, “Do we despise what You have created in us so very much that we would cut off a part of who we are?” Help us to think clearly and rationally about our marriages and what they mean in Your presence. Amen.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. Ephesians 5:29

Paul, in support of his statement that “husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies,” brings in an obvious matter. Unless mentally deranged, “no one ever hated his own flesh.” It is interesting that Paul uses the term “flesh” rather than “body.” His mind certainly hearkened back to Genesis 2:23 –

And Adam said:
“This *is* now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

Though the man and wife have separate bodies, they are one flesh. A man doesn't hate his own flesh, and the wife is his very flesh. Therefore, it is contrary to what is moral and biblically sound to hate one's wife.

To further explain, he next says that a man will nourish and cherish his own flesh. The word "nourish" is found only twice in the Bible, and both are in Ephesians. It gives the sense of rearing a child up to maturity. In essence, it indicates "from childhood to adulthood." This is how a man is to treat his wife. He is to care for her as their marriage moves from stage to stage. She is not to be loved while young and in her flower, and then discarded after her body has become aged and worn.

The word "cherish" is also rare. It is found here and in 1 Thessalonians 2:7. "Cherish" is a good translation of it. It originally came from the thought, "to keep warm." When it is cold out, we will protect ourselves with that which warms us. Maybe we will kindle a fire, make a cup of hot chocolate, and wrap up in something fuzzy. This is what one is also to do for his precious wife. He is to tend to her, cherishing her in a manner which will keep her safe, happy, and content.

And once again, in order to show the basis for this treatment of our beauties, Paul returns to the antitype, Christ. He says that we are expected to do these things "just as the Lord *does* the church." He again equates Christ's relationship to the church with a man's relationship to his wife. For us to act contrary to this in regard to our wife is to then show contempt of how the Lord has already set the pattern for us in His love of us.

Life application: The Bible shows us, clearly and precisely, that men are to act properly towards their wives, caring for them and treating them in the same manner that Christ treats His church. When we fail to do this, our actions are certainly unacceptable in the eyes of the Lord.

Lord God, You have set a marvelous example for men in how they are to treat their wives. We are to care for them just as You care for Your church. Our care is to extend from year to year as our marriage ages, even bringing the relationship to a point of maturity never imagined in our youth. And our care is to be as if she is our own flesh; keeping her warm, safe, and content in the cold reaches of life's walk. Help us in this, O Lord. Help us to be loving, caring, nurturing men, willing to put our wives on the pedestal of our hearts. Amen.

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. Ephesians 5:30

Again, as cited in the previous verse, this harkens back to Genesis 2. The woman was taken from the side of Adam. She was fashioned from who he already was, rather than being fashioned from the earth as was Adam. In a figurative way, the church sprang from the side of Christ as well. Thus, the personal nature of Eve being truly a part of Adam is repeated in the personal nature of our being so intimately connected to Christ.

In this most intimate union, Paul says that we “are members of His body.” Our spiritual connection to Christ is so tied up in the work of the Lord that we are directly connected to Him, even as being “of His flesh and of His bones.” Nothing could be more personal than this marvelous union to God through Christ. The pattern was set in Adam and Eve, and it follows through to us.

The lesson Paul is giving though needs to be remembered. Men are to love their wives as their own body, just as Christ loves His own body.

Life application: The patterns of the Bible are repeated to help us understand deeper spiritual truths. Things which are recorded in the Bible which happen in the stream of time in the physical creation are used to point us to these spiritual truths. As you read the Bible, keep this in mind and it will help open up seemingly obscure and odd passages to a fuller appreciation for the work of God in Christ.

Great and marvelous God, it is so wonderful how You have fashioned women for men. The two complement one another and find a fulfillment in the union which is more than remarkable. Help us to look to the positive in our marriages, overlook the faults of one another, and to not pervert what You have ordained through neglecting what is so obvious – that a relationship in marriage is ordained for a union of a man and a woman. May we stand opposed to anything which challenges this fundamental rule of morality and biology. Amen.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Ephesians 5:31

Paul is using the previous example of husbands loving their wives from verses 28 and 29 to make a point. From the thought of those verses, he said “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.”

This is speaking of Christ. The words explain where Paul is going with verses 28 & 29. He is showing that the original giving of Eve to Adam was to be taken in type and picture of what would come about in Christ. This will be made explicit in the verse to come.

For now, he cites the substance of Genesis 2:24 which explains the union between a man and a woman. Eve was taken from Adam's side; Adam made a proclamation concerning the nature of the woman; and from this came the resulting explanation. "For this reason" means, based on the intimate nature of what occurred, as well as the fact that the two bear one and the same nature, "a man shall leave his father and mother." The union of a man to a woman is to mean a new beginning for the man.

This is, in type, a picture of Christ. He left the realm of His heavenly Father and came to dwell among humanity. In so doing, the intent was that He would "be joined to [H]is wife." Man leaves his father and his mother and starts a new life together with his bride. Christ likewise came to join with His bride, meaning the church. The word "be joined" is a "compound verb which denotes the most intimate union" (Vincent's Word Studies).

It is in the union of Christ and His church that "the two shall become one flesh." This means one in nature and one in goal based on this most intimate union which has been established. We are given a spiritual nature instead of our carnal human nature, and we are to direct our lives to this nature as we await the coming of our Lord to consummate the marriage. This nature came from the pierced side of Christ, just as the nature of Eve came from the rib inside of Adam.

Although it was unknown at the time of the writing of the Genesis account, all of this was set up at the very beginning to show us what God would do in Christ. It is from the very first moments of man's existence, and even before the fall of man, that the plan was laid out and the type and picture of what would occur was given.

Life application: If we ever have doubts about where we are going, or if we come to the point where we think that control has been lost and things are just too much to face, all we need to do is contemplate the ramifications of this passage from Ephesians. Christ has called us out to be His bride. It is something that was planned from the very beginning of time. Nothing is out of control! Everything is being worked towards a marvelous end.

Heavenly Father, from the very beginning, You set a pattern in the union of man and woman to be a type and picture of Christ and His church. Even before the fall, You had shown us what You were going to do. The Son would leave His eternal domain and come to pay the bride-price for us. How can we be down! How can we lose hope? Everything is being worked for a marvelous end as we await the consummation of this marvelous love story. We shall wait patiently on our Lord. Amen.

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:32

According to Vincent's Word Studies, the word "great" acts as a predicate, not as an attribute. Therefore, this is correctly rendered, "This mystery is great..." Paul is telling us that what was just said about the man leaving his father and mother and being joined to the woman is a type and picture of what God would do in Christ with His church.

Paul calls this a "mystery" because it is something that had never been revealed before, but which was now being revealed by him. The symbolism of the Lord being wedded to His people does run through the Old Testament, but it was always thought to apply only to Israel. However, the mystery-now-revealed shows that the intent all along was that the marriage typology actually was pointing to God's people, brought near to Him through the Person and work of Christ.

Having said that, Paul's note about the greatness of the mystery shows that we can only understand a portion of what is being presented. In reality, until the consummation of the marriage, we can only speculate as to what lies ahead. However, it does lie ahead, and therefore we should be in eager anticipation of it, and we should be continuously preparing ourselves for that day.

Life application: We are as a bride to our Bridegroom. Let us try to act like it.

Heavenly Father, great and gracious God – Your church is likened to a bride being made ready to meet her Bridegroom, and yet we sure don't act like it. Please grant us the wisdom to prepare ourselves just as carefully and meticulously for that marvelous meeting with Christ that we would need in preparation for an earthly marriage, even more so. Our earthly marriages may be splendid, but they will end at some point. Our heavenly marriage is eternal. How can we not be preparing ourselves for such a marvelous moment? Help us to redirect our lives towards the spiritual side of who we are. Amen.

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects *her* husband. Ephesians 5:33

This last verse of the chapter begins with "Nevertheless." It is an indication that Paul is returning to the practical aspects of the husband/wife relationship. He has been speaking of the mystical union of Christ and the church, of which the husband and wife

relationship is a pattern. In order to “get back to the basics” from this high and lofty analogy, he brings it back down to a practical level with this word.

In the human economy of marriage, this final admonition begins with, “let each one of you in particular so love his wife as himself.” This doesn’t mean that a man is to love his wife as much as he loves himself, but he is to love her as if being his own self. This goes back to verse 31 which says that “the two shall become one flesh.” There is to be a love for the wife that maintains this united essence.

Next, Paul says, “and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.” The word translated as “respect” here is *phobeó*. It actually means “to fear.” This is the reverential fear that a person might have towards God. It is used in Matthew 9:8 concerning the fear of the people when Jesus healed a paralytic. It is this type of reverential fear which is referred to. The wife is to give way to her husband in decisions and to submit to his authority with a reverence that is appropriate to his position as the human authority of the household.

Life application: When the admonitions of Paul concerning the husband/wife relationship are ignored or undermined, the family unit will inevitably fail to work properly. Each has been given a place by God, and all must adhere to that placement for the benefit of the family and to the honor of the Lord.

Lord God, Your word makes certain distinctions within the family hierarchy which are expected to be adhered to – the father, the wife, and the children. When they are not, dysfunction and disharmony will be the inevitable result. Help us, as men and women of Your flock, to be obedient to those distinctions and to apply the admonitions of Scripture to our devotion to You, and to our placement within the family structure. Surely with this You will be pleased. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

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

Chapter 6 begins with a movement from the marital relationship to that of the responsibilities of and for children. Paul addresses the *teknon*, or children, directly. The word indicates a child, but in its fuller sense, it figuratively indicates “anyone living in *full dependence* on the heavenly *Father*, i.e. fully (*willingly*) relying upon the Lord in *glad submission*. This prompts God to *transform* them into *His likeness*” (HELPS Word Studies).

The word in this case is following the family unit of children within a household. In such a case, the children are instructed to, “...obey your parents in the Lord.” The words “in the Lord” are given to qualify the word “obey.” In other words, the assumption is that Paul is writing to children who are of the household of faith.

His words do not exclude the fact that all children should so obey their parents, but not all children will receive the words of Paul. Those who do not, still have God’s general revelation of Himself which is instilled in them concerning family hierarchies. However, as is the case outside of God’s special revelation of Himself to His people, these things often become skewed, or even outright rejected.

However, to avoid that happening within the faith, Paul explicitly directs the children who are “in the Lord” to obey their parents. If they are in the Lord, this is the expectation of the Lord, and they are to adhere to it. As Paul next notes, “...for this is right.”

Even without this word of special revelation (meaning the apostolic authority of Paul’s writing), it is understood throughout races, cultures, and societies that this is the normal and proper situation in the family unit. How much more so then when it is an expectation of the Lord who has so structured the family unit!

Life application: The parents are to be the leaders in the family. The children are to obey the parents. How unfortunate it is that modern culture has turned this upside down in movies and TV shows. The children tell the parents what they will do and the parents back down as if the decision by the child is fixed. We must be careful to reject such displays and not get our family decisions caught up in this perverse role-setting.

Heavenly Father, Your word outlines the roles of the family unit, and it shows us what is right and proper in the conduct of our family life. Children are admonished to obey their parents because this is the natural and right order of how things should be done. Help us to reject the modern roles displayed on TV and in the movies which upturn this God-ordained hierarchy. May our family decisions be in accord with Your word as the parents lead and direct the family in godliness. Amen.

“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise:
Ephesians 6:2

Verse 1 said, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Now, in support of his note that “this is right,” he cites the fifth of the Ten Commandments. In this, he notes that a special blessing is affixed to this command by saying, “which is the first commandment with a promise.” It is not only the first, but it is actually the only commandment of the Ten Commandments with a promise affixed to it.

Some argue that the words of the second commandment also bear a promise –

“...For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” -Exodus 20:5-6

This is not a promise. Rather, it is a general declaration of how the Lord works. It is a part of His nature which is being explained in those words. The promise of the fifth commandment is truly a promise, being affixed to show the importance of the command to those who will hear and heed. The promise itself is given in the coming verse.

Life application: The Bible lays great stress on the honoring of parents, and for good reason. If one is unwilling to honor his earthly father and mother, then a disrespect towards God is an obvious result of this attitude of the heart. Our heavenly Father is infinitely worthy of honor. Let us endeavor to honor Him by honoring our earthly parents in obedience to His word.

Parents! Why, Lord, do they ask us to follow so many rules? Heavenly Father, You have given us our parents to be examples to us of how to live properly. They are people too and are prone to err, but You have asked us to honor them as our parents. Help us to do this, and in turn we will be honoring of You who have given us this command. And Lord,

help those of us who are parents to be godly examples of Your will for our own children. Help us to raise our children in a way with which You will be pleased. Amen.

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

The words here are reflective of the promise made in the Ten Commandments to Israel, both in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16. There is a portion he omits from his citation though. In the Ten Commandments, it says, “that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”

The people of Israel were promised an inheritance in the land of Canaan. In disobedience to the Lord, they would be exiled from that land. For them, to be exiled was a form of punishment. And so, a long life would be one of enduring that punishment. In other words, the true prosperity of Israel is tied into the land of Canaan, not merely to a long life. There was no need for this statement to be included by Paul when addressing the Gentiles. There is no earthly inheritance which comes through faith in Christ.

Therefore, this is a general blessing which is pronounced upon any and all – Jew or Gentile – who come to Christ. Things can be expected to go well with us, and we can generally anticipate a long and fruitful life on the earth, when we honor our parents. As this is a general promise, it cannot be expected in all instances. Like the proverbs of Solomon, it is a broad guideline that we can anticipate, not a blanket guarantee. In honoring one’s parents, things can normally be expected to go well for us.

Life application: If you want things to go well with you, following the precepts laid out in the Bible is a good way for that to come about. In not following them, you will pierce yourself with many thorns, but in following them, you can generally expect things to turn out in a positive manner.

Lord God, help us to be parents which are responsive to the needs of our children, and also help us to be responsive to the needs of our own parents. The family has been established for care, protection, love, and edification. These, and so many other wonderful benefits, come when we live in accord with Your word concerning family matters. And so help us in this Lord. Surely You are pleased when we live lives which have care and respect for those who are so close to us in the family. Amen.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

Paul's words now are directed to the head of the household, the father. The word is *patér* and it is generally used of a father, elder, ancestor, or senior. In Hebrews 11:23, a plural form of this word is used to speak of the parents of Moses.

It is certainly correctly translated as "fathers" here as they are considered the head of their respective houses, as has already been established. However, if a house is lacking a father, for whatever reason, the word is broad enough to speak of the one who is in charge of it. The responsibility does not change if the actual father is not in the picture.

The father, being the head of the house, is told, "do not provoke your children to wrath." The word "provoke" is *parorgízō*. It comes from two words, *pará*, which means "from close-beside," and *orgízō*, which means to "become angry." Combined, they give the sense of rousing someone to anger in a way that "really pushes someone's buttons" (HELPS Word Studies). The father is not to act in this manner and thus bring his child to a state of wrath.

Instead, Paul offers sound advice which is all too much lacking in today's world. He says that fathers are instead to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." There are two separate ideas here. The first is "training," or nurture. This is whatever care and handling is necessary for the child to grow into a responsible person. The word is *paideia*, and it actually carries with it a stern aspect. It means, "discipline; training and education of children, hence: instruction; chastisement, correction" (HELPS Word Studies).

This then includes the idea of correction and punishment. The book of Proverbs gives several examples of what this word certainly includes. Two are –

"He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly." Proverbs 13:24

"Do not withhold correction from a child,
For *if* you beat him with a rod, he will not die.
¹⁴ You shall beat him with a rod,
And deliver his soul from hell." Proverbs 23:13, 14

The same word is used in Hebrews 12 to explain our relationship with the Lord, just as a son is dealt with by his own father. The word is translated as "chastening" there –

“If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?”

-Hebrews 12:7-9

And as a confirmation of this, a variant of the word is used by Jesus concerning our relationship with Him. Again, it is translated as “chasten” –

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” Revelation 3:19

The second word that Paul uses, translated as “admonition,” is *nouthesia*. It means “properly, setting (placing) the *mind* through *God-inspired warning*” (HELPS Word Studies).

We are to improve the minds of our children through teaching them to reason things out so that they will come to godly solutions in their thought process. When Paul says, “admonition of the Lord,” that is exactly what he means. We are to speak of, explain, and correct faulty notions of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

In doing these things, we will have children who also grow up in the way of the Lord, and who are set to continue this same training in their own children in the future.

Life application: It is never too late to begin the process described in these verses today. Although it is right that the process should begin as early as possible, many do not come to Christ until later in life. From the moment this happens though, it is the responsibility of the parent to share in the knowledge of the Lord in order for the child to know and understand what has been instilled in the parent.

Gracious Heavenly Father, Your word asks us to instruct our children in “the training and admonition of the Lord.” This includes chastening them in order to bring them in line with Your will, just as You also do for us. Help us not to be weak in our convictions, nor in our stand against wrong-doing. The people of the world today seem to find it wrong to discipline children, but they can shut up and sit down. Your word is our guide, a guide which leads to salvation. Their weak-willed attitude will only lead to condemnation. And we love our children far too much to follow the way of this world. Amen.

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; Ephesians 6:5

Paul now turns from the immediate family within the household, to those who are almost as close, and maybe even closer, as far as daily contact is concerned. The term “bondservant” is as good as one can get from the Greek word *doulos*. The term applies to one who is bound to the service of another. This could be a voluntary subjection or an involuntary duty, and it can also go as far as being a slave.

Their rights were extremely limited even in the best of cases. In some instances, they had virtually no rights at all. And yet, there is an irony in this status which will be fully revealed in verse 9. Without jumping ahead in too great of detail, it can be said that all are slaves in one way or another.

For the Christian bondservant, Paul instructs them to “be obedient to those who are your masters.” Despite the many difficult rigors often suffered under cruel masters, Paul simply makes the command. He doesn’t qualify it with, “If they are good masters,” nor does he give any hint that they have a right to rebel. The status of slaves or bondservants was simply a fact of life. Those who were so bound were to accept it. However, he does give a note concerning slaves elsewhere that is worth citing –

“Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it*.” 1 Corinthians 7:20, 21

However, as long as a person was bound, they were to be obedient to their masters. And yet, Paul adds on a descriptor for them to consider. It is a master “according to the flesh.” In other words, there are human limitations which are being spoken of here. Paul is implying that they are bondservants of Another as well, which is not according to the flesh. It is for this reason that they were to be obedient to their human master.

The same phrase is used again in Colossians 3:22. By using it as he does, Paul is letting them know that these human limitations to this human slavery have no control over the spirit. Man may subjugate their bodies, but their spirit is owned by, and in the complete control of, the Lord. It was an encouragement to them that their time of freedom would surely come.

And so, for whatever duration of their bondage to human masters, bondservants were to be obedient “with fear and trembling.” This same term is used by Paul on several

different occasions, and it is particularly used of a person who is under a special responsibility to the Lord.

Even though they are under the will of a human master, they are to be concerned that this will is satisfied. This is to be true even to the point that they would be afraid and ashamed if the master was displeased. The desire for this should be so ingrained in them that it is not just an external fear and trembling, but one which is “in sincerity of heart.”

They should be truly concerned that their performance was spotless before their masters, just as it would be “to Christ.” The highest devotion of any man – slave or free – who has been redeemed is to the Lord, but Paul wanted the bondservants to show that same devotion to their earthly masters. The reason should be obvious. They were representatives of Christ. To be slack in their human duties would then reflect on their spiritual devotion to the Lord. Paul wanted this to never be the case.

Life application: In today’s world, we have employers rather than masters. But the premise of this verse should hold true in such cases. Our duties to our employers should be performed to the highest degree of trustworthiness as possible. In so acting, they will see that our conduct is without fault and will note that we can be trusted. If this is so, then it may lead them to wanting to know the Lord as well.

Heavenly Father, we have responsibilities to others, such as our employers. They will make an evaluation of our Christian lives based on our conduct towards them regarding to the fulfillment of our duties. Help us to be the epitome of faithful employees, volunteers, or in whatever other capacity we interact with those who have responsibility over us. In this, they will hopefully see our actions as glorifying of You. In turn, we can then hope that they will want to know Christ our Lord as well. Help us to never bring a stain upon His great name through the less-than-faithful care of our responsibilities. Amen.

...not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, Ephesians 6:6

This verse continues to explain what was introduced in verse 5. Taken together they read –

“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as

men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart...”

Paul is asking that bondservants be obedient “not with eyeservice.” It is a word used only here and in Colossians 3:22, and it appears to be a word invented by him. The use of it is to indicate someone who serves only when the eye of his master is present. When the master is out, he refuses to conduct his duties as he should. Paul says that this is inappropriate. Rather, a servant is to serve his master in the same manner as he would for the Lord, which means at all times.

He next says that they are not to be men-pleasers. This word is also found only here and in Colossians 3:22. It indicates someone who is willing to please man rather than God. The idea of both of these words is that a bondservant is to look to his duties to his master (whether he is a good master or a crummy one) as if he was actually serving the Lord. In so doing, he would be a responsible representative of the Lord in the presence of his master. This is explained in the next words, “but as bondservants of Christ.”

By acting as a bondservant of Christ even for his earthly master, he will then be “doing the will of God from the heart.” Paul connects the two duties to show the importance of right and proper conduct at all times.

As we have a different system of employment in the world today, we need to adapt that system to Paul’s words. Rather than masters, we have bosses. However, we are to treat our bosses with the same respect that the bondservant is called to for his master. We are not to be employees who perform with mere eyeservice, nor are we to simply be men-pleasers. We are to act as if we are reporting to Christ, making the most efficient use of our time under the employ of our employers.

Life application: In the world, it is so easy to fall in with the “labor union” mentality. The liberal attitude, both in government and in private industry, says that it is ok to not work to the highest standard of integrity and diligence. But the Bible tells us otherwise. If you act like a democrat in your work environment by failing to give your all to your boss, you are not acting as the Lord would have you to work.

It is time to mature out of your self-centered work attitude, and to become a devoted, dedicated employee. And this is regardless of the attitude of your employer. If you can’t deal with him, then it is you who needs to find another job. Think clearly! Apply the Bible and its precepts to your life! Be honoring of the Lord through your employment.

Lord God, the attitude of the work environment, especially among unions and those on the left, is that of eye-service and simply doing the minimum amount in order to get through the work day. But this is not what Your word would have for us to do. Rather, You would have us work our jobs as if we are working for Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. It sure would be nice if people actually did this. Productivity would be up, and whining would be down. Help us to not be whiners, but to be faithful employees who strive to seek Your honor before our earthly bosses. Amen.

...with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, Ephesians 6:7

Again, context needs to be maintained in order to see the progression of Paul's thoughts—

“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men...”

He last stated that the duties of the bondservant are to be carried out as if “doing the will of God from the heart.” He now elevates the thought to show that “from the heart” means that he is to have a proper attitude in that his service is to be done “with goodwill.” It is a word used just this once, and it indicates “with kindness” or “with enthusiasm.” It is directly connected to another word used in Matthew 5:25, translated as “agree with,” or “make friends with” —

“**Agree with** your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.”

The duties of a bondservant are to have this friendly and agreeable attitude because it is “as to the Lord, and not to men” that his work is actually to be done. We may have earthly masters over us, but we are first and foremost servants of the Lord. It is to Him that we are fully accountable in all aspects of our lives.

Life application: Who do you feel you are serving when you go to work? A crummy boss? A greedy company? In the highest sense, you are serving the Lord. Therefore, perform your duties to the highest of your capabilities, knowing that He will reward you for your efforts in glorifying Him.

Lord God, some of us have really crummy bosses, or we work for corporations who are greedy and uncaring about the world around them. All they can see is the amount of profit they can get out of it. And yet, when we go to our jobs, we are above all serving You. Give us the desire, as faithful followers of Christ, to perform our jobs to the utmost of our capabilities so that others will see and speak well of Your name. Surely You will reward us for our efforts in bringing such glory to You. Amen.

...knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free. Ephesians 6:8

Paul now moves from the admonitions of verses 5 through 7 into the thought of an expected reward for meeting those same admonitions. In these verses, he is specifically addressing slaves, or “bondservants.” He is showing now that regardless of worldly station, there will be no such distinction when standing before the Lord for judgment. This is reflected quite a few times in his letters, but the most notable is probably Galatians 3:28 –

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Though these differences exist in the world, the distinctions do not exist for judgment for those who are in Christ. We are all on the same spiritual plane, and we will all be judged by the same perfect standard. Understanding this, Paul says, “...knowing that whatever good anyone does.” This is a general statement, but it is given to bolster the many seemingly difficult admonitions for the slave of the previous verses. Put yourself in the place of a slave with a really crummy master, and read these words again –

“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men...”

As you can see, it would be a tough thing to live out these words if your master (or your boss of today) was a tyrant. But the Lord is watching, and He will reward even the slave who is faithful in adhering to His word. This is confirmed with the next words which say, “...he will receive the same from the Lord.”

The Greek is emphatic; it will happen. The wording does not say that he will receive the reward for what he does, but rather it says that he will receive the deed itself. In other

words, there will be a like-kind reward. Paul uses a metonymy – a like-kind of payment – to express the completely fair reward for faithful adherence to the admonitions. And this can be expected “whether *he is* a slave or free.”

At the judgment seat of Christ, all will be openly rewarded for their deeds. Their status now has no bearing on what will be. It is a great comfort to know this because in this earthly system, some have easy lives, and they seem to get all the good benefits of it. Some have difficult lives, and they seem to only get more trouble. But the faithful soul shall receive his reward.

Life application: We are given a sure promise in this verse. It is from the word of God which is faithful and true. Don't look at the temporary but look to the eternal. Fix your eyes on Jesus and your heart on being obedient to His word.

Lord God, Your word says that when we come before You for judgment, we will be rewarded based on faithful adherence to Your word. The positions of this world will not matter. Those who are slaves or those who are masters will be on the same level. Those who are rich and those who are poor will both face the same peering eyes, looking at the intent of the heart, not the size of the wallet. The earthly distinctions will be set aside, and the life lived in accord with Your word will be brought forward. Thank You that all have this marvelous opportunity of pleasing You equally. Thank You for Your promise of just rewards! Amen.

And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. Ephesians 6:9

Paul spent four verses of instruction on what bondservants were to do and how they were to act while under the authority of their masters. He now gives one all-encompassing verse of instruction to the masters. Further instruction is not necessary because he says, “And you, masters, do the same things to them...”

In other words, masters are given all of the same instructions as the bondservants in this one thought. Anything that can be made prescriptive towards the slave is to be taken as such for them. But they are given more instruction as well. This would replace those items which were specifically intended for the slaves in relation to their masters.

For the masters, they are to give “up threatening.” In the Greek, there is an article before “threatening.” It says, *tēn apeilēn*, or “the threatening.” In other words, it was a

customary practice of masters within the empire to threaten their slaves. Instead of, “Good morning Philemous,” they might say, “Get to work or I will beat you.”

Instead of, “Bring me some yummy papaya salad Charliopolus,” they might say, “Unless you want to be whipped, you’d better bring me papaya salad right now.” Paul instructs them that they are no longer to threaten their slaves, but to understand that there is now a new economy because of their status as Christians.

And yes, this definitively shows that Christians were slave-masters. Paul never questions this, nor does he say it is an unnatural or inappropriate point in life. It was, and continued to be, a normal part of human existence. However, as Christians, these slave-masters were to know and understand that their “own Master also is in heaven.”

They, in fact, became bondservants of Christ when they called upon Him. Because of this, they were to consider how they wished to be treated by their own Master, and then turn and treat their slaves in a like manner. They were to be impartial to them because “there is no partiality with Him.”

As these are prescriptions from Paul, then the slave-master who ignores them will be held accountable for his refusal to be obedient. It is no different for them to mistreat their slaves than it is for them to engage in immoral behavior. The standard is the word of God, and the standard demands adherence to what is laid down.

The irony of the matter is that a disobedient slave-master will certainly stand before the Lord and receive less eternal reward than a faithful and obedient slave! Such is the fairness of Christ who looks upon the hearts of men and rewards according to His infinite wisdom.

Life application: If you are a boss, the prescriptions of this verse certainly apply to you. You have charge over subordinates, and you are to treat them kindly and fairly. In this, you will be a responsible Christian and a faithful servant to your heavenly Master.

Heavenly Father, Your word instructs us to act responsibly towards those who are placed under us. In Rome, that meant their slaves. In our world today, it surely means that as bosses and business owners, we are to be considerate of those who work under us. Help us, if we are in such a position, to be kind and gentle-hearted towards them, and yet firm in our responsibilities towards those who are above us. Help us to have peace in our work environments, knowing that we are ultimately accountable to Christ our Lord who will judge our actions fairly and impartially. Amen.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Ephesians 6:10

Paul now comes to the closing thoughts of the epistle. This is evidenced by the word “Finally.” He has presented an amazing display of the wonder of the work of Christ and how it pertains to His redeemed, but he wants them to not forget that there is still an on-going battle which is being waged.

Though the victory is assured, and though the redeemed are already saved once and for all (Ephesians 1:13, 14), and though we are even now seated in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6), we still have this earthly life to get through. It is one which can wear down the hardy, and it is one which can cause us to take our eyes off of the Lord.

And so, Paul now takes the time to admonish the faithful to “be strong in the Lord.” The word in Greek is in the present imperative, and so it literally reads, “be strengthened in the Lord.” It is something that we are to actively do as we live out this life. The way that we are to do this has already been given –

“...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,” Ephesians 3:16

It is “through His Spirit” that we can do this. Paul will explain what that means in the verses ahead. However, before getting to those verses, it can be noted that there are things which we must actively do, using the tools which the Spirit has already granted to us. If we fail to act; we will not be strengthened. In turn, our walk will be filled with trials and woes, and yet it will be a bed of our own making. This was reflected in the words of Ephesians 4:30 –

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

In the coming words of Paul, he will use terminology that is reflected in the uniform and armament of a Roman soldier. It is probable that he was being guarded by a Roman soldier as he wrote, and he looked at him and contemplated a spiritual analogy to his earthly adornment. This is similar to what David and others had done in the Old Testament.

The guards, being Roman soldiers, would be well disciplined, meticulously careful with their attire and weapons, and encouraged in what those things stood for. These implements would be their protection in battle, and it is in battle that soldiers are the most dependent on one another, even as if they were brothers by blood. This is seen in the use of the term “my brethren” while finishing his thoughts to the Ephesians.

He has told them to be strong in the Lord, but they are also to be strong “in the power of His might.” Roman soldiers were individually strong in the empire, but they were also strong as a member of the empire. In other words, an individual soldier may be strong and great in battle, but he is not disconnected from the empire he served. Likewise, we may be strong in the knowledge of the word, a great orator, or an excellent missionary, but apart from the body of Christ as a whole, we are waging a losing battle.

We are to be strong in His great power as well as strong in our individual stations within His body. The two, combined together, are what make it possible for us to endure the trials which are sure to come in this life.

Life application: The Lord has given us His word by which we can be strong in the Lord. But we also must apply that word to our lives. Knowledge without application is wasted knowledge. Let us trust in the power of the Lord to direct us in all ways, but let us also not be deficient in growing in our knowledge of Him as well.

Lord God, for us to be strong and faithful as Your followers, we must be strong in You. We can't do this unless we know what You expect. And that is detailed in Your word. We also cannot be strong in the power of Your might, unless we apply that word to our lives. Together, these two things bring about the ability for us to stand firm in this earthly life we live. Thank You for Your word. And now, give us wisdom to learn it and apply it to our daily walk. Amen.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Ephesians 6:11

In order to explain the words of the previous verse, Paul now introduces the thought of protective armament, both for offensive and defensive uses. His words were that we are to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” In order to do that, we are told to now, “Put on the whole armor of God.”

The Greek word for “whole armor” is *panoplia*. It equates directly to our modern word panoply. It is only used twice in this chapter and once in Luke 11:22. It signifies “a

complete set of defensive and offensive armor (weapons), i.e. everything needed to wage successful warfare; (figuratively) the full resources the Lord gives to the believer so they can successfully wage spiritual warfare. In this way they do not fight *for* victory – but *from His* victory!” (HELPS Word Studies).

We are to determine what the “armor of God” is, and then to adorn ourselves with it. Paul will detail and explain each implement which comprises this armor. From that, we are to pay heed to his words, applying these concepts to our spiritual lives. This “armor of God” corresponds to what he spoke of in Romans 13. First he said –

“Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.” Romans 13:12

The “armor of light” is the “armor of God.” It is contrasted then to that which belongs to the devil, and which belongs to darkness. In explanation of “the armor of light,” Paul continued on in Romans 13 –

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.” Romans 13:14

Everything which Christ embodies and displays is what we are to pursue. His humanity was sinless and perfect; we are to pursue this. His deity is absolute holiness; we are to strive to likewise be holy. We are told to pursue Christ by adorning ourselves in His light, and adorning ourselves in what His human/divine nature signifies. Paul’s instructions in this are so “that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

The Greek word for “wiles” is *methodeia*. It is only found here and in Ephesians 4:14 which spoke of the “deceitful plotting” of those opposed to the truth of the gospel. It indicates “a predictable (pre-set) *method* used in *organized evil-doing (well-crafted trickery)*” (HELPS Word Studies).

As a great parallel to what we are seeing in Ephesians 6, Ephesians 4 continues on with the words –

“...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—” Ephesians 4:15

We are to put on the whole armor of God so that we “may grow up in all things into Him who is the head.” We cannot do this unless we are properly dressed in the armor of God in order to stand against the wiles of the devil.

What is implied in this verse is that those who do not put on the whole armor of God will not be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Instead, they will remain “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14).

Life application: In order to mature in Christ, and in order to defend against the attacks of the devil, we need to properly prepare ourselves. Paul will explain what the “whole armor of God” is in the coming verses. Let us pay heed to these words and then apply them to our lives, soberly considering that the devil is there and ready to attack us at our weakest points, and in our weakest moments.

Lord God, Your word shows that the devil is real, and that he relishes in weak and untrained Christians. In our failure to learn Your word and apply it to our lives, we are like children who are easily tossed back and forth by every crazy wind of doctrine that comes about. We follow conspiracies, we get misdirected in our theology, and we take our eyes off of Jesus. What a shame that we are willing to spend countless hours searching out crazy websites full of nonsense, and yet are unwilling to immerse ourselves in Your word. What a shame. Help us to reprioritize and redirect ourselves to Your word. Amen.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Ephesians 6:12

The Greek word for “wrestle” is found only here in the Bible. It indicates a fight, struggle, or conflict, but it is a noun, not a verb. Therefore, it more accurately reads “For our wrestling is not against...” It is a match which we are engaged in. It is active and on-going, but it is not against “flesh and blood.” Actually, in the Greek, the order is reversed. It says, “blood and flesh.”

The life is in the blood, and thus without the blood, there would be no movement of the flesh. Regardless of this, we are in a wrestling match, but it is not one which is of the body against other physical bodies. In other words, even if the world is filled with people who stand against Christ and the gospel, this is not the source of the battle, and we are not actually in a war against them. Rather, the fight is against:

Principalities – The Greek is *arché*. It is a word which indicates rule, such as in a kingly or a magisterial sense. It is “properly, from the *beginning* (*temporal sense*), i.e. ‘*the initial* (starting) point’; (figuratively) what comes *first* and therefore is *chief* (foremost), i.e. has the *priority* because ahead of the rest...” (HELPS WORD Studies). In other words, there is a hierarchy of wickedness, and these would be the first, or starting point of that system of wickedness.

Powers – The Greek is *exousia*. It indicates authority from conferred power, or that which is delegated. These would be under the “principalities” and would be granted power to carry out their designed schemes.

Both of the terms so far, meaning “principalities and powers,” have already been seen in Ephesians 1:21. They are being repeated here, but they are in subjection to Christ as was noted in that verse. Paul’s list continues next with:

The rulers of the darkness of this age – The Greek for “rulers” is found only here in the Bible. It is *kosmokratór*. It refers to Satan and demons who influence worldly people’s lives. The phrase is more correctly rendered, “the world-rulers of this darkness.” This word shows the limits of these beings.

In the Bible, Jesus is referred to as the *Pantokrator*, translated as “Almighty,” or “Ruler of all.” And so, *kosmokrator*, defines a limited being, and thus limited powers. However, it is a ruling ability which does span the entire world. There is no part of it which is not susceptible to their powers of darkness. And this darkness is set in contrast to Christ’s light.

Ephesians 2:2 shows that this power extended over the Ephesians (and thus anyone else before coming to Christ). But when the gospel was heard, they became obedient to it and moved from the darkness of the world to the light of Christ. As can be seen, this battle is spiritual in nature. This is confirmed in the next category...

Spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places – According to Vincent’s Word Studies, this “phrase is collective, of the evil powers viewed as a body. Wickedness is active evil, mischief.” The term “heavenly *places*,” or “heavenlies,” refers to the spiritual nature of the battle. Rather than being a fixed location, the battle is being waged as if in the air above, denoting all places and at any given time.

These forces have powers, but they are limited in nature. Further, they can be, and are being used, against Christians. In some cases, they are used to diminish their

effectiveness. In others, their powers are used as a form of punishment for falling away. Two good examples of the latter are where Paul hands someone over to Satan for disobedience. These are found in 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 1 Timothy 1:20.

This is a real battle, and it has been going on since the very beginning of man's time on earth. Only through Christ can these powers be defeated. Paul will explain what the implements of this battle for us to use are in the verses ahead. If we fail to pay heed to his words, we will find ourselves ineffective in the war which is being waged.

Life application: Anyone who doesn't believe we are in a spiritual battle isn't paying attention. If they are a believer in Christ, they are being duped by the very powers which Paul is describing. They may be saved, but they are doing more to help the enemy than to ensure that he is defeated. What a sad state for those who will someday stand before the Lord and have to face His judgment, having done nothing to further His kingdom.

Lord God, Your word tells us that we are in a real spiritual battle. It truly is good versus evil. The devil is real, and his forces of wickedness are real as well. Your word also tells us what implements we need in order to effectively wage war against them. And yet, way too many Christians don't even realize they are helping the enemy through a lack of preparation. The details are found in Your word, and Your word sits idly by, gathering dust. What a sad moment when we stand before You for our judgment with empty hands, having lived ineffective lives because we didn't prepare for, or participate in, the battle. Help us not to live this way, but to be on the offensive against the wickedness around us. Amen.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:13

Paul now uses war terminology to explain the wrestling he mentioned in verse 12. Though a wrestler will drop everything that hinders in order to have his hands free as he enters into a match, this is not the type of wrestling that Paul was speaking of. Instead, he is speaking of a warrior going into battle. In such a conflict, he will be fully adorned with both offensive and defensive gear. This is "the whole armor" that he needs to effectively fight with, and also to protect himself.

In the case of our spiritual battle, we are to "take up the whole armor of God." There are implements which Paul will next begin to describe which are both offensive and defensive in nature. If we fail to use all of them (meaning "the whole armor of God") we will either leave ourselves open to attack, or we will be unable to go on the offensive.

Either way, we will not be effective and well-trained soldiers who are properly prepared for the battle we are asked to engage in.

According to his words, the intent of this “whole armor of God” is “that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.” The Greek word for “withstand” is one which should be fully evaluated. HELPS Word Studies defines it as:

- 1) To “take a complete stand against, i.e. a ‘180 degree, contrary position’; (figuratively) to establish one's position publicly by conspicuously ‘holding one's ground,’ i.e. refusing to be moved (‘pushed back’).”
- 2) To... “forcefully declare one's personal conviction (where they unswervingly stand); to keep one's possession; ardently withstand, without giving up (letting go).”
- 3) It “was a military term in classical Greek ... meaning ‘to strongly resist an opponent’ (‘take a firm stand against’).”

As can be seen, to “withstand” carries the connotation of both standing firm in one’s position, and also actively declaring (as if on the offensive) one’s personal convictions. One can do neither of these unless he is properly trained in the word of God. But if that is the case, then that person will “withstand in the evil day.”

This is not speaking of any specific day (such as “the Day of the Lord”), but rather it is speaking of each and every day that one may face the evil onslaught of the devil and his forces. For the Christian, every day may be “the evil day,” or it may come only occasionally. However, if Paul is writing to all Christians, as he is, then all can expect the evil day to come. We must be prepared for it so that when it arrives, we will be able to handle it.

He finishes with, “and having done all, to stand.” In other words, we will have been able to stand because we engaged in the battle with all of the necessary implements we needed in order to be effective in our warfare. We employed our defensive implements as well as our offensive ones. We were able to stay off the incoming attacks, and we were able to go after the enemy and slay him.

In the coming verses, Paul will name five implements that we can use in order to be effective in this battle. They can be compared to the “five smooth stones” that David

picked up in 1 Samuel 17:40 in order to slay the giant Goliath. David was prepared for the battle, and he prevailed. If we follow through with Paul's advice, we too will prevail in the battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness which surround us and come against us. In the end, we will stand. Paul speaks in similar terms in 1 Corinthians 15:58–

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Life application: We are to declare our personal convictions boldly, and we are not to cave on them. Oh! That Christians would be willing to solidify their personal convictions from a biblical standpoint, and then to actively proclaim them. We are admonished to do so, but in today's world, we have become too peevish about “offending” others to do what we are instructed to do.

Offense schmoffense! Who cares about offense when the sacred duty of upholding the word of God is ours to defend and proclaim. Christian – grow a spine and hold fast to this sacred treasure which has been placed in your care.

Lord God Almighty, Your word tells us that we are in a spiritual battle, but a real battle, nonetheless. In this war, we are to take with us implements which are both offensive and defensive in nature, and we are to engage the enemy. It is a battle which specifically revolves around what is moral and just. But Your people today are worried about “offending” others. We have become peevish and unwilling to defend what Your word calls morally right and wrong. Offense schmoffense! If something is an abomination to You, then it is to be so to us as well. May we not be wimps in the face of moral perversion, but rather advocates of Your word – willing to put aside “tolerance” and offend a little if need be. Whose side are we on anyway! May Your people proclaim Your word unashamedly. Amen.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, Ephesians 6:14

Paul now begins his analogies between the physical implements of armor and those of a spiritual nature. These are certainly general descriptions which are intended to make spiritual points rather than being firm and fixed descriptions which are to be taken to unintended extremes.

This is noted because it is exactly what happens when people write flowery books about the analogies being made here. One example of the non-rigid nature of the implements of armor is for that of “salvation.”

In verse 17, it is called “the helmet of salvation.” However, in Psalm 18:35, David says that the Lord gave him “the shield of Your salvation.” The helmet and the shield are both pointing to the same spiritual truth, salvation, but they are being used in different contexts to make different points about the matter of salvation.

And so, these are descriptions which Paul is giving in order to make specific spiritual analogies. And of course, they are very good analogies because they point to real truths in simple and yet profound ways.

He begins with the words “Stand therefore...” This is in support of the word “stand” used in the previous verse. There, it denoted the end of all of the efforts which a Christian will face in the spiritual conflicts he encounters. Here, it is a note for the beginning and duration of them. We are to stand now (active) in order to be found still standing at the end.

He then notes, “having girded your waist with truth.” To gird oneself is to use a belt in order to draw in a garment close to the body. Ancient dress was loose and flowing, like robes – either short or long. If one was to run, they would need to have these flowing garments drawn in tightly, or they would trip over them if they were long, or – even if short – they could get them caught in something like a branch. By girding the waist, it would draw the garment in so that this wouldn’t happen.

The analogy is obvious. When one lies, it will eventually trip them up. Just think of Richard Nixon or the Clintons. But by girding oneself and drawing in the truth, there will be no room for lies. Instead, there will be freedom of movement in one’s spiritual life.

Next he notes, “having put on the breastplate of righteousness.” The “breastplate” or “thorax” was a coat of mail extending from the neck down to the thighs. Under it is found all the vital organs which needed to be kept safe and secure from incoming jabs and blows by the enemy. In the Bible, the place of emotions, wisdom, and knowledge are said to be found in these organs. If one is unprotected against attacks on these things, they will suffer harm.

If a person is attacked emotionally, he is bound to falter in his theology by caving in to unsound moral precepts. If one is attacked through his limited knowledge of Scripture,

he will not be able to withstand the onslaught. This is a warning, for example, against aberrant doctrines taught by crazy cults or heretical teachers. People need to be grounded in the Bible, and in a sound interpretation of it. Likewise, a person's wisdom may be found wanting if he has not been trained in how to apply it to the knowledge he possesses.

The "righteousness" described by Paul goes deeper than a personal righteousness. Rather, it is speaking of the imputed righteousness of Christ. All who call on Him are granted this. From the time we are saved, we are deemed righteous. But will we apply that properly? That is the question which needs to be answered. We are told in Philippians about this sacred trust we have been granted –

“...and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;” Philippians 3:9

As can be seen, Paul's use of these analogies is given to get us think through underlying truths which have already been revealed in Scripture. Two passages from Isaiah were certainly on his mind as he contemplated and wrote –

“Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.” Isaiah 11:5

“For He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
And a helmet of salvation on His head;
He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing,
And was clad with zeal as a cloak.” Isaiah 59:17

Life application: Understanding metaphors in the Bible is an immensely important point of knowing what is on God's mind. God is the Creator, and so He knows what is best in order to make sound spiritual analogies. When He uses water as a comparison to something, it is because the properties of water, and the benefits to be derived from water, are sound analogies to what He is describing in spiritual matters. Pay heed to these things. In doing so, you will find a treasure trove of wisdom to apply to your theology.

Lord God, Your word asks us to gird ourselves around our waists with truth, and to put on the breastplate of righteousness. If we do not speak the truth, we will be caught up in our own lies. We will be unable to properly and effectively act as Christians who represent You. And if we are not prepared emotionally, intellectually, and practically in

our theology, we will get caught up in every changing wind of doctrine which comes about. We will be weak and ineffective soldiers in this spiritual battle we are facing. Help us to be sound in our walk and faithful in our speech so that we will bring You the glory and honor You are due. Amen.

...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Ephesians 6:15

The words of this verse have caused a great deal of variety in commentary. But what one simply needs to do is remember that Paul is in prison, probably looking at a Roman soldier, and he is using the military wardrobe of his guard to make spiritual applications for the believer in Christ.

The Roman army was the preeminent power, and it was a great and conquering force. This was because its soldiers were well trained, and their uniforms were designed for waging war. This included their feet as well. A soldier whose feet hurt, or which were either not protected or which were inappropriately protected, would be at a significant disadvantage.

The feet are the base of the body, and they are that upon which everything else is supported. For this reason, the Roman soldier's shoes were carefully designed for use in both offense and defense. Vincent's Word Studies describes their footwear –

“The Roman soldier substituted for the greaves of the Greek (metal plates covering the lower part of the leg) the caligae or sandals, bound by thongs over the instep and round the ankle, and having the soles thickly studded with nails. They were not worn by the superior officers, so that the common soldiers were distinguished as caligati.”

This is certainly what Paul is describing. A guard in the prison where he was would not be an officer, but a battle-ready soldier. His shoes would have these studded nails so that he could firmly plant his feet and strike without slipping. Further, the heavy materials would, at the same time, protect his feet on top, bottom, and sides. With feet that were protected, he could then go forward in battle without worrying about suffering injuries to them. Thus, they were at once defensive and offensive.

We are instructed by Paul with the words, “having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” In other words, the gospel is our base, and it is what we are to use as the support for everything else we do. If someone comes against us, we are to stand firm on the gospel, not slipping and caving on our convictions. We are not to

budge even an inch on the truth that Jesus is the way to peace with God, and that there is no other.

And with this conviction and firm base as a defense, we will stand steady. Also, our feet (which are our base) will be protected from harm. In this protected state, we can then use them for offensive purposes – that of going forward in the battle, carrying the good news of Jesus Christ. Isaiah speaks of this –

How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good *things*,
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion,
“Your God reigns!” Isaiah 52:7

Paul uses Isaiah’s words in Romans 10 –

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

Life application: The gospel of peace must be both defended and actively proclaimed. A gospel which is proclaimed, but which is not defended will not be the sound and true gospel. If the true gospel is defended, but not proclaimed, it will be a wasted message which dies with the one who bears it. Let us both stand firm on the true gospel, and let us be bold in our proclamation of this marvelous “good news.”

Heavenly Father, You have given charge of defending and sharing Your good news to the sons of men. We are never to allow it to be watered down, and we are not to hold it in and keep it secret. As faithful followers of Christ Jesus, we are to both care for this sacred trust, and also tell others about it. If we defend the gospel, but don’t proclaim it, that is a sad waste. If we don’t defend it, then it will suffer in its content. Should we proclaim a gospel which has not been protected, we will be proclaiming a false gospel – one which only condemns. Help us to be proper stewards of this sacred treasure You have given to us. Amen.

...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Ephesians 6:16

Concerning the “whole armor of God,” Paul continues his list with the words “above all.” The words carry an ambiguity in them and could mean either “over all,” or “in addition to all.” The latter is the proper sense. He is not stating this as a matter of importance, but of “covering all.” In other words, just as a soldier covers himself with a shield, we are to take up “the shield of faith.”

This shield in Greek is a *thureos*. The word comes from *thura*, meaning “door.” This is because of its shape which was oblong, about 4 feet by 2 ½ feet. It was sometimes curved on the inner side so that one could almost completely enclose themselves in it during an incoming salvo. It was held with the left arm by straps affixed to the inside.

Such a shield was usually made of a light wood with a brass rim around it. After that, several layers of skins would cover it. It was slightly curved, and it was kept smooth, being polished with oil so that arrows and darts would glance off of it. Though a different style of shield was used by Israel, the curved shape of their shields would also allow for complete coverage as is referred to in the 5th Psalm –

“For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous;
With favor You will surround him as *with* a shield.” Psalm 5:12

As this shield covered all of the other armor, so “the shield of faith” is intended to cover all of the other “armor of God.” Its intent is that “you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”

The thought of the shield being a part of the “armor of God” goes all the way back to the great man of faith, Abraham. In Genesis 15, the Lord states to him –

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”
-Genesis 15:1

Just a few verses later, Abraham’s declaration of righteousness based on his faith was announced. This same “shield of faith” is available to us. But it should be noted that this is not the active faith which is often referred to in the Bible. It is almost a passive one. It is that of endurance.

A shield is a defensive item. It is meant to protect *from* something. Thus, it reflects the covering of God, just as was promised to Abraham. As the fiery darts come in, we can stand behind the promises of God and remain protected. These fiery darts are well described by David in the 120th Psalm –

“What shall be given to you,
Or what shall be done to you,
You false tongue?
⁴ Sharp arrows of the warrior,
With coals of the broom tree!” Psalm 120:3, 4

The lies of the enemy, his verbal attacks through his workers of iniquity, the tempting words of a seductress, and the like are such fiery darts. They come in and we are to allow the Lord to shield us from them, letting them glance off by His protection. In turn, the 7th Psalm says that the Lord will then send back His fiery shafts of judgment –

“God *is* a just judge,
And God is angry *with the wicked* every day.
¹² If he does not turn back,
He will sharpen His sword;
He bends His bow and makes it ready.
¹³ He also prepares for Himself instruments of death;
He makes His arrows into fiery shafts.” Psalm 7:11-13

We are to trust the Lord by relying on the promises of His word. In so doing, the darts coming in will not harm us, and the Lord will take care of those who so attack. Vincent’s Word Studies states the following concerning the use of this armor –

“Temptation is thus represented as impelled from a distance. Satan attacks by indirection - through good things from which no evil is suspected. There is a hint of its propagating power: one sin draws another in its track: the flame of the fire-tipped dart spreads.

Temptation acts on susceptible material. Self-confidence is combustible. Faith, in doing away with dependence on self, takes away fuel for the dart. It creates sensitiveness to holy influences by which the power of temptation is neutralized. It enlists the direct aid of God.”

Life application: Let us exercise faith, just as those faithful to God in the past. Let us trust that what God offers is far better than whatever the devil can hurl in our direction. Temptations of sex, money, drugs, moral perversion of all kinds... these things need to be kept from us by God’s protective shield. Let us hide ourselves in the Lord through faith, and He will win the battle for us while keeping us safe from the enemy.

Lord God, Your word says that You have granted us a shield of faith by which we can enclose ourselves from the incoming fiery darts of the enemy. No matter what he throws at us, our faith in You can stand, if we simply continue to trust. The darts of enticement, the darts of temptation, the darts of boastfulness, pride, and haughtiness... these can be quenched if we hide ourselves in You as a shield. Help us in this Lord. Give us wisdom to secure Your word in our hearts, and to secure ourselves in the promises that word holds. Be our safe and sure covering, O God. Amen.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; Ephesians 6:17

Paul now admonishes the Christian to “take the helmet of salvation.” Charles Ellicott notes that “There is a break here. We are said not to put on, but to “take” (or rather, receive)—a word specially appropriate to “salvation.”

The Greek word for “salvation” is not what is more commonly used. It gives the sense of “tending towards salvation.” In other words, it would be our hope of salvation. The thought is “And take the hope of your salvation, and put it on your head like a helmet.” It is an adornment for all to see, and it is a protection against anything which could come against our reason.

We are not to intellectually surrender our hope. Rather we are to contemplate the hope of our salvation, knowing that it is our great protection for that time to come. It is a wonderful picture of eternal salvation. One cannot take on a hope of something that is not going to surely come about. Vincent’s Word Studies describes the helmet in use at Paul’s time –

“The helmet was originally of skin, strengthened with bronze or other metal, and surmounted with a figure adorned with a horsehair crest. It was furnished with a visor to protect the face.”

We can look to the future with confidence, because we have a helmet of salvation which adorns us, and even our face is protected from harm. 1 Thessalonians further explains this helmet for us –

“But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation.” 1 Thessalonians 5:8

We are then to also take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The sword was the only offensive weapon chosen by Paul. It was a most important part of the soldier’s armament.

They were trained in, and carried, other weapons, but without a sword, they could not be considered as properly armed. Close-in fighting required this implement, and it is this which Paul has in mind – direct contact fighting. The sword was a short sword with both edges highly sharpened.

Here, and at all times, the term, “sword of the Spirit” is not to be separated from the term, “the word of God.” Charismatics and others who claim “spiritual gifts” err if they think that they are granted a special “anointing” which makes them super-warriors of Christ without knowing and applying the word of God properly.

Verses need to be taken in context, dispensations in time need to be considered, and our theology is to be Christ centered. When we fail to apply the word of God in this manner, we have no “sword of the Spirit.” Instead, we have parts of God’s word ripped out of intended context but having no true power. To misuse Scripture is to be without our one offensive weapon which has been described by Paul.

Life application: From this verse, we should be comforted in the knowledge that we are saved. We are to take up that knowledge, and we are to adorn ourselves with it. Let us not waiver in this precept. And further, we are to stand fast on the word of God, using it as our main means of engaging the enemy. God wrote it, and so it is the most effective weapon we can employ. Let us never fail to keep it handy, apply it properly, and stand fast on its eternal precepts.

Lord God, You have adorned us with salvation through the work of Christ. Help us to take up the helmet of our salvation and wear it as a sure hope in that which we already profess. And Lord God, help us to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is Your word in order to engage the enemy in the spiritual battle we are in. You are the One who fashioned this word, and so it is surely capable of cutting through all that the enemy sends our way. Thank You for the helmet of our salvation, and the sword of the Spirit! Surely they are mighty implements of battle. Amen.

...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— Ephesians 6:18

Paul is still referring to the “whole armor of God” in these words. Though they are not being described with a metaphor as the previous verses were, they still follow the same thought. We know this with certainty, because it follows in the same admonition which was given in verse 10. There he instructs us to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” In order to accomplish this, we are to be “praying always.”

This fits with the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing.” This does not mean that we get on our knees and stay there all day without accomplishing anything else. There are many types of prayers and the admonition fits any of them at any given time. There are formal prayers and informal prayers.

There are silent prayers of the heart given in our times of distress or deep need, and there are vocal prayers which are given to build up others for courage, comfort, or edification. There are secret prayers, given between oneself and God which reveal the innermost soul of the one praying.

There are public prayers offered for gatherings of God’s people as they meet to worship or petition Him. There are prepared prayers which are meticulously worded in order to inspire deep conviction, reverence, or courage. And there are sudden prayers which leap out of our souls as we come upon a moment of need.

Paul’s admonition to be “praying always” is one which should be taken literally. There is never a time that we can simply talk to God and it not be considered a “prayer.”

We are also to pray always with “supplication.” Prayer is more general, whereas supplication is more specific. When one has a family member suffering with illness, he will petition God through supplication, begging for relief for his loved one.

But whether it is through prayer or supplication, it is to be “in the Spirit.” This means that the heart is to be directed to God, and the prayers are not to simply be rote repetitions. The idea of “praying the rosary” is never hinted at in Scripture. We aren’t to just mindlessly repeat things in our prayers, but we are to rather use our minds and hearts to join with God in our prayer life.

Next, he tells us that we are to be “watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Paul’s admonition to be watchful means that we are to look around us, observe what is going on, determine a need in others, and then to offer our prayers for that need.

We aren't to simply have our eyes closed to the world around us, but to be aware of what is happening in order to make effective prayers. These prayers then are to be "with all perseverance and supplication."

When the need is seen, we don't just pray once and cease, but we should rather pray frequently and specifically (supplication) for that which is before us. This is to be done "for all the saints" as well. We may not all agree in life, but if we are chosen by God because of having received Jesus Christ as our Savior, we should not withhold our prayers for our brothers and sisters. Color of skin, nation of origin, social status, and the like... none of these things should be a barrier to our offering of prayers for others.

Life application: Much is written about prayers and prayer life, books in fact. We can spend so much time reading about how to pray, and yet we can completely ignore the simple admonition that we are to be "praying always." We don't need to read books about how to pray. We need to simply pray. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, and our hearts focused on our relationship with God. In so doing, prayers will come naturally through simple and heartfelt communication.

Lord God, sometimes we might feel that our prayer life is weak and ineffective, but this doesn't mean we need to attend a seminar on how to pray. Your word gives us all we need to know on the subject. We can just look at the prayers recorded there and emulate them. And if we followed the simple admonition which says to "pray without ceasing" we would probably find that our prayer life is really an extension of our daily interactions with others. Just as we speak to our friends and associates, so we can also speak to You. Help us to remember this, and to keep our channels of communication open to You at all times. Be with us in this, and be our close and personal prayer Receiver! Amen.

...and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, Ephesians 6:19

In the previous verse, Paul had asked for prayer and supplication to be made "for all the saints." Now he makes a specific, personal, extra request by saying, "and for me." He felt that he needed their additional and explicit prayers so "that utterance may be given to me."

He wanted prayers for the very words he would speak, desiring that they would be in accord with his calling and as led by the Spirit. This then would be a confirmation of what Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 10:19, 20 –

“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

Jesus’ words were directed to those who would speak on His behalf in the transmission of the gospel message. This certainly included Paul. Though his commission came later, he was still an appointed apostle of Jesus Christ, and he desired prayers that his words would not be of him, but rather given to him by the Spirit.

This utterance is then further explained by the words, “that I may open my mouth.” In Scripture, the idea of opening one’s mouth indicates an intentional and authoritative utterance for direction, teaching, and instruction. For example, it is used to show this when Jesus spoke out the Beatitudes –

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:”
-Matthew 5:1, 2

Paul’s desire in the opening of his mouth was “boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” Vincent’s Word Studies indicates that the word “boldly” is tied to “make known” rather than “open my mouth.” Anyone can open their mouth and proclaim something, but it was Paul’s desire that he do so in order to boldly impart the mystery of the gospel.

This was his passion and his great desire. Until Christ completed His work, the gospel was not fully realized. And even after His work, the mystery of it being open to the Gentile people was still not fully realized. Peter got a glimpse of this in Acts 10, but it is Paul who makes known the full scope of what the church age indicates. This is what he desired to proclaim, and this is what he was asking for concerning prayer.

Life application: Do we suppose in our Christian walk that we can do without prayer? Paul didn’t. He asked for prayer openly, understanding that God does hear and respond to them. Likewise, we should not refrain from praying, or refrain from asking for prayers when the need arises.

Lord God, our precious Heavenly Father – thank You for being attentive to our prayers and searching out our hearts as we walk in this troubled world. You are there, listening and responding according to Your great wisdom. It may seem that at times our prayers are unheard, but this isn’t the case. Certainly, You are listening and responding

according to a wisdom that we don't always see or understand. But in the end, every need is met, and every prayer is responded to in accord with Your will. Thank You for such great attention to our heartfelt words which are lifted to You in our times of need. Amen.

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

The words “for which” are speaking of “the mystery of the gospel” which Paul just mentioned. It is for this marvelous message from God, and which speaks of peace between Him and man through the work of Christ, that Paul found himself “an ambassador in chains.”

His words here are an oxymoron, and even a paradox. Paul claims to be “an ambassador” but he also states that he is “in chains.” The very nature of being an ambassador signifies one who is granted outward splendor and high honor. This was, and continues to be, a law of nations.

A violation of this honor could then, as now, spark immense outrage and even war. An ambassador represents a leader. Thus, Paul was a representative of Christ, and yet he was bound as if a criminal.

The word for “ambassador” here is *presbeuó*. It “means to act as an established statesman (diplomat) – a trusted, respected ambassador who is authorized to speak as *God's emissary* (represent *His kingdom*)” (HELPS WORD Studies). It is found only here and in 2 Corinthians 5 –

“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21

The ambassador of Christ, who represented the One who knew no sin, but who was made to be sin for us, was also accounted as one who had committed an offense. Paul emulated His Lord well in order to bring the word to the world. Even today, he is despised by Jews, his words are attacked by world leaders and college professors, and his life and work are even diminished by ill-informed Christians as to the nature of what his writings mean.

He is often ignored by churches, and yet it is his writings which establish proper doctrine for all churches during the Gentile-led church age. As Christ's ambassador, rejecting him and his word is thus a rejection of Christ and His word. But in his life, the Lord allowed him to be so bound.

The word translated here as "chains" is actually in the singular in the Greek. Paul would have been bound by a manacle connected to a chain, and that may then have been connected to his Roman guard. Or it could be that his chain was bound to a ring on the wall next to him, or even loose. If loose, it could easily be grabbed by the guard as he tried to escape.

No matter what, Paul was free on one hand so that he could move about, write, and so forth, but he was still bound. It is this chain which he is now considering the badge of his ambassadorship. Unlike other ambassadors who were considered immune from prison, Paul found his ambassadorial duties intimately connected to his confinement.

In this state, he asks for prayer and supplication (see verse 18) "that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." As can be seen, his request for prayer wasn't just some arbitrary desire, as if he was looking for people to unnecessarily recognize him. Rather, he truly needed this prayer because of the abnormal state in which he was placed. He, an ambassador bound to a chain, was a representative to the Gentile world of the grace of God which is found in Jesus Christ.

Life application: Christ Jesus was made a public humiliation in order to reconcile us to our heavenly Father. Paul followed Him in this and became an ambassador of Christ who was frequently afflicted with trials, imprisonments, beatings, and the like.

Should we not consider that oppression and trial for the sake of the name of Christ is also a badge of honor if we so suffer? Let us not forget that our faithful testimony in such circumstances will be rewarded by the Lord when we face Him on the day of our judgment.

Lord God, there are many faithful Christians, even right now in the world, who are being persecuted and even martyred for their faith. Help us to remember them in our prayers, help us to not be ashamed of their afflictions, and help us to be likewise faithful in such trials if that time comes for us as well. Let us bear the reproach of the world gladly for the sake of the exalted name of Jesus Christ our Lord. For He took our reproach upon Himself so that we could be reconciled to You. Help us to emulate Him in all ways that the circumstances of our surroundings call for. Amen.

But that you also may know my affairs *and* how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you;
Ephesians 6:21

This verse begins with the words, “But that you also...” This is an indication that other churches were apprised concerning Paul’s affairs and his condition. This would have been the understood meaning of these words. This is then made completely evident in the words of Colossians 4:7 –

“Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.”

Tychicus would have been sent out with Paul’s letter(s) of instruction, and he would have carried along other information about how he was and what he was up to. This Tychicus is mentioned several times in the New Testament. He is found in Acts 20:4. There he is described as being a person “of Asia.” He was also accompanying Paul from Corinth to Asia. He is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:12, and in Titus 3:12 as well.

In this letter, he is called “a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.” The word used for “minister” is *diakonos*. This is the source of our word “deacon,” and it comes from two separate words – *dia*, meaning “through,” and *konis*, meaning “dust.”

Therefore, it is someone who scurries through the dust, and is thus a servant or a minister. In this verse, he is doing exactly what the name implies. He is travelling with the message through the dusty streets of cities for the benefit of the saints. This term is probably not being applied to him in the technical sense of a “deacon,” but rather it points to the duties which he is carrying out. He is ministering to Paul as a friend, a brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant.

It is this hardy soul who was with Paul in such a close relationship who “will make all things known to you.” Not only would he bring the beautiful epistle in his hands, and not only would he tell about how Paul was doing, but he would also answer any further questions that would come about concerning Paul and his ministry.

Life application: How willing are you to relay the good news concerning the gospel to others? Tychicus was willing to travel by land and sea in order to get the news out to those who were hungry to hear it. Are you at least willing to share it in the circles you travel? Do the people at the restaurant you frequent even know that you are a Christian? Get the news out!

Lord God, we have favorite places that we often go to. Some of us have a special restaurant that we go to every chance we get. We go to the same bank, week after week. There are other places that we frequent, and the people know us well. But do they even know of our faith in Jesus? Have we ever once asked if they wanted to hear about why Jesus came and how important this is to know? Are we so afraid of sharing the only means of salvation with the people we see the most? Help us in this Lord. Give us boldness to speak about the most important issue humanity will ever face. Amen.

...whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts. Ephesians 6:22

“Whom” is speaking of Tychicus of the previous verse. The words, “for this very purpose,” relate to what Paul just said to them – “...that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing.”

He had sent Tychicus to Ephesus with his epistle, entrusting him to fill in all of the information about him which was unstated in the letter. This then explains why the book of Ephesians lacks the usual personal greetings, general well-wishes, and other such messages which are found in some of his other epistles.

Tychicus was obviously faithful in his ability to recount anything that Paul passed on to him. If there was a personal greeting, he would relay it. If there was a note of commendation, he would relay it. If someone needed correction, Tychicus was competent and faithful to ensure it was passed on. For the most part though, the duties of Tychicus were to relate how Paul and those with him were faring, “and *that* he may comfort your hearts.”

They certainly would want to know how Paul was getting along while in prison. They would want to know about his care, any visitors, how he was treated, and so on. With this knowledge, their hearts would be comforted.

It appears that Tychicus was eminently suited to this task, because a word for word parallel of this verse is found in Colossians 4:8. The whole thought concerning him and his special duties says –

“Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. ⁸ I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, ⁹ with Onesimus,

a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all things which *are happening* here.” Colossians 4:7-9

This then is a statement of complete confidence in Tychicus which stands as a personal commission concerning him.

Life application: It is always good to know that a person can be completely trusted. Is this how others see us? Are we willing to conduct our lives with such high integrity that we can be relied upon with even the most sensitive or personal material? Let us endeavor to be such people at all times.

Lord God, Your word says that a good name is better than precious ointment. Help us to be people of integrity, who seek after a good name that can be trusted in all matters. Help us to have such high integrity that we can be relied upon in all ways, even in the most sensitive matters that arise. Because we bear Your name, our actions ultimately reflect upon You. And so, help us in this Lord. Help us to be people of peak integrity. Amen.

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

Paul’s final words are given verses 23 and 24. He begins with “Peace to the brethren.” The subject of “peace” seems heavy on his mind during his time in prison. He seems to have found an understanding of peace which filled his life in a way he didn’t fully realize until he was bound with his chain. This is most especially expressed in Philippians 4 –

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6, 7

He wishes this peace to those in Ephesus, and to any who would read his letter and apply its contents to their continued walk with Christ.

He next says, “and love with faith.” Peace with God comes first, through receiving the work of Christ. In that moment, a propitious relationship with God is restored, and peace and harmony are realized. When that occurs, God can then pour His love out on us in a way which was not previously possible.

And this will grow as our faith grows. Thus, he says, “and love with faith.” His words are a petition to continually grow in faith, and thus receive the love which comes “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

God the Father is the Source of these good blessings; Christ is the One through whom they come. There is no hint of subordination noted in Paul’s words, but rather a logical process by which the love with faith is lavished upon us. To grasp this, we could look at the love as a future anticipation (the source).

When the moment comes that we exercise faith (which is in the present), the love is received. The present then would be the logical progression of time from future to “here and now.” There is no subordination of the present to the future. Rather, one follows logically after the other, coequal and yet having a different aspect. Such is true with the nature of God towards us.

Life application: Let us be grateful to God for the perfect Gift, which is Christ Jesus our Lord, and through whom come all of the many blessings which God sends upon His favored children.

Lord God Almighty, how grateful we are to You for the Gift of Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Him, You have lavished upon us peace, love with faith, mercy, and grace. Reconciliation is found, harmony is realized, and we are brought into Your marvelous family. What an honor to be granted these beautiful blessings because of the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross. All hail the great and exalted name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

Grace *be* with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

Ephesians 6:24

We have arrived at the last of 155 verses of marvel and wonder. The book of Ephesians has been a beautiful presentation of Christ and our expected conduct in Him. Paul has opened up treasures of knowledge never before presented to the human mind.

The mysteries have now been made known, and the prospects of eternity in the presence of the Lord, shaped as living stones in His building, have been revealed. These and many other wonderful truths have been unveiled to us. Now he closes out the epistle with words to those at Ephesus (and thus to us!) which are intended to grant us a special blessing as we pursue Christ, ever going forward in the love and knowledge of Him.

He ends the epistle here as he ends all of his epistles, by penning a request for grace. What is of note is that the epistle to the Hebrews also ends with grace, but none of the letters from James through to Jude state it. However, the Bible finishes with the same note of grace –

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.” Revelation 22:21

As Paul’s letters are doctrine for the church age, the age of grace, it is appropriate that this expected blessing would be given. However, he qualifies the anticipated bestowal of grace by adding in the thought that it is to be “with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”

Anyone can claim to be a follower of Christ, but not all truly are. There are countless people who are under the control of the power of the devil, and who fill and infect churches around the world. His qualifying words are meant to exclude them, and they are certainly given as a reminder to his readers that this is exactly why we are to “put on the whole armor of God.”

We need to be prepared to defend ourselves against such perverse people, and we are also expected to go on the offensive, challenging them concerning the false teachings and cutting apart their heretical words. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and thus Christ’s spokesperson to us, would have us do no less. Those who are insincere in their hearts towards Christ are not included in the grace He bestows upon those who love Him in sincerity.

Finally, he closes with “Amen.” The word signifies “truth,” or “so be it.” And may it be so in our lives as we seek after, and even pursue, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Life application: As you go back and reread the epistle to the Ephesians in the future, remember that the words which are written are directed to you as well. Hold fast to the promises, be careful to ponder and apply the exhortations, and be pleased to share the wonderful marvels of this word with others – to the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the book of Ephesians. It is a book which is filled with marvels and wonders for us to consider. It is a book which asks us to reflect on the work of Jesus Christ, and it is a book which admonishes us to hold fast to Him and His commands and exhortations for us. Help us to be faithful followers of You by applying the words of that precious book to our lives. And may we be sincere in our love and devotion to Christ Jesus our Lord always. Amen.